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The Problem of Guilt

Leviticus 5:1-13

Intro: Before we start with this week's text, I want to go back and reflect on something from our last study. As was pointed out, the constant reference to blood in ch4 is unmistakable. There is some extensive blood rituals associated with the purification offering, just as there were for other offerings. There was blood sprinkled in front of the veil; blood applied to the incense altar and quite a lot of blood poured all around the altar of the burnt offering. It was a phlebotomist's worst nightmare. Now, there are many ways in which a human being can die without the shedding of blood. In fact, when capital punishment is carried out in our country, it's rarely if ever accomplished by the shedding of blood. In our state, the death sentence is carried out by lethal injection. It used to be the electric chair but even that was generally a bloodless affair.

There were plenty of ways that Jesus could have died without shedding His blood. He could have been stoned to death, which surely would have drawn blood but it would have been difficult to see under a pile of rocks. He could have been strangled or pushed off a cliff, shot through with an arrow or run through with a sword. Any of which would have produced some bleeding but death would have been quick and relatively painless. But none of these happened because our Savior was ordained to die by a death in which the shedding of blood was very conspicuous.

We all know there was blood at the foot of the cross but do we realize how much of Christ's blood was shed on the night of His passion? While He was still praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Luke tells us that His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground (22:44). When he was on trial before the Sanhedrin and they condemned Him to death, Mark tells us they blindfolded Him and beat Him. His blood would have been spilled in that judgment hall. Later, Roman soldiers entertained themselves by throwing a purple robe on Jesus, placing a crown of thorns on His head and striking Him on the head with a reed. His blood would have been on the reed, the robe and all over the floor. When He was scourged, His blood would have covered the floor as well as the surrounding walls. Then there were the nails in His hands and feet and the spear in His side. Our Lord's

death was a bloody affair but this extensive blood shed would forever link Him to these sacrifices in Leviticus which were made as types and symbols of His great work of atonement.

We stopped at v13 because vs14 begins a section that describes the restitution (reparation/guilt) offering. Our text (1-13) falls between the purification offering (ch4) and the reparation offering (5:13-6:7). So, what are we to call the offering that's described here? Does it go with the previous offering or the subsequent offering? Well, even though the words guilt or guilty appear 5 times in the text, however, the text itself makes reference to a sin offering at least 7 times. So this passage serves as an appendix to the sin/purification offering and it deals with some special cases. But this should not downplay the reality of guilt as mentioned in our text because guilt is a real problem today.

Google tells me there are 198,811 therapists practicing in the US, along with 81,000 psychologists; that's a lot of emotional baggage! What's the deal? The truth is that while fewer and fewer people choose to live by a moral code, everyone still has a conscience. God has given every human being an inherent sense of right and wrong. Rom 2:15 refers to people who don't know Jesus, yet it says of them that the work of the law [is] written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness [or confirming this]. All people have some sense of right and wrong because all people are made in God's image. God has also given us a sure guide to right and wrong in His perfect Word, the Bible. God's Word not only tells us what is right and wrong but also what to do with a guilty conscience.

Again, God spoke His Word to His people in the wilderness of Sinai and gave them His law. He knew they would transgress His law and commit sin. Sin is not allowed in the presence of the perfectly holy God, so God could have given up on His people because of their sin. Instead, God provided a means to atone for their sin. That points us to 5 counter-cultural truths about God, us and our sin.

1) Transgressing God's law is sin (1-4) – this eternal truth began with Adam and Eve. God gave them just 1 simple law and they transgressed that law and sin and death entered the human experience for the first time. That truth is still in effect today, when anyone transgresses God's law, it is sin. The first 4 verses refer to 3 specific sins that require a purification offering.

The first refers to an indifferent silence or failing to give testimony. This has to do with someone witnessing wrongdoing, presumably a crime, and he was called to testify but he didn't. Or, a person knows about a crime but doesn't come forward. They say nothing about what they saw so the perpetrator of the crime goes free and doesn't experience the consequences of their behavior and justice would be either delayed or outright thwarted. The witness had the chance to help the cause of justice but they didn't. That's the same as promoting injustice. Silence is not always golden; sometimes it's just cowardly yellow.

The text doesn't say why the witness failed to come forward. It could be a case of complicity, or being influenced by friendship, shame or fear or it could just simply be indifference (not my problem). Regardless, failure to testify was a serious sin because it led to the delay or worse, the denial of justice. It wasn't enough for God's people to merely not tell lies. God also required His people to make the truth known, so even if someone just knew about a lie or a crime, they were responsible to make the truth known. In Israel all the people were to be involved in seeing that justice was done. Not to do so was a sin. So, it should be no surprise that such a sinner bears guilt or bears the punishment for iniquity. To avoid this punishment, the sinner must confess the sin and bring a purification offering to the tabernacle.

We can say, by extension, that the same spiritual principle applies to our witness of Jesus Christ today. It isn't enough that we refrain from actively denying Jesus or lying about our relationship with Him. We must also take every opportunity to tell the truth about Jesus, to show the truth of Jesus Christ and the impact that it He has on our lives. When we have the opportunity to speak the truth or live out the truth, indifferent silence is sin. If you think that is unnecessarily harsh, let me remind you of what the Apostle James said in his epistle, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin (4:17).

V2-3 refer to the sin of prolonged impurity or the failure to properly deal with ritual impurity. As we'll see in later chapters, God declares certain things to be clean and certain things to be unclean for the Israelites. His people were to stay away from the things that were unclean and if they did come in contact with something unclean, they were to observe the purification rituals the Lord had commanded. This passage deals with someone who did not avoid the unclean thing, so they were defiled. The defilement could have

been unintentional so it wasn't necessarily a sin. But the defiled person neglected to observe the purification ritual, which the Lord commanded. That neglect made them guilty of sin and when they recognized their guilt, they were to offer a sacrifice to atone for their sin.

Understand; it wasn't normally wrong for a person to become ritually impure but it was wrong for them to leave their impurity unaddressed because then they ran the risk of committing a very serious sin: defiling the Lord's tabernacle or the holy items associated with it. In this case, impure people have not dealt properly with their impurity because it has been hidden, either they were unaware of having contracted the impurity or they had forgotten about it. In this context, the guilt didn't begin when the offender realized it; they were guilty when they committed the sin. However, when they realized their sin, then they were responsible to deal with the sin as God had commanded. In the same way, believers must deal with sin in our own lives as we become aware of it as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and on our consciences. We should keep short accounts with God; which simply means: don't prolong the impurity.

V4 refers to refers to an unfulfilled promise and is addressed to those who thoughtlessly made a promise or took an oath. When Israelites took an oath, they invoked the Lord's name, asking Him to bring judgment upon them if they were lying or failed to keep their promise. Failure to keep an oath was tantamount to profaning the Lord's name; it was the same as saying that the Lord was unable to judge effectively. Thus, godly Israelites kept their oaths, whether it benefitted them (their good) or was costly to them (their harm). Here, the oath was hidden, meaning the sinner forgot it and then failed to keep it. This isn't surprising; rash oaths are often made in the heat of the moment and can quickly be forgotten. Again, when they become aware of it, they must deal with it quickly and properly.

Honoring our word isn't an old-fashioned standard; it's God's standard. God tells us that if we say we're going to do something, we should do it. [Eccl 5:2](#) says, "Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven and you on earth; therefore let your words be few." In the same chapter God goes on to say it's better not to make a vow than to vow and fail to keep the vow ([5:5](#)). Today, people make sacred vows at the marriage altar and break them. People sign contracts and then refuse to do what they promised to do. In our own

worship we often promise things in the songs but do we do them? When we leave here we have a lot of things to do and the things we said in worship get crowded out. God takes our promises seriously. We should too.

2) Sin results in guilt – When we transgress God’s law and commit sin, we’re guilty. Again, sin isn’t a popular subject in our culture. People rarely speak of behavior as being right or wrong, merely seeing it as personal choices that should be tolerated, if not celebrated. In our modern society, trust in God has declined while trust in science has increased. God and true science are not incompatible, but in the modern West an increasing percentage of people look to the sciences to define reality instead of looking to God. Since the sciences don’t often include categories for morality, the acknowledgment of moral guilt has decreased as commitment to the sciences has increased.

But, our text doesn’t allow for guilt to be ignored. It describes it as a reality, a metaphysical entity attached to one who commits sin. We commit sin and we bear guilt. Our culture treats guilt as a psychological problem. Feeling guilty doesn’t feel good so they go to a therapist to help them feel better. The goal of secular therapy is to eliminate any bad feelings, to help the patient feel better about themselves. The truth is: they feel guilty because they are; they’ve transgressed God’s law and that’s sin! God’s Word says breaking God’s law is sin and when we sin, we feel guilty.

Of course, that’s a spiritual reality whether we feel guilty or not. Guilty feelings result from God’s gift of a conscience that prods us to an awareness of our sin and motivates us to repent of sin and reconcile with God whose holiness we have offended. Probably the worst thing we could do is try to eliminate the feeling of guilt without addressing the root problem of sin that caused the guilt. So how do we address our root problem of sin? That leads to the 3rd truth.

3) God requires confession of guilt (5) – the root meaning of confess is: to declare or proclaim. The word is used in 3 main ways in the OT. 1st, it’s used primarily to refer to confessing or declaring God’s attributes and works (praise). 2nd, it’s used a few times for man’s praise of man. 3rd, it’s used to refer to confessing personal or corporate sin. This OT usage supports the idea that the confession God intends here was public confession: declaring one’s sin. The purification/sin offering was a visual confession, yet God

instructs worshippers to add their verbal confession to the offering as well. God expected them to declare their sin. When we realize our guilt, we confess. Confession is taking God's side against ourselves; it's agreeing with God that the sin was wrong, not just a mistake or an oversight.

Before we can truly confess, we must realize our guilt. I don't know if they do this anymore but there was a time when you would go through airport security and the security personnel would ask you, "Has anyone placed anything in your luggage without your knowledge?" What? If it was without my knowledge, how would I know? But, the answer they wanted to hear required you to stand there like a buffoon and say, "No, nobody put anything in my luggage without my knowledge." Things can happen without our knowledge. We can commit sin without knowing it. That's why we need to ask the Lord to reveal our sin to us so we can deal with it properly (confess/ask His forgiveness).

4) God provides atonement for sin – Atonement refers to reconciliation – 2 parties becoming at one with each other. They were estranged from one another but they're coming together. Atonement refers to doing what is necessary for 2 parties to be reconciled. As far as our relationship with God is concerned, it refers to taking away sin. Sin has to be removed for us to be reconciled with God. God formalized the removal of sin in the sacrificial system. For sin to be removed, God's righteous wrath must be satisfied. God provided the means of His satisfaction through the sacrifices. When the sacrifice was offered, God's wrath was satisfied and the worshipper could be reconciled to God.

Notice, it wasn't the ritual itself that reconciled people to God. God reconciled them to Himself based on His merciful willingness to forgive and the condition of the heart of the person who observed the ritual ([Ps 51:16-17](#); [Heb 10:4](#)). God's wrath against sin isn't appeased by just performing a religious ritual; that's paganism. God sees the heart and He requires sorrow over sin that leads to confession of sin. This honest sorrow and true confession result in turning from sin and turning to God. That's what God wants! He wants our hearts to be right with Him. In the OT, God gave His people ceremonies that symbolized turning to God. But the bulls, goats, lambs, doves, bread and flour were only symbols. Depending on the hearts of the worshippers, those symbols either represented a spiritual reality or they merely gave the appearance of reconciling a person to God. Only God

forgives sin and He only does so on the basis of the condition of our hearts and His merciful response to our honest repentance.

The OT sacrificial system was temporary and preparatory; it prepared God's people for the perfect sacrifice He had in mind: Jesus Christ. Jesus is God in the flesh; He offered Himself as a sacrifice. He's both the sacrifice and the priest. But, when Jesus became our sacrifice, he wasn't just a symbol of our sorrow over sin and repentance. God actually placed all of our sin upon Jesus as He hung on the cross (II Cor 5:21). Jesus knew no sin so only He is qualified to be our priest. Human priests sin, but not Jesus. Since Jesus knew no sin, He's also uniquely qualified to serve as the perfect, unblemished sacrifice. Even the best, most expensive animals offered for sacrifices were never perfect, but Jesus is; He knew no sin. But the Father made Him to be sin for us. He dumped the entire pile of garbage that is humanity's sin upon His Son on the cross. By that act Jesus won our forgiveness, which brings us to

5) After confession and atonement, God forgives – V10; 13 declare that after the worshipper offered the sacrifice and atonement was made, he will be forgiven. God's forgiveness is a glorious thing and what's even more wonderful: His forgiveness is available to everyone! In ch4 we learned that purification offering was available to every person no matter their social status: priest, the whole congregation, civic leaders and common people. Ch5 says the purification offering was available for every person regardless of economic status. If people couldn't afford a lamb or a goat, they could bring a few birds. If they couldn't afford a few birds, they could bring a measure of flour. No one was excluded from God's forgiveness on the basis of social status or economic status. This offering was for all of God's people- for those in high positions and the lowly; no one was barred from God's forgiveness.

The Psalmist exalted in knowing the joys of experiencing God's forgiveness (32:1-2). It is a joy and a relief to know God's forgiveness. On the other hand, it is a curse to be unforgiven by God. Those who have never experienced God's forgiveness or have refused His forgiveness are still under the curse of all their sin and guilt; an emotional burden that no amount of therapy could ever hope to assuage.

How about you? Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and

Lord? Maybe you never knew you needed a Savior. Maybe you never realized you were guilty of sin. The Bible says that all have sinned – so now you know. All have sinned and the wages (penalty) of sin is death: separation from God for eternity. If you've never received Jesus as Savior, you should do so today. Only Jesus can forgive your past sin and give you a new life and an eternal life.

The sacrificial system described in Leviticus was God's invitation for His people to come into His presence and worship Him. Today, we can accept this same invitation that is made available to us through His final and universal sacrifice for sin – Jesus, who is not only the sacrifice but also the high priest that officiates over the sacrifice. He's the Messiah, the Savior, the only begotten Son of God. Won't you call out to Him today? 😊