THE SIN OFFERING

Leviticus 4:1-5:13

Key Verse: 4:6

“He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary.”

Thank God for revealing the truth of the fellowship/peace offering. The LORD God is the God of fellowship in peace. Our fellowship with God came true through the reconciliation brought by Christ’s blood shed on the cross. Since God loved us by giving his best, not even sparing his own Son, he wants the best from us, the most precious thing, our total surrender, our whole submission of intellect, emotion and will, so that our fellowship with God be true, above all other fellowships, and so our fellowship with others also be true in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He also wants us to serve generously and share the message of reconciliation in expectation of his coming kingdom. Today’s passage is about the sin offering. Sin is the very thing that separates men from God, breaking the relationship between the two and bringing punishment upon the sinner. But through the sin offering, atonement and forgiveness can attained along with restoration of life in every area. This is a marvelous grace of God through his Son Jesus Christ. This passage, concerning the sin offering, wonderfully describes the way of forgiveness and restoration revealing the gospel truth so graphically. May the Holy Spirit unfold the truth of God in this sin offering.

This chapter begins with the words, “The LORD said to Moses.” Leviticus begins with the words in 1:1, “The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting.” After talking about the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering, now the author writes, “The LORD said to Moses.” It reminds us that the words are the words of the LORD, not of Moses, a human being. Then in verse 2 it says, “Say to the Israelites; ‘When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands—” This expression is written also in verse 13, 22, and 27. In the cases of the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering, sin is not mentioned, though ‘any of you’ in 1:2, which is *Adam* in Hebrew is stated, reminding us of our original sin – that we are born sinners. The sin offering is for anyone who sins specifically. Sinning unintentionally is sinning because of weak flesh or tempting circumstances or any other reason against one’s good wishes. It is breaking God’s commands, doing what is forbidden or not doing what is required (5:1). Commission and omission both are sin. We are to know that the basis of judgment is God’s words in the Bible, not the standard of the world or any human’s idea, or my own criteria. Sin is breaking any of the Lord’s commands, or not keeping any word of God.

James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilt of breaking all of it.” Anyone who sins even unintentionally, even just breaking one command, is a sinner before God. There are those who say, “I am not a sinner.” But the reality is that they get old and die, for the wages of sin is death, resulting in the second death, that is, eternal punishment. In this passage, we read the expression repeatedly, “they are guilty” or “he is guilty” (13, 22, 27, 5:2, 3, 4, 5) though he is not aware of it. The meaning is that sin is sin. When one sins and breaks God’s law, God’s heart is broken and grieved, as a parent’s heart is broken and the father or mother is grieved over the child who had done wrong. Sin’s effect is already at the work in in the lawbreaker though the person may not feel it. It is like a liver patient who does not feel pain at the beginning stages. Sin is a terrible thing, like an uncontrollable, ever-changing virus. It is like cancer or leprosy. Sin eats up the soul, making it sick. Sin has to be treated as any fatal disease is to treated in a matter of time. Denying sin or denying God is not the solution. In that denial, the sickness of sin becomes worse and worse to the point of final destruction.

In his great mercy and marvelous grace, God provided the way of treating sin through the sin offering system, which points to the coming of Christ Jesus as a sin offering for us. In this passage, what kind animal is brought as a sin offering – whether a young bull, a male goat, or a female goat/lamb – differs according to who sinned – a priest, the whole community, a leader of the tribe, or a member of the community. It indicates that more spiritual blessing means more responsibility, resulting greater seriousness in the case of sin.

Now verses 3 and 4 say, “If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect. He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD.” And in verses 14 and 15 it says, “When they become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull a sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting.” And verse 23 says, “When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect.” And verse 28 says, “When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering for the sin he committed a female goat without defect.” Here we are to know that becoming aware of their sin or being made aware of his sin is critical. It is really a blessing. When they realize their sin, they can see their misery and come to God. This is one purpose of Bible study. For this, Bible teachers and shepherds are needed to reveal the truth of God’s word.

Then verse 4b says, “he is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before the LORD.” And verse 15 says, “The elder of the community are to lay their hands on the bull’s head before the LORD, and the bull shall be slaughtered before God.” The laying on of the hand is also written in verse 24, 29, and 33. As we studied, laying on of the offeror’s hand has the meaning of identification, transferal and substitution. At this point, we are to remember the laying on of the hand upon Jesus’ head, his baptism by John in the Jordan river. It was totally unthinkable for John to baptize Jesus by laying his hand on Jesus the Son of God. So John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented (Mt. 3:15). Historically it happened. What humiliation, though it was pleasing to God because it fulfilled all righteousness! According to Apostle John, the baptism happened after John the Baptist’s message regarding Jesus, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Through the baptism of Jesus, our sins were transferred to him. In Genesis 7, God saved eight members of Noah’s family who were in the ark amid the flood judgment, as the ark was floating on the water (7:23). According to 1 Peter 3:20, they were saved through water, while all others were wiped out by the water. And then Peter wrote, “this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you.” And then he says, “It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (3:21). So submerging into and emerging out of the water refers to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. What a significant event of Jesus’ baptism though the laying on of the human hand! Later, he ultimately would undergo the baptism of death, being slaughtered (Lk 12:50) for our sins as the Lamb of God. What grace!

Now verses 5 and 6 say, “Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull’s blood and carry it into the Tent of Meeting. He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary.” It is also written in verses 16 and 17, “Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull’s blood into the Tent of Meeting. He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the LORD seven times in front of the curtain.” These are very specific instructions concerning the sin offering, in comparison to the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, in which the blood was sprinkled against the altar on all sides at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. What is the significance of this? The curtain divided the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Only the High priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and that once a year on the day of Atonement. The curtain signifies the barrier between God and man. As we know, according to Hebrew 9:26, “Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” Here the priest is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle, not with hyssop which was used to smear the blood of the door frames of a house at the time of the Passover for Exodus (Ex 12:22). When the priest dipped his finger into the blood and sprinkled, it was like his own blood. And sprinkling the blood seven times on the curtain refers to complete and perfect forgiveness, since seven is the perfect number. We remember the amazing event that when Jesus died shedding his blood on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two and so many people who had gathered at the Passover at that time saw it with great surprise and bewilderment. Also seven times of sprinkling the blood can indicate Jesus’ shedding his whole blood: at the time of his prayer at Gethsemane, his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground; when flogged, his flesh was torn apart and the blood sprang up from his shoulders and back; when his thorn-crowned head was stricken by the staff of the soldiers, blood came out from his brow and flowed on his face; when his two outstretched arms and feet were nailed to cross, blood gushed out; and when his side was pierced by a spear, it brought the sudden flow of blood and water. Through Jesus’ death on the cross with his all of his blood shed, the way for us to come to God was opened. The author of Hebrews confirms it describing it in this way, “…since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.” What an amazing and astonishing revelation! We can come to the presence of God through the new and living way opened for us, that is, through the curtain of his blood-soaked body ripped and broken on the cross. It has brought the perfect forgiveness of sin. Many thanks and praises to our Lord Jesus! The LORD God had this marvelous plan in mind when he instituted the sin offering system around 1500 years prior. Praise God!

Then verse 7 says, “The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the bull’s blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.” It is also written in verse 18, “He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the Tent of Metting.” In the Bible, horn refers to power and authority. The altar of the incense is put right before the Most Place with the curtain hiding the Place. The author of Hebrews even considered that the golden altar of incense was placed in the Most Holy Place (Heb. 9:4). The fragrant incense was to burn regularly every day (Ex 30:7), rising up to God. According to Revelation 5:8 and 8:3, incense refers to the prayers of the saints. So putting the blood on the horns of the altar of incense could mean that the privilege and authority to pray was restored since the new and living way to God was opened. So Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” And 1 John 5:14 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hear us.” What a privilege! What power and authority! It is also related to our authority over all evil spirits.

In the case of a leader’s sinning and offering of a male goat, it is written in 25, “Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.”It is also written in verse 30, “Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar” and in verse 34, “Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.” We know that in Christ Jesus, we not only have authority over evil spirits, but also over all kinds of diseases since Jesus took up our infirmities and carried our diseases (Mt 8:17), and by his wounds we have been healed (Isa 53:5; 1 Pe 2:24). In the gospel, when a paralytic was brought to Jesus, Jesus said, “Son, your sins are forgiven” and demonstrated his authority to forgive man’s sins by making the paralytic get up, take his mat and walk out in full view of the people there. Sin made the paralytic powerless, but when his sins were forgiven he became powerful, which was displayed before the people. In the blessing of the forgiveness of sins, all authority has been given to his people, over any sickness and any environment and circumstances. For he took away all the curses and brought all blessings of God through his death on the cross. There is a hymn song “Joy to the World”,which says, “No more let sin and sorrow grow, Nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is the found, Far as the curse is found, Far as, far as the curse is found.” God wants us to claim all the blessings of God in Christ Jesus. It is the restoration of God’s blessing in Genesis 1:28, “…Subdue it and rule over it.”

In verses 8-10, “He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering—the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys—just as the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering.” And verse 11 says, “The hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts an offal—that is, all the rest of the ashes are thrown, and burnt it in a wood fire on the ash heap.” In the case of the sin offering, the hide and even offal are taken outside the camp to be burned. It is because sin has to be treated as sin thoroughly. God is the God of thorough judgment. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus became sin itself for us. What an expression! Jesus was so badly treated because of our sin. The author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 13:11-12, “The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.” What a fulfillment! Surely Jesus has become the sin offering for us, which assures us our perfect forgiveness and perfect salvation in Jesus Christ.

In verses 20b and 21 it says, “In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven. Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull. This is the sin offering for the community.” And in verses 26b, “In this way the priest will make atonement for the man’s sin, and he will be forgiven.” The atonement and forgiveness is also written in verse 31, 35 and 5:13. We know that this is ceremonial outward cleansing and temporary forgiveness as written in Hebrews 9:13. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (Heb 10:4). The true and perfect and permanent forgiveness is found in Christ Jesus. Our High Priest made atonement for us by his own sacrifice and blood and so again the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins is there in Christ Jesus, our sin offering. Hebrews 10:11-14 says, “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.” Jesus completed his duty of taking away sins. And in 10:14, “by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

Now in 5:1 it says, “If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible.” The ninth commandment in Decalogue is “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.” Being a false witness is a serious sin. It is not speaking the truth. Again, not doing what we have to do according to God’s command is sin. And verse 5 say, “When anyone is guilty of in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned.” The Bible clearly says about the importance of confessing one’s sin. David said in Psalm 32:1-5, “Bless is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” 1 John 1:7, 9 says, “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin…If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” When God’s word touches our hearts, helping us to realize our sin, we should repent confessing our sins. If not, as time passes, our hearts become numb, and we calculate and rationalize, losing the opportunity to confess. This is a spiritual battle. But when we acknowledge our sin and confess it at the opportune time, God remembers the sin no more. He knows all our sins and all the sins of the world as the God of omniscience, but our confessed sins he remembers no more. This is God’s memory system like the computer deleting system. The confessed sins are automatically deleted. It is as written in Hebrews 8:12, “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” and in 10:17, “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” God really wants us to live in this grace of forgiveness.

We can say that the more we are sensitive to our sins, the deeper we can go into the grace of forgiveness. As for Samuel, failing to pray for God’s flock was sinning against God (1 Sam 12:23). May God help us to be sensitive to our sins based on the word of God.

God was so mindful for the poor people that he also provided for them to offer the sin offering and live in his grace of forgiveness and receive all the blessedness. He is the merciful God for all. They could offer two doves or two young pigeons. The same forgiveness is written in 5:10, “The priest shall…make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.” If they still could not afford them, they could bring a tenth of an ephah of fine flour. And verse 13 says, “In this way the priest will make atonement for him for any of these sins he has committed, and he will be forgiven.” One’s poverty cannot be an excuse. The sin problem has to be resolved for both the rich and the poor. God wants all to live in his blessing. The power of forgiveness is not in the animals, but the important thing is to follow the prescribed way. Forgiveness comes from God. Now God’s prescribed way is through Jesus Christ.

Thank Jesus who shed his whole blood for us, the blood in his sweat, the blood on his back and shoulders, his thorn-crown brow, his two hands and folded feet and side. Thus he made an atonement for our sins and brought us perfect forgiveness of sins along with all the blessings of God. May we put our full trust in him and dwell in this marvelous grace, confessing our sins at each time in light of the words of God.