

The Book of Leviticus

Lesson 3: Guilt Offerings and Instructions for the Priests -- Leviticus 5:14–6:30

Picture a man in ancient Israel who has wronged his neighbor. Maybe he kept a deposit that was not his, or shaded the truth about a found purse, or skimmed a little off what belonged to the LORD. He cannot sleep. The wrong sits on his chest like a stone. Then he remembers what God has provided, not a way to excuse the sin, but a way to make it right and to come home clean. That is where Leviticus 5 and 6 meet us. These chapters are not dusty regulations about animals and altars; they are God showing sinful people how to approach a holy God without being consumed, and how to repair the damage their sin has done.

We tend to think of forgiveness and restitution as opposites, as if grace means we never have to pay anyone back. But here God ties them together. The guilt offering required the worshiper to restore what he had taken and then add a fifth on top of it. God cared about the broken relationship on earth, not only the broken relationship with heaven. When we read these laws we are not reading a cold ledger; we are reading the heart of a God who wants His people both forgiven and honest, both pardoned and put right.

Then the scene shifts to the altar itself. There is a fire there that must never go out. Day and night, through the dark hours when no one is watching, the priest feeds the flame. It is a quiet picture of constant devotion, of a love for God that does not flicker out when the crowd goes home. And over it all stands the priest, the mediator who carries the offering between the people and God, a man set apart to handle holy things, a shadow of a greater Priest who would one day carry our offering once for all.

So as we open this passage, remember what we are doing. We are not putting ourselves back under the law of Moses; that law was nailed to the cross and fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17). We are standing in the shadows to see the substance more clearly. Every drop of blood here points forward to Calvary. Every flame on that altar asks us a question about the fire in our own hearts. Let us listen for the voice of the living God, who is just as holy now as He was then, and who has made a far better way for us to draw near.

Group Discussion: Read Leviticus 6:13. Why do you think God commanded that the fire on the altar burn continually and never go out, and what does that say about the kind of devotion He desires from His people?

Personal Reflection: Is there a wrong you have done to someone that you have apologized for in your heart but never actually made right with them? What would honest restitution look like for you this week?

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Study Questions

1. According to Leviticus 5:14–19, what made the trespass or guilt offering necessary, and what does it teach us about the seriousness of sin, even sin committed in ignorance against the holy things of the LORD?
2. The guilt offering required the worshiper to restore what was taken and add a fifth to it (Leviticus 6:4–5). Where in your own life might genuine repentance call for more than an apology, and how does paying restitution change the heart of the one who repents?
3. In Leviticus 6:1–7, the sins listed against the LORD are actually sins against a neighbor (lying, robbery, deceit, keeping what was found). What does this teach about how God views the way we treat one another?
4. When you have wronged someone, do you find it harder to confess it to God or to face the person you hurt? What does this passage suggest about why both are necessary?
5. Study the law of the burnt offering in Leviticus 6:8–13. Why must the fire on the altar be kept burning continually, and what does the perpetual fire reveal about the worship and devotion God desires?
6. What practices help keep the fire of your devotion to God burning when no one is watching, and what tends to let that flame die down in your life?

7. In Leviticus 6:14–23, the grain offering and the priests' portion are described. What does it mean that the priests lived from the offerings, and how does this set apart the work of the one who mediates between God and the people?
8. The priest had to handle holy things carefully and live a set-apart life. In what concrete ways are you called to live set apart for God in a world that pulls the other direction?
9. Leviticus 6:24–30 stresses that whatever touches the sin offering becomes holy, and that the priest who offers it eats it in a holy place. Drawing on Hebrews 7–10, how does the Aaronic priesthood and its sin offering point forward to Christ our High Priest, and what is better about His once-for-all sacrifice than the daily offerings of Leviticus?
10. Looking across this whole passage, the restitution, the continual fire, the mediating priest, the holiness that sets apart everything it touches, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming you through these chapters to make a wrong right, to keep your devotion burning, or to draw near to God through Him.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 9:11–14, Christ entered once for all by His own blood to cleanse our conscience, fulfilling every animal offering; Hebrews 7:23–28, our High Priest lives forever and offered Himself once, unlike the many priests of Leviticus; Luke 19:8–9, Zacchaeus restores fourfold, showing repentance that makes wrongs right; Romans 12:1, we present our bodies a living sacrifice, the continual fire of devotion; 1 Peter 1:15–16, be holy as He is holy, the call that flows from the holiness of God seen at the altar.