

Vicarious atonement, viscerally felt or, God's grace does not negate God's righteousness

... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. — HEBREWS 9:22

Analysis

A. (4:1-5:13) The sin offering



KARL F. KEIL
(1807-1888)

First clear light
on the
expiatory value
of sacrifice

Though the sins described are not 'high-handed', but rather what we might describe as sins of ignorance, what is continually reinforced by the detailed directives?

Keil [ii 269] offers his opinion that there is no clear idea of expiation in the sacrifices before Moses and the Law. This, he suggests, is demonstrated by the fact that the patriarchs offer sacrifices to a God who has already "drawn near to them in revelations of love".

[4:2] It could almost be called the Lapse offering; for 'unwittingly' translates a word which implies not so much ignorance as stumbling or straying. [Kidner 110]

[4:3] This secret of the unfathomable love of the triune God was hidden from the Israelites in the law, but it formed the real background for the divine sanction of the animal sacrifices, whereby they acquired a typical signification, so that they set forth in shadow that reconciliation, which God from all eternity had determined to effect by giving up His only-begotten Son to death, as a sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. [Keil ii 277]

The law of the sin-offering is introduced by phraseology different from that which is used in the case of the preceding offerings. In the case of each of these, the language used implies that the Israelites were familiar with the offering before its incorporation into the Levitical sacrificial system. The sin-offering, on the other hand, is introduced as a new thing. And such, indeed, it was. While, as we have seen, each of the offerings before ordered had been known and used, both by the Shemitic and the other nations, since long before the days of Moses, before this time there is no mention anywhere, in Scripture or out of it, of a sacrifice corresponding to the sin- or the guilt-offering. The significance of this fact is apparent so soon as we observe what was the distinctive conception of the sin-offering, as contrasted with the other offerings. Without question, it was the idea of expiation of guilt by the sacrifice of a substituted victim. This idea, as we have seen, was indeed not absent from the other bloody offerings; but in those its place was secondary and subordinate. In the ritual of the sin-offering, on the contrary, this

idea was brought out into almost solitary prominence – sin pardoned on the ground of expiation made through the presentation to God of the blood of an innocent victim. [Kellogg 116-117]

In this word "atonement" we are introduced to one of the key-words of Leviticus, as indeed of the whole Scripture. The Hebrew radical originally means "to cover," and is used once (Gen. 6:14) in this purely physical sense. But, commonly, as here, it means "to cover" in a spiritual sense, that is, to cover the sinful person from the sight of the Holy God, who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil." Hence, it is commonly rendered "to atone," or "to make atonement;" also, "to reconcile," or "to make reconciliation." The thought is this: that between the sinner and the Holy One comes now the guiltless victim; so that the eye of God looks not upon the sinner, but on the offered substitute; and in that the blood of the substituted victim is offered before God for the sinner, atonement is made for sin, and the Most Holy One is satisfied. [Kellogg 45]

Corporate responsibility – of nations and corporations

[4:11,12] But that the priest, and all present, might go home with an awful conviction of the heinousness even of forgiven sin, other things remained to be done. "We are not to forget sin, because it has been atoned for; and we are not to think lightly of sin, because it is washed away. Our God wishes his people to retain a deep and lively sense of their guilt, even when forgiven. Hence the concluding ceremonies in the case of the priest's sin. [Bonar 72]

[4:13] Thus Israel was taught by this law, as we are, that responsibility attaches not only to each individual person, but also to associations of individuals in their corporate character, as nations, communities, and – we may add – all Societies and Corporations, whether secular or religious. Let us emphasise it to our own consciences, as another of the fundamental lessons of this law: there is individual sin; there is also such a thing as a sin by "the whole congregation." In other words, God holds nations, communities – in a word, all associations and combinations of men for whatever purpose, no less under obligation in their corporate capacity to keep His law than as individuals, and will count them guilty if they break it, even through ignorance. [Kellogg 124-125]

[4:13] Never has a generation needed this reminder more than our own. The political and social principles which, since the French Revolution in the end of the last century, have been, year by year, more and more generally accepted among the nations of Christendom, are everywhere tending to the avowed or practical denial of this most important truth. It is a maxim ever more and more extensively accepted as almost axiomatic in our modern democratic communities, that religion is wholly a concern of the individual; and that a nation or community, as such, should make no distinction between various religions as false or true, but maintain an absolute neutrality, even between Christianity and idolatry, or theism and atheism. It should take little thought to see that this modern maxim stands in direct opposition to the principle assumed in this law of the sin-offering; namely, that a community or nation

"... responsibility attaches not only to each individual person, but also to associations of individuals in their corporate character, as nations, communities, and – we may add – all Societies and Corporations ..."

S.H. Kellogg, *The Expositor's Bible*

is as truly and directly responsible to God as the individual in the nation. But this corporate responsibility the spirit of the age squarely denies. [Kellogg 124-125]

The principle, however, is of present-day application. Privilege is the measure of responsibility, no less now than then, for nations as well as for individuals. Thus national sin, on the part of the British or American nation, or indeed with any of the so-called Christian nations, is certainly judged by God to be a much more evil thing than the same sin if committed, for example, by the Chinese or Turkish nation, who have had no such degree of Gospel light and knowledge. [Kellogg 128]

[4:21] It is remarkable that after the declaration of forgiveness, these other ceremonies take place. They are intended, no doubt, to impress a horror of sin on the soul, even after it is forgiven. The forgiven man is most capable of seeing the horror of sin; and therefore the people are first pardoned, and then led out to see the last mite exacted without the camp. See the same order observed, and for the same reason, we suppose, at vv 11, 12. None but a pardoned man could have uttered Paul's cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). [Bonar 79]

B. (5:14-6:7) The guilt offering. Is sin ever merely a matter between man and man?

Grittith Thomas stresses that the Sin offering & the Trespass offering, unlike the first 3, were entirely new, underlining the need of expiation, the substitution of one life, symbolized by the blood, for another. The Trespass offering, however, stresses the need for reparation or satisfaction for injury. The Sin offering stresses guilt. [see Thomas 115]

[5:7] The dove, as Harrison notes [48], is a suitable symbol for the sacrifice of innocence, as it is well known to exemplify non-aggressive, non-retaliatory behaviour. Hence it has come to serve as symbol of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and too as the international peace symbol.

[5:11] A few ears of the wheat of that land would furnish enough; and every Israelite had some family inheritance. An omer, or the tenth part of an ephah, is the quantity; just the very quantity of manna that sufficed for each day's support. Probably the poor man, who needed to bring his offering for a sin committed, was thus taught to give up just his food for that day – fasting before the Lord. [Bonar 96]

[5:11] ... whereas the meal for the meal-offering had no limit fixed as to quantity, in this case the amount is prescribed – "the tenth part of an ephah" (ver. 11); an amount which, from the story of the manna, appears to have represented the sustenance of one full day. Thus it was ordained that if, in the nature of the case, this sin-offering could not set forth the sacrifice of life by means of the shedding of blood, it should at least point in the same direction, by requiring that, so to speak, the support of life for one day shall be given up, as forfeited by sin. [Kellogg 144]

[5:18,19] Israel was thus shut up to the solemn duty of inquiring into the Lord's revealed will. By treating ignorance as a sin of such magnitude, the Lord made provision among His people for securing a thorough and continual search into his mind and will; and thus, no doubt, family instruction was universal in every tent in the

wilderness, and the nation became an intelligent as well as a peculiar people. [Bonar 105]

Griffith Thomas contrasts the wrongs against God (chapter 5) with the next chapter's wrongs against man, with the subsequent need for confession and reparation or restitution, as well as offering to God. [Thomas 115]

What a startling conception is this, which forms the background to the great "guilt-offering"! Man a debtor to God! a debtor for service each day due, but no day ever fully and perfectly rendered! in gratitude for gifts, too often quite forgotten, oftener only paid in scanty part! We are often burdened and troubled greatly about our debts to men; shall we not be concerned about the enormous and ever accumulating debt to God! [Kellogg 171]

[6:3, ... he has found something lost ...] Unconcerned at the anxiety it may have given to the loser, the man refuses to part with what he has found. This is surely selfishness in the extreme. But it is so, also, if the finder is not willing to hear of an owner, glad only at his own advantage, and saying, "The owner may never miss it – God has thrown it into my hands." The Lord teaches us not to build up our joy on the loss or sorrow of others. Such is the kind care of the God of Israel. Is he not still "the Eagle" over them, stirring up her nest and fluttering over her young? He teaches His family to be full of love – superiors, inferiors, equals. He would infuse the holy feelings of heaven into the camp of Israel. Truly, society regulated by the Lord is blessed society, for His own love flows through it all, and is the very joints and bands. [Bonar 108]

"By treating ignorance as a sin of such magnitude, the Lord made provision among His people for securing a thorough and continual search into his mind and will ..."

– Andrew Bonar *Leviticus* 105