

DO RIGHT WHEN YOU DO WRONG Leviticus 5:1-5, 14-16; 6:1-7

Have you ever been sitting in a theater or church and someone has to pass in front of you to get to their seat and he or she steps on your toes? What is the minimal expectation you have regarding how people should react when they do step on your toes? (Normally, most of us would be satisfied with an apology such as “I’m sorry” or “pardon me” or something similar.) What about a situation in which your grandchildren are at your house and they are playing baseball or just fooling around with your golf clubs and they hit a ball through a neighbor’s window? What would you do (assuming you discovered what had happened)? You are in a hurry to get somewhere and you misjudge the time-distance factors as you approach an intersection and you wind up going a red light that has a camera monitor. What is going happen? (You have to pay a fine.)

Things happen that can be harmful to you or other people and many times there was no malicious intent or even blatantly irresponsible behavior on the part of the one who caused the problem. In a civil society, there is an expectation that an attempt will be made to make things right when someone else has been hurt or had property damage. Helping people deal with such issues is the motivation behind liability insurance.

Sometimes when things happen and people are hurt or property is damaged there are questions regarding who needs to “make it right” or take the responsibility. When the stakes are high and more than an apology or a few dollars are needed to fix the problem, then people will sometimes deny any responsibility, blame others, or attempt to justify what they did. Such refusals and denials are the offspring or the legacies of Adam and Eve. Things did not work out very well for them and if we follow the same pattern, then we can expect similar results. God had a better plan and ways of handling misdeeds and wrongdoings were prescribed in the laws He had given the Israelites.

As we get into some of the details of the laws in the account given to us in Leviticus, we find instructions for worship (our interaction with God) and requirements for acceptable behavior (our interactions with people). Some basic steps are identified in the passages in which we will be looking. The first is to Acknowledge Your Wrongdoing (Lev 5:1-5), next is to Get Right with God (Lev 5:14-16) and finally Make Restitution Where Possible (Lev 6:1-7). Several specific examples are given in these passages and we can discover the principles behind the prescribed action which should help us apply the principles to the situations we encounter today.

Acknowledge Your Wrongdoing (5:1-5)

¹ ‘Now if a person sins after he hears a public adjuration *to testify* when he is a witness, whether he has seen or *otherwise* known, if he does not tell *it*, then he will bear his guilt. ² ‘Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean cattle or a carcass of unclean swarming things, though it is hidden from him and he is unclean, then he will be guilty. ³ ‘Or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever *sort* his uncleanness *may* be with which he becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know *it*, he will be guilty. ⁴ ‘Or if a person swears thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, in whatever matter a man may speak thoughtlessly with an oath, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know *it*, he will be guilty in one of these. ⁵ ‘So it shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that he shall confess that in which he has sinned. Leviticus 5:1-5 (NASB95)

Several typical situations are addressed in these five verses. The first is with regard to having information or being a witness to a matter that is being litigated and a call goes out from the prosecution or the defense for anyone who has information to come forward. The idea here is that the expectation from those in authority is that justice and truth would be the outcome of

whatever matter was being considered. The bottom line is that if you know something that is relevant and you do not share that information, then it is considered to be a sin.

You hear requests similar to this every now and then with regard to a crime that has been committed and an appeal goes out over the news media for anyone who has any knowledge of the crime to call the local authorities. Sometimes people do call and share what they know and it can make a difference. On the other hand, we may see situations regarding crimes that happen in areas where gangs are in control of what goes on and people are very reluctant to tell what they know because they fear for their safety. This kind of tension is present in many situations where there may not be a safety concern as much as it is simply a desire to not get involved. Balancing that reluctance is a declaration from God that says you are sinning if you do not testify to what you know.

This may be stretch, but just consider that each person is continually conducting a “hearing” (or trial) within his own heart to decide between the “way of the world” and the “way of the Kingdom of God” as to how they will live. You, as a born-again believer have evidence that is pertinent to the “hearing” and the call has gone out to share that testimony with everyone. We call that the Great Commission. Would it be a stretch to say that your refusal to tell what you know would be considered to be a sin in the context of Leviticus 5:1?

The second typical situation considered in this passage has to do with coming in contact with “unclean” things. We are not going to get into the whole list of what constitutes uncleanliness as far as animals and humans are concerned, but suffice it to say that the Israelites had some very comprehensive listings of what one should avoid touching. When such contamination was discovered then steps were to be taken to deal with the uncleanliness that the person has acquired by coming in contact with a dead animal, dead person, or whatever.

Why was this avoidance of “unclean things” so important? From a practical point of view, there were physical health issues at stake. They did not have the USDA or the FDA or the CDC to watch out for things that could ruin their health. In order to give some substance to the prohibitions, the violations of these “health rules” were deemed to be sins and some corrective actions were prescribed. Why are we not concerned with such things today? Actually, we are concerned with such things to such an extent that we have agencies that cost a lot of tax dollars to deal with these issues. The places where there are lapses in the system are quite serious with such things as e-coli contamination, salmonella, and flu viruses. Our hospitals are supposed to maintain very strict cleanliness practices to avoid spreading diseases.

Is there an application here with regard to our spiritual health? Should we be concerned about coming in contact with the “deadly” things of the world in which we live. There are a lot of poisonous philosophies around, there many things that are just simply filthy that we inadvertently come in contact with. The lesson to be learned from this is that when we discover such contamination in our lives, then we should deal with it by the appropriate cleansing techniques. Part of that methodology is to get into the word and correct any misunderstanding that may have crept into our thinking.

The third concern addressed in this section is with regard to making a rash vow that you either can't or have no intention of keeping or one that would harm others if you did keep the vow. The wording “to do good or to do evil” is probably an idiomatic expression that means “to do whatever” so that the issue is not whether the vow accomplishes something good or bad. The issue is that it was done thoughtlessly or without regard of the consequences (either intended or unintended). Sometimes people say things in the heat or emotion of the situation in which they are in that may be a gross overstatement or they say they will do something they would actually

never do if they really thought about it. You hear parents making a statement such as “If you do that again, I swear to God, I’m going to beat you within an inch of your life.” That is not good!

We could make a long list of reasons why such vows are inappropriate. We can start with the fact that we make a vow in the name of God that we have no intention of keeping. That, at the very least, is a violation of the commandment to not take the Lord’s name in vain. It is also a violation of the commandment to not bear false witness. Saying things that are “unbelievable” hurts your credibility. Loss of credibility hurts your relationships with others. When considering such consequences, we would do well to recall the verse that tells us we will have to give an account for every idle word. Solomon had some advice regarding this issue in Ecclesiastes 5:5 where he tells us “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.”

The remedy for all of these is summed up in verse five: Confess the sins or errors. The typical reaction of many people to such a suggestion would be “I did not intend to do that and don’t consider it a sin. According to the evidence in the scriptures, “missing the mark” by reason of failure, neglect, ignorance or carelessness is still sin and needs to be confessed in order to be cleansed and atoned for. Most people do not intentionally rebel against God, but in the pressures of life and in the weakness of our nature we find at the end of a day that we have to admit “we have done things our own way, we have not done things that we should have done and we have done those things that we should not have done.” If we don’t address these “failures” that happen every day, then we run the risk of accumulating the accompanying guilt and that can be a hindrance to good mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Having a prescribed way of dealing with such things is essential and we can be very thankful that through the sacrifice of Christ that all we need to do is confess our sins and know that He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Get Right with God (Lev 5:14-16)

¹⁴Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁵“If a person acts unfaithfully and sins unintentionally against the LORD’S holy things, then he shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD: a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation in silver by shekels, in *terms of* the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering. ¹⁶“He shall make restitution for that which he has sinned against the holy thing, and shall add to it a fifth part of it and give it to the priest. The priest shall then make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and it will be forgiven him. Leviticus 5:14-16 (NASB95)

The previous verses dealt with sins that would affect us personally. We can also sins that involve the misuse of things that have been set apart for the Lord. In such cases the remedy went beyond confessing and involved presenting a substitutionary sacrifice plus making restitution of whatever loss that was incurred as a result of the sin. This act of sacrifice and monetary payment was generally referred to as a guilt offering. The specific transgressions are not mentioned here, but it is thought that such things as eating a portion of the food that was set aside for the use of the priest, failure to tithe, failure to bring a first fruits offering, inappropriate use of the vessels of the Tabernacle, or doing things that would defile the Tabernacle.

What would be the present day application of “sins against the Lord’s holy things?” We might think immediately of failure to tithe or perhaps gossiping falsely about the preacher as examples of the sort of things we might do that would come under the general category of such sins. What about mistreating a fellow Christian? If we realize that each of us carries the designation of “saints of the Lord,” which would mean that we are set apart for the Lord’s use, then we could expand the application of such sins to include not only unintentional mistreatment of others but mistreatment of places of worship. What is not addressed here and is difficult to

define is the whole issue of what constitutes inappropriate behavior in church. I would think that your ideas of what is appropriate or inappropriate would be different from what someone would think that had been raised in a Roman Catholic tradition or even a Pentecostal tradition. It would certainly be different from what a much younger person would think.

One thing that is different now as compared to the time when these prescriptions were given for guilt offering for sins against the Lord's holy things is that we do not have any accountability associated with such transgressions today. I would think that the priest would have had the responsibility in the Old Testament to point out such transgressions and to require the sacrifice and restitution, but today it would appear that no one is in charge. Who should do this today? I think we can find some help in the writings of Paul in his letter to the church of the Galatians. In Chapter 6, verse 1, we see the following:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

Therefore, it would appear that we are responsible for each other. This would be the logical conclusion since we are "kings and priests unto God." We find in the first epistle of Peter these words in Chapter 2, verse 9

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light

Make Restitution Where Possible (Lev 6:1-7)

¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²"When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted *to him*, or through robbery, or *if* he has extorted from his companion, ³or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do; ⁴then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him or the lost thing which he found, ⁵or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day *he presents* his guilt offering. ⁶"Then he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering, ⁷and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any one of the things which he may have done to incur guilt." Leviticus 6:1-7 (NASB95)

The final part of the guilt offering discussion moves from transgressions regarding the Lord's holy things (5:14-16) and violation of the Lord's commands (5:17-19) to transgressions that affect another person. We might call such things embezzlement, theft, extortion, and failure to return lost property. It would appear also that the discussion has moved from things done unintentionally to sins that were intentionally carried out to the harm of another person.

The prescribed remedy for such sins is the same as the remedy for unintentional sins against the Lord. In fact, such acts are characterized (in verse 2) as sins against the Lord even though the one who was harmed was another person. We may think that such a characterization is strange; however, when a crime is being prosecuted in our courts today, the official charge brought against the accused is that they violated "the peace and dignity of the state" in carrying out the robbery or whatever the charge might be. When we consider that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein" then we can see that when we harm another person, then the sin is ultimately against God.

D. A. Carson's comments in the *New Bible Commentary* on this passage are very helpful in connecting this passage with others that deal with similar issues.

A similar range of disputes is covered in the law in Ex. 22:7–15. There, the restitution required was double the value of the object, not one fifth extra as here. Perhaps the reason was that the Exodus law deals with cases where the guilty party has been brought to court and his guilt proved by the evidence, whereas this passage is dealing with voluntary confession of guilt with appropriate sacrifice. The lesser penalty in this case would thus encourage people to 'own up' rather than wait to be caught or accused and proved guilty.

It is noticeable that full restitution, plus the added fifth, must be made before the sacrifice is brought. There was no point trying to get God's forgiveness until proper amends had been made to the injured party. The horizontal aspect of the offence must be attended to before its vertical aspect could be dealt with. Both these dimensions of this kind of sin are expressed right at the beginning of the chapter: a person guilty of *deceiving his neighbor* is simultaneously guilty of being *unfaithful to the LORD (6:2)*. Jesus also emphasized the connection between what he called the first and second great commandments in the law.

The guilt offering thus completes the list of sacrifices that were to be brought by Israelites and their families. It is worth pausing to consider the range of symbolism expressed. The vocabulary of sin in the Old Testament is very comprehensive, as was needed to convey the depth and variety of its understanding of the human predicament. The four blood sacrifices portray four distinct, though obviously related and overlapping, models of sin, and offer remedies that apply to those different dimensions. The burnt offering sees sin as objective guilt before God, and it functioned as the major atoning sacrifice, providing the ransom by which God's anger was soothed and kept back from venting its full force on the sinner. The fellowship offering sees that sin produces brokenness and barriers between people and, while still providing atonement in relation to God, emphasizes the need and blessing of restored relationships and shared joy. The sin offering sees sin as dirt and pollution, which inevitably offends the presence of the holy God, and thus offers the means of cleansing and purification so that God can continue to dwell among his people. The guilt offering sees sin as a wrong or a debt which has to be repaid and, therefore, demands full restitution as well as sacrifice. All of these are truths which the New Testament affirms in different ways and which continue to have a great theological weight long after the last animal was sacrificed on Israel's altars.

FOUR MAJOR OFFERINGS (Summary of above comments in table form)

Offering Type	Burnt	Fellowship	Sin	Guilt
Nature of sin addressed	Objective guilt before God	Brokenness and barriers between people	Dirt and pollution that offends God	Debt to be repaid
Character of the offering	Major Atoning Sacrifice	Atonement in relation to God	Cleansing and purification	Sacrifice and restitution
What the offering accomplishes	Ransom by which God's anger is averted	Restored relationships	God continues to dwell with His people	Right thing to do or restitution

D. A. Carson - New Bible Commentary.