

“Circumspect Clear & Clean Conscience” (Lev. 4 Purification Offerings)

1. Opening Scriptures: 1 Tim 1:19; 1:5, 3:9; Acts 24:16; 1 Pet 3:16; 2 Cor 1:12, 4:2; Heb 13:18
Inadvertent = unintentional, undetermined or unplanned sin. A thoughtless act of violation as opposed to a determined, willful, rebellious act of sin. “The sin offering was also used to cleanse a person who was ritually unclean but not in any sense sinful, e.g. a woman after childbirth (12:6–8) or someone with a skin disease (14:19) or bodily discharge (15:15). It was, in general, the offering which effected cleansing as distinct from, though linked with, forgiveness (15:31).”¹
2. Ignorance = is no excuse. A cop may tell this to a speeder who didn’t know the limit. Now if one ignorantly speeded and there was no harm nor foul, there need be no cleansing or compensation as it were. However, innocently breaking the speed limit is not the same as innocently breaking God’s Law. For God is perfectly holy and omniscient and thus offended by the least transgression.
3. Instruction = v. 1 from YHWH to His people in order that they may be pure. Actually, what is of note is that the emphasis is on the cleansing of the Tabernacle re: the ceremonial rites. We need to be aware of how holy God is and that all sin (including unintentional or ignorant sin) is offensive and breaks fellowship. God doesn’t tolerate sin (2 Cor. 6:14-18). He has called out a people unto Himself to be holy. Keeping the Tabernacle cleansed was essential. A defiled Temple was ultimately left desolate as predicted by Jesus! Having God dwell among them was a blessing and a danger. Expounding below.
4. Interpretation = therefore, the appropriate name for the offering is not “sin” offering but “purification” offering. Again, such is why the purifying means (i.e. altars, curtain, priests, etc.) had to be cleansed with the sprinkling of blood.
5. Implications =
 - a. Atoning Aspects: The former burnt offerings dealt with the **propitiation** aspect of atonement viz. the **satisfying** payment for sin, hence the ascending aroma pleasing to Covenant LORD (CL). Here in the Purification Offerings, the **cleansing** aspect of atonement is applied (**expiation**). Such is also seen in the scapegoat where the nation’s sins were expelled, taking their guilt and putting it on the goat and removing it from their midst.
 - b. Profound Paradoxes:
 - i. As I read the instructions (Lev. 4), I thought of how stained with blood the priests’ clothes, the curtain, and altars had to have been. What a sight! What a paradox too that the cleansing ones had to be defiled by touching dead animals, albeit sacrificial animals.
 - ii. Jacob Milgrom noted: “By thinking of the red cow as a purification offering, we can unlock the paradox of the sacrifice that purifies the defiled and defiles the pure. The unique characteristic of all purification offerings is that they defile their handlers. Thus the one who burns the purification offering outside the camp “shall launder his clothes and bathe his body in water; and after that he may reenter the camp” (16:28). With the ritual of the red cow, we have a precise parallel: The one who burns the red cow outside the camp is defiled and must undergo a similar purification (Num 19:8). Furthermore, like the purification offering blood, which bears the impurity it has absorbed, the remnants of the red cow, which contain the same blood, contaminate anything they touch (Lev 6: 27b*). Hence, the laws of impurities prevail in regard to

¹ Wright, C. J. H. (1994). [Leviticus](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 127). Inter-Varsity Press.

* ²⁷ Whatever touches its flesh shall become holy; and when any of its blood is spattered on a garment, you shall wash the bespattered part in a holy place.

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the objects touched by the purification offering: Earthenware must be broken (cf. 6:21a [Eng. 28a] with 11:33, 35; 15:12a) and metalware scoured (cf. 6:21b [Eng. 28b] with Num 31:22–23).² Milgrom summarized the paradox: “Whereas the ashes of the red cow purify those whom they sprinkle, they defile those who do the sprinkling (vv. 19, 21 and, indeed, anyone who handles them (v. 21) or is involved in preparing them (vv. 6–10) This paradox is neatly captured in the rabbinic apothegm: They purify the defiled and defile the pure.”²³

- iii. So back to the bloody curtain: It surely must symbolize the grotesque, primitive, brutal, agonizing, obscene event of Jesus’ crucifixion. He the pure and innocent One was slaughtered for defiled sinners. Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14)?
6. Indescribable = Jesus’ work. Though these sacrifices shadow the substance of Jesus atoning work, nothing can fully describe the complete accomplishment and all of its implications. Though Jesus purified us with His blood (1 Pet. 1:2), He, unlike the priests who needed cleansing, remained blameless and undefiled. Nevertheless, this show the irony. Here we see that the priests had to incur ceremonial defilement and cleansing in order to provide means of atonement. Can you see a picture of how Jesus had to be shamed to free us from shame? He had to be punished to free us from punishment. He had to be wrongly accused of blasphemy and sedition by those who blasphemed and committed sedition against God. He had to become sin (2 Cor 5:21) and a curse so that we could be purified and glorified!
7. Incidentally – I thought of many paradoxes re: help to harm e.g. fear of sickness or lack of work caused many to take medications that harmed or killed them. My uncle brushed teeth too well and lost enamel. I’ve practiced similar things for my benefit which proved to do damage rather than good. We speed so as not to be late and get pulled over to be even later. Yep, guilty. Conversely, when we trust God He takes what is difficult in our lives and uses it to equip us for His Kingdom. In case one is offended by the facts of ‘vaccinations’ harming people, I cannot allow feelings to override truth. We are only to render unto the State what is the State’s. [Grace Community Church’s “The Essential Church.” Neither our bodies, unborn body parts, nor worship are the prerogatives of the State! These sins of ignorance occur along with sins of omission – where the Church fails to call out the reality of certain acceptable sins. Note Hos. 4:6-8 = people destroyed for lack of knowledge of truth for priests failed and were thus satisfied eating the offerings – the more sins, the more meat! And for fear of cancellation, we have omitted preaching the revelation of God’s righteousness, Law, and repentance. We are not guiltless in this regard. We need a sacrifice of purification. We must fear God and not man (Prov. 29:25). We must be willing to choose God over preserving earthly relationships (Lu. 14:26). You see the connection? The paradox of trying to preserve certain relationships by never revealing the Gospel can actually permanently ruin them.
8. Incrementally = Beginning with the “anointed priests” (highest ranked) to the congregation (perhaps circle of priesthood and or Israel’s representatives (see **Further Study, Congregation**)), to the governors of tribes (community/clan leaders) to the common Israelite; the purification means varied according to rank. Perhaps a twofold principle is conveyed. Firstly, those in charge of spiritual health, truth, atoning matters had to offer the most expensive valuable sacrifice for they are held to higher account (Jam. 3:1). Secondly, those of very little means were afforded small sacrifices (including grain). For the anointed priests and congregation of representatives (see **Further Study,**

² Milgrom, J. (2004). [A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: a book of ritual and ethics](#) (p. 35). Fortress Press.

² Cf. *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 4:6; *m. Para* 4:4; *Midr. Num. Rab.* 19:1, 5.

³ Milgrom, J. (2004). [A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: a book of ritual and ethics](#) (p. 34). Fortress Press.

Congregation), the blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled on the inner altar and the curtain whereas for the community leaders and common folk, the blood was applied outside of the holy place upon the altar on the four horns.

9. Interdependence = the solidarity of Israel was not unlike the Body of Christ. One member represented all as the “anointed priest” represented all v. 3. Likewise, all were priests to a degree as the Church is today. Therefore, guilt can spread wide via neglect of priestly duties of keeping cleansed from guilt. Think of how our culture suffers as the Church suppresses preaching truth. Milgrom offered this illustration of solidarity in warfare: “In the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., there is an enlarged photograph, covering an entire wall, of Allied planes over Auschwitz flying on to other destinations. It is estimated that the Auschwitz crematorium was gassing two thousand Jews and other “undesirables” each day. Imagine, had these planes released but one bomb, they could have stopped that killing machine for months!”⁴ Is the Church in a warfare? Eph. 6:10-20. We are to drop truth bombs from the pulpit and beyond in strategic times and places or we too will share the guilt of filth for which Christ died to cleanse us. Turning a blind eye to known omissions or commissions is no escape from guilt. *Hebrews* thus offers the New Testament application of the Purification Offering (10:19-22) to have our consciences purified.

Further Study:

“The congregation is not the whole people, but the people represented by its heads.”⁶⁷ The congregation was a clearly defined group of people in ancient Israel with representative and legal functions.⁶⁸ From time to time we find the congregation acting in a legal capacity, especially in capital cases (Num. 15:33ff.; 27:2; 35:12, 24f.). It is a group alongside Moses and Aaron which comes into prominence in times of leadership crisis (Exod. 16:1, 2, 9; Num. 8:20; chs. 13–14, 16). Probably it was a large body, a sort of parliament with representative and judicial functions.⁵

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Our Christian duty is not just to stay out of trouble. It is not just to preach the Gospel. Neither is it merely to have a clean conscience for not directly engaging in sin. Including these three responsibilities, we are to also be circumspect i.e. aware of our environment and participation/association with promoted sin. We see that the Purification Offering was one which needed to be done for ignorant sins and sins of association (negligence). The Church is an organization of high solidarity and one that is called out to be separate from the world. The Purification Offering brought attention to the essential emphasis on these two realities. Discernment and the Spirit are necessary in maintaining practical purity in a post-Christian society. In fact, failure to have done so has been the deciding factor of why our society is now post-Christian.

⁴ Milgrom, J. (2004). *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: a book of ritual and ethics* (p. 33). Fortress Press.

⁶⁷ Keil, *Biblical Archaeology* II, p. 316; cf. Saalschütz, pp. 38ff.

⁶⁸ A. Hurvitz (*Tarbiz* 40 [1971], pp. 261–67) shows that ‘*ēdāh*, a term particularly common in priestly literature, fell out of use after the exile.

⁵ Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (p. 98). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.