

# **SIN POLLUTION**

## **LEVITICUS 4:1-35**

There Is No Such Thing As Personal Sin.  
Sin Separates Individuals And Communities From God.

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# Sin Pollution

## Leviticus 4:1-35

**THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS PERSONAL SIN. SIN SEPARATES INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES FROM GOD.** It never ceases to surprise me that when immoral leaders are caught and confronted, they almost always seem not to be able to understand what the big deal is. Immoral leaders think the only damage they do is to themselves.

If someone would just casually read the Bible, they could easily see how individual sin pollutes the whole community. We have already stated that all these laws in the book of Leviticus were meant to protect all the people living in the community. Since God was living in the middle of their camp, and since God is perfectly holy, any kind of sin could cause God to wipe out the entire community or cause Him to leave.

Again, like the other chapters, a particular type of offering is described and then several options and applications will be described. Therefore, I will deal with this offering like I have the previous ones. I will group the variations together.

### **I. SIN BREAKS FAITH WITH GOD (VS 1-3, 13-14, 22-23, 27-28, 32) *Sin Separates Individuals From God.***

In verses 1-3, 13-14, 22-23, 27-28, and 32 we see that sin breaks faith with God. In other words **SIN SEPARATES INDIVIDUALS FROM GOD.** At this point in the book of Leviticus, we are introduced directly to sin and its remedy. The interesting thing is that in the other types of sacrifices, there was no distinction made in the categories of people. In other words, in the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering, everyone was treated equally and offered what they could. Here we will see that the higher the position in the community, the more serious the sin becomes in regards to the survival of Israel. Therefore, the sacrifice required will reflect the seriousness of the sin. The seriousness of the sin is directly related to the status of the individual.

#### **A. TYPES OF SINNERS (1-3a, 13a, 22a, 27a)**

Let's look at the types of sinners in verse 1 through the first half of verse 3, the first half of verse 13, the first half of verse 22, and the first half of verse 27. These are clearly listed in the order of importance. Sin in the person that could cause the most damage to the survival of Israel is described in verse 3 as the anointed priest. There is some debate as to whether this applies only to the high priest or all the priests. All the priests were anointed to serve God. The high priest was the only person in all of Israel who could enter the Holy of Holies.

Let's take time to think about what this meant for the survival of Israel. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies on behalf of the entire nation of Israel. He went in this place to make atonement for the sins of the entire nation. If he were to enter the Holy of Holies with sin still on his personal hands, God would kill him on the spot. And further, God would not accept the sacrifice offered on behalf of Israel. Israel would have to live an entire year estranged from God because their sin had not been atoned for. In fact, to let you know how dangerous it was to enter the Holy of Holies, the other priest would tie a rope to the foot of the high priest and bells to him before he entered the Holy of Holies. If they didn't hear the bells jingling, they would assume he quit moving. That would mean God has struck him dead and they could pull his body out without entering the Holy of Holies. If the high priest had sin on his hands, his sin would affect every person in Israel.

If the word refers to all the priests in general, it still would affect many people because if people brought their sacrifices to a sinful priest to offer up, God would not honor the sacrifice.

Many of you sacrifice a great deal to come here and to be on time for worship each Sunday. Many of you give money sacrificially. Many of you are sick and still manage to come. You come here to worship God. If I am up here preaching to you while being immoral myself, we can sing and pray all we want, but God is not going to honor that worship. We have all come here and wasted our time and money. The same goes for worship leaders as well. If any of us who are leading you into worship are living immoral lives, then you the congregation are wasting your time, money, and energy in coming because God is not listening. The behavior of church leaders affects the entire congregation, every last one of us.

Verse 13 describes community sin. Throughout Israel's history, the nation became lackadaisical concerning their worship and honoring God. It played itself out in things like putting their business interests above God. They started to work and do business on the Sabbath. They had little regard for the poor. They became very self-centered. In modern days, many people who claim to be Christian don't really put God first in their lives. All sorts of things come before church, worshiping God, and supporting the ministries. Racial, social, and economic prejudices have infected many churches. Attitudes of self-centeredness and self-absorption are common things in church. People are always looking to how they can be blessed by God, but seldom look at how they can become a blessing to God and for God.

Third on the list of importance are tribal leaders. Note, these are not religious leaders. They are tribal or social leaders. We could put local or national politicians in this category.

Finally, if an individual sins, he or she can still bring pollution to the community. Back in verse one, God pointed out that anyone that sins must make an offering. Atonement must be made to cleanse the individual and the community of sin. Every sin pollutes the community to a certain extent. The level of pollution is determined by the following formula: the higher the individual sinner, the greater the extent of the pollution.

## **B. TYPES OF SIN (2b, 13b, 22b, 27b)**

And that brings us to the types of sin as described in the second halves of verses 2, 13, 22, and 27. The type of sin is described as unintentional sin. The word for sin is the common word *chata* in Hebrew. It means to miss the mark. In other words, if we were shooting an arrow at a target and missed the target, that would be the word *chata*. The mark for Israel is described here as the LORD'S commands.

Again I need to point out that in this passage, the word **LORD** is in all capital letters. This is God's personal Name Jehovah that He gave to the Israelites. This is the Holy God that is living in the center of their camp. There is no other God. He gave them the commands. The word is *mitzvah* which means laws and commands. Even today, Jewish children study the Torah. They go to religious classes, and somewhere around 13-years-old they have a public ceremony. For boys it is called a Bar Mitzvah. For girls it is called a Bat Mitzvah. What they are publicly confirming is that they are now becoming men and women of God's laws. It would be equivalent to Christian adult baptism or confirmation.

This is another phenomenon of the modern day church that confuses me. Through baptism or confirmation, Christians declare themselves to be followers of Christ. And yet, many so-called Christians pick and choose which laws and commands they follow, or redefine the laws and commands so they can continue to live and do what they want while still claiming to be Christian. The problem is that we have not dedicated ourselves to reading, studying, and obeying the commands of Scripture.

Since I am a pastor, people often offer me their interpretation of the Christian life. I can't even begin to tell you how cockeyed their theology is. It's clear they didn't get it from the Bible. The most dangerous type of these people are the ones who take one verse or passage of Scripture, take it out of context, and then build a whole theology out of it. I'm going to go out on a limb

here. I'm going to guess that most of us here this morning have not read and studied through the whole Bible. Even those of us who have been Christians since we were young have not read through the entire Bible. How can we claim to be children of the book when we have never read the book?

The type of sin here is translated by the NIV as "unintentional." The word means inadvertent, ignorant, unwittingly, or in error. I'm not sure I understand the full ramifications of this. Let me explain. The Hebrews talked about committing sin with a high hand. In other words, the sinner would shake his fist in the face of God and say, "I don't care what You say. I'm going to do what I want to do."

I'm confused because if those are the only two choices, unintentional sin and sin with a high hand, then it seems to me that almost all our sin is sin with a high hand. We usually know better. When people hold on to a grudge, they know it is sin. When people commit adultery, they know it is a sin. When young people take drugs or have sex, they know it is a sin. When we talk unkindly, we know it is a sin.

As I look at the sin in my life, I have to say, "I know it is sin, but at the same time, I don't want to think I'm shaking my fist in God's face saying I don't care what He thinks." Maybe that's because I don't take sin seriously enough. Maybe we need to think about sin the way the Bible describes it. When I knowingly disobey God, I push Him away, I pollute my life, and I pollute the life of my family, friends, and church. The point I'm making here is that we all sin. We need to name it for what it is. It is disobedience and rebellion against God. We need to acknowledge its consequences. It not only pollutes my life, it pollutes the lives of my family, friends and church. It not only pushes God out of my life, it pushes God out of the life of the church.

### **C. TYPES OF AWARENESS (13c-14a, 22c-23a, 27c-28a)**

A good test of whether or not we are on the right track is illustrated by the types of awareness described in the last half of verse 13 through the first half of verse 14, the second half of verse 22 through the first half of verse 23, and the last portion of verse 27 through the first half of verse 28. Notice that sin brings guilt. Sin brings guilt to the individual and to the entire community. Guilt is one of those words that have fallen out of favor in the Christian church. We talk about guilt as if it is something we need to avoid and to get rid of. The fact is that guilt is both a feeling and a state of being. In other words, when we sin, our state of being is one of separation from God. Sin separates us from God. And because of this, we ought to feel estranged from God. If I were to do something bad to you, your expectation is that I ought to feel bad about it. If I don't feel bad about it, you would think I was a jerk.

Sin offends God. It separates us from Him. But further, our sin separates our community from God. When I sin, God withdraws from me. Since I am part of this community, when God withdraws from me, He also withdraws from you.

The phrase that describes our awareness of sin is something like, "When he is made aware of the sin he committed." It is a simple matter of knowing. Here is the test for us. When we are confronted with our sin, either by another believer or the Holy Spirit, how will we react? For the most part, when Christians are confronted with their sin, they are sorry and appear to be repentant. However, for the most part, I have noticed that people are sorry they got caught in sin or burned by sin, but rarely are they sorry they offended God, hurt others, and destroyed a community. We are such self-centered people; we tend to only think of ourselves.

Please remember this as we move on to a new era at Devon Church. I am going to try my best to make sure that the leaders here, including me, live holy and upright lives. I'm challenging all of you to pursue holiness in your personal lives remembering that your holiness can affect our church for good and your sinfulness can damage our community.

### **D. TYPES OF OFFERINGS (3c, 14b, 23b, 28b, 32)**

Again, the seriousness determines the types of offerings in the last section of verse 3, the second halves of verses 14, 23, 28, and all of verse 32.

For the sin of an anointed priest and for the community sin, a perfect young bull is required. For the sin of a social leader, a perfect male goat is required. For an ordinary citizen, a female goat or lamb must be sacrificed. Keep in mind there were alternatives in the other type of offerings. But for the sin offering, the specific animal for the particular sinner is given by God. There is no substitution here. The clear message in this section is that **SIN SEPARATES INDIVIDUALS FROM GOD.**

## **II. SIN POLLUTES PEOPLE (VS 4, 15, 24, 29, 33)** *Sin Separates The Community From God.*

The next section points out that sin pollutes people in verses 4, 15, 24, 29, and 33. The idea here is that **SIN SEPARATES THE COMMUNITY FROM GOD.**

### **A. TRANSFERRING GUILT**

The first part of this ceremony illustrates the transference of guilt. In each case, the animal is presented to the Lord. The animal is the specific animal required by God's commands and the animal is perfect. In the first part of the ceremony, the sinner places his hand on the head of the sacrificial animal. In the case of community sin, elders of the religious community lay their hands on the animal. The meaning of the ceremony is the transference of the sin onto the sacrificial animal.

### **B. TRANSFERRING PUNISHMENT**

The next part of the ceremony reminds us of the transference of punishment. Sin pollutes the sinner and the community. If God did not provide a way in which the sinner could substitute an animal, every Hebrew in the camp would be dead. When the animal's throat was slit, as its knees buckled, and it fell dead to the ground in a death shake, the sinner would be reminded that it was for his sin that this innocent, perfect animal was killed. Later on in Israel's history, they become indifferent to these ceremonies. They could kill the animal in a religious ceremony without feeling the proper guilt and remorse. In reality, they were killing and murdering innocent animals for no good purpose.

Jesus' mission could not be any clearer. When He was baptized, He didn't need to repent of anything. The meaning of Jesus' baptism was His identifying with our sin. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. In this He identified with the Hebrew nation who spent 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus went through the 40 days totally dependent on God. When the Hebrews were hungry and tempted, they sinned. When Jesus was hungry and tempted, He did not sin. He lived a sinless life. When presented to Pilate, Pilate declared that he found nothing wrong in Jesus. Jesus was perfect. He took your sin on Him. He took my sin on Him. He took on the sins of the whole world. Jesus, the perfect substitute, suffered and was killed. His blood was shed for every sin that we commit. When we reflect at the end of each day, we should call to mind the ceremony here in Leviticus 4. We lay our hands on Jesus. He takes our sin. And then we slit His throat and watch Him die for our sin. We have become desensitized to the horrible effects and consequences of sin. Sin not only separates us from God. **SIN SEPARATES THE COMMUNITY FROM GOD.**

## **III. SIN POLLUTES THE COMMUNITY (VS 5-12, 16-21, 25-26, 30-31, 34-35)**

## ***Repairing Our Relationship With God Requires Death.***

Again we are reminded in this last section that sin pollutes the community as laid out in verses 5-12, 16-21, 25-26, 30-31, and 34-35. I want us to never ever forget this. **REPAIRING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD REQUIRES DEATH.**

I want us to carefully understand the nature and extent of sin. We tend to think of the pollution in terms of individuals. I think by now we have come to realize that sin pollutes the community as well. But the pollution also has a geographic/religious effect. The message here for us is to remember that God will not inhabit unclean places.

As we think about the steady thread of immorality among the leaders that has gone on here for 14 years, let us keep this truth in mind. Around the year 600 B.C., the prophet Ezekiel described a vision in chapter 10 of his book. In a vision given to him by God, Ezekiel saw the Spirit of God get up, and walk out of the temple. God was so fed up with Israel and her fake worship that God just got up and left. With immoral leadership, and with enough immorality among the congregation members, God may not even be here.

Can you imagine how horrible that would be? We may be coming here week after week. When we open in prayer or sing the first song, God may so disgusted with us, that He may have gotten up and left for several Sundays or for several months, perhaps God has even left here for years. We may be singing and praying all emotional and we may be waving our arms and crying. And yet, God may not even be here. The next time any of us think that our sin is a private thing, think again.

### **A. DEGREES OF POLLUTION (5-7, 16-18, 25, 30, 34)**

And again, we'll see that the sin of leaders have the most devastating effect. Verses 5-7, 16-18, 25, 30, and 34 lay out the degrees of pollution. We must always keep in mind the geography of holiness. Israel was camped in the wilderness. The worship tent stood at the center of the camp with three tribes camped on each side. The worship tent was divided into two sections, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place is also known as the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was the absolute most holy place.

Then the other section of the worship tent was the next most holy place. Then the courtyard was next with holy status, the Hebrew camp, and then outside the camp where they dumped all the garbage and refuse was unclean. When the anointed priest and the community sinned, blood had to be carried all the way into the Holy Place and blood had to be sprinkled right before the curtain of the Holy of Holies. The sin of religious leaders causes the most destruction and pollution. Not only was blood sprinkled there but blood was to be smeared on the horns of the altar of incense. The altar of incense stood right in front of the curtain that hid the Holy of Holies. The rest of the blood was poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offerings.

The rest of the people who sinned caused less damage. The blood of the sacrificed animals was smeared on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and the rest of the blood was sprinkled at the base of this altar.

### **B. CLEANING UP THE PEOPLE (8-10, 19-20, 26, 31, 35)**

Verses 8-10, 19-20, 26, 31, and 35 describe the cleaning up of the people. Like the previous sacrifices, the kidneys, liver, and fatty portions were taken out, and then offered up on the altar where they were completely burned up. This made atonement for the sin. The word for atonement is *kaphar*. It means to cover, to purify, cleanse, pacify, rectify, and reconcile. What it meant was that the person was forgiven of their sin and their relationship with God was restored. We will study about this later in Leviticus but there was a particular day set aside designed to cleanse Israel of all her sins. The day is called *Yom Kippur*. On this day, the priest would take blood into the Holy of Holies and present the sacrifice to God. If the priest came out of the

ceremony alive, it signified that God had forgiven all of Israel and all the people of their sins. They were reconciled with God as individuals and as a community.

That is wonderful to know that through true sorrow and repentance, we can be reconciled with God as individuals and as a community. However, even if we were to repent as a community here at Devon Church, and even if God were here and chose to remain here, and even if our individual and community relationships with God were totally restored, we are still left with all the consequences; the destroyed ministry, the lack of trust, the lack of leadership, broken relationships, and all the waste and loss of the past 14 years.

### **C. CLEANING UP THE COMMUNITY (11-12, 21)**

Maybe that's why in verses 11-12, and verse 21 that cleaning up the community is portrayed. Keep in mind, the blood had been sprinkled; the designated parts of the animal had been burned up. But the meat and the hide of the animals were still there. In other sacrifices, the meat could be eaten and the hides preserved. In the case of the sin offering, all the rest of the good meat, the hide, and everything else were carried outside the whole camp. There was a designated place outside the camp where they dumped the ashes. It was a ceremonially clean place. Nothing was salvaged. All the perfectly good, edible meat and the perfectly good hide were to be completely destroyed. Nothing was preserved. I hope that we are starting to get the idea of how destructive sin is. Your sin and my sin can suck the life right out of Devon Church.

Think about this. Jesus was taken outside the city to be executed. Jesus died outside the camp to make us holy and pure. How can we go on sinning? Our salvation and the existence of Devon Church are secured by the death of Jesus Christ. **REPAIRING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD REQUIRES DEATH.**

## **IV. EPILOGUE**

Like I said earlier in the sermon, we have some pretty messed up theology. We think our sin is just between God and us as individuals. That is just plain false. Our sin not only pollutes our individual lives, our sin pollutes our family, friends, and the church. The higher our position in the church, the more damage we do to the church. Leaders have been dragging down Devon Church for 14 years. We think when we say we are sorry that all is forgiven and we just move on. That may be the case for an individual, but how about all the consequences and mess that person's friends, family, and church have to live with?

We have tried to get guilt out of our church vocabulary in the United States. However, we need to understand that sin has serious consequences. We need to constantly remember this. **THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS PERSONAL SIN. SIN SEPARATES INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES FROM GOD.**

Maybe if just once we had to lay our hands on an innocent animal, slit its throat, catch the blood and then slaughter the animal and burn it up, then we come to realize how horrible sin is. But even that wouldn't be enough. We would have translate that whole incident and relate it to Jesus Who died for us. These kinds of songs have fallen out of favor in the church.

But please listen to the words of this Hymn written by T. Dennis. The name of the hymn is "He Died of a Broken Heart."

*"He died of a broken heart for you,  
He died of a broken heart ;  
Upon a tree, for you, for me,  
He died of a broken heart.  
Have you read the story of the Cross,*

*Where Jesus bled and died;  
Where your debt was paid by His precious blood  
That flowed from His wounded side?  
Have you read how they placed the crown of thorns  
Upon His brow for you,  
When He prayed, 'Forgive them, oh, forgive;  
They know not what they do?'  
Have you read that He looked to heaven and said,  
'Tis finished?' 'Twas for thee!  
Have you ever said, 'I thank Thee, Lord,  
For giving Thy life for me?'  
He died of a broken heart for you,  
He died of a broken heart ;  
Upon a tree, for you, for me,  
He died of a broken heart."*

Remember that the next time we are tempted to sin. Jesus died to give us life as individuals and as a church. When we sin we affect both. Upon a tree for you for me. He died of a broken heart.