

PAY BACK

LEVITICUS 5:14-6:7

**TRUE REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS IS DEPENDENT
ON MAKING RESTITUTION WHEN POSSIBLE.**

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Pay Back

Leviticus 5:14-6:7

So far we have encountered three types of sacrifices in Israel's religious system. They were the burnt offering, the peace offering, and the sin offering. We will review these a little later. But for now, I would like to remind us that the sin offering had to do with purification. This morning, we are going to examine the fourth type of sacrifice. It is the guilt offering. This also has to do with sin. However, whereas the sin offering had to do with cleansing and purification, this sacrifice has more to do with making restitution.

In other words, the sinner will not only have to offer up a sacrifice, he or she will have to make restitution for the damage they caused. I know that as I have been studying and preaching through Leviticus I have said this before. However, I think it is worth repeating since I think it is a disease that plagues modern day America. We have become a nation of people who refuse to acknowledge and take responsibility for our behavior. We blame our sin and our problems on others. It never seems to be our fault. We have this victim mentality.

What is really distressing to me is that this attitude has found its way into the church. When we sin, we act as if someone or something caused us to sin. Even though it's distressing, it's also interesting to me how much alike the ancient Hebrews and the modern day church are. For example, when Moses went up the mountain to get the Ten Commandments, it took him 40 days. The people got restless and had Moses' brother Aaron build a golden calf that they could worship. The people got drunk, partied, and worshiped the golden calf. When Moses came down and confronted his brother Aaron said something like, "Hey it isn't my fault, the people brought me gold, I threw it in the fire, and up out of nowhere came this golden calf. We all know from the story that Aaron intentionally formed and fashioned the idol.

In the modern day church, we are shocked that someone would dare confront us with out sin. And even if we are willing to accept that, there is never any talk of restitution. That is a total concept that we have lost. Let me give you an idea of what I'm talking about.

You remember the church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough.

I had a deacon who had been cheating on his income tax for years. I had been preaching and teaching on holy living. And one particular week, I preached on restitution. The deacon looked distressed for the whole next week. I asked him what was wrong and he told me that he had been cheating on his taxes for years and my sermon had convicted him. He decided he had to make things right by making restitution. He asked me if he could use my office. He was in there for about an hour. When he came out, he had an envelope in his hand. He looked relieved and said to me, "Pastor, I feel much better. I have just written a check to the IRS." With that he went off and mailed the check and the letter.

I was feeling pretty good until I noticed that when he wrote the letter, he had inadvertently placed his paper over my telephone message pad that had carbon paper in it. When I turned over the page on my message pad, I saw what he had written the IRS; "To Whom it may concern, I have been cheating on my taxes for many years and my conscience is troubled. Here is a check for \$5,000. If I don't feel any better, I'll send the rest."

Well obviously the deacon had no idea of what biblical restitution is all about. But more to the point, I don't think the modern day church is even aware of the concept of restitution.

I. APPRAISAL (5:14-15a, 17, 6:1-4a)

Honesty In Our Relationship With God And Others Is An Important Part Of Holy Living.

I have been in the ministry for over 30 years now. I'm guessing that I have not preached more than 5 sermons in all those years on the concept of restitution. But now that I've been studying through Leviticus, and in particular this section, I'm convinced that I have been negligent in preaching and teaching about a large part of what authentic repentance is all about. We preach and teach a lot about confession, but not much about restitution. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **TRUE REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS IS DEPENDENT ON MAKING RESTITUTION WHEN POSSIBLE.**

Obviously we can never go back and repair the damage we have done as a result of sin, but where we can, we should pay back what we have taken or repair the damage we have done. In paying back a debt that we owe, we must first make an appraisal of what we have taken, destroyed, or cheated. This is described in chapter 5 verses 14-15a & 17, along with chapter 6, verse 1 through the first half of verse 4.

Let me just make a comment here concerning the nature of the things taken, stolen, or withheld. In this section, the items are quantifiable and measurable. For example, if someone withheld his tithe from God, that was easily valued. The person would take the total of what she earned, multiply it by 10%, and that would be the total she was supposed to give. For example, if she made \$100, she owed God \$10 as her tithe. If someone found a purse with \$10 in it and did not return it, she owed the owner \$10. However, we can do damage to people by using them, betraying them, gossiping about them, etc. Although the damage is not as readily quantifiable, it is just as real.

This section is meant to demonstrate this point. **HONESTY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHERS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF HOLY LIVING.** It is clear that God's design in creation is that we are to live harmoniously in the context of community. And by naming Himself and living in the center of the Hebrew camp, God made it clear that He was part of the community.

A. CHEATING GOD (14-15a & 17)

In verses 14-15a and 17 of chapter 5, cheating God fractures the relationship. Verse 15 describes a violation of religious duty. The text says this type of sin is related to God's holy things. The word holy in Hebrew means set apart for a particular purpose. The Hebrews were supposed to give a tenth of all they grew, harvested, or made in money to God. The tithe was considered to belong to God. It was holy. People may have come to the worship place, perhaps without even knowing it, unclean because of contact with some forbidden object, person, or animal.

Here is what I want to point out here. It didn't matter if the person intentionally violated the religious law or mistakenly gave God less than a tenth. The result was that it was sin and there was a penalty. The word for sin in this word is the common word *chata*. It meant to miss the mark. In other words, we are to be careful as to what belongs to God. It is to be holy. It does not belong to us. If we do not give all that belongs to God in material things or in honor or respect, then we have missed the mark. It is sin. And sin has consequences. It incurs a penalty. The word penalty in Hebrew is *asham*. This word is very interesting because words that come from this root have to do with liability, incurring liability, and making restitution. So saying, "I'm sorry," isn't enough. Correcting the problem is important. Restitution must be made. I know this is not popular in our society, but "I'm sorry," is not enough.

In the New Testament, Christians are addressed as "holy ones." That is exactly what the word *saints* mean. The New Testament addresses believers as saints, holy ones. In other words, we have been set apart as God's special possessions. We belong to God. If that is the case then everything we own, everything we have, and all that we are belong to God.

Again, if we were to look at our calendars, our day planners, our checkbooks and our credit card statements, could we conclude from this that we are treating God's holy things with the respect due them? How much time, energy, and money do we give to God? If our husbands, wives, boyfriends or girlfriends treated us like we treat God, would we be happy? I know there are all sorts of excuses that we use and very clever ways in which we try to wiggle out of the plain conclusion. However, let me remind us that this verse states clearly that even if it is unintentional, we have still robbed God and we still owe Him.

Verse 17 has to do with breaking a religious, social, or civil law for the Jews. In other words, it has to do with disobeying or failing to obey one of God's commands. We all know what this involves. However, I want to again point out that even if we are unaware of breaking a commandment, we are still guilty.

Oftentimes we have become so comfortable with the world's standards that we are unaware that we are sinning. I know this is difficult and I would say it is impossible to do on our own. I think it can only be done in the context of a small group of believers who are willing to challenge each other and to be accountable to each other. But we are required to live according to God's standards not the world's standards. It is possible to be a really good and noble person according to the world's standards and still fall short of God's. Going back to the concept that we are God's holy people, we are called to be set apart from the world. We should be living way above the world's standards. And yet, when I examine my own life, I sadly find that I am not much different than my neighbors and non-Christian friends. But that cannot be because in doing so, I am robbing that which belongs to God. It is really a matter of attitude.

I have people tell me all the time that we don't live under Old Testament Law. We live under New Testament grace. God's legal commands like tithing don't apply to us. I tell them that they are absolutely right. A tenth of my time, money, and energy don't belong to God. One Hundred Percent of my time, money, and energy belong to God. In fact my very life: every minute of every hour belongs to God. We have lost the sense of God's ownership, His holiness, and His command to us to be holy. I think if we were honest about how we spend our time, money, energy, and how we use our bodies and minds, we can easily see that we have cheated God.

B. CHEATING EACH OTHER (6:1-4a)

Chapter 6 verses 1 through the first half of verse 4 cheating each other is named as sin that will require restitution. Verse 2 describes a situation in which a person sins by betraying the trust of a neighbor. In this case, someone leaves something of value with a neighbor to care for. The neighbor may not value the person and neglect the care of the things he has been entrusted with. Or worse yet, the neighbor may actually steal the things entrusted to him. The idea is that either the person is cheating, stealing, or neglecting the things his neighbor entrusted him with.

In verse 3, the sins are finding something and keeping it instead of returning it to the proper owner. It talks about lying and spreading lies about someone. This section describes the lack of concern, care, and respect for people within the community of faith.

Our society has taught us to focus on our own happiness and not to worry about anyone else. I understand that. I see everyday how non-Christians use each other to get what they want. I see everyday how people try to get even with each other, to get ahead of each other, and don't care who they destroy or what damage they do: just so they get what they want. I really do understand that in society because that is exactly the message we have been taught

over the past 40 years. We have been taught to take care of Number One and to look out for Number One. We have truly built a narcissistic society. People think they are entitled to everything and yet have responsibility to no one or no thing.

But the great scandal of our time is to see this attitude surface in the church. I'm going to make a generalization and I'm sure it doesn't apply to everyone. But my hunch is that most people who call themselves Christians have this same attitude as the people we work with every day. People come to church for what they can get out of it. Rarely do people come because they have identified themselves as God's chosen people. I have seen the worst kind of relationship abuse happen in churches. I have looked at the way Christians treat other Christians and often said to myself that I'd rather hang around with my non-Christian friends. There are not many Christians who take time to see how their actions affect others and the church as a whole. The older I get and the longer I am in the ministry the more disgusted I get to see how people who identify themselves as Christians cheat God and cheat one another. Self-reflection is something that we need to do more of. That does not mean thinking about ourselves and what would make us happy. I'm talking about the reflection that comes before God to let His Holy Spirit point out clearly and bring into the light how we have abused our relationship with God and how we have abused our relationship with others. This is important because **HONESTY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHERS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF HOLY LIVING.**

II. CRIMINAL ASSESSMENT (15b, 18a, 6:6)

In Order To Truly Repent, We Must Realistically Quantify The Damage We Have Caused.

Once we have assessed the value of the original object or duty, we now need to make a criminal assessment of the damage defined in the second half of verses 15 and 18, along with chapter 6 verse 6. Here is the point of this section. **IN ORDER TO TRULY REPENT, WE MUST REALISTICALLY QUANTIFY THE DAMAGE WE HAVE CAUSED.** In other words, we don't just say "I'm sorry," and then go on as if nothing happened. In order to truly repent we must first acknowledge the seriousness and the damage of our sin.

A. NATURE OF THE OFFERING

The nature of the offering in this section again has to do with making restitution. It is referred to as a guilt offering. Remember the word is *asham* and that has to do with first of paying back what I owe or what it cost to repair the damage. It is all about the commitment to making full restitution. Sin always brings chaos to relationships in the community. Sin harms people and it offends God. When we sin, we fracture our relationship with God, with others, and with the community. Sin isolates us. In order to repair broken relationships, we need to be willing to own up to the damage we have done and commit ourselves to making things right.

B. THE MOST COSTLY

The type of sacrifice designated here is the most costly. The ram was considered to be the absolute sacrifice. It was to be perfect and without defect. It was to be flawless. In other words it was to be the most valuable specimen of the most costly type of sacrifice. Notice, the sinner is not the final judge of whether or not this indeed is the best of the best. The priest would be the objective judge. The priest would determine whether or not the sacrifice was acceptable. The idea here is that sin is so horrible that the person who was guilty had to put their money where their mouth was. In order to repent and receive forgiveness, the sinner

would have to demonstrate their true sorrow, their acknowledgement of the damage, and a willingness to make things right.

As we think about how we repent of our sin, it seems to me that we don't think of it as this serious. When we sin or when we are confronted with sin, we merely say, "I'm sorry," to God and then go on as if nothing happened. I think we have to start to acknowledge how destructive our sin has been before we can receive forgiveness. And as we will see later, we must be willing to make restitution.

C. A POSSIBLE SUBSTITUTE

I'm not sure but I think the mention of silver and monetary currency, there may have been an acceptable substitute. The priest would determine what the going rate of the acceptable sacrifice would be and the person may have been able to pay the equivalent amount. I'm not sure that would be right however, because it seems to me that blood must be shed over this type of offence.

At any rate, there was an objective standard of the cost or the nature of the sacrifice. The sinner could not make up his own rules. The choice was totally taken out of the hands of the sinner. The sinner had no rights. I don't know how graphic the book of Leviticus has to get and how many times we have to read about the slaughter of an animal before the idea of Jesus' humiliating death for our sin sinks into our thick heads. In order to fully appreciate the work of Jesus, we first have to acknowledge the full extent of our sin. **IN ORDER TO TRULY REPENT, WE MUST REALISTICALLY QUANTIFY THE DAMAGE WE HAVE CAUSED.**

III. PENALTY ASSESSMENT (16a & 6:4b-5)

It Is Important To Go Out Of Our Way To Make Things Right. In Fact Restitution Must Take Place Before We Can Worship.

If this notion of restitution is foreign to us, this will stun us even more. The first half of verse 16 along with chapter 6 the second half of verse 4 through verse 5 lays out the penalty assessment. **IT IS IMPORTANT TO GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT. IN FACT RESTITUTION MUST TAKE PLACE BEFORE WE CAN WORSHIP.**

A. PAYING BACK PRINCIPLE

I'm pretty sure we have gotten the idea that we have to pay back principle. In other words, if we stole \$100 it is clear that we have to return the \$100. If we have gossiped about someone, we are responsible to go and correct our spreading of misinformation. If we have cheated someone, we must pay back what we owe. If we have cheated God in any way, we need to pay Him back what we withheld. I think that is pretty simple.

B. PAYING BACK INTEREST

However, what is interesting about this section is that the sinner is required to pay back interest. The interest comes to 20%. Therefore, if I stole or withheld \$100, I would have to pay back the principle of \$100 plus a penalty of \$20. I think that the tacking on of interest is to remind us that it is not just the sin, but it forces us to accept the fact that we have caused damaged far beyond our individual act.

Just think for a moment if a couple got pregnant out of wedlock and had to get married. Just getting married doesn't make everything right. There are damages and consequences that will play themselves out in the life of this child. And it may affect their children and their children as well. The same goes for alcohol, drug, pornography, or any other addictive behavior. The sins of our modern day society are sexual immorality, substance abuse, and all sorts of addictive and unrestrained behavior. There are consequences that will play themselves out for generations. The fact that a 20% penalty is added on to the principle should remind us that our sin has devastating consequences for others.

C. PAYMENT TIMETABLE

The payment timetable is interesting to me as well. The offender is to make the restitution payment to the person they have hurt on the same day he presents the ram as a sacrifice at the altar. If we have harmed anyone in any way, we can never think that just because we confessed our sin to God we are good to go. In fact, if we have not made things right and if we have not gone beyond the call of duty to rectify the situation, then we are wasting time coming to church and worshiping on Sunday. God will not listen. Those are not my words. Those are the words of Jesus:

²³"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24 / NIV).

Most of us have reacted to what we have perceived as legalistic religion. However, I think that perhaps we have overreacted. If we do not make things right and if we do not make restitution, then we are not truly repentant. And if we are not truly repentant, then no matter how passionately or how often we confess, we will not be forgiven of our sin. There is a great deal of restitution for believers to make. There is monetary restitution, emotional restitution, material restitution, and many other forms. Each of us must evaluate our sin and make restitution as part of our repentance. **IT IS IMPORTANT TO GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT. IN FACT RESTITUTION MUST TAKE PLACE BEFORE WE CAN WORSHIP.**

IV. FINAL ASSESSMENT (16b, 18b-19, 6:7)

In Reality, We Can Never Repair The Damage We Have Done Because Of Our Sin.

The final assessment of the pay back is described in the second half of verse 16, the second half of verse 18 through verse 19, and chapter 6 verse 7. The final assessment is this. **IN REALITY, WE CAN NEVER REPAIR THE DAMAGE WE HAVE DONE BECAUSE OF OUR SIN.** As I look back at my life and assess the damage my personal sin has caused, there is no amount of money or no amount of apologies that can repair the damage I have caused and all the future damage my past sins have caused. Look, I have made restitution as much as possible, I have confessed and apologized, but the damage done cannot always be fixed.

A. PAYMENT FOR SIN AGAINST PEOPLE

In these verses we see that there is a payment for sin against people. The priest offered up the ram as a sacrifice after the person made restitution. The sinner would have to publicly confess, make full restitution plus and additional 20% tacked on. Maybe or maybe not that relationship could be restored. Perhaps the person forgave the person who wronged him, but I'm sure there would be a trust issue in regards to that particular sinner in the future. I'm

amazed at how men who commit adultery expect their wives to forgive them and just start trusting them again. I have forgiven many people who have let me down or betrayed my trust, but I still don't trust most of them nor do I even know how they could ever earn my trust again.

B. PAYMENT FOR SIN AGAINST GOD

Next, payment for sin against God is accomplished by the actual slaughter and sprinkling of the ram's blood on the altar.

C. TECHNICALLY FORGIVEN

Technically, all is forgiven. However, we have all witnessed people who continually prove themselves to be untrustworthy. They are a drain on the community. Again, let me point to the adulterer. I almost always counsel women not to take the guy back. If the adulterer is a woman, I counsel the man not to take them back. Here is the interesting thing. I don't need to tell healthy men or women not to take the adulterer back. They rarely consider taking them back. It is unhealthy people who take adulterers back. The same goes for abuse. If a spouse, a boyfriend, or girlfriend cheats on you once, they will surely do it again. If a person abuses you in any way, you can be sure they will do it again. Maybe many of you are better people than I am, but there is no way that kind of person could ever again earn my trust and respect.

To be sure the person who was cheated must forgive the cheater or abuser, but nowhere is it stated that they must be vulnerable to that person again. The bottom line is this. When we sin against others and against God, we fracture our relationship with God, with others, and with the community. There is forgiveness, and in addition the person could be repentant and make restitution. However, there will be damage that will remain that no one can ever go back and fix. Those consequences may be passed on for generations. **IN REALITY, WE CAN NEVER REPAIR THE DAMAGE WE HAVE DONE BECAUSE OF OUR SIN.** And to me, that is the power of the Gospel. Every night I go to bed, I have to acknowledge that I am thankful for the blood of Christ for my forgiveness but always have to remain a little sad for the irreparable damage I have left behind. Jesus approached a crooked tax collector named Zacchaeus. When Zacchaeus understood the Gospel message of Jesus, here is how he responded:

⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:8-10 / NIV).

Taking responsibility for our sin and all the damage that we have caused is not a very popular attitude in our society and I'm sad to say it has fallen out of our church experience. However, **TRUE REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS IS DEPENDENT ON MAKING RESTITUTION WHEN POSSIBLE.**

V. EPILOGUE

In my study through Leviticus, I have come to really like the way Derek Tidball makes topics relevant to our day. Listen to how he summarizes this section in his commentary on Leviticus:

"One wonders how often the presence of God seems absent from our worship services, not because the minister is ill-prepared, or the liturgy defective, or the songs ill-chosen, but because some of those in attendance are deluding themselves by thinking that by their much singing and praying they can conjure up the presence of God, when what is really needed is for them to go and pay their bills, apologize to their friends, repair bridges with their neighbors, meet their obligations to their families and make practical amends for any cheating in which they have been engaged. Just as significant is the cheating they have done on God by their meager offerings or the paucity of time they have set aside for him in daily devotion or in public worship. If reparation were made in these areas, might we not see God 'open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that [we] will not have room enough for it?'"

Biblical repentance is very different from what most of us have come believe and practice as repentance. We need to be thinking about the damage we have caused and how we can undo the damage we are able to repair. If we are not willing to confess and make things right, then there is no reason for us to call ourselves Christians.