



When You Sin Without Knowing It

Kicking It Off

What is something you found out you had been doing wrong for years, and how did you finally find out?

Read

Leviticus 4:1-12
and 5:1-13

Summary

The first three offerings did not mention anything about fault. Nobody brought a burnt offering, a grain offering, or a peace offering because they had done something wrong. They brought them because God is holy and worthy of tribute, and because He was inviting an unholy people to dwell with Him. Leviticus 4 changes the situation. These offerings are not voluntary and they are not tribute. Something has gone wrong, and something has to be done about it.

What has gone wrong is sin the sinner never noticed. Verse 2 opens a category most of us do not think about: sinning unintentionally, in any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done. Someone with a food allergy understands this instantly. The cook's intentions have nothing to do with it. So does anyone who has bought a house with a crack in the foundation. The damage is structural whether or not the family living on it ever knew, and the inspection does not create the problem, it finds it.

The chapter then sorts the room. The anointed priest, whose private sin brings guilt on the people. The whole congregation, sinning together in ways nobody caught. A leader. A common person. Every one of those cases ends the same way, "and he shall be forgiven," except the first one, where the sentence is simply not there.

Chapter 5 keeps going and the cases get harder to call accidents. A man hears a public call to testify, and he saw what happened, and he says nothing. What ties these situations together is not that nobody meant it. It is that the recognition came late. And when it comes, the man is required to confess, so the one who would not speak has to speak. Then the cost descends: a lamb, then two birds, then a tenth of an ephah of plain

flour with no oil and no frankincense on it. The same sentence closes every rung. He shall be forgiven.

Finally, the carcass had to be carried outside the camp and burned there, because God cannot coexist with sin. Hebrews says Jesus suffered outside the gate for the same reason, to sanctify the people through His own blood. That is where the table comes in. We are still keeping this ritual. Communion is confession and joy together, and you do not have to bring a complete list of your sins to it, because the whole point of this passage is that the list is never complete.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. The offering in chapter 4 exists for sin nobody caught, which means the damage was real the whole time the man felt fine. What is your first reaction to being told you are responsible for something you did not know you did?
3. The chapter begins with the priest, and his sin brings guilt on the people (4:3). Where have you seen the failures of someone in leadership land on the people under them, and how did that affect the way you thought about God?
4. In chapter 5 the man who kept silent when he was called to testify is later required to confess out loud (5:1, 5:5). Silence gets answered by speech. What is something you know you should have said and did not?
5. The sermon argued we can unintentionally sin by failing to do good the Spirit put in front of us. Where in an ordinary week are you most likely to tell the Holy Spirit no because it would be inconvenient?
6. God let the offering descend all the way to a handful of flour, with no oil and no frankincense, and still said, he shall be forgiven (5:11-13). What does that tell you about what God is actually after in a sacrifice?
7. Communion asks for self-examination that Leviticus 4 guarantees will come up short. What would change about how you come to the table if you believed the blood of Jesus reaches the sins you have never once thought of?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"Just because you don't feel like you're sinning, just because you don't even have awareness that what you were doing was wrong, does not in fact change the fact that what you were doing was wrong."

"Jesus isn't going to turn your sin and magically make it into something good. He takes your sin and He forgives it."

"Being a Christian is not growing in your holiness. Being a Christian is growing in holiness through the forgiving work of Jesus."

"You may not be sinning, but you may unintentionally not be doing what is good, not be doing what is right."

"We take communion regularly, not because you are so bad, but because the God you serve is so holy that there are areas in your life you don't even know about that you need the blood of Jesus to cover."

Sermon Notes**Leviticus 4:1-12**

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the Lord's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them, if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the Lord for a sin offering. He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord and lay his hand on the head of the bull and kill the bull before the Lord. And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting, and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the Lord in front of the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the Lord that is in the tent of meeting, and all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And all the fat of the bull of the sin offering he shall remove from it, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys (just as these are taken from the ox of the sacrifice of the peace offerings); and the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, with its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung— all the rest of the bull—he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, to the ash heap, and shall burn it up on a fire of wood. On the ash heap it shall be burned up.

Leviticus 5:1-13

"If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity; or if anyone touches an unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean wild animal or a carcass of unclean livestock or a carcass of unclean swarming things, and it is hidden from him and he has become unclean, and he realizes his guilt; or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever sort the uncleanness may be with which one becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and realizes his guilt; or if anyone utters with his lips a rash oath to do evil or to do good, any sort of rash oath that people swear, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and he realizes his guilt in any of these; when he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses the sin he has committed, he shall bring to the Lord as his compensation for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.

"But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the Lord as his compensation for the sin that he has committed two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a sin offering and

the other for a burnt offering. He shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the sin offering. He shall wring its head from its neck but shall not sever it completely, and he shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, while the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar; it is a sin offering. Then he shall offer the second for a burnt offering according to the rule. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.

“But if he cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, then he shall bring as his offering for the sin that he has committed a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. He shall put no oil on it and shall put no frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering. And he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take a handful of it as its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, on the Lord's food offerings; it is a sin offering. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed in any one of these things, and he shall be forgiven. And the remainder shall be for the priest, as in the grain offering.”

Outline

1. The Damage Started Before He Knew - Leviticus 4:1-12

- a. An allergy does not care about the cook's intent, and a cracked foundation does not care whether the family living on it treated the house well. The damage is structural, and the inspection does not create it.
- b. Leviticus 4 is written for sin the sinner did not catch, and the whole time he felt fine the defilement was real.
- c. Just because you do not feel like you are sinning, and do not have any awareness that what you were doing was wrong, does not change the fact that it was wrong.
- d. Anyone who thinks, I do not sin that often, is exactly who this passage is written for. Israel had people who kept the law and still needed atonement for sin they never saw.
- e. Even the good works we hand God are riddled with pride and with the assumption that our work is worth His pleasure.
- f. Burnt offering, grain offering, peace offering: hand on the head, blood drained, smoke ascending, the priests' portion, the table set. All three are about getting into the room with God.
- g. The first three carry no fault. God is holy, He is the King who brought you out of Egypt, He grew the grain, and the tribute is owed to Him because He is worthy.
- h. Chapters 4 and 5 open the question of fault, which is the bridge from ritual purity to moral purity, and both are required to dwell with God.
- i. I am allergic to fruit, and God is allergic to sin. Not that sin makes God itchy. Sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God, because He is perfect and it is not.
- j. Which sounds unfair until you notice that Leviticus is the map out. God is holy, and God is also a forgiving God.
- k. The chapter begins with the priest, and Leviticus stays silent over him. It is one of the more important silences in the Bible. The framework is everywhere else and it is withheld here.
- l. I believe the priests were forgiven. The provision is missing because the true high priest has no need of it, and Hebrews says so: one who lived unblemished, who has never failed and never will.

2. When He Comes to Know It - Leviticus 4:13-5:6

- a. The chapter sorts the room: the priest, then the whole congregation, then the leaders, then the individual, and each one has to bring the offering when the sin becomes known.
- b. The sin of leaders lands on the people (4:3), and that is true well outside the church. The sin of those over you affects you.
- c. Every tier except the priest ends the same way: and he shall be forgiven. Community, leader, individual, forgiven.

- d. Leviticus 5 pushes into cases that do not look accidental. A man hears a public adjuration to testify, and he saw it, and he says nothing.
- e. That is not high-handed rebellion, and it is not good either. The category is sin recognized late.
- f. A fire alarm going off is not the alarm's fault. It means something is going wrong, and the conscience God gave you does the same work.
- g. You knew there was a better way to live, and you chose the neutral way. That also is sin.
- h. There are thousands of opportunities in your day to do the opposite of an unintentional sin, which is to unintentionally fail to do what is good.
- i. They woke up in a flop sweat, remembered what they had failed to do, and beelined to the tabernacle.

3. Down to a Handful of Flour - Leviticus 5:7-13, with Hebrews 13:11-13

- a. Lamb, then two turtledoves, then a tenth of an ephah of fine flour, no oil and no frankincense, and the same sentence over each: he shall be forgiven (5:13).
- b. God does not price forgiveness at what the rich can afford and let the poor fall off the bottom. He scales it to what is in your hands.
- c. The cost of the sacrifice is not the point. Recognizing your guilt is.
- d. Every version of it ends the same way, with the carcass carried outside the camp to be burned.
- e. Hebrews 13:11-12. The bodies are burned outside the camp, so Jesus also suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people through His own blood. There is a reason He was not killed in the temple or in the center of the city.
- f. Jesus is the sin offering, once and forever, and His blood covers even the sin you cannot name.
- g. Being covered does not remove the need to confess. Good motives do not convert a sin into something acceptable, and Jesus does not turn your sin into a good thing. He forgives it.
- h. God does not change His rules, because His rules are perfect. He changes your relationship to them, and the Spirit in you leads you into them.
- i. Being a Christian is not growing in your own holiness. It is growing in holiness through the forgiving work of Jesus, and being shown more of your brokenness and more of His love.
- j. Hebrews 9:14. The blood of Christ purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.
- k. Communion is self-examination and confession and joy at the same time, and it is not a settling of accounts. Come regularly, not because you are so bad, but because God is so holy and there are cracks you cannot see.

Notes

I have oral allergy syndrome. Certain fruits go into my mouth and my body decides they are pollen, so pitted fruit and melon are out, and carrots taste spicy to me, and cherries and peaches are the worst of it. Cooked or made into jam, no reaction at all. And I do not really care. My wife cuts up a Costco watermelon and I sit there and eat it and pay for it later, and my kids ask, aren't you allergic, and I say, nah. I do not like telling people either, because then everybody has to rearrange their kitchen for me. But here is the part that matters. If somebody makes me something with raw carrot in it, they are unintentionally causing me pain. They were not trying to poison me. It is poison to me anyway. Bring a dish to a potluck that you have made a hundred times and somebody in this church cannot touch it. Your intent does not enter into it.

That is where I want to start with unintentional sin, because there are a lot of misunderstandings about it. Leviticus 4 is dealing with people who did not know that what they were doing was wrong, and some of the examples are strange, because you read them and think, you should have known. What the priests had to learn was how to cover and atone for sin the people did not understand they were committing. Regardless of motive, regardless of how it felt to them, if God's law was broken, God's law was broken. Not feeling like you are sinning, not even being aware of it, does not change what it was.

When we bought our first house in Texas there was one we loved, on a hill, with a view, and way under price. So we asked the realtor why, and eventually it came out. Foundational issues. You will have to replace the foundation. And I was done. It did not matter that the owner may not have known. It did not matter that the family had treated that house beautifully. There is a crack in the foundation, and you will have to put the house on stilts and repour it. Our spiritual lives work the same way, and this series is not going to end with my condemnation of you, because every week in Leviticus ends at Jesus. But before that, you have to know there are cracks you cannot see.

If you have ever thought, I do not sin that often, this passage is addressed to you. There were Israelites who kept the law as far as they could tell and still needed atonement for what they never caught. And the worst misreading available this morning is to think we are better than they were. I would hope if I told you this congregation has unintentional sin in it, the response would be, of course. Of course there are cracks in the foundation. Of course the good works we carry to God have something poisonous mixed in. Even the way we present our good works is riddled with pride, with the sense that what we do for the Lord ought to please Him.

Four weeks in, here is where we have been. The burnt offering: hand on the head, the animal killed, the blood drained, the whole thing on the altar, and the smoke rising as

a fragrant offering, which is what opens the door. The grain offering: flour prepared in a specified way, given to God, the rest going to the priests. The peace offering: another animal, more blood, and this time the table is set and the people eat. All three are about getting into the room with God, an unholy people welcomed to dwell with Him.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the bridge from ritual purity to moral purity, and those are not as far apart as you think. In the first three there is no fault. Nobody is bringing a burnt offering because they messed up. They bring it because God is holy, because He is the King who brought them out of Egypt, because He made the grain grow in the first place. Now moral purity comes into it, because our God is holy and cannot coexist with sin.

I am allergic to fruit. God is allergic to sin. I am not being cute, and I am not saying your sin makes God itchy. Sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God, because He is perfect and it is not. This is where I lose people, who say, then God is unfair, we are all sinners, every foundation is cracked, there is no way in. Before you go there, notice what Leviticus is. It is the map. It is the pathway into God's presence for people whose foundations are cracked, and it rests on another attribute of God: He forgives.

Chapter 4 sorts the room into a hierarchy. The priest sins, and he brings a bull. The whole congregation sins, a communal sin rather than an individual one, because there are things we do together, in our culture and our groupings, that require an offering. The leaders sin, and when they recognize it they bring another offering. And the individual, on the same playbook, in the same exacting language. Every one of those tiers except the priest ends with the same sentence: and he shall be forgiven. Community, forgiven. Leader, forgiven. Individual, forgiven. Our God is a forgiving God.

But the priest does not get that promise. I think it is one of the more important silences in the Bible, and it sits right at the end of the priest's paragraph in chapter 4. Everywhere else the point is hammered flat, make this sacrifice and you receive forgiveness, and here the sentence is simply not there. Let me tell you where I land. I genuinely believe the priests were forgiven. I think the provision is absent because the passage is still echoing the Messiah, still pointing to one who is actually worthy to be the priest handing out this atonement, and He is not from this land, He comes from heaven. The true high priest has no need of forgiveness, because He lived unblemished, has never failed, never will, and goes on being our high priest forever.

Read the chapter again and you see how it starts. God begins with the priests, the men who have given their lives to obeying Him and running this system, and says even they mess up. And catch what verse 3 does: the priest's sin becomes the guilt of the people. The sin of leaders lands on those under them, and that is not only true in the church. Then verse 12. The carcass has to leave. The tabernacle sits in the middle of the

camp with the tents arranged around it, and the blood is sprinkled in a very particular way where God is residing, and then the body is carried outside the camp and burned there. That is God telling His people He cannot coexist with sin.

Chapter 5 keeps going, and the cases get harder to call accidents. A man hears a public adjuration to testify. He was there. He saw it. He says nothing. And I read that and thought, that sounds like an ordinary sin. Should he not have spoken? Of course he should. But Scripture puts it in this category, and what it means is that it is not good. So now he is carrying guilt. He is thinking, I should have said something, I could have cleared that man's name, I saw what happened. There is an alarm going off in his head, and the alarm is what sends him to the tabernacle.

I think of the fire alarms in our houses. Pastor Adam had some excitement with his. When an alarm goes off it is not the alarm's problem, unless it is faulty, and I know some of yours are. It is going off because it detects something wrong. God has given us a conscience that does that. I should not have done that. I regret that. Some time has passed and I can see it was not good. That is what Leviticus is describing, thousands of years ago, people saying, I wish I could take that back. God says, that right there, that is unintentional sin. You knew there was a better way to live and you took the neutral one. That is not good for you to live.

People say His standards are impossibly high, and I am standing in the back saying, that is the point. His ways are higher than ours. So if you are in the camp of I do pretty good, consider that you have thousands of chances every day to commit the opposite of an unintentional sin, which is to unintentionally fail to do the good in front of you. Israel knew what to do about it. They woke up with the flop sweat, realizing they never said the thing they should have said, or that they promised to help a man on Thursday and it is Friday. And they prepared the cattle or the goat or the pigeons, whatever they had, and went and said, Lord, I sinned without knowing it. And there was forgiveness.

That applies to us. When we come to know a sin, we go to God with it. There are more sins in your life than you have any recognition of, and I am not asking you to produce the inventory. The Spirit who lives in you, and the conscience God gives even to people who do not believe, keeps telling you there is a right and a wrong. When you see one of those moments, that is when you go and say, I need atonement.

And look at how far down the ladder God goes. A lamb, then two turtledoves, then a tenth of an ephah of fine flour, no oil, no frankincense, just flour on the altar. And what does it say? He shall be forgiven. I underlined it. God is not pricing forgiveness at what a wealthy man can afford. He looks at what is in your hands. This is why Leviticus is so long and so repetitive, running scenario after scenario, because not everyone has cattle, not

everyone has goats, not everyone has time to catch two birds. The cost is not the point. Recognizing your guilt is the point, hearing the alarm and bringing the confession.

And every version of it ends with the carcass carried outside the camp to be burned. None of the words of Leviticus are spent without purpose. Hebrews 13: the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places are burned outside the camp, so Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood. There is a reason He was not killed in the center of the city or in the temple. He went outside, and His body was the sacrifice.

There is a reason the bottom of the ladder is a fistful of flour, too. We talked about the grain offering last week and said, that is communion. All of it points to what Jesus has done. When we take communion we are saying we dwell with God and are His living temple, and amen to that. But there is another layer, because of how much you and I sin without knowing it. God no longer asks for a bull or a goat with its blood shed. He gives us bread and cup, His body and His blood, and through them we dwell with God and we are forgiven.

Which is why communion asks you to examine yourself. Hebrews 9:14, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. That is Hebrews talking about conscience, not the pastor. And that is where our unintentional sin goes, into the body and blood of Jesus, where we are forgiven.

Here is what I do not want you to take from this. I do not want you thinking Jesus takes something sinful and makes it good. He does not. He forgives it. And I do not want the Christian version of the sincerity argument, where good motives are all God cares about. You can have every right motivation and still be doing what God abhors. Does the blood of Jesus cover it? Absolutely, all of it. The question is whether you will call it sin. God does not change His rules, because His rules are perfect. He changes your relationship with them, and the Spirit inside you leads you into them more and more. And still, in this flesh, on this broken foundation, you will not be perfect, so you will keep sinning unintentionally. Which does not make it right and does not justify it. It makes the blood of Jesus something you need every single day. Being a Christian is not growing in your own holiness. It is growing in holiness through the forgiving work of Jesus, being shown more of how wretched and broken you are and more of how loved you are, until you hear Him say, I have made the payment for you to be forgiven, do you even want it?

In closing, this whole series is me trying to explain what church is for. The pinnacle of gathering is not the message and it is not even the singing. We gather because we are dwelling with a holy God. I hope you feel His presence in the songs, and I am always encouraged when someone says the message hit exactly where they are, because that is

not me, that is God speaking to you. But the pinnacle is when we recognize that this is not only about feeling good, that every day there are things the Spirit says would be good for you to do, and too many of us, myself included, tell Him no, that is inconvenient. It may not be bad motives that make you say no, and it is still sin, and there is real responsibility in it.

And then the beauty. You are forgiven. Every time you failed to follow the Spirit leading you in your conscience, you are forgiven. So when we come to communion, I read 1 Corinthians 11 every time because it tells us how, and it begins with self-examination, with seeing all the places I have not done right and need God's forgiveness. Then we take the elements, and it is joy and confession at once, because what we confess is what only the blood of Jesus can pay for.

So when Leviticus reads like a laundry list of dos and don'ts, understand that Jesus is the author and perfecter of it, and that we are not done with the sacrificial system. We observe it every time we take communion. We are not taking a handful of flour, we are taking a different form of flour. We are not sprinkling blood, we are drinking the blood of Christ, symbolically, not actually His flesh and blood. Jesus did not abolish this. He completed it and perfected it. The question for Israel was whether they wanted to partake, and some of them heard the alarm and decided two turtledoves was too much hassle this month and they would catch it next time and maybe upgrade to a goat. This is why we take communion regularly. Not because you are so bad. Because the God you serve is so holy that there are areas in your life you know nothing about that need the blood of Jesus over them. So we come and say, Lord, I need You. I need Your forgiveness. I need Your mercy. I need Your presence.

Blog

The first three chapters of Leviticus describe offerings a person brings to the tabernacle. The burnt offering goes up in smoke to God, the grain offering goes to God and the rest to the priests, the peace offering ends up being a meal of fellowship, and none of them were prompted by anything in particular. Someone could bring all three in the same week for no other reason than that they wanted to.

Chapter 4 opens with a new speech from the Lord and the situation changes. These offerings are required, and they are not started by devotion. Rather, they are started because of a discovery.

The category is set in the second verse. If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the Lord's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them. The Hebrew behind unintentionally is shegagah, from a root that means to stray or wander, the way sheep do, and it covers more ground than the English word accident. It includes not knowing the law, not knowing the facts, and simple carelessness. What it does not include is defiance, which Numbers handles separately and does not provide an offering for. So the chapter is about a man who broke a commandment and had no idea he had done it, and the first thing Leviticus tells us about that man is that he is guilty.

Most of us are hung up here, because nobody loses sleep over sins they never knew they committed. We work with a simpler equation, where sin requires intent and guilt requires awareness, and a thing done in genuine ignorance is a mistake rather than a wrong. Leviticus is written against that logic. A crack running through a foundation is doing structural work whether or not the family upstairs has any idea it is there, and the inspector that finds it was not the one who made it. Nobody blames the family for not knowing. Nobody thinks the house is fine because they did not know. Both of those are true at the same time, and that is the position of the man in chapter 4.

The chapter then sorts the whole nation. The anointed priest first, then the entire congregation, then a tribal leader, then a common person, each with a specified animal and a specified procedure. Read straight through it feels repetitive, and the repetition is where the meaning hides, because the differences between the four cases are small and deliberate. Pay close attention to the blood. When the priest sins, the blood goes into the tent, sprinkled seven times in front of the veil, smeared on the horns of the incense altar, with the remainder poured at the base of the altar outside. Same for the whole congregation. When a leader or an ordinary Israelite sins, the blood only reaches the horns of the bronze altar in the courtyard. Rank determines how far into God's house the contamination traveled.

That detail says something the rest of the chapter assumes. The blood in Leviticus 4 never touches the person who sinned. Not once. He brings the animal, lays his hand on

its head, kills it, and then he is finished, and the priest carries the blood into a room the man has never entered and puts it on furniture the man has never seen. The word for this offering is *chatta't*, which is also the ordinary Hebrew word for sin, and the verbal form behind it means to decontaminate. Sin does damage in a place the sinner cannot inspect. He stands in the courtyard while it is cleaned, and then the priest comes back out and tells him he is forgiven.

The forgiveness is the refrain. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. It closes the congregation's case, the leader's case, both of the ordinary man's cases, and both rungs of the ladder in chapter 5. The verb is one the Old Testament reserves for God alone, and it is passive, which leaves the actor unnamed and unmistakable. He walks home forgiven whether or not he feels different on the way.

It appears everywhere except the first case. The priest brings his bull, the blood goes in, the fat is burned, the carcass is carried outside the camp, and the paragraph simply ends. The congregation's paragraph a few verses later is nearly a copy of it and does say he shall be forgiven. Careful readers have argued both directions about the silence and Leviticus does not give a satisfactory answer. What the text will say plainly is that when the anointed priest sins, he brings guilt on the people. His private failure is a public event, and the community's standing is bound up with the condition of the man who represents them. That is not a comfortable thing to read in a room full of elders, and it is the reason Hebrews is so insistent later that our high priest had no sins of His own to offer for first.

Chapter 5 narrows from categories to situations, and the situations complicate the word unintentionally. A man hears a public call for witnesses, knows something, and stays quiet. A man touches something unclean and forgets about it. A man swears a rash oath and it slips his mind. Only the middle case is an accident in any normal sense. What holds the list together is not the absence of intent, it is a gap in time, marked by a phrase the chapter keeps repeating: when he comes to know it. The guilt was real during the gap. The knowledge is what makes it something he can act on. A recall letter arrives eighteen months after the part left the factory, and nothing about the car has changed except what the owner knows, and the letter does not make the part defective. It makes the defect fixable.

Then chapter 5 requires something the sacrificial instructions rarely require, which is speech. When he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses the sin he has committed. The man who would not talk when he was called to testify is now made to talk. And the offering scales down from there in steps, a lamb, then two birds, then a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for anyone who cannot afford birds, which is about two quarts, an amount a day laborer could put together. The flour gets no oil and no

frankincense on it, since those belong to a thanksgiving gift and this is not one. It is a poor man's sin offering and it is still a sin offering, and the sentence over it is identical to the sentence over the lamb. He shall be forgiven. God set a price high enough to be real and low enough that no one falls off the bottom.

Which leaves the bull. The blood went into the tent, the fat went up from the altar, and everything else was carried outside the camp to a clean place and burned there on the ash heap. The writer of Hebrews knows exactly which animals those were, the ones whose blood was brought into the holy places, and he says that Jesus suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people through His own blood. Then he tells us to go out to Him there. The place where the sin offering was disposed of turns out to be the place where we meet Him. And the same letter says that if the blood of goats and bulls could purify the flesh, the blood of Christ will purify our conscience, which includes the parts of it we have never managed to examine.

You will be handed bread and a cup on Sunday, and Paul says to examine yourself before you eat. Leviticus 4 guarantees that the examination will come up short. Those two things are both true and they have always been true, and the answer is not to try harder at the inventory. Nobody has ever come to that communion table with a complete list. What you bring is the confession you can actually make and the honesty that it is partial, and what covers the rest is a sacrifice that was finished outside the gate before you knew there was anything to confess. The provision came first. It always has.

Read Leviticus 4 and 5 this week, and read Psalm 19:12 alongside them, where David asks to be declared innocent of faults he cannot name. Leviticus is God's answer to that prayer, written down centuries before it was prayed. The accounting for all of it comes in October when we reach the Day of Atonement. Come Sunday ready to be forgiven for more than you can remember.