

AUGUST 27th
FORGIVENESS REQUIRES A SUBSTITUTE

“The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock. “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”

LEVITICUS 1:1-4

The local butcher. You can take many animals to the local butcher to get your animal killed, processed, and sliced into all the different cuts of meat that you want. Even as raw cuts of meat are available at the local grocery store, there's nothing quite like buying cuts of meat fresh from the butcher. Butchers allow us to cut out the middleman, which usually gives a better purchase price. One thing that unites grocery stores and local butchers is death. The meat that is prepared for the purchaser has been cut from a dead animal. Here in Leviticus, we have many kinds of sacrifices, all required to cover the sin of God's people. What does God teach us here in the first few chapters of Leviticus?

One idea that gets emphasized often with these sacrifices is the “without blemish.” This condition of the animal points forward to the ultimate sacrifice of atonement...Jesus Christ. He is our Substitute that knew no sin. He was pierced for our transgressions. This is an essential truth that is the bedrock of our Christian faith. However, it's not the only truth to be learned from these few chapters. Kenneth Mathews in his commentary on Leviticus makes a strong point about the gender of the animal. While we may think that the male animal is a more valuable part of the sacrifice, Mathews emphasizes that this is actually not the case: “The significance of the male beast was more symbolic than the actual value. Practically, the female animal was more valuable since it produced milk and was essential to reproduction. The male, however, was viewed as the symbolically significant animal since it was representative of the whole herd as the chief animal...”. You can understand this truth by comparing this text with another in Romans 5:12-21. Jesus is the second Adam who acts as the representative of His people. Before leaving the idea of the sheep, goat, and bull being sacrificed, notice a key detail about the actions of the worshiper: laying a hand on the head of the animal. This is a key identifier that the animal acts as the substitute for the worshiper. Sin causes death. In order for God to look upon His people, blood must be shed. A substitute is provided so God's people can approach a holy God.

A final point from these sacrifices is the variety of animals that are used. It's not just the bulls, the sheep, and the goats. What else do you notice is an appropriate sacrifice for the worshiper? Leviticus 1:14-15 tells us: “If his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves or pigeons. And the priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head and burn it on the altar. Its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar.” Why would God give this provision to His people? The answer is the economic diversity among the Hebrews. The important truth is that the worshiper comes with an unblemished offering with a worthy heart. Being unable to afford sheep, goats, or bulls should not deter God's worshipers. Instead, all are invited to come to offer their sacrifice to cover their sin.

Men, these are key points that we don't often consider today since we have the cross of Christ. However, God points forward to a Savior here in Leviticus. There is an unblemished sacrifice that has been offered to pay for our sin. Except this offering is so much more. The blood of bulls and goats in Leviticus can never take away sin; it only acts as a covering. But God. God sends a Supreme Substitute that can offer once for all His sacrifice. What an amazing God!

Spend some time thinking about these sacrifices that only cover sin but can't take away sin. Imagine having to offer these sacrifices every time you approached the Tabernacle. Now think about how you can approach God's throne boldly any time that you want because of Jesus' sacrifice.

Further Reading: Psalm 32