

It Is Written

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THE OLD LAW, UNINTENTIONAL SINS, AND THE CHRISTIAN

By Timothy D. Stringer

In Leviticus 4:1-6:7, God, through Moses, gives the Israelite nation provisions for the forgiveness of sins. The priest, the congregation, the leaders, and the common people are given different sacrifices and rituals to perform to receive forgiveness for unintentional sin. (Leviticus 4) For example:

"Now if anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and becomes guilty, if his sin, which he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without defect, for his sin which he has committed. ... Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven" (Leviticus 4:27-28, 31 NASB).

Chapter 5 provides for a common person who cannot afford a lamb for sacrifice. The first seven verses of Chapter 6 give instructions concerning forgiveness for various kinds of theft. In all cases, when an Israelite made the proper sacrifice, his sin was forgiven (Leviticus 4:20, 27, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7).

What was to be done about a sin, committed unintentionally, that was not made known? Ignorance was no excuse: "Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty, and shall bear his punishment" (Leviticus 5:17). A sin, committed in ignorance, is still sin, and punishment is demanded for that sin. However, God did provide a general amnesty for His people. Once a year, the high priest made a sacrifice "for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance" (Hebrews 9:7, cf. Leviticus 16). After the high priest performed the prescribed rituals on the tenth day of the seventh month, God told the people, "You shall be clean from all your sins before the LORD" (Leviticus 16:30). The sins committed ignorantly during the past year were forgiven.

Since "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction" (Romans 15:4), are there any lessons for the Christian?

The New Testament states that forgiveness is found "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:5-7; Colossians 1:13-14). To be "in Christ," a person must have a relationship with Christ. That relationship is begun by faith working through obedience to God's word. Faith in Jesus, confession of Jesus, repentance of sins, and baptism in water are commanded for a relationship with Christ Jesus and for receiving forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9-10). At the point of baptism, all a person's past sins are forgiven.

However, as the bumper sticker says, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven." Christians can and do sin. (I John 1:8,10) A Christian can fall from grace (Galatians 5:4). I John 1:9 tells the Christian to confess his sins, and God will forgive them. Must a Christian confess every sin he commits in order to have forgiveness?

God provided a sacrifice for the Israelites to cover their sins that were committed in ignorance. The Hebrew writer draws an analogy between the yearly sacrifice and Christ's sacrifice in Chapter 9. He concludes that because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, there is perfection in Christ (Hebrews 10:14), and complete forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 10:17-18). What sins? All sins, including the sins committed in ignorance! (Hebrews 9:7).

Christians are required to confess known sins and faults. (I John 1:9; James 5:16) But, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation

for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (I John 2:1-2).

Unwashed Hands

By Hugh DeLong

Somewhere before the time of Jesus, some of the Jewish leaders had taken the instructions for Priests in Num. 18:8-13, where they were to ceremonially 'wash' their hands before eating 'holy' food which had been offered as a sacrifice, and applied it to 'ordinary' food and 'ordinary' people. After a short while, this understanding and application became 'the rule'. As such, it was viewed as 'sinful' not to do it. It had nothing to do with health and sanitation; it simply had become their tradition.

Many 'traditions' come about like this. One generation begins doing or believing something, and after a short while, the reason behind the action is forgotten, but the action is deemed 'necessary'. While it may not be wrong to continue such a practice, here, the practice was being 'bound'. Everybody has traditions! Yet they are not to be held as God's commandments.

Jesus calls them out on this. They neglected the commandments of God yet held on to their traditions. They set aside various commandments of God and clung to their traditions.

This simply shows that we must be careful to recognize traditions for what they are: traditions. We must also recognize the commandments of God as the commandments of God. This will require some thinking on our part, but it is necessary.

Sin Always Comes Out

By Mike Thomas

As the Israelites were preparing to take the land of Canaan, they had some who did not want to join them in the land. The tribes of Gad, Reuben, and one half of the tribe of Manasseh wanted to remain in the land east of Canaan, where they had resided for decades. This decision disturbed Moses, who was busy preparing the people for battle. He asked these would-be defectors, "Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here?" (Numbers 32:6). The people assured him that they intended to join their brethren in fighting for the land; they just wanted to return to the outskirts of Canaan to live where they always had. "We will not return to our homes until every one of the children of Israel has received his inheritance" (v.18). Moses consented to their request, but offered a serious warning if they later decided to not keep their word: "If you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out" (v. 23).

Moses stated a principle that is still true today: sin always comes out. One way or another, if we remain in it, it has a way of telling on us, even after our death. Paul said, "Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later" (1 Timothy 5:24).

One of the reasons our sins find us out is because God is all-knowing. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). There is nothing we can do that His omniscient eye does not see, which should dissuade us from believing we can sin without getting caught. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). We might successfully convince ourselves and a few gullible souls of the lies we have told to disguise our rebellion, but God is not fooled. He knows if we are serving Him from the heart or if we are living in sin (2 Timothy 2:19). He can

tell if we are forsaking the assembly or if we are truly unable to attend. He sees if we are sincerely fighting against the "fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11) or if we have "feet that are swift in running to evil" (Proverbs 6:18). He is even aware of how we treat our family when no one else is around. The Lord knows us! So instead of looking for ways to keep our sins from others, let us be wise and submit to the One who will judge us. For, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).