

# Offer Sacrifices to the Lord

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Naomi, thank you. So, lots of readings there from this Old Testament book Leviticus. Here's our question for this morning. In a sense, quite straightforward. How should we be towards him? In our lives, this week, how should you and I relate to him, this pure and holy God? In our world today, at school and work, God is rarely mentioned, right? It's like he doesn't exist, and so asking how we should relate to him doesn't make sense. It's a non-question. You don't need to bother about that. But privately in our world, and certainly amongst us, there are still people who do believe stuff about him. Some people in our world imagine that God is there, but he is far away and not involved, like a forgetful landlord if you rent. And so how do you relate to a God like that? Well, don't ruin his property, but basically do what you want and live how you like. Other people imagine him as a kind of singular, severe ruler. How do you relate to a God like that? You submit.

Some of us have grown up with very demanding parents and have fallen into thinking that God is somehow just a bigger version of them, and so our days are marked by desperately trying to impress the God whom we will certainly disappoint. Others like to think of him as a kind of soft daddy, the gentle and always accepting dad that I've always wanted. He will love me whatever, so I'll live how I like, and then I will come to him for spiritual cuddles. But the truth is God is not like any of that.

He's not like any of that. He is no forgetful landlord. He is no severe ruler. He is no demanding parent. He is no soft daddy. The God who has made himself known to us in history and here in the Bible is holy. He's holy.

The eternal God who made the heavens and the earth, he's a sovereign, mighty king. He's far above us and beyond our understanding. He's great and exalted. There is no one like him. Our God is majestically other and holy and deserves our highest praise. And this holy God, moreover, is morally other. Like the sun, he shines with blazing moral purity. He's righteous. He always does what's just. The Bible says he dwells in unapproachable light and his eyes are too perfect to look upon evil. He is morally other, blazingly perfect and holy. And if those who are unclean and morally impure try to come close to him, they will be consumed. Majestically other, morally other, the true God is holy, holy, holy.

And in his holy love, he stoops down to people like us and he says remarkably, I will be your God and you can draw near to me. So how should we be towards him? How should we relate to this God who is pure and holy and yet says, I will be your God? The whole Bible tells us. Leviticus tells us.

[ 3 : 2 2 ] A bit more introduction again like last week. We're very, very early on in the Bible story. Three and a half thousand years ago from now, God in his love, if you know the story, rescued his chosen people, Israel, out of Egypt and he brought them to Mount Sinai. To myself, said God. And the mountain blazed with fire, by the way, because God was present in his holiness. He gave Moses the Ten Commandments and then God instructed the people to build for him a tent of meeting, a tabernacle pictured on the screen here, a little model over on the table there. As the people travelled through the desert towards the land where they would live, this tabernacle tent would sit right in the middle of the camp and in this tabernacle the Lord would dwell. I will be with you, he said. Just extraordinary.

And yet when the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, not even Moses could enter. In these first pages of Leviticus, God speaks to Moses and tells him how the people of Israel can and should relate to him. How can you? How should you relate to him, this pure and holy king who steps down to us and says we can come near to him and have him as our God. Chapters 1 to 7 of Leviticus say so profoundly that you come near to God, you can and should relate to him only through sacrifice, through costly sacrifice. Last Sunday in Leviticus 1, we considered the foundational sacrifice God demands, the burnt offering. This sacrifice that you brought to the tent of meeting would cost you

dearly, a young male animal without defect which you offer. And yet offered to the Lord, this sacrificial animal would make atonement for you. It would pay the ransom price and die the death that your sins deserve.

Slaughtered, skinned, chopped up, then burnt up on the altar completely. It would be an aroma pleasing to the Lord. The Lord in heaven would see this sacrifice and smell it and he would be soothed and pleased and he would no longer consume you in his holiness. The burnt offering back then points forward, we said last week, so wonderfully to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross who gave his costly life as a ransom for many dying and destroyed in our place that we might be accepted by God today. You draw near to God today through the sacrificial death of Jesus. Well now this morning, we're going to take a deep breath and for our remaining minutes, we're going to dive in further and we are going to make it pretty swiftly through the other four offerings. And there are things here to teach us. How should you and I relate to him today, this pure and holy God who sent Jesus for us. First, taking chapters two and three together, we are to offer pleasing sacrifices to the Lord. Explore this with me. Within the sacrificial system, as you look down at the pages, the burnt offering, grain offering and fellowship offering all belong together because all of them are called a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. In chapter two, end of verse two, do you see the grain offering is a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. Chapter two, verse nine, the same. In chapter three, end of verse five, the fellowship offering is a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. Chapter three, verse 16, the same. And so these offerings show us it is possible for people like you and me to genuinely please the Lord who is in heaven. Just pause and ask, did you know that? Some of us may have had it drilled into us, twisting a Bible verse as far as I can see, that all our righteous acts are always like filthy rags to God. We're just rubbish. For sure we've been accepted through Jesus, but we will never please anyone really. Not our demanding parents and certainly not God.

[ 7 : 58 ] But the Lord here says in Leviticus that's not true. You can offer pleasing sacrifices to him. And what are they? Well, firstly, the grain offering, which says to the Lord, I'm yours forever.

I'm often going along with the burnt offering brought at the same time. The grain offering is a gift, it's a tribute, it's a present. More widely in the Bible, you approach a ruler or a king, someone you want to bow before and praise, you might bring a kind of gift offering. Maybe one day you might even bring gold and frankincense and myrrh. Here in verse one, you bring to the Lord an offering of the finest flour. And they're to pour olive oil on it and put incense on it to make it rich and pleasing for him.

And part of the job of the grain offering is to provide food for the priests, for Aaron and his sons. They burn a bit as a memorial portion to the Lord and then they keep and eat the rest. But all of it is to the Lord, this gift. Sometimes, verses 12 and 14, it'll be an offering of firstfruits. God has been so kind to us and given us a harvest and now we bring you the firstfruits. It's a tribute, it's a gift to you, our God. In verse 13 of chapter 2, you're to season all your grain offerings with salt. Don't leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings. Add salt. Salt back then was something everlasting. Can't destroy salt by fire or time. And so the salt of the covenant of your God spoke of an agreement, a relationship that was forever. Put that in your grain offering. What is this offering about then? It's not dealing with your sins. It's not putting you right with God. It's an offering for you, gracious King. This is for you, my Lord. I am yours and you are mine forever. And it pleases him. You say, so what for us? We have no altar today, rightly. You do not need to bake a loaf and burn it for him. Instead, what? The New Testament says, Romans 12 verse 1, picking up this language, therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. Don't just give your finest flour, not just the firstfruits of your money.

[ 10 : 46 ] Your body. And there is a sweet old story told of a little boy in church, not this little boy, but another little boy, who heard about God's wonderful love. And as the offering plate was passed around for people to put their collection money in, he looked in his pockets to see what he could give. He found a dirty hanky. He found a sweet wrapper and a rusty old pen knife. It was a long time ago. And he didn't think any of those things were appropriate for such a good and holy God, not enough. And so when the collection plate was passed to him, he thought and he paused for a moment. And then he put the collection plate on the floor and he stepped onto it himself.

All that I am, my flower, my finest flower, my cash, my body, is for you. I'm yours forever.

And did you know, as you live like that this week, it will be a pleasing aroma to him. The God who has saved you through Christ will be pleased with you as you live for him.

As, secondly in the text, when you offer a fellowship offering. A fellowship offering which says something to the Lord like, thank you, we'll eat.

The burnt offering and the grain offering, they are part of the daily regular offerings. The fellowship offering is not like that. It's the kind of offering that you bring just when you want to and when you're moved to. It's a fellowship offering or a peace and friendship offering.

[12:25] It's about fellowship and peace and friendship with the Lord. In chapter 7 you discover when people might bring this offering, it's an expression of thankfulness or the result of a vow or a free will offering. I'm bubbling over with thankfulness and devotion and praise for what you've done, Father, in my life.

Later in the Bible, King David says in Psalm 56, I'm under vows to you, my God. I will present my thank offerings to you because you've delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling that I may walk before you. What happens with this sacrifice?

Well, you present an animal, verse 1, without defect. Then you put your hand on its head and you slaughter it, verse 2, and then blood gets splashed on the sides of the altar. And then, verse 3, you cut out the innards which are given to the Lord on top of the burnt offering. Chapter 7 will add that this food offering is to the Lord, but then the rest of the animal gets eaten too, not just by the priests, but also by those who bring the offering. And so the fellowship offering becomes a meal of thankfulness and joy in fellowship with God and together.

Can you imagine what that might look like? When we share the Lord's Supper together, when you sit around a table and eat together and you're thankful to God and you say, God, you're so good to us and we praise and thank you. When you're like that in your life and when we are as a church, it will be a pleasing aroma to him. Genuinely.

And this is the point of these two offerings. He is no severe ruler, the Holy One. He's not an always disappointed, demanding parent. Leviticus 2 and 3 offer sacrifices to. We are yours forever. We bring you our life. We will serve you.

[14:38] We're committed. We're so thankful. And if in your life you do that this week, he will see. And he will smell the sacrifice of your life. And he'll be pleased. Like genuinely pleased with you.

I think isn't that good? Don't I want to be like that? And yet, yet at the very same time as we say together, we're going to offer you pleasing sacrifices and live for you, don't think that our God is some kind of soft daddy.

Gentle and always accepting. Because even as we live for him, he remains the God of awesome holiness and blazing perfection. And so when you and I, or when we do things that are forbidden by his commands, and when we fail to do as we should, or when we are unfaithful to him, before this holy God we do deserve to die.

And yet in his holy love, God has made a way for us to live. He's made a way for us to ongoingly have him as our God, even as we sin.

How? Through sacrifice. Through sacrifice to the Lord, who forgives your sin and guilt.

[16:13] Chapters 4, 5 and 6 outline the sin offering and the guilt offering. We've only time to touch on a few details. These sacrifices, they're not routine and regular.

They're not just when you feel like it either. These sacrifices are what God says you must do when you sin and deserve his judgment of death.

If you've got it open in front of you, just notice, through these chapters, instructions are given for different people for different sins. In 4 verse 3, if the anointed priest sins.

Over the page in chapter 4 verse 13, if the whole Israelite community sins. 422, a leader. 427, a member. In 5 verse 1, if anyone sins because they don't speak up and so on.

And at the end of each little section of these two offerings, the little paragraphs, come solemn, wonderful words. In this way, the priest will make atonement and they will be forgiven.

[17:24] So consider firstly the sin offering, which cleanses sin's dirt. Chapter 4 verse 1 begins, The Lord said to Moses, Say to the Israelites, When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, dot, dot, dot.

What is an unintentional sin? At the very least, it is doing forbidden things, but you just didn't know at the time. And so I drove at 30 miles an hour up the Arbery Road and I didn't know it was a 20 limit until someone pointed it out to me.

But I should pay. I think it's more than that though. The word unintentional can mean when you err. Maybe when in your weakness you go astray from God's commands in your life.

In Numbers chapter 15, God speaks of unintentional sins and defiant sins. Have you heard of this? You can sin defiantly with eyes wide open and gritting your teeth and despising the Lord and breaking his commands.

And if this person sins ongoingly like that, you will be cut off and your guilt will remain on you. We can't call ourselves Christians and mock the living God.

[18:49] The sin offering here is for unintentional sins. You didn't know. Maybe you knew, but didn't mean to, and yet you half did.

You're weak. You go astray. And when your conscience kicks in or someone close to you tells you your sin, it breaks you and you're sorry.

Do you know what that feels like in your life? What can you do if you sin like this before a holy God? Let me just read a little bit from chapter 4 and verse 13 onwards.

Follow this with me. If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what's forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, even though they're unaware of the matter, when they realise their guilt and the sin becomes committed, they committed becomes known, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the tent of meeting.

It's got to be an animal sacrifice to pay for your sins. The elders of the community have to lay their hands on the bull's head before the Lord are sins which deserve death placed on it and the bull will be slaughtered before the Lord.

[20:05] And then what? Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull's blood into the tent of meeting. He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the Lord seven times in front of the altar.

He's to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar before the Lord in the tent of meeting and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

If you imagine how it was in those days, there's just going to be blood everywhere. You say, what's going on with that? With blood sprinkled before the Lord and daubed and poured.

There will be so much blood in Leviticus as we go on because God will say that sin pollutes and blood cleanses.

Our sin pollutes like mould spreading through an apple like sewage poured into a river. When we disobey our God, it pollutes us, it spreads through us, makes us dirty and unfit for the presence of a pure and holy God.

[21:19] And if I can put it like this, like the slime behind a slug moving along the ground, I pollute wherever I go. I put it like that.

Some of us may know this instinctively. Sometimes when I realise how I've been, I can sense that I am dirty.

And I almost can't even bring myself to open my Bible. How can I come near to God and pray to him? But if our sin pollutes, the Lord God says that the blood of a slaughtered sacrificial offering can cleanse.

A life given in death can pay sin's penalty and wipe away sin's blood. That is because, Leviticus 17, the life of a creature is in the blood.

And the Lord says, I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. If sin pollutes you, God says that blood can make atonement for your life.

[22:27] And so here, in this so solemn moment, the priest, not you, takes blood into the tent. Before the most holy place where God dwells between the cherubim, he sprinkles it.

In the holy place, he puts blood on the horns of the altar and then he exits and pours it out at the base of the altar of burnt offering. There's blood everywhere. Because like a spiritual bleach, the blood of this animal can wipe away sin's dirt.

And so, verse 20, in this way, the priest will make atonement for the community and they will be forgiven. God will not treat you as your sins deserve.

Because the sacrificial animal has been slaughtered in your place. Its blood has been poured out and spread, cleansing sin's dirt. And so now, you can be forgiven.

Chapter 5, verse 14, takes us on to the guilt offering. That will have to be afterwards, over lunch or at growth group or another time. But if the sin offering cleanses sin's dirt, the guilt offering pays sin's debt.

[ 23 : 40 ] For when we've done wrong, when we've deceived a neighbour or stolen something or cheated God or someone out of what should be theirs, it renders us guilty and we owe and there is a penalty to pay to God and to others.

And so the Lord says you must make the offering and put things right and in his mercy, the Lord God will forgive you. This is Leviticus chapters 2, 3, 4, 5.

We've moved through at a fair pace. There is so much to get to grips with here. I just asked at the beginning, how should we be towards him?

The Lord God, our God, he's no forgetful landlord, he's no severe ruler, he's no demanding parent, he is no soft daddy.

How should you and I relate to him, this God who is pure and holy and yet says to us, I will be your God? Only through sacrifice. Through pleasing sacrifices to the Lord.

[ 24 : 49 ] We're yours forever. We will go into our week and live for you and we're so thankful. And when you sin, as you have done this past week, because you are weak and disobedient just as I am.

And when you feel so unclean and unfit for him, you're to know that he is the God who can forgive you and he will forgive you through the sacrificial blood of what?

Well, not bulls or goats ultimately. You notice that we don't slaughter livestock today.

Wouldn't be allowed in the school, but even if we could, we don't in sacrifice. We don't do that and nor are we meant to. And that is because as the New Testament will state so clearly, it is actually impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to really take away sins.

Ultimately, animal sacrifice and animal blood is not enough. But instead, these ancient bloody sacrifices in Leviticus point forward.

[ 25 : 56 ] They point forward to the once-for-all sin offering and the once-for-all guilt offering. They point forward to the one whose blood is able to deal with all your sins, past and present and future for good.

because forgiveness, real forgiveness, lasting forgiveness for our sin and our guilt comes now today wonderfully through the sacrifice of Jesus.

It says in Hebrews 9.26, He, Jesus, has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sins by the sacrifice of himself.

Hebrews 9.14, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.

Jesus Christ came in history the one man without defect, morally pure, and he offered himself on the cross in sacrifice, his precious life for yours.

[ 27 : 16 ] And through his death on the cross, his blood can make even the foulest person clean. He can wash away your dirt, he washes away your ongoing sins so that you with your sins done away with and your conscience cleansed, you cleansed from the inside out, even you, you can serve the living God.

It is possible to approach him and know him, this holy Lord. His Son has given his life for us. So in your life, offer pleasing sacrifices to the Lord, thank him and live for him and love him, this God who forgives all your sin and guilt and does it through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're going to sing together.