

How God Deals with Unholy People

Paul / General Adult

The Lawful Use of the Law / ESV-A Leviticus 1–7

In seeking to understand what Paul means by the lawful use of the Law in 1 Tim. 1:8, this series tries to build a framework from within the Law to understand its purpose.

Introduction

Last time I was here, I wasn't able to go into a lot of detail in the passage we looked at. We could go back and dig deeper, but I think instead, I'd like to turn this into something of a teaching series, where we try to gain a broad understanding of what's going on in the Law and how to use that understanding appropriately under the New Covenant. We looked at a couple passages briefly in 1 and 2 Timothy, where Paul says that there is a right and a wrong way to use the Law and that all Scripture (including the Law) is profitable for the believer. I actually want to read those again, so we have them in our minds. These are not the only passages in the NT that instruct us on how to use the Law, but they give us a really strong starting point. ([1 Tim. 1:3-11](#); [2 Tim. 3:14-17](#))

[2 Timothy 3:14–17](#)

(ESV)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[1 Timothy 1:3–11](#)

(ESV)

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

This is important: The law is not laid down for the just. The law is not meant for that group (us). That's because obedience is not something we do; it's something we are. And because the flesh is always there fighting the spirit, we have to be reminded and instructed to live righteously. But it's not about doing. We don't not steal because it's in [Exodus 20](#). We don't not steal because, if we're walking with Christ, we should want to work to provide for those in need ([Eph. 4:28](#)). It's not about doing; it's about loving, and it always has been.

I'm gonna steal this secondhand from Moe: Do we love him?

In that spirit, I want to try to build a foundation for us to study the Law and to do so profitably. We may go back at some point and look at Genesis and the beginning of Exodus in more detail, but for now, I'll assume we're all much more familiar with those portions of the Law.

Last time we looked at a particular incident in Exodus, which we'll review briefly. Then we'll see how Leviticus flows directly from that, and we'll see how far into the book we get this time. If we spend too much time in the first section, we'll pick up there next time I'm here.

Body

I. Review

Main takeaway: God is now dwelling in the midst of a people of whom he said this:

[Ex. 33:5](#)

[Exodus 33:5](#)

(ESV)

For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.' "

- A. Exodus was about God taking his people out of Egypt and establishing them as his own people. |
- B. Where we focused last time I was here was a time when Israel blatantly and knowingly broke the covenant God had made with them. |

1. God was going to destroy them |
2. Moses interceded, and God relented |
3. God was going to fulfill his promise to bring them into the promised land, but he would not go with them. |
4. Moses interceded again |
5. God agreed to go with them and guaranteed it by proclaiming his name to Moses and re-instituting the covenant. |
6. Israel builds the tabernacle according to the design God had shown Moses, and God moves in. |

C. **Important:** How was this a lawful use of the Law? How is it profitable for us?

1. We could use it to browbeat people into obedience, but that's not lawful. That's how the Law is useful for sinners, but that's not the goal of a teacher of God's people ([1 Tim. 1:3-11](#))

[1 Timothy 1:3-11](#)

(ESV)

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality,

enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

2. Instead, we get to see a glimpse of who our God is and get to know him better. We see both God's wrath against sinners and the swiftness and personalness of his great mercy and love. |

3. It makes us "wise for salvation" because it shows us why we need it in the first place. God is holy, and he cannot abide the presence of sin, or rather, sinners cannot abide the presence of God's holiness. We are beyond hope of being holy by nature. If we have any hope of seeing God and not being consumed, God has to make the way. |

II. Sacrifices ([Lev. 1-7](#))

Questions to ask ourselves: |

— What does this show us about our hearts? |

— How does this foreshadow the New Covenant? |

— How does this help us better understand our need? |

— How does this help us better understand what Christ accomplished? |

Note: Not every sacrifice answers every question |

Main takeaway: I want you to be looking for ways that the different sacrifices instruct us as we draw near to God to worship. What do they show us about our need? How do they picture what our heart should be like? How do they reflect the work of Christ on our behalf? |

A. Leviticus picks up right where Exodus leaves off. |

1. God is dwelling in the midst of the people, but there is still distance between him and his people ([Ex. 40:35](#))
[Exodus 40:35](#)
(ESV)

|[And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.](#)|

Even Moses can't be in God's direct presence anymore |

2. [Leviticus 1:1](#) is the first thing God speaks to Moses "from the tent of meeting" without Moses actually being in the tent of meeting. What God speaks is his provision for the people to come near to him. |

B. God provides a number of kinds of sacrifices for the people. These sacrifices provide different things (1-7). I classify them into two broad categories, based on how the first three are all described and what the last two accomplish. |

One quick note: We'll jump around in this section, because the instructions are given twice: once for the people, and once for the priests, and each time includes different details relevant for each group. |

1. "Pleasing aroma" sacrifices |

a. Burnt offering |

i. Made atonement so a person could be accepted by the LORD
([Lev. 1:3-4](#))

[Leviticus 1:3-4](#)

(ESV)

“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. |

ii. The fire burned continually ([Lev. 6:12-13](#))

[Leviticus 6:12-13](#)

(ESV)

The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out. |

iii. For this offering, the whole animal was burned on the altar ([Lev. 1:13](#))

[Leviticus 1:13](#)

(ESV)

but the entrails and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it and burn it on the altar; it is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. |

iv. There were different options of animals to offer based on how much the person offering could afford. This is true of several sacrifices. |

v. This offering parallels [1 John 1:7](#)

[1 John 1:7](#)

(ESV)

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. |

vi. Let's ask those questions from before |

b. Grain offering: Acknowledged the importance of the work of the priests |

i. The Levites did not receive an inheritance in the land. Instead, the LORD was their inheritance ([Deut. 10:8-9](#))

[Deuteronomy 10:8-9](#)

(ESV)

At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD to stand before the LORD to minister to him and to bless in his name, to this day. Therefore Levi has no portion or inheritance with his brothers. The LORD is his inheritance, as the LORD your God said to him. |

ii. Instead, God gave them a portion from the sacrifices. The grain offering particularly illustrates this, because the part the priests ate was the most holy part of the offering ([Lev. 2:1-3](#)) |

[Leviticus 2:1–3](#)

(ESV)

“When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it and bring it to Aaron’s sons the priests. And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil, with all of its frankincense, and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the LORD’s food offerings.”

iii. Richard E. Averbeck was helpful in pointing out that this offering usually accompanied both burnt and peace offerings. (Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch).|

iv. Paul alludes to this (and other sacrifices) in [1 Cor. 9:13-14](#)

[1 Corinthians 9:13–14](#)

(ESV)

Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.”

c. Fellowship/Peace offering

i. The key part of this offering is that only certain parts of the animal are burned on the altar. Specifically, the portions with fat ([Lev. 3:16-17](#))

[Leviticus 3:16–17](#)

(ESV)

And the priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering with a pleasing aroma. All fat is the LORD’s. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood.”

ii. The priests always received certain portions of these sacrifices ([Lev. 7:28-36](#))

[Leviticus 7:28–36](#)

(ESV)

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever offers the sacrifice of his peace offerings to the LORD shall bring his offering to the LORD from the sacrifice of his peace offerings. His own hands shall bring the LORD’s food offerings. He shall bring the fat with the breast, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the LORD. The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons. And the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifice of your peace offerings. Whoever among the sons of Aaron offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion. For the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed I have taken from the people of Israel, out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel. This is the portion of Aaron and of his sons from the LORD’s food offerings,

from the day they were presented to serve as priests of the LORD. The LORD commanded this to be given them by the people of Israel, from the day that he anointed them. It is a perpetual due throughout their generations.”]

iii. ESV calls it a “peace” offering, and when we hear that, we usually think that the person offering is trying to make peace, but that’s what the burnt offering is for. In this case, the sacrifice is being made *because* there is already peace. |

iv. Three types (7:11 ff)

(1) Thanksgiving

(a) Included bread

(b) Had to be eaten all on the same day

(2) Vow/Freewill

(a) Not clear whether it included bread or not

(b) Could be eaten the same day and on the second day, but it could not be eaten on the third day, or it would be counted as sin

(c) Leftovers had to be burned |

v. Some observations

(1) These all involve celebration of some sort.

(2) Why the time limit?

(a) Thanksgiving offering —

(i) There was no provision to burn the leftovers for this one, and one person wasn’t going to eat a whole cow or lamb or goat. |

(ii) You had to bring friends, and lots of them. If you’re going to celebrate what God has done for you, you have to let other people know!

(iii) This is probably what Elkanah was doing with his family in I Samuel. The event became an occasion for others to come to the presence of God as well. |

(b) Vow/Freewill —

(i) There was more time to eat this one, and the leftovers could be burned. This was perhaps a more intimate time with God, perhaps just bringing a few friends

(ii) We see this in [Acts 21:23-26](#)

[Acts 21:23–26](#)

(ESV)

Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.” Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them. |

(iii) Perhaps there is something to the third day. The offering would not be accepted if the sacrifice remained on the third day... |

(3) Whatever the occasion, these offerings were seen as sharing a meal with God Himself. The best parts went to God, the group “tipped the waiters,” so to speak, and they ate together with God to celebrate His wondrous works. |

2. Sacrifices for sin |

a. Sin offering |

i. This offering is similar to the burnt offering, because it makes atonement for the people ([Lev. 4:20](#))

[Leviticus 4:20](#)

(ESV) |

Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. |

ii. However, it differed from the burnt offering in some important ways |

(1) The priests did not burn the whole animal for the sin offering, but instead ate a good portion of it. |

Note: Can you think of a better way to feed a group of people? Tie their food supply to people’s sinfulness.

Brilliant. |

(2) The burnt offering was perpetual to be a pleasing aroma that covered the people’s sinfulness. The sin offering was offered on specific occasions of a person or group sinning. |

(3) The burnt offerings had different options based on the persons economic status. The sin offering had different options based on the level of influence the person or group had. This is a picture that, the more influence you have, the more costly your sin is ([Lev. 4:1-3](#), [13](#), [22](#), [27](#)).|

(i) Note: there is also an economic provision for the poor for this offering, too. No one is exempt from the requirement to seek God’s forgiveness, and no one is excluded from the opportunity to receive it. |

iii. This offering does not cover every kind of sin. |

“Unintentional” is probably not the best way to translate it, because it implies complete ignorance. However, chapter 5 lists at least one sin the person would be conscious of ([Lev. 5:1](#)). Rather, it is in contrast to sinning with a “high hand” ([Num. 15:27-31](#)). This is a matter of the heart wherein the person demonstrates hatred toward God. |

[Numbers 15:27–31](#)

(ESV)

“If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them. But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him.”|

David was being literal, not poetic, in [Ps. 51:16](#)

[Psalm 51:16](#)

(ESV)

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; |

you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. |

That’s where [Rom. 3:22-26](#) comes in |

[Romans 3:22–26](#)

(ESV)

For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. |

iv. If the burnt offering ties with [1 John 1:7](#), this offering ties us in with [1 John 1:8-9](#)

[1 John 1:8-9](#)

(ESV)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. |

There is a general acceptance for us in which Christ's blood covers us in our sinfulness. But then, when we sin, we confess our sins (without offering a sacrifice), and God is both faithful and just, so he can forgive our sins and cleanse us. |

b. Guilt offering

i. This offering is basically the same as the sin offering ([Lev. 7:7](#)) [Leviticus 7:7](#)

(ESV)

The guilt offering is just like the sin offering; there is one law for them. The priest who makes atonement with it shall have it. |

ii. The biggest difference is that it required restitution before the sacrifice would be accepted. This was for sins that harmed another person or violated the holiness of the tabernacle. |

iii. Why restitution? It reflects a change in heart that both recognizes the wrong done and now desires the good of the one wronged (cf.

[Luke 19:8-10](#))

[Luke 19:8-10](#)

(ESV)

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." |

Conclusion

I. Summary

II. How is this “lawful”?

A. God was never interested in rote obedience. He has always been after the hearts of his people. We want to look past the ritual and the details to understand what these sacrifices reveal about a proper heart response to God (“teaching, correction, instruction in righteousness”).

B. The sacrifices help us understand our need for God’s forgiveness (“wise for salvation”).

C. I hope this provides some context for personal study, because as we look at what’s going on behind the scenes a little bit, we can understand better what Christ has accomplished on our behalf. Sacrifices are talked about all the time in both the OT and the NT, and these five sacrifices are the ones those writers have in mind. If we have a good grasp of what these sacrifices are about, we will have a better understanding of what’s going on as we read the rest of Scripture.