

Unit 4: The Blood Redeems, Cleanses, and Restores Us

When Adam and Eve sinned by taking what was forbidden by God, they hid from God and tried to cover the shame of their nakedness by sewing fig leaves together. God asks them a penetrating question: *"Who told you that you were naked?"* If we're obedient to God, we won't be self-focused and covered in shame. The knowledge of evil makes us feel exposed. Knowing this, God follows his first question with the direct question, *"Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?"* Adam and Eve have an opportunity to confess and repent, but they don't. Instead, they try to put the blame on someone else for their actions. *"The man replied, 'It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.'"*¹³ Then the LORD God asked the woman, *"What have you done?"* *"The serpent deceived me," she replied. 'That's why I ate it'"* (Genesis 3: 12-13). Adam blames both his wife and God ("it was the woman you gave me"), and Eve blames the deceiver for her actions. The offspring of the first man and woman have been casting the blame ever since. Cain killed Abel because God preferred Abel's animal sacrifice to Cain's, so rather than change his ways, he turned his anger toward his brother and tried to blame someone else – just like Mom and Dad (Genesis 4).

Every person is accountable to God for his or her actions. We cannot blame someone else for our sin. As we discovered in the last unit, God's law was given through Moses so that his chosen people would know what obedience to God is supposed to look like, in order to enjoy God's presence and covenant blessings. But the law also calls us to take responsibility for our actions by offering sacrifices for our sin. Knowledge without application gets us nowhere. I may understand the directions for how to drive to someone's house, but until I get in the car and put it in motion, my knowledge hasn't moved me closer to my desired destination. Knowledge of sin is good in that it leads to repentance, but that repentance must have an outlet, otherwise we just feel really bad. The sacrificial system, which we will study in this unit, is how God graciously made a way for his people to atone for their sins.

Unfortunately, many Christians have knowledge of sin that continues to trip them up, but they don't understand how to move past feeling bad about it and experience full restoration. We cover ourselves with fig leaves of self-determination and call it "personal holiness," but we still feel exposed because we don't understand how God covers our shame and makes us holy through his covenant. *"Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised"* (Galatians 3:19). The law of the old covenant was good because it held us accountable for sin and served as a guardian to keep God's people on a trajectory toward Christ, who offered himself as the final sacrifice for sin. The law contrasts God's holiness with our sinfulness. We are still under the conviction of the Holy Spirit to obey God's precepts in the new covenant, but we are *not* under a curse for failure to obey the law. Understanding this distinction is vital to every Christian who wants to enter God's promised rest.

*"All who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith. ¹⁰ But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law.'"*¹¹ So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, *"It is through faith that a righteous person has life."*¹² This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, *'It is through obeying the law that a person has life.'*¹³ But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, *'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a*

tree.’¹⁴ Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:9-14).

So how does the Holy Spirit convict us? What does he convict us of? What do we do when we feel his conviction, and how do we distinguish between it and condemnation from the Accuser? In this unit, we will examine the purpose of the sacrificial system and how it is fulfilled in Christ. God covered Adam and Eve's shame by killing an animal to make clothing of skins for them. It was the first blood sacrifice. We will learn how to apply the blood of Jesus to our sin in order to overcome guilt and shame. The blood of Jesus offers atonement, redemption, and full cleansing. You may already know that on an intellectual level, but God introduced these concepts through the law of Moses on a physical level so that his children would not easily forget the cost of sin. However, awareness of sin is not God's ultimate goal for his children. He does not intend for us to live our lives in bondage to shame with our eyes continually fixed on ourselves.

The sacrificial system served the purpose of restoring access to the presence of God in the Tabernacle. In the next two units we will discover the step by step process God outlined for restoring intimacy under the old covenant which is fulfilled by Christ in the new covenant. God doesn't just want us to be aware of our sin; he wants to forgive it, cleanse us from it, and remove it so we can enjoy fellowship with him.

Day 1

God introduced the substitutional sacrifice through Abraham, when he instructed him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac (Genesis 22). It was a test of Abraham's faith which he passed by not withholding from God that which was most precious to him, the heir God had promised him. It also foreshadowed the sacrificial system that would be given to his descendants through Moses. When God stopped Abraham from carrying out the sacrifice, and provided a ram for Abraham to offer instead, God declared two things: he does not require child sacrifice, and he allows an animal as a substitute for human death. Just as God killed an animal to clothe Adam and Eve and cover their shame, God allows the blood of a substitute animal to atone for – or cover over – the sins of his people.

Though God does not allow Abraham to carry out the sacrifice of his son, he allows him to feel the anguish leading up to it. All of his descendants would know the story and tell their children about God's gracious gift of a substitute sacrifice. But while God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, he did not spare his own Son. What God foreshadowed through Abraham's obedience, he completed through Jesus' obedience to offer himself as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of all who would believe in him as the necessary sacrifice to make us right with God. By relating to Father Abraham, and understanding the old covenant's sacrificial laws, God's people were being prepared to recognize what our Heavenly Father did for us when he sent his Son to die on the cross.

In God's legal system, it is the blood that makes atonement for breaking God's laws (sinning) because blood represents life. *“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and 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.”¹² Therefore I say to the Israelites, ‘None of you may eat blood, nor may any foreigner residing among you eat blood’” (Leviticus 17:11-12).* God first taught this principle to Noah when he confirmed his covenant after the flood. God gave all the animals to Noah to eat, with this condition: *“You must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood in it” (Genesis 9:4).* The blood must be drained from an animal before it is eaten.

Interestingly, when the Apostles were reinterpreting the law for the Gentiles, one of the few commands that remained was the command to abstain from eating blood. Life is precious to God, and blood represents life. The writer of Hebrews tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin because the penalty for sin is death. However, in Isaiah 1, God clarifies that he is not pleased with the sacrifices themselves, unless they are matched by true repentance and reverence for God. Blood must be shed to enable forgiveness, but it is the repentant heart of the worshiper that counts.

The Altar of Sacrifice

The Tabernacle was the movable tent where God's presence dwelled with the Israelites until the Temple was built. The altar of sacrifice was in the outer court where Israelites who were ceremonially clean were allowed. Only the priests could enter the Holy Place and Most Holy Place, where the presence of God above the Ark of the Covenant rested. While it is the blood that was sprinkled on the altar and atonement cover of the ark that provided purification and paid the penalty for sin, the shedding of blood was done outside the Holy Place. The altar's placement teaches us that death is not allowed in God's sanctuary.

King David was not allowed to build God's Temple, even though this was his earnest desire, because God said there was too much bloodshed on his hands from war (2 Chron. 22:7-8). The cross where Christ offered the final sacrifice was just outside the city because death must be separated from God's holy sanctuary. In fact, any Israelite who came in contact with a dead person or even a woman who was shedding blood from the death of an unfertilized egg could defile the sanctuary. So the purification rules were put into place in order to teach us that God's holiness and death do not mix. Why does this matter? Because Revelation 21:4 tells us that death is not allowed in heaven. Death and decay are not allowed to defile heaven – thanks be to God! Therefore, they are not allowed to defile God's earthly Tabernacle.

One of God's strict rules regarding sacrifice was that only the priest could offer a sacrifice. When King Saul tried to do this, it cost him God's blessing over his rule and his future lineage on the throne. God set up the rules for sacrifice, and we don't get to change them. This is, perhaps, the most fundamental teaching of the Torah. God is the first and final authority. Many of God's commands are followed by the statement, "I am the Lord your God," which is the Father's way of saying, "Because I said so!" In this age of moral relativity, we tend to bristle at the idea of laws and guilt for breaking laws. The sacrificial system was set up to teach us that we are all guilty of breaking God's laws, and to provide a means for restitution and restored relationship with God. Remember, the purpose of the entire sacrificial system was the enablement of God's holy presence to dwell with his people.

"Then Moses and Aaron went into the Tabernacle, and when they came back out, they blessed the people again, and the glory of the LORD appeared to the whole community. ²⁴Fire blazed forth from the LORD's presence and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When the people saw this, they shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground" (Leviticus 9:24). The priests were instructed to never let the fire on the altar go out because it had been ignited by God himself. As we explore the various sacrifices and their fulfillment in Christ, hang onto the idea that the purpose of God's laws is our restored relationship with the Father who wants to reveal to us his glory. The ongoing work that was accomplished by Christ's sacrifice will never be extinguished.

The Burnt Offering and Day of Atonement

The burnt offering consisted of a male bull, sheep, or goat (or turtledove or pigeon, for those who were

poor) without defect. By laying hands on the animal before the sacrifice, a person's sins were transferred to the animal, thus providing a substitute sacrifice to atone for that person's sins and make him right with God (Leviticus 1:4). The Hebrew word for burnt offering is *'olah*, meaning "what goes up." The entire animal except for the hide, which was the inheritance of the priest, was consumed and ascended to heaven in smoke. Because of the sinless life he lived in a fully human body like ours, Jesus met the law's requirement of a perfect male without defect. Just as nothing was withheld in the burnt offering in order to make atonement, Christ withheld nothing when he took on our sins and offered himself as our atoning sacrifice.

Christ's entire body suffered at his crucifixion so that he could ascend to heaven as a complete sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. His hands were pierced to pay the penalty for Adam and Eve taking the forbidden fruit and causing the curse of death and decay. His feet were pierced because the enemy would be allowed to strike his heel. His side was pierced for the sin of the woman who was taken from Adam's rib, so that we could overcome the curse of broken relationship that came upon Eve. Jesus' head was pierced with a crown of thorns – because thorns symbolized the curse on the earth – so that all curses that have fallen on our heads are broken through the shed blood of Christ. The purpose of Christ's suffering was foretold hundreds of years earlier by the prophet Isaiah. *"He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed"* (Isaiah 53:5). Not only did he take on our curses, healing and restoration are made possible through Christ's shed blood. Romans 3:25-26 tells us that Christ's atoning sacrifice worked backward through history and forward, so that his one sacrifice would atone for the sins of all who would believe in him for all time.

Christ satisfied the requirements of the law as both our atoning sacrifice and scapegoat. On the Day of Atonement, two burnt offerings were sacrificed to atone for the sins of the entire nation. Blood from those offerings was sprinkled on everything in the Tabernacle to purify them from any defilement that had taken place over the previous year. This need for regular cleansing reminds us that while Christ has paid the penalty for our sins and purified us with his blood, it is still possible for us to become defiled because we still live in a sinful world. Christ's atoning sacrifice made us right with God so that we are able to be filled with his presence, but our "sanctuary" may still need a good cleaning from time to time.

God not only provided a way for atonement of sin, but removal of it. Enter the scapegoat. Two goats were selected for the Day of Atonement. One would be offered as a sacrifice along with a bull, and one physically represented the removal of sins from the people. *"When Aaron has finished purifying the Most Holy Place and the Tabernacle and the altar, he must present the live goat. ²¹ He will lay both of his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the people of Israel. In this way, he will transfer the people's sins to the head of the goat. Then a man specially chosen for the task will drive the goat into the wilderness. ²² As the goat goes into the wilderness, it will carry all the people's sins upon itself into a desolate land"* (Leviticus 16:20-22).

Just as Jesus taught through stories, God gave us visual aids in the old covenant to help us understand what Christ would do for us in the new covenant. When Christ took on our sins as our scapegoat, he took them to the "desolate land." Christ removes our sins *"as far from us as the east is from the west"* (Psalm 103:12). The prophet Isaiah foretold the Messiah's role as our atoning sacrifice and scapegoat who would not only carry our sins but our weaknesses and sorrows.

"It was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! 'All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all'" (Isaiah 53:4, 6).

Picture God, himself, naming your sins as he lays them on Jesus. 1 Peter 2:24 tells us that Jesus *"personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed."* Christ carried not only your personal sins, but your weaknesses and sorrows (v. 4), so that his blood now has the power to make you whole in every way. There is no weakness that cannot be overcome by the power of the blood! Jesus took away our sins as our atoning sacrifice and scapegoat, but we must still confess them as our act of repentance (1 John 1:9). The people were not allowed to just offer a sacrifice to appease God, like the idol-worshippers would do. Atonement that makes us right with God requires true repentance and confession of "all the wickedness, rebellion, and sin" God brings to mind. When we respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and confess any sin or rebellious attitude or wicked association he brings to mind, we can visually picture transferring our sins to Jesus, who removes our guilt and forgives our sins.

Confession is one component of our salvation, but the other is belief. *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10:9). It is our belief in Jesus as the perfect sacrifice who makes us right with God that saves us from guilt and condemnation. When the Accuser dredges up our old sins for which we've already confessed and been forgiven, we do not need to submit to false guilt. We simply confess that Jesus is Lord of our lives, and acknowledge that because of his sacrifice we are forgiven. If we are not experiencing the joy of our salvation, it is likely because we have unknowingly surrendered it to the enemy. Jesus pointed out that the one who has been forgiven much, loves much. If we're struggling to feel God's love or express it, perhaps we don't understand the free gift of forgiveness Christ gave us. We are now no longer under condemnation, but we must choose to believe what Christ has done for us over our feelings of shame brought on by the enemy.

"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. ³ The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. ⁴ He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-4).

The atoning sacrifices continued year after year until Christ offered the perfect sacrifice for our sins, putting an end to the sacrificial system. The requirements of the law have been satisfied for us who follow the Spirit instead of the sinful nature. While the work of atonement has been completely accomplished, assuring us of forgiveness from God when we sin, our obedience to the Spirit is still required. In order to gain further understanding of what obedience looks like, we will examine the other sacrifices God ordained in the old covenant law in the next chapter.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does understanding that Christ took all of our curses upon himself as a perfect atoning sacrifice

affect your belief in God's power to make you whole and victorious in the areas in which you struggle? Is there anything Christ's blood cannot overcome?

Jesus, there is power in your blood! Thank you for taking all of my curses, weaknesses, and sins upon yourself on the cross. By faith, I declare that sin has no power over me! By faith, I declare that your grace is sufficient to sustain our relationship in spite of my weaknesses and shortcomings because your blood covers those, as well. You suffered out of love for me. You endured the cross because of the joy set before you of restored intimacy with me. I cannot fathom the depths of your love for me. Thank you for forgiving my sins. I lay them on you, Jesus, and name them as your Spirit brings them to mind. Thank you for removing them from me so that the memory of them has no power to condemn me. Blessed Savior, you are my King. The Accuser is under your feet. Silence his accusations as your blood is applied to my sins, and guard my heart and mind with your promised peace. In the powerful name of Jesus, amen.

Day 2

The Guilt Offering

Leviticus 5 and 6 describe the circumstances under which a guilt offering must be made. This offering is required when a person – intentionally or unintentionally – breaks one of God's laws that causes damage to another, including damage to God by defiling his sanctuary. The person who sins against someone else – not just God – must offer a guilt offering (similar to the sin offering), plus pay restitution. Lying, cheating, and stealing not only affect a person's relationship with God, requiring the forgiveness of sin, but cause harm to others. The person guilty of this type of offense was required to return what was taken plus 20 percent, in addition to presenting the guilt offering to God.

Sometimes we feel guilt for our wrongdoing because we haven't yet confessed our sins (by agreeing with God that we were wrong) or accepted Christ's free gift of forgiveness. We may be trying to earn salvation through good works, or deny that we are a sinner. However, sometimes we experience guilt that we can't resolve through prayer alone because we have wronged someone else and need to make restitution. The old covenant laws addressed both our relationship with God and others. The whole law hinged on loving God and our neighbor as ourselves, according to Jesus. Christ was adamant that our relationship with others matters as much to God as our relationship with him. He explains what we must do when we come to worship God and become aware of guilt because we have wronged someone. *"If you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, ²⁴ leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God"* (Matthew 5:23-24).

Under the old covenant, restitution was required to pay for physical damage. Under the new covenant, efforts toward reconciliation are also required for emotional damage we have caused, whether intentional or unintentional. Notice, Jesus said we are to go and be reconciled if someone has something against *us*, not just if we feel like we did something wrong. If I know that my husband is upset with me, it doesn't matter if I feel like I am in the right, or if what I did to upset him was unintentional. According to Jesus, I am to go and make every effort at reconciliation, otherwise my worship of God will be hindered. God loves my husband – and everyone – as much as he loves me, so I need to be quick to ask forgiveness of both God and others. But reconciliation is more than asking forgiveness, it is a willingness to do whatever is needed to restore relationship. The Father spared nothing to reconcile us to himself, so we pursue reconciliation with others because it reflects the heart of God toward his children. *"For*

God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). We don't just preach reconciliation, we live it.

Jesus highlighted this requirement of reconciliation in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), when he revealed the underlying precepts of the law and explained that we need to not only have pure hands, but pure hearts. It's not just murder that makes us guilty before God, but judgmental anger, because God is the only fair judge. It's not just adultery that is a sin, but the lust that leads to it. He explains that we are guilty when we sin in thought, as well as deed. Through Christ we have been reconciled to God, but even under the new covenant we are not excused from making an effort at reconciliation with those we've harmed. In fact, we work harder at unity because God desires unity among believers. If others refuse to be reconciled, our conscience is still clear because we have been obedient to God. Hebrews 12:14 says, *"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone."* If we have made every effort toward peace, we can still experience God's peace that comes from submission to God, no matter how others respond to us.

The Sin Offering

The sin offering could be considered the unintentional sin offering. It accounted for the times when the people broke God's laws accidentally or without realizing it. Examples God gave for sins requiring this type of offering included sins of withholding information, unknowingly touching something unclean, and making a foolish vow (Leviticus 5:1-4). When the Israelites became aware of their guilt, they were to bring an offering for the priest to sacrifice on their behalf, in order to purify them and make them right with God. It was offered along with a grain offering that was mixed with olive oil and frankincense. Together these made a pleasing aroma to God. Unlike the burnt offering, which was completely consumed, only part of the animal and grain was sacrificed on the altar. The rest was given to the priests for food. In this way, God provided a livelihood for the priests who were not given land to work.

The sin offering shows us that breaking God's laws demands a sacrifice, whether the law was broken intentionally or by accident. The number of laws that could be broken was overwhelming, but the detailed description of all the ways we can mess up was given in order to demonstrate that there is no such thing as a "good person" who is not in need of forgiveness (except for Christ). The sin offering also shows us God's mercy toward us when we make foolish mistakes. If a person made a foolish vow, rather than carry out devastating consequences by sticking to that vow, God provided an escape clause by allowing for the sin offering. If the person admitted their foolishness and brought an offering to the Lord, his sin would be forgiven. God takes vows very seriously because he is a covenant-making God who keeps his promises. As his children, we ought to keep our promises, but sometimes we speak before we think.

I learned the importance of not making careless vows several years ago, when the Holy Spirit kept me from making one during a church service. The pastor had asked people to come forward to commit to bringing a non-Christian to church within a certain time frame. Assuming this must be God's will for me because it came from the pulpit, I was about to respond to the invitation, but the Holy Spirit stopped me. At that time, I was homeschooling and had very little contact with the "outside world." God knew that I would feel condemnation if I made a vow I couldn't keep, so he told me to stay seated. The Holy Spirit is such a precious gift! He not only shows us what to do when we've sinned, but keeps us from setting ourselves up for condemnation. He is our Helper, and if we'll just listen to him, he will help us!

Isn't it freeing to know that God doesn't require us to go down with the ship when we make a mistake and commit to something we shouldn't have? We all have that one stupid decision that hangs around our neck like a brick necklace. It comes to our mind as we're trying to go to sleep, and embarrasses us at every turn. The good news is Hebrews 10:1-18 tells us that Christ accomplished the purpose of all the sacrifices by his one sacrifice. *"And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices"* (Hebrews 10:18). We no longer need to bear the shame of unintentional sins and foolish mistakes because Christ covered those with his blood, as well. We don't have to live in fear of making a mistake and displeasing God, *"For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy"* (Hebrews 10:14). We are forever made perfect in God's eyes because of Christ's sacrifice and because we are filled with his Spirit, who is in the process of sanctifying us and making us holy.

However, we still live in frail human bodies and are prone to make errors in judgement. We may have a pure heart, but immature character. We still may experience conviction when we later realize we failed to do something we should have done. We still live in an "unclean" world that can defile us if we let our guard down. By slowly moving God's boundaries to accommodate the cravings offered by the world, we unintentionally invite the defiling effects of sin. When any of these things happen, and our conscience is quickened by the Spirit, we simply need to confess our mistake, ask for forgiveness, and thank God for his grace. The blood of Jesus covers all our sin, so when we make mistakes, God invites us to apply the blood like an eraser that blots out the record of our foolishness.

I have discovered that these steps are critical in overcoming the false guilt thrown at us by the Accuser. Once we've claimed the blood of Jesus as payment for a particular sin or mistake, the enemy can't use it as a weapon against us. Our salvation is not undone by a foolish transgression – Christ's one sacrifice is enough to cover all our sins – but we can't sweep them under the rug, either. If we do, we will experience guilt and give the devil a foothold.

The Peace Offering

So if Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial requirements of the law, what kind of sacrifice do we, then, bring to God? Christ's sacrifice is the one that makes us right with God, not our own sacrificial acts, and yet the New Testament acknowledges our continuing sacrifices to God. *"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him"* (Romans 12:1). If God does not require sacrifice, how do these verses fit in? There is one more sacrifice mentioned in Leviticus. It is not an atoning sacrifice, but a peace offering.

Whereas peace offerings to idols were meant to bring peace between the god and the worshiper, the peace offerings God ordained reflected the peace already enjoyed between the worshiper and God. It was voluntarily brought by the worshiper to express gratitude to God for his goodness and to be drawn closer to him. In fact, in Hebrew the root of the word offering, *korban*, means "to come close" or "draw near." The purpose of all the offerings to God was to experience restored relationship and enjoy the presence of God, as opposed to appeasing God or pacifying his anger.

"For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God sent Jesus as our Emmanuel – "God with us" – to come close and draw near to us as the offering for our sin. He is the peace offering sent from God to us! Christ, our Prince of Peace, restores our peace with God. *"Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for*

us. ²Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory" (Romans 5:1-2).

The peace offering outlined in Leviticus 7 was offered for a variety of reasons, including thanksgiving, in recognition of a fulfilled vow, or as a voluntary gift. Everything we do for God under the new covenant is a reciprocal peace offering out of gratitude for what God has done for us. Christ fulfilled his vows and gave his life as a voluntary gift. Because of the peace we now enjoy in God's presence, we offer our entire body, soul, and spirit as a peace offering to God. This is how we fulfill the command to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We respond to his lavish gift of love through Christ by offering ourselves in love with thanksgiving for the peace we now enjoy.

The old covenant peace offering was to be offered in part to God (by burning the fat and some organs), with specific portions set aside for the priest along with a variety of bread offerings. The rest was to be enjoyed by the worshiper either that same day or spanning two days. It was a shared meal signifying fellowship and harmony with God. The New Testament equivalent is the Lord's Supper, which often was part of a shared meal in the early church. Of course, we look forward to the covenant meal we will enjoy with God someday in heaven! Until then, we offer our very lives to God in service out of gratitude to him as we enjoy fellowship with God through his presence in us.

The peace offering had fewer restrictions than the atonement sacrifices. While our atoning sacrifice must be a male without defect, because Christ is the only acceptable sacrifice for permanent atonement, the peace offering could be a male or female animal. Both men and women are equally welcome at God's covenant table. A slight defect was allowed for the voluntary offering, but the Israelites were forbidden to offer animals that were sick, lame, or injured because God wanted only their very best. In fact, Malachi 1 tells us that Israel broke covenant and invited God's discipline by withholding their best from God and instead offering him the animals they didn't want. That kind of offering was unacceptable then, and this knowledge should guide us as we offer our lives to the Lord as a peace offering. Christ withheld nothing and offered himself as a sacrifice of love for us. We are to go and do likewise. And yet, God does not demand perfection from the peace offering.

Paul admonished us to give our very best to God and his church, saying, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Colossians 3:23).* We offer our lives to God not out of duty or compulsion, but as an offering that draws us near to God and demonstrates to the world the peace and fellowship we enjoy with him. Likewise, the monetary gifts we give replace the former peace offering as an expression of our gratitude to God for all his gifts to us.

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). As in the old covenant, a portion of our gift goes to support those who minister to us. This is our tithe given to our local church. Offerings we give are out of gratitude for our abundance, but our 10% tithe is given out of cheerful obedience. It is our testimony to the world (and ourselves) that everything we have belongs to God, and he is able to provide all we need.

Hebrews 13:15-16 sums up what an acceptable sacrifice to God looks like under the new covenant. *"Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name. ¹⁶And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God."* There you have it: praise God continually, do good, and share. The good works we do in

Jesus' name are a reflection of the peace we already enjoy with God, not an attempt to appease God or earn his favor. We do not have to strive to please the Father because he is pleased to call us his own. We enjoy peace in his presence, not because of our perfect behavior but because of his perfect love.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Was there a particular aspect of a sacrifice that the Holy Spirit drew to your attention? (Reconciliation, release from foolish vows, the peace offering as a symbol of peace already enjoyed, etc.) Thank him for speaking to you and respond in agreement.

Jesus, thank you for paying the penalty for my sin – even the ones I didn't know I was committing. Right now I confess the ones the Holy Spirit has brought to my mind and ask for your forgiveness. Thank you for removing my guilt for the foolish mistakes I've made so that the memory of those mistakes is now material for testimony instead of fuel for shame. Blot out my sin with your blood, Jesus, and lead me along paths of reconciliation. Replace my guilt with the joy of my salvation as I trust in the power of your blood to wash away my sin and shame. Father, may my life be a peace offering, as everything I do out of love ascends to your throne as a pleasing aroma. Thank you for bringing peace to my heart as I rest in your unfailing love. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Day 3

Why We Need to Understand God's Legal System

Understanding the scriptural definition of sin according to God's covenants is important because what we don't know can be used against us by the enemy. While the detailed laws of Moses have been replaced by the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us interpret God's laws, the moral laws of God on which they were based have not changed; it's the system of paying the penalty for breaking God's laws that has changed. Instead of offering a sacrifice, we ask the Father to apply the blood of Jesus to our sin and forgive us.

I used to carry around a load of guilt and shame because I assumed that since Christ's atoning sacrifice provided forgiveness for all past and future sins, somehow the sins I committed didn't matter to God. And yet I felt guilt when I made mistakes, but didn't know what to do with my guilt because there are no longer any sacrifices we can make. The enemy jumps at the opportunity to turn our guilt into condemnation. This is compounded by the loose morality that occurs when "freedom from the law" is misinterpreted as freedom from rules. When we pick and choose which rules we want to follow, instead of inviting the Holy Spirit to teach us God's ways and help us live lives of obedience, we sin in ignorance and wonder why we feel under conviction all the time.

The first step to overcoming guilt and shame is to start agreeing with God about sin. This may seem like I'm suggesting we return to the law, which brought guilt by pointing out our sin, but what I'm advocating is actually a yielded spirit that invites God to define sin. You see, one of my problems that opened me up to mental torment by the enemy was that I wanted to define right and wrong for myself, which is Satan's agenda. When I wander outside God's boundaries and into enemy territory, I am inviting the devil to accuse me. I would agree with God that things I found distasteful were wrong, but was totally comfortable with other sins (like judging, pride, unforgiveness, and unbelief). I rated sin on a scale of least to greatest importance, and assumed that if it wasn't important to me, it wasn't important to God. I've read through the Torah and you know what I've found? God doesn't rank sin. Even unintentional sins required a sacrifice. That means that if I am going to live in tune with the heart of God, I must ask

him to give me the mind of God. Having the mind of God means that when he says something is wrong, I don't resist him or try to justify my actions. I simply say, "You're right. I was wrong. Please forgive me."

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (1 John 1:8-9). Anytime we live in agreement with a lie we give the enemy an opportunity to accuse us, which is why learning God's truth and confessing when we've strayed from it is so important. We are promised forgiveness and cleansing *if we confess our sins to him*. We don't have to have intentionally sinned to confess. Confession of sin is simply agreeing with God's definition of a transgression, rather than making excuses for our sin. Just like the high priest on the Day of Atonement, we have to own our sins and mistakes before we transfer them to our scapegoat, Christ, who removes them from us. Adam and Eve tried to pass the blame for their sin without owning it. God will not allow us to do that because when we are lying to God and ourselves, we give the "father of lies" a foothold that can easily grow into a stronghold (Ephesians 4:25-27).

While belief and confession that Jesus Christ is Lord is all that is necessary for salvation, daily agreement with God about sin in our life keeps us from being burdened with a guilty conscience. The Holy Spirit's job is to teach us God's laws. When we listen as he points out where we've strayed from God's boundaries, and respond in agreement, we demonstrate our desire to be obedient children. The conviction of the Holy Spirit is for our training and spiritual growth, so we need not resist him. If we want to develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit, then we need to demonstrate that we are listening by responding in agreement with whatever he says. That's all confession is. The more specific we are when we name our sins before God, the more we will grow in our ability to discern right from wrong. We don't confess our wrongdoing out of guilt, but to show God that we're listening to our Teacher and desire to be teachable. I've even begun to thank the Holy Spirit for pointing out errors in my thinking or behavior because I want to know how to be more like Christ. There's no anxiety with God when we realize that he is teaching us as a mother trains a little child.

Specific confession also takes us out of enemy territory because as we yield to God, the enemy has no grounds to accuse us. The memory of our sin will have no power over us because the guilt associated with those specific memories will be removed and replaced with the joy that comes from receiving forgiveness. The practice of immediate and specific confession is not legalistic obedience to the law; it's our path to freedom from guilt when we realize we've broken one of God's laws. We don't need to be hyperconscious of our sin, living in fear of making a mistake. We can trust the Holy Spirit to convict us, and stay in perfect peace as we remain yielded and obedient to his voice. In the chapters to come, we'll learn how to recognize by our emotions when we've left the peace of God and strayed into enemy territory (and what to do when that happens).

We could learn a thing or two about the value of confession from our Catholic friends. While we don't need a priest to forgive our sins because Jesus is our high priest, confession of sins to a trustworthy person is a valuable spiritual discipline. Through it we discover that we do not need to hide from God in shame, as Adam and Eve did. Confession requires trust that a person will still love you in spite of your faults. When we confess our faults to a trusted person, and they give us grace, we are set free from the lie that we have to be perfect on the outside and cover up our sins. This is why James says, *"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results" (James 5:16).* Based on personal

experience, I can tell you that there are times when the healing we desire may only be granted once we've humbled ourselves before God and the Body of Christ, and confessed our need for forgiveness and prayer.

I strongly encourage you to find a "righteous person" to be your accountability partner, someone to whom you can confess sins and who will pray for you. My sister is this person for me, and God has used her prayers to bring healing to my heart, mind, and body. As we invite Christ to shine his light in the dark places where sin hides, he cleanses us from guilt and shame, and he often partners with people to do this through their words of grace. Jesus then replaces our ugly emotions with profound gratitude for God's grace and joy in his presence. While we live a lie and pretend we don't sin, the Accuser has grounds to accuse us. But when we confess our sins and rejoice in our forgiveness, the Accuser falls silent.

"My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. ² He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. ³ And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. ⁴ If someone claims, 'I know God,' but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth" (1 John 2:1-4).

What we need to understand about God's legal system is that God is a merciful Judge. For the believer, the Holy Spirit is not the prosecuting attorney, but the Counselor for the defense. This title Jesus used to describe the Spirit is a legal term. He is our Counselor, the way we would address an attorney as Counselor (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit wants to draw us to God at all times, so he convicts us when we've stepped outside God's boundaries because sin separates us from our awareness of God. The Counselor reminds us of what Christ has done to cleanse us from sin so that we will believe in Christ and apply his blood to receive forgiveness (John 14:26).

Christ is our Advocate who is seated at the right hand of the Father, pleading for mercy on behalf of those who call on his name. *"Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us" (Romans 8:34).* The Triune Godhead is on our side! *"So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most" (Hebrews 4:16).* God is just and will uphold his laws, but he gives us every advantage and opportunity to avoid guilt and punishment. We just need to listen to his counsel, claim by faith the free gift of grace and forgiveness he offers, and submit to his authority out of love because he loved us first.

So if God is not condemning us, who is? It is our adversary, Satan. Peter warns us that the adversary is prowling like a lion, looking for someone to devour. Paul gives counsel to Timothy regarding a particular situation in his church, and follows it with the warning to *"give the adversary no occasion for slander" (1 Timothy 5:14, ESV).* The word adversary in this context means "one who brings a lawsuit." Revelation 12:10 tells us that in the spiritual realm, Satan accuses us before God day and night. Satan is a legalist. He looks for every opportunity to accuse us of breaking God's laws, hoping that we will surrender to guilt and shame and give up our inheritance. That's why we must ask the Holy Spirit to counsel us in God's laws and help us obey them, so we will give the accuser no opportunity to slander us. If we ignore the Spirit's counsel, the enemy has legal grounds to accuse us. But when we bring ourselves under the authority of Christ, we are given authority over the devil and can tell him to leave (Luke 10:19).

1 John 5:18 says, *"We know that God's children do not make a practice of sinning, for God's Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot touch them."* We are under the covenant of grace. If we are God's child through belief in Christ, we will not make a *practice* of sinning. John already acknowledged, in the passage we read earlier, that sometimes we do sin in our weakness, but Jesus is our advocate to the Father on our behalf when we do (Luke 22:31-32). To make a practice of sinning is to willfully or ignorantly continue sinning, which invites the Father's discipline. Just as God disciplined the children of Israel in their rebellion by allowing their enemies to harass them, our enemy has limited permission to make us miserable in our rebellion so that we will repent and return to obedience. However, once we repent and ask God to forgive us for any sin or unbelief that the Spirit reveals to us by applying the blood of Jesus to our debt, the enemy can no longer touch us. This process is simple and effective in keeping us free from mental torment by the enemy when we learn how to daily listen and respond to the promptings of the Counselor. This is how we live in continual victory over the enemy! (We'll go through this process in further detail in the section on breaking strongholds.)

James tells us that if we know what we ought to do and don't do it, that is sin (James 4:17). However, Paul acknowledges that sometimes we keep sinning against our will because the pull of our sinful nature is strong. When our sinful nature gets the best of us because of strongholds that may be deeply rooted in us, we need to hear Jesus' words of grace: *"I will not judge those who hear me but don't obey me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it"* (John 12:47). Look again at 1 John 5:18. It tells us that Jesus holds us securely. He is not only able to save us by grace, but hold us securely in his grace. We don't have to spend all our time in anxious self-examination, fearing that we failed to confess a sin. Fear and anxiety – including religious performance anxiety – put us in enemy territory, so God gave us a covenant of grace in order to keep us in his territory which is ruled by the Prince of Peace. God is not looking for opportunities to judge us whenever we fail to perfectly obey him, but wants to save us from the *practice* of sinning because it opens us up to harassment by the enemy. Conviction from God is always – always – for the purpose of our restoration and freedom, not condemnation. If we feel condemned, it is coming from the evil one. However, according to 1 John 5:18, he cannot touch us without our permission. He can only try to make us feel guilt and shame over our sin, with the intention of driving us away from God.

In order to enter God's promised rest, we need to learn how to rest in the grace of God with the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is our friend to help us understand God's ways and keep us on God's path of blessing. When we resist the counsel of the Holy Spirit, it hinders us from enjoying the presence of God because the Spirit's goal is the same as Christ's: to reconcile us to God so we can enjoy his presence. *"Yet now [God] has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. ²³But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News"* (Colossians 1:22-23).

If we are going to enjoy the benefits of God's Kingdom, we need to learn how to stand firmly in it and believe the truth that we have been saved by the blood of Jesus. The sacrificial system teaches us that all sins – intentional, unintentional, those that harm others – matter to God and require some action on our part. Under the new covenant, Christ takes care of the sacrifice that is necessary to make us right with God. Our responsibility is to heed the Spirit by agreeing with God's definition of right and wrong. We simply ask for forgiveness when the Spirit shows us we've strayed from God's boundaries, believe and rejoice that the blood of Jesus makes us right with God (instead of giving in to feelings of

condemnation brought on by the enemy), and step back into God's boundaries (making reconciliation with those we've wronged, when necessary). If we have a teachable spirit and desire to love God, we don't need to fear the conviction of the Holy Spirit because it always restores us to peace and joy in God's presence. We can be confident that we have been brought into God's presence by Jesus, holy and blameless, without a single fault. Stand in that truth, and don't let the enemy move you!

God wants us to not only be reconciled to him, but to others. Sometimes it's not sin that we hold onto, but unforgiveness, and unforgiveness gets in the way of reconciliation. In the next chapter, we'll look at the cleansing power of Jesus' blood to not only wash away our sins, but the wounds caused by other people. In order to enter the Tabernacle, the priests had to wash off the dirt from our unclean world that would defile God's sanctuary. Jesus washes off the stain of the sins of others against us, and requires our participation through forgiveness, so that we can enjoy his presence continually.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does it change the way you view God's conviction to realize the Holy Spirit is your legal Counselor, helping you know how to be free from condemnation? What impacts you more, to know that the Father is a merciful Judge, the Son is your Advocate, the Spirit is your Counselor, or that it's actually the devil who is accusing you and trying to make you feel shame?

Father God, thank you for being a merciful and just Judge. All your decrees and laws are right. We owe you a debt for our failure to obey your laws, and yet you cancelled the charges against us when we pleaded the blood of Jesus in payment of our debt. Thank you for your Holy Spirit who counsels me in your laws and shows me how to avoid the traps of sin and guilt. Thank you, Jesus, for removing my shame. There is now no condemnation over me. The accuser may accuse me, but his words cannot overpower the blood of Jesus! Teach me how to quickly call on your name for forgiveness when I become aware of my transgressions, Lord Jesus, so that the enemy cannot slander me. I rest my case in the courts of heaven, trusting in your grace and mercy to help me in my time of need.

Day 4

"Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. ¹⁴ Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God" (Hebrews 9:13-14). The purpose of Christ giving us a clean conscience is so that we can enjoy worship of God that is not hindered by guilt and shame. This is Christ's free gift to us, and all we have to do is believe he has done this for us! Our salvation is not based on our ability to keep God's laws and make sacrifices every time we sin; it's based on our belief that Christ perfectly obeyed the law on our behalf and paid the penalty for our sin. The purpose of acknowledging our sin is not to pay penance for it, but to be reminded of how much Christ loved us to die for us while we were still slaves to sin. When this realization sinks in, and we are overwhelmed by God's grace, we live out the life of worship and joy in fellowship with God that he desires for us. We are able to give grace to others when we embrace the grace God freely gives to us.

Unfortunately, many of us live by feelings, not by truth. We don't feel forgiven because of our guilt, so we base our belief on our feelings instead of the truth that we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. God knows that we are physical beings with emotions that sometimes override our knowledge of the truth, so he gives us physical ways of experiencing the feelings of cleansing we desire. Sometimes we need to experience cleansing for what we've done, and sometimes we need cleansing for what's

been done to us because both our sin and the sins of others against us can cause feelings of shame. The physical experience of cleansing was part of the old covenant, and was further revealed by Christ to help connect our body to our spirit for our emotional well-being.

The Wash Basin

God commanded Moses to have a bronze wash basin made for the priests to use for the required cleansing rituals in the Tabernacle. They were to wash their hands and feet before serving the Lord, and wash their clothes whenever they came in contact with something that could defile the sanctuary. The cleansing rituals taught the Israelites that because of our sinful world, everything must be cleansed before it is brought into the presence of God. Water was not only used to cleanse the priests and those who were participating in the various prescribed purification ceremonies, it was also used to cleanse the internal organs and legs of the sacrifices (Leviticus 1:13). I find it interesting that when Jesus was crucified, one of the soldiers pierced his side, and water gushed out of his body and down his legs, which seems to fulfill this sacrificial requirement. Both blood and water were used for cleansing and purification in the old covenant in order to prepare us to understand the symbolism of blood and water in the new covenant.

When the Temple was built, Solomon commissioned a bronze basin that could hold 16,500 gallons of water, called The Sea (2 Chronicles 4:4-5). It could be used for full immersion to fulfill some of the cleansing laws. This paved the way for our understanding of baptism, the sacrament during which we continue the symbolic washing away of sin with water. The Jews of Jesus' day already understood the symbolism of baptism, known as "mikveh" in Judaism, because the practice of immersion was already in place for converts to Judaism. Gentiles who converted were required to take a ritual bath to symbolically wash away impurities from their background. When John the Baptist preached repentance and baptism in order to prepare the way for Jesus, the people came out to be baptized because they understood the value of ritual cleansing. Washing with water helps us to experience on a physical level what God does on a spiritual level when we repent of sin and invite him to cleanse us.

We need both the blood of Jesus and the experience of cleansing in order to live an abundant life of victory and joy in the Lord. *"Who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. ⁶And Jesus Christ was revealed as God's Son by his baptism in water and by shedding his blood on the cross—not by water only, but by water and blood" (1 John 5:5-6).* It is through the blood of Jesus that we are saved, and the cleansing water of the Holy Spirit that we are reborn. Christian baptism symbolizes dying to our old way of life and being raised to new life in Christ. Jesus said that we must be born again. Like the waters of the womb, immersion in the baptismal waters represents emergence from a spiritual womb as a new person. We need a deep, abiding awareness that the old life is gone and a new life has begun so that our past doesn't follow us.

When Jesus was baptized he did not need to be cleansed from sin, but when he emerged from the water God said, *"This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5).* The Father used Jesus' baptism to testify to all those present that Jesus was his Son. We often give people an opportunity to share their testimony when they are baptized, but have you ever considered that God does the same for you? When we emerge from the waters as a testimony to being reborn in the Spirit, God testifies that we are his dearly loved child! *"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8:16 NIV).*

Baptism is not a requirement for salvation; it is a gift from God that enables us to experience the feeling of cleansing as well as a defining moment of separation. In my experience, baptism was the moment I bore witness before God and my church that I desired complete sanctification (to be set apart for God). Even though I had been a Christian for years, I made up my mind that I no longer wanted to follow the desires of my flesh or the world. The symbolic death and resurrection of baptism helped to separate my old double-minded life from my new, wholehearted pursuit of God. Baptism gives us a moment we can forever point to as the time when our old sinful nature was washed away, and we were raised to new life in Christ by the same power that raised Christ from the dead. What is this power? It is the power of the Holy Spirit, the living water that purifies us from within.

In John 7:37-39, Jesus said, *"Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! ³⁸ Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.' ³⁹ (When he said 'living water,' he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)"* As we draw near to the presence of God, and ask him to cleanse us from all sin and the effects of living in a fallen world, God washes us with the living water of his Spirit within us. Jesus is the fountain through which we access this water, and Isaiah 12:3 declares, *"With joy you will drink deeply from the fountain of salvation."* We draw in the cleansing living water by coming to Jesus, the fountain. Just as the priests needed to continually wash their hands and feet in order to live and work in the presence of God, we are continually in need of cleansing by the Spirit as we come in contact with the filth and wounds of our sinful world so we can have joy.

Water is not only used for cleansing in the Bible, but also for healing. When Naaman, the commander of the Aramean army, came to the prophet Elisha to be healed of leprosy, Elisha instructed him to *"Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy"* (2 Kings 5:10). But Naaman was offended at this instruction. He wanted Elisha to wave his hand and instantly heal him. His officers tried to reason with him, saying, *"Sir, if the prophet had told you to do something very difficult, wouldn't you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply, 'Go and wash and be cured!'"* So Naaman obeyed the prophet's instruction and was healed.

How often do we react the way Naaman reacted? God tells us how to be healed of our soul wounds – by forgiving those who've offended us – but we instead get offended at God. He wants to wash off the wounds others have given us because our bitterness and resentment is keeping us from experiencing peace in his presence, but we just can't let him wash us. We would rather try to enter God's presence by working long hours in ministry or giving sacrificially, than simply let him wash off the wounds we've collected through offense. But just as the priests had to wash before approaching God in the Tabernacle, Jesus wants to wash us of our offense at the things that have been done to us.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took on the role of a servant and washed his disciples' feet in a wash basin, declaring, *"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me"* (John 13:8 NIV). Why? Because Jesus was about to give them – and us – access to God's abiding presence through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and they needed to submit to cleansing. We don't approach the throne of God on our own terms, but must be washed by Christ. He declared that they didn't need to bathe all over, just like we don't need to be baptized again when we discover that part of us has been soiled by sin or the sins of others. Only the disciples' feet – the part that comes in contact with the world – needed to be washed.

All of us collect pain, wounds, disappointment, and sometimes trauma from living in our fallen world. It clings to us like dirt on our feet. No matter how hard I try as a mother to protect my kids, they have been wounded. We all get dirty sometime. It's not just our sin that needs to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus, but our wounded souls need to be washed in living water so that we're not carrying around baggage from the past. When we apply the blood of Jesus to our sin, we are forgiven. But what about the sins others have committed against us? Is the blood of Jesus powerful enough to remove the effects of their sin? Yes! But it requires our participation. We have to allow Jesus to wash our feet with the living water of the Holy Spirit and remove the dirt of the offenses we've collected. Why wouldn't we? Because it can be hard to let go of offenses, especially once they've become part of our identity.

"Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. ³Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. ⁵One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?" (John 5:2-6). Now that seems like a needless question, doesn't it? Who wouldn't want to get well? Listen to the man's reply, though. He doesn't answer Jesus' question, but seizes the opportunity to tell his story of why he isn't well. "I can't, sir, for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me" (John 5:7).

Some of us have been ill for a long time. Our soul was wounded in childhood, and the offenses just keep piling up. We've been saved from our sins by the blood of Jesus, but when he asks us if we'd like to get well, we start rehearsing the story of why we're sick. "Jesus, I can't get well because of what they did to me. I've been hurt too much. If it wasn't for (a particular person or situation), I would be okay." Instead of asking the fountain of living water to wash us and heal us, we hold onto our story of brokenness because we have embraced it as our identity. For some of us, our story is what's keeping us sick. We're afraid that if we ever let go of our offenses and excuses for why we're broken, we wouldn't know who we are. A man who had been sick for thirty-eight years would suddenly have a new life with new responsibilities if he was healed. So Jesus asks him and us, "Do you want to be healed?" Are you willing to let go of your story? Are you ready to stop blaming people for your condition and let Jesus heal your wounded heart so he can rewrite your story?

I realize that this is a hard message to hear, and trust me, this has been a hard message for me to obediently write. But I can testify to the healing power of Jesus to restore my soul. I was wounded in childhood, and it left scars of insecurity and loneliness. When I became aware of the fact that holding onto my wounded identity was keeping me from experiencing the abundant life of my inheritance in Christ, I struggled to let go of it. Inviting Jesus to heal that wound meant letting go of my right to use it as an excuse for my behavior and having to own all the poor decisions I'd made as a result of my wounding. If I let go of my offense at the people who caused me pain, I had to own the pain I'd caused myself and reconsider the story I'd been telling myself. Yes, people had sinned against me, but by nursing my wounds, I'd used their sin as an excuse to slander, gossip, carry a grudge, judge, and turn a blind eye to my sin. Sometimes we can't see the sin in our lives because our wounding has blinded us. So Jesus asks us, "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus wants to cleanse our heart of pain and trauma because he loves us and wants us to experience freedom from our past. We are raised to new life in Christ by the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit.

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). Whether the

devil has oppressed you through feelings of rejection, sickness, abuse, or other trauma, the blood of Jesus and the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit can make you whole. Jesus healed people in both their body and soul. He has healed both my body and soul, but I had to let him. I had to stop telling my old story and rehearsing the offenses of people. An amazing thing happened when Jesus healed me from emotional trauma. I used to only be able to remember a certain time period of my life with pain and disgust, but I now only remember the happy times. Jesus has washed away not only the pain, but the way I remember my life. He has rewritten my story to be about him and his power, instead of about people and their power over me. Instead of my testimony being "I'm paralyzed because people won't help me," it is "I'm healed because Jesus did for me what no one else could do." Jesus loved me so completely that my broken heart was mended and my soul was cleansed of pain associated with my memories.

Jesus told the man at the pool, *"Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!"* John 5: 9 tells us, *"Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking!"* Jesus is able to heal us instantly. When I realized that Jesus was my best friend, I was instantly healed of loneliness and haven't felt lonely in over two years. Praise God! We don't have to keep carrying around the pain of our wounds. However, sometimes our cleansing takes time, as was the case with Naaman, and our faith is tested as we keep dipping in the healing water and trusting God to eventually restore us. The Living Water, who is the Holy Spirit, ministers to us by revealing the offenses we've carried. If we will surrender our story of brokenness and ask God to heal us, the Holy Spirit will reveal the wounds that are triggering our pain and causing us to lash out at people. As our Counselor, he wants to give us understanding so we can see our story from God's perspective, and so we can turn away from any sin associated with our wounding. All of this is for our benefit and restoration of joy in God's presence.

The story of the man at the pool doesn't end with his healing. *"Afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, 'Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you'"* (John 5:14). We don't know what the man's sin was, but Jesus connected his physical situation to the state of his spirit. In the next chapter, we'll look at the sin that is making us sick and how followers of Jesus are instructed to not only receive cleansing, but give it.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you need Jesus to wash off a memory that makes you feel dirty or cleanse a wound that has festered into bitterness or paralysis? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the source of pain in your life, and invite the healing water of God's Spirit to wash over you and make you whole.

God, I confess that I have held onto offense at the things people have done to me. Jesus, I need you to clean my wounds and wash off the stain of the sins of others against me. Wash off my bitterness, shame, discouragement, and any false identity that the enemy has tried to put on me as a result of my wounding. I ask you to heal my broken heart and give me a new identity as your beloved child. Change my story to one of victory, instead of defeat; joy instead of despair; hope in your goodness and power to sustain me. Erase the pain of my memories and replace them with your perspective. You are my deliverer. Nothing is impossible for you, God, even deep soul healing. Wash over me with your grace and love as I drink from the fountain of living water. You satisfy every longing of my heart, O Lord. In the name of Jesus, I am whole. Amen.

Day 5

Jesus said that the living water of the Holy Spirit would not only flow in us, but out of us, so that we can be used by God to wash others. *"After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, 'Do you understand what I was doing?' ¹³You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. ¹⁴And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. ¹⁵I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you"* (John 13:12-15). Jesus changed our understanding of ritual cleansing by identifying our personal cleansing with his death and resurrection, through baptism. But he also modeled a continuous lifestyle of death to selfishness through service to others, which is exemplified by the lowly act of washing other people's feet. As followers of Christ, we are not to be consumed by our own "cleanliness," but serve those who are also in need of the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit. One of the ways we wash the feet of others is through forgiveness. Jesus cleanses us and forgives us, but we must follow his example to forgive others and wipe away the stain of their sin against us.

Why does our forgiveness of others matter? Colossians 2:14 tells us that Christ *"canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross"* (NIV). We all owed God a legal debt for failure to obey him, in the same way someone would be liable to pay damages for breach of contract. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he instructed us to ask God to forgive our debts by cancelling what we owed to God. However, he also lifted out the moral precept of loving others as ourselves by connecting our forgiveness from God to our forgiveness of others. We are to pray, *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"* (Matthew 6:12, NIV). Our debt is paid by Christ's blood, but we must also invite the blood of Jesus to pay the debts owed to us by those who sin against us as we forgive them of their debts. God's children are called to love others the way God loves us – with grace and forgiveness. When we refuse to forgive, we put a roadblock between ourselves and God. Jesus said, *"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (Matthew 6:14-15). We need to not only let Jesus cleanse us with his forgiveness, but follow his example and wash the dirt off of others.

How does forgiving another person wash their feet so they can be clean? When we sin against someone, we feel the stain of it on our soul. Forgiveness wipes it away. But there's a deeper issue in the spiritual realm when we withhold forgiveness. When someone wrongs us, we are the plaintiff in God's court. Every time we speak about the offense to someone or replay it in our mind, it's as if we've walked into God's court to bear witness against that person. The Accuser can now use our words as evidence against that person. Jesus forgave those who wronged him by praying, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing"* (Luke 23:34). We can't comprehend all the ramifications of our sin. Jesus does, so he releases his right to press charges, and forgives those who do evil to him so that the Accuser cannot use him as a witness for the prosecution. Jesus is instead a witness for the defense of all who are guilty by becoming our advocate. When we hold grudges, we're partnering with the Accuser. Jesus, who understood the heart of the Father and wants us to be restored to unhindered relationship, releases forgiveness. We, who are being conformed to his image, are to go and do likewise so that we can partner with God in prayer instead of working against him.

The purpose of cleansing in the Tabernacle was so that the priests could go into the Holy Place. It's about moving closer to God. In the next unit, we'll learn about the Tabernacle objects in the Holy Place and Most Holy Place, and the pattern God gave us for drawing near to him through Jesus. Jesus meets us at every step. He's at the altar, reminding us to apply his blood to our sin. He's at the wash basin, asking us to let him wash the dirt we've collected off our feet, and release forgiveness to others so he can wash them, too. The purpose of all this, however, is not to make us hyper-aware of our need for cleansing. It's so we can enter God's presence with thanksgiving and praise, rejoicing that he has lifted all our burdens and brought peace to our hearts!

Too many Christians stop in the outer court of repentance and never make it into the inner court of communion with the Father. If all our focus is on our sin or the sins of others, we're not enjoying the presence of God and engaging in worship. The inner court, the Holy Place, is where we want to be! God wants to cleanse us so we can take our eyes off of ourselves and others, and focus them on Jesus, *"the author and perfecter of our faith"* (Hebrews 12:2). When we remain in connection with Jesus, and his words remain in us, we are promised that we can have anything we ask for (John 15:7). The inner court is where we "remain" in Jesus' love. When we are filled with gratitude for all Christ has done for us, we can connect with the Father through prayer and ask for anything. This is God's deepest desire for us, to be effective partners in prayer!

"I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours. ²⁵ But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too" (Mark 11:24-25). God is a generous Father who invites us to pray big prayers, but we must pray with the heart of God. God has already demonstrated through Jesus his willingness and desire to forgive, which is why our relationship with God is tied to our forgiveness of others. To forgive is to act in accordance with the will of the Father, and when we humbly remember our own need for forgiveness, we are able to approach God's throne of grace and pray bold prayers that move mountains. God wants nothing to stand in the way of our effective prayer – not our sin or someone else's sin against us. He is able to cleanse us from all of it and restore our joy and peace in his presence. That is our inheritance in Christ.

In order to enjoy unhindered relationship with God and others under the covenant of grace, we must share that grace by forgiving quickly and often. When I feel uneasy or ugly emotions (like bitterness, judgment, dread), I've learned that I need to ask the Spirit to reveal any unforgiveness I've held onto. This is almost always the root cause of ugly emotions for me. We will discover in the upcoming units on strongholds that forgiveness is one of the keys to overcoming mental torment and toxic emotions. Unforgiveness takes us into enemy territory, but forgiveness restores us and releases God's healing power. We obey Christ by loving others as he loves us and forgiving others as he has forgiven us. Because he washed our feet clean from our offenses, we forgive those who've offended us so that they can be clean.

The difference between the old and new covenants is that the first made us aware of our guilt in order to produce repentance, and the second is a covenant of grace that frees us from guilt because Christ paid the price for our sin. That freedom is something we both enjoy and are required to give to others. Christ fulfilled the ritual cleansing laws by cleansing us from sin by his blood, and sending the Spirit as living water to continually purify us from within as we grow in grace. His first miracle at the wedding in Cana beautifully illustrates the fulfillment of the cleansing laws in the old covenant (John 2). When Jesus'

mother saw that the host had run out of wine, she asked Jesus to intervene. He instructed the servants to fill the jars used to hold water for ceremonial cleansing. He then turned that water into wine. This miracle foreshadowed the new covenant, wherein the water that was once used to cleanse us on the outside is now enjoyed as the wine of celebration and fellowship with Christ.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Is there someone that comes to mind who you need to forgive? Respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting and ask the Lord to blot out the record of any words you've spoken against them. Then join Jesus as that person's advocate by asking the Father to forgive them. (This act of obedience will increase your sensitivity and awareness to the heart of God.) Continue doing this as long as the Spirit keeps bringing people to mind.

Father, I release the debts that are owed to me. I pray for blessing and revoke any curses I've spoken against those who have wronged me. You are a gracious and forgiving God. I trust you to heal my heart, so I drop the wall of flesh I've put up between us by withholding forgiveness. Heal my soul and body as I release forgiveness to others, and pull me into your holy dwelling place so I can enjoy fellowship with you, Jesus. I don't want anything in between us, so remove any barriers. Give me your heart toward people, Father, as I grow in my awareness of your great love for me. I can't do this on my own strength, so I pray that all this will be accomplished in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.