

# **The Pattern: The Tabernacle and the Presence of God**

*Part 5: What's Wrong with Sin (Exodus 29:1-37)*

Bryan Craddock – March 12, 2023

When you see a fence, are you ever curious about what is on the other side? When I was growing up, I had a friend named James who could not resist climbing over fences or crawling through holes in them. The restricted areas in our neighborhood were mostly concrete channels for stormwater. They had warning signs posted, but that never stopped him. Thankfully, James was never hurt, but ignoring fences is risky business. Someone thought it was worth the time, money, and effort to put it there.

Exodus 20 records that God established the Ten Commandments as moral/spiritual fences for the people of Israel. He forbids the worship of other gods, the use of idols, taking his name in vain, working on the Sabbath, dishonoring your parents, committing murder, committing adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting. Why did God set up these boundaries? Is it to keep us away from something good? Certainly not! They reflect his character and help us see the positive ways that he wants us to relate to him. But we are all tempted to cross those lines.

So, what's wrong with sin? In looking at the Tabernacle, we see that sin keeps us away from the presence of God. His presence is what made the garden of Eden a true paradise. In Psalm 16:11, David said that in his presence there is fullness of joy. Sin deprives us of that, but the Tabernacle reveals the pattern for how sin will be overcome.

The Tabernacle, however, is just a starting point, a shadow, a pattern of what is to come. Everyone is not able to draw near to God through it, only the priests. Are they able to do so because they are sinless? No, far from it! We saw in Exodus 28 that God requires them to be clothed in holy garments. But that is not enough. For them to draw near, their sin must be dealt with.

So, Exodus 29:1-37 records that the Lord gives Moses instructions for consecrating the priests. This procedure for dealing with their sin shows us why it bothers God so much. It demonstrates four problems that must be overcome to draw near to God. Just as the earthly Tabernacle points to heavenly realities, these steps for dealing with the sins of the priests point forward to the saving work of Christ. We need to understand those connections to appreciate what he accomplished for us. But we also need to be reminded of what's wrong with sin so that we will make every effort to avoid it.

## ***Sin Stinks***

We encounter lots of terrible odors in life, but the stench of someone's sweaty socks may be one of the worst. When my son was in his high school marching band, I served as a chaperone for their week-long summer training camp, but I didn't know what I was getting myself into. The boys' rooms smelled so bad from their sweaty socks and clothes that it made my eyes water!

Sweat itself does not smell. The odor develops when perspiration comes into contact with bacteria on someone's skin. Lack of cleanliness is the problem. Sin is like that bacteria. It causes a terrible stench. Sin stinks. But just like in the physical world, we seldom realize how bad the problem is for us. We notice sin in others, but not in ourselves. Of course, when it comes to drawing near to God, it is his perception that matters.

So, the first step in consecrating the priests was for them to wash. In Exodus 29:1-4, the Lord tells Moses,

Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. Take one bull of the herd and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil. You shall make them of fine wheat flour. You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, and bring the bull and the two rams. You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water.

The Lord will say more about how these animals and supplies are to be used later in the chapter. Our immediate focus is the washing of Aaron and his sons. The Lord instructs them to make a special basin for this purpose. The description of it shows us how important it is for them to be washed. Exodus 30:17-21 tells us,

The LORD said to Moses, "You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations."

So, this washing is not a one-time event for the priests. It is probably more extensive at their initial consecration, perhaps a full-body cleansing. But they must continue to wash every time they come near to the Lord, and it is so important that it is a matter of life and death.

Later Jesus uses the idea of washing to explain salvation to his disciples. John 13 tells us that as they enter the upper room to celebrate the Passover, he starts washing their feet. Peter protests, but Jesus says, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (v. 8). Peter responds by wanting his whole body washed, but verse 10 tells us, "Jesus said to him, 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.'"

Other passages in the New Testament help us understand that the blood of Christ that he shed on the cross cleanses believers from all sin (1 Jn 1:7). No matter how immoral or perverted our lives have become, he washes us clean (1 Cor 6:9-11). So, we must not return to that stinky old way of life. We must continue to confess the sins that we commit every day, so that he will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9).

Going back to Exodus 29, we find that the Lord requires another action for the consecration of the priests that is related to smell. Washing removes the odor, but they also need a pleasing scent. In verses 5-9, the Lord tells Moses,

Then you shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the coat and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban. You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them, and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them. And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

In chapter 28, we learned that these garments are made from the same materials as the inner layer of the Tabernacle. In a superficial sense, they clothe the priests in holiness. But Aaron and his sons are also anointed with a special oil. The Lord gives them a recipe for it in Exodus 30:22-25. It tells us,

The LORD said to Moses, "Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh 500 shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, 250, and 250 of aromatic cane, and 500 of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. And you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil.

So, this oil has a strong fragrance. It becomes the smell of holiness! It is sprinkled throughout the Tabernacle. In verses 26-29 of chapter 30, the Lord continues by saying,

With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils and the basin and its stand. You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy. Whatever touches them will become holy.

So, the priests are not only clothed to look like the Tabernacle, this anointing oil makes them smell like it too! But that is a unique privilege. In verses 30-33, the Lord explains,

You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. And you shall say to the people of Israel, 'This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on the body of an ordinary person, and you shall make no other like it in composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people.'

As we have seen, the Tabernacle has limitations. Though God dwelt among his people, they did not all have access to him. But those restrictions change in the New Testament. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit (Lu 4:18), and at Pentecost he began to pour out the Spirit upon all who believe in him. The Spirit works to make us like Christ. He helps us resist sin and bear spiritual fruit.

Paul even associates the character of believers' lives with a fragrance. In 2 Corinthians 2:14-15, he says,

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

From God's perspective, sin stinks, but through faith in Jesus we are cleansed by his blood and anointed by his Spirit. Does his holy fragrance surround you?

### *Sin Kills*

We have all been infected with a disease. It is the root cause of aging and every other health problem. We were born with it, and the prognosis is not good. Every case eventually leads to death. But it is not a physical infection, it is the spiritual disorder that we call sin that entered the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God.

We must recognize that sin kills, but there is a treatment. The consequences of sin can be transferred. The first clear prescription for this procedure is found in Exodus 29:10-14. The Lord tells Moses,

Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. Then you shall kill the bull before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall take part of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar. And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and burn them on the altar. But the flesh of the bull and its skin and its dung you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.

It was sin that led God to banish Adam and Eve from his presence. So, for the priests to draw near to him through the Tabernacle, the consequence of their sin must be met. This bull must die in their place. Its blood is smeared on the horns of the altar and poured out at its base. Its fat is burned on the altar. Our culture sees fat as bad, but in those days it was considered to be the best part. The rest of the animal is taken outside the camp far from God's presence to be burned.

Later in Leviticus 4, the Lord instructs all the people of Israel to present sin offerings. But they only apply to unintentional sins. What about willful disobedience? What about when you fall into unintentional sin again? Animal sacrifice is only a temporary, partial, earthly solution for the death sentence of sin.

The author of Hebrews points to Jesus as the true sin offering. In Hebrews 13:11-12, he says,

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

As the eternal Son of God, Jesus suffered death for all of us and for all our sins. He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice. We cannot place our hands on his head, but we identify with him by faith. When we believe in him, we

are sanctified, made holy, through his blood. Through his death, we are spiritually healed so that we can live forever in the presence of God.

Back in Exodus 29, however, the priests needed to offer another sacrifice. The bull bore the negative consequence of their sin. But to draw near to the Lord, they also needed a positive way to please him. So, in Exodus 29:15-18, the Lord tells Moses,

Then you shall take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, and you shall kill the ram and shall take its blood and throw it against the sides of the altar. Then you shall cut the ram into pieces, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head, and burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD.

In a burnt offering, death is not the consequence of sin but the price of devotion. The whole ram is offered up to God. But did the smell of roasting meat truly please him? The Prophet Samuel ponders that question when King Saul usurps the role of a priest in making offerings. Samuel says that to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22). Perfect obedience is what pleases the Lord, and only one person has ever measured up to his standard.

At both the baptism and the transfiguration of Jesus, God the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17; 17:5). Jesus lived a life of perfect righteousness. Even the cross itself was an act of obedience for him. As he prayed in Gethsemane, he surrendered himself to his Father's will.

So, when we believe in Christ, we are justified, made pleasing, righteous in God's sight. In response to his pleasing sacrifice, we are called to make one of our own. In Romans 12:1, Paul writes, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Sin kills. But as our sin offering, Jesus died so that we do not have to. As our burnt offering, his righteous devotion makes us pleasing to God. So, in response we must offer our lives to the Lord, dying to self every day and being renewed to keep worshiping him.

### *Sin Offends*

There is an expression we use likening someone to a bull in a china shop. It pictures aggressive, reckless behavior that results in extreme destruction, perhaps unintentionally. Sin has that effect on our relationships. It can shatter them to the point that they often seem beyond repair. Every time we turn around it happens again. Sin offends people, and more importantly, it offends God.

When Adam and Eve disobey the Lord, they shatter their relationship with him. They lose the access to his presence that they enjoy in Eden. Since that time, all people have been separated from him. So, for the priests to draw near through the Tabernacle, they need to be reconciled to him.

In Exodus 29, the Lord prescribes a third sacrifice for the consecration of the priests. In verses 19-20, he begins by saying,

You shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, and you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar.

In our relationship with the Lord, he wants us to use our ears to listen to him, our hands to serve him, and our feet to walk with him. The application of this blood to the priests and then to the altar seems to signify their commitment to do that. Then blood is then taken from the altar back to the priests to show God's response. In verse 21, the Lord explains,

Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons' garments with him. He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons' garments with him.

In the first two sacrifices, Aaron and his sons are not supposed to do anything other than laying their hands on the head of the animal. Since they are not yet consecrated, Moses does the priestly work. He is the person that God is referring to when he says "you." But in verses 22-25, the Lord begins to involve them. He says,

You shall also take the fat from the ram and the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh (for it is a ram of ordination), and one loaf of bread and one cake of bread made with oil, and one wafer out of the basket of unleavened bread that is before the LORD. You shall put all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and wave them for a wave offering before the LORD. Then you shall take them from their hands and burn them on the altar on top of the burnt offering, as a pleasing aroma before the LORD. It is a food offering to the LORD.

Aaron and his sons wave or lift this ceremonial meal before the Lord, and Moses offers it up. In response, the Lord gives a portion to them. In fact, he explains that they will always receive a portion of this kind of offering. In verses 26-28, he says,

You shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's ordination and wave it for a wave offering before the LORD, and it shall be your portion. And you shall consecrate the breast of the wave offering that is waved and the thigh of the priests' portion that is contributed from the ram of ordination, from what was Aaron's and his sons'. It shall be for Aaron and his sons as a perpetual due from the people of Israel, for it is a contribution. It shall be a contribution from the people of Israel from their peace offerings, their contribution to the LORD.

The back-and-forth nature of this offering is designed to establish peace with God. That was essential for Aaron and his sons to be ordained as priests. Later when the people bring their peace offerings to the Lord, the priests

continue to receive a portion. At this point, the Lord clarifies that this privilege will only be enjoyed by Aaron's descendants. In verses 29-30, he says,

The holy garments of Aaron shall be for his sons after him; they shall be anointed in them and ordained in them. The son who succeeds him as priest, who comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the Holy Place, shall wear them seven days.

So, what do Aaron and his sons do with the meat they have received? They cook it and eat it as an expression of their fellowship with God. In verses 31-34, the Lord gives them these instructions:

You shall take the ram of ordination and boil its flesh in a holy place. And Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket in the entrance of the tent of meeting. They shall eat those things with which atonement was made at their ordination and consecration, but an outsider shall not eat of them, because they are holy. And if any of the flesh for the ordination or of the bread remain until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy.

Here again, the priests enjoy a relationship with God that the average person does not. But through the death of Jesus, every believer is reconciled with God. In Colossians 1:19-22, Paul explains,

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

The offense of our sins leaves us alienated from God. He perceives our sins as hostile acts. They put us at enmity with him. But because Jesus is both God and man, he is the perfect mediator. His blood establishes true peace. We are reconciled to God through our union with his body.

Like the priests, we also have a meal to celebrate our restored fellowship with God. We express our communion with him as we eat the bread and drink the cup. It symbolizes our peace with God, but in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul argued that it is all a mockery if we are still at odds with people. The church in Corinth was divided, and Paul warned them about taking communion in an unworthy manner. Jesus has overcome our sin's offense against God. So, as those who have been reconciled with him, we must make every effort to reconcile our offenses against others. We must pursue peace.

### *Sin Sticks*

Modern industry has manufactured some powerful adhesives. But nothing seems quite as sticky as gum on the bottom of your shoe. You don't want to touch it because it has been in someone else's mouth. It does not wash off. You can scrape it away, but it oozes into every crevice. If you are not careful, it will make a mess everywhere you go.

Sin is like that. It sticks to us. Even when you confess, repent, and receive salvation in Christ, it maintains a residual influence in the crevices of your life. It keeps making a mess. This problem seems to be reflected in Exodus 29:35-36a.

Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Through seven days shall you ordain them, and every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement.

The first sin offering is not sufficient for their ordination. It must be repeated seven times. Why seven? Some say that it is a number of completeness, but it is also the number of days in God's week of creation. Perhaps it signifies that to draw near to God, a person must become a new creation.

The priests did not necessarily experience inner spiritual transformation through that week of sacrifices. But Paul tells us that every believer is made new. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, he writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Though believers receive new life, the old life sticks to us until we see Christ face to face (1 Jn 3:3). We also continue to face the effects of sin in the world. Creation has been corrupted. Perhaps that explains why the Lord requires another action during these seven days of consecration for the priests. In Exodus 29:36b-37, the Lord says,

Also you shall purify the altar, when you make atonement for it, and shall anoint it to consecrate it. Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar shall become holy.

The altar is made from wooden boards covered in bronze. It cannot commit sin as a person can. But it comes from a world that has been corrupted by people's sins. Ultimately, the world itself must be remade. In 2 Peter 3:13, Peter says, "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

The Tabernacle points forward to that promise. Sin sticks to this world, but one day God will create it anew. Through Jesus, we have the hope that we will enjoy that new existence being free from sin and enjoying the unhindered presence of God forever.

---

What's wrong with sin? It stinks. It kills. It offends, and it sticks. To draw near to God, the priests offered sacrifices, but that only dealt with sin in a superficial ceremonial way. True access to the Lord is only possible through the once-for-all sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

Are you identified with Christ? Do you trust him as your Savior? If not, I encourage you to repent and believe today. If you want to learn more about his salvation, Romans 5 would be a good chapter to read.



If you are trusting him, are you putting to death sin in your life? Is there something you need to confess to him today? Don't be deceived into thinking that sinful behavior is insignificant. It stinks. It kills. It offends, and it sticks. For the honor of Christ we must keep putting sin to death by the power of the Spirit.

And don't forget to help others. They feel the effects of sin, but they may not know what to do about it. They might search for excuses and worldly remedies, but they need a Savior. Tell them the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

May God give us victory in our battle against sin!

### ***Reflect***

How is this understanding of sin different from what we hear from the world?

Which of these perspectives on sin will be most helpful as you seek to resist temptation? Why?

How could you use this understanding of sin to explain the gospel to someone?