
Atonement as Purification

The emphasis in this book will be on Christian atonement ideas and patterns of thinking, but this requires some knowledge of origins. Atonement originates primarily from sacrifice; therefore, we must look into the concepts of sacrifice that early Christians would have known mainly from Jewish, but also from gentile, sources.

Functions of Ritual

Before talking about sacrifice specifically, a few views on the function of ritual in society may be helpful. One view has ritual playing the role of restoring order: “Ritual recognizes the potency of disorder. . . . Danger is controlled by ritual.”¹ In Jewish culture, sacrificial ritual provides for the expiation (cleansing) of impurity, and thus the restoration of order. Further, ritual helps to solidify the group and its values: “Ritual as a restricted code. . . . enables a given pattern of values to be enforced and allows members to internalise the structure of the group and its norms.”² Walter Burkert says that ritual’s “function

1. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966; repr., New York: Routledge, 1991), 95, 97. In the original 1966 edition, these were on pages 94 and 96.
2. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 54.

normally lies in group formation, the creation of solidarity, or the negotiation of understanding.”³

David Janzen has a similar understanding: “Rituals function as a kind of rhetoric to convince their participants to lend their allegiance to the worldview and moral system of one social group in particular.”⁴ Janzen is talking about P, the hypothetical priestly author and editor of a large portion of the first four books of the Bible, including Leviticus 1–16, which contain the most concentrated set of sacrificial instructions.

Mary Douglas points out that “doctrines of atonement” are most prominent in “high group, high grid” (rigidly structured and controlled) societies.⁵ The priests in postexilic Judah (after about 530 BCE) became the ruling class, and were in charge of all sacrificing. The class structure in classical Greece was also reinforced by sacrificial ritual but usually not through a priestly class. In Athens, all free men performed priestly roles for certain periods.⁶ Participation in the ritual was determined by one’s social status; distribution of animal parts was metaphoric for the distribution of rights.⁷ Sacrificial ritual reflects and inscribes the lines of power in both Israel and Greece, despite their having very different kinds of priesthood.

Religious ritual, therefore, seems to be responding to a human anxiety about order. People were anxious about the real and constant dangers to life and limb, as well as the perceived threat from hostile spirits or demons, many of whom would visit them in their dreams. “Fear of the supernatural, divine beings or demons, was a natural part of life in the ancient world.”⁸ The priests had the monopoly on handling sacred substances, and so protecting the community.

Moshe Halbertal believes that ritual helped to reduce anxiety about

3. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. John Raffan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 54.

4. David Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: A Study of Four Writings*, BZAW 344 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 4.

5. Mary Douglas, *In the Active Voice* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 211.

6. Stanley K. Stowers, “Greeks Who Sacrifice and Those Who Do Not: Toward an Anthropology of Greek Religion,” in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 310, 317, 322, 325.

7. *Ibid.*, 306, and throughout.

8. Thomas Kazen, *Issues of Impurity in Early Judaism*, ConBNT 45 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 25.

the danger of God rejecting a sacrifice, as happened to Cain's sacrifice in Gen. 4:3–5. The “detailed routine” of ritual provides consistency, perhaps even a kind of insurance: “Ritual is thus a protocol that protects from the risk of rejection. . . . The establishment of ritual [is] an effort to overcome the anxiety of rejection.”⁹

Ritual identifies a society, and helps to *bind* society together. It provides coded behavior understood only by insiders, and enforces conformity on insiders. But the socialized religious mentality is stifling to those who seek justice or truth beyond conventional habits and beliefs. No good deed, if it transgresses the boundaries, goes unpunished. Jesus seems to have been profoundly ill at ease with purity boundaries, as is shown by his arguing with purity rules, and his disrupting the sacrificial trade at the temple (Matt. 15:1–20; 23:23–27; Mark 7:1–21; 11:15–17; John 2:14–19). Even if some of these texts may be shaped by disputes between the church and the rabbis of fifty years later, there is enough “smoke” to affirm the “fire” of Jesus’ resistance to purity barriers. He also rejected any kind of religious snobbery, as is shown by his associating with gentiles and Samaritans (including women), and with “tax collectors and sinners” (Mark 2:15). Jesus’ altogether independent prophetic stance was profoundly threatening to the priestly monopoly.

Another function of purity systems seems to be to help the human mind make distinctions. The Israelites are told, “You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean. You shall be holy to me” (Lev. 20:25–26). The fundamental, ancient meaning of “holy” is “separate,” and its basic mandate is to separate what is common from what is *qōdeš* (holy). God’s separateness and superiority must always be honored. Horror stories occur amid the sacrificial instructions to reinforce this point. When two of Aaron’s sons light up some “unholy fire” in their censers, “fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev. 10:1–2). When there was rebellion against Moses over who could perform priestly functions, God had the earth swallow up some of the

9. Moshe Halbertal, *On Sacrifice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 15, 18.

rebels, and sent fire “and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense” (Num. 16:23–35). Let *that* be a warning! Priestly prerogatives are surrounded by threats of violence.

Boundaries, rules, and strictures are fundamental to purity and to holiness. Ritual helps to define and enforce the boundaries. “The priests act like God in their role of ‘separating (*hbdyl*) between the holy and the profane and between the impure and the clean’ (Lev 10:10).”¹⁰ “The notion of separation carried over to priestly thinking about holy place (sanctuary), holy times (sabbath, rites of passage . . .), holy persons (. . . priests, Levites).”¹¹

The first half of Leviticus is heavily focused on sacrificial rituals. The second half of Leviticus has some sacrificial instructions, but also rules about forbidden sexual behaviors, family and marriage ethics (chaps. 18–21), economic instructions (do not harvest your fields fully; leave some gleanings for the poor, 19:10; 23:22), prohibitions of idolatry, rules on holy days, and warnings about infractions that can result in banishment (being “cut off,” as in 17:4, 9; 18:29; 20:6, 18) or death (20:2, 13, 27; 24:16–17, 21). God gave them the land, but God can just as easily drive them out (20:22–26), especially for murder, idolatry, and certain sexual sins, which “pollute the land” (Num. 35:33; cf. Lev. 18:13–28; Ps. 106:38).

Ritual comes increasingly to reflect ideas about order and reliability in the spiritual universe, even the ideas of spiritual law and of sin, which is a breaking of the law. If there are laws, then there is a certain reliability in the spiritual level, so that one can learn to please God. Two ideas emerge, in some tension with each other: the notion of maintaining order through correct ritual procedure in worship and devotion, and the idea of living in loyalty to spiritual law through the ethics of the covenant, the moral commandments. Either one, or both, of these principles could be meant by “keep the law” (1 Chron. 22:12; Prov. 28:4; Acts 15:5; Rom. 2:27). The Bible reflects differing views of what this meant.

10. Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 113.

11. John G. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel* (1989; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 43.

Speaking in terms of developmental psychology, purity systems help people engage in classification, differentiation, and separation. Socially speaking, purification is a control trip: purity inscribes social stratification and separation. In Judaism, the high priest is more holy than ordinary priests, and can go places they cannot go. He also is more vulnerable to impurity, in a way, since he is barred from access if he has become impure. Ordinary priests are holier than laypeople. Within the lay population, men have more access and higher status than women. Finally, all the people within the Israelite culture are more holy than foreigners. In many ways, purification systems can be seen to reflect, to inscribe, and to defend social structures. Nancy Jay argues that sacrificial systems create an imagined male lineage, assigning men their place in a holy community. “Membership in patrilineal descent groups is identified by rights of participation in blood sacrifice. . . . Sacrificing can identify membership in groups with no presumption of actual family descent.”¹² (See the rights of male “descendants of Aaron” as described, for instance, in Lev. 6:15–18.)

Atonement Ideas in the Hebrew System

The Hebrew sacrificial system, as described primarily in Leviticus, had whole or burnt offerings, purification or sin offerings, reparation or guilt offerings, peace offerings, and cereal offerings. However, rather than organizing this study by *types* of sacrifice, I am approaching it through the main atoning *functions* or outcomes.

Atonement concepts can become complex or composite, but it is important to begin with the simpler and foundational concepts. As I see it, biblical sacrifice had two fundamental purposes (some sacrifices seem to point to one or the other, thus I use the conjunction *or*): to purify or to compensate. These foundational ideas of sacrificial atonement in the Bible, then, are as follows:

1. Atonement as *purification*: In priestly thinking, God resides in the tabernacle, which needs to be ritually cleansed to ensure God’s

12. Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 36–37.

continuation there; along with purification goes the restoration or “forgiveness” (Lev. 4:20; 5:10) of persons in society. It is not the mere death of the animal, but the application of the blood and the burning of the fat, that accomplishes atonement. Purity will be the main subject of this chapter.

2a. Atonement as *compensation* or reparation (including the notion of feeding God with offerings): This is expressed *formally* in the reparation or guilt sacrifice (Lev. 7:1–7), and *functionally* in any sacrifice that is understood to secure benefit (Ps. 54:5–7) or in noncultic activities such as prayer (Psalm 141) or even violent retribution (2 Samuel 21). Compensation is the subject of chapter 2.

2b. Atonement as *redemption*: This is a variation of compensatory atonement, and overlaps with the noncultic realm. Being a crucial soteriological (saving) metaphor for the apostle Paul, redemption will be examined in chapter 4.

In the first of his two “purity” books, Jonathan Klawans argues that there seem to be two kinds of impurity in Israel: ritual impurity and moral impurity.¹³ “Ritual” and “moral” impurity are scholarly terms (the topic is hotly debated). The Bible does not have these separate terms, but it does show the differing consequences and significations that have led scholars to make these distinctions. “Ritual impurity in all its forms is natural”;¹⁴ it is not sinful. It simply needs to be eliminated through purifications or sacrifices, and no blame attaches to those impurity-causing acts (like being in the vicinity of a corpse) that are unrelated to sin. It is physically contagious.¹⁵ Moral impurity is blameworthy, is not contracted by physical touch, and has serious consequences: causing the temple and the whole land to be polluted. (The Pentateuch, speaking of Moses’ time, mentions only *tabernacle*, not *temple*, but most scholars believe tabernacle stands for temple,

13. Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22–31. His second purity book is *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Walter Houston finds Klawans’s “neat distinction” inadequate (Walter J. Houston, review of *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, by Jonathan Klawans, *JTS* 52 [2001]: 724).

14. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24.

15. *Ibid.*, 22–26.

since the texts were written during the times of the Jerusalem temple.) The main three sins (or groups of sins) that produce moral impurity are idolatry, homicide, and sexual sins;¹⁶ Hannah Harrington adds certain cultic violations as a fourth category of moral impurity.¹⁷ The danger of moral impurity is that “defilement of the land will vomit out Israel as it vomited out its previous inhabitants (Lev. 18:28; 20:22).”¹⁸ Only moral impurity is called תועבה, *tô’ēbâ*, an “abomination,” although both ritual and moral impurity can be called טמא, *tāmē*, “impure.”¹⁹

No ritual can cleanse the “pollution that is generated by apostasy (Lev 20) . . . , sexual misconduct (Lev 18), and murder (Deut 19:13; 21:8). These three classes of impurity pollute both the people and the land,” and ultimately lead to “be[ing] נכרת (‘cut off’)”²⁰ or exiled.

Really there are not two different kinds of impurity but two different causes of impurity; one sinful, one not. Menstruation, nocturnal emissions, and skin disease are not considered sinful. All impurity has its dangers. One must never bring impurity into the temple, or into contact with anything deemed holy: “Anyone who brings impurity into contact with holiness is in danger of כְּרֶת [kereth], death by divine agency (Lev 7:20–21). . . . Deliberate mixing of impurity and holiness is the most dangerous of all combinations.”²¹ All impurity threatens the temple if purification rites are not maintained. (In the last section of this chapter, “The Psychology of Purity,” I will say something about impurity itself, its possible origins, and how people reacted to it.)

From the seventh century BCE, Judah’s ritual system was centralized at the Jerusalem temple. For the priestly author, “P,” the focus of the ritual system is the removal of impurity. Whenever sin is committed anywhere in Israel, impurity settles on the temple furnishings; “sin

16. *Ibid.*, 26–31; Susan Haber, “They Shall Purify Themselves”: *Essays on Purity in Early Judaism*, edited by Adele Reinhartz, EJL 24 (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 163.

17. Hannah K. Harrington, “Clean and Unclean,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 1:682.

18. Jacob Milgrom, “Kipper,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 10 (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 1043.

19. Haber, *They Shall Purify Themselves*, 27–28; the last point cites Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 26.

20. Haber, *They Shall Purify Themselves*, 23; she is drawing on Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 404, 407–9.

21. Harrington, “Clean and Unclean,” 682.

is a miasma which wherever committed is attracted to the sanctuary. There it adheres and accumulates until God will no longer abide in it.”²² Hence the necessity for ritual purification. The main verb used for sacrificial purification is the *piel* verb *kipper* (כִּפֶּר), and the main purifying sacrifice is the חַטָּאת, *ḥaṭṭā’t* (the “sin sacrifice” or “purification offering”).

The impurity caused by the worst sins—“presumptuous sins”—lodges on the כַּפֹּרֶת, *kappōrēt* (cognate with כִּפֶּר), the lid of the ark of the covenant.²³ If the impurity is not cleansed, God will abandon the temple.²⁴ The ark cover is often referred to as the “mercy seat” in English. “Mercy seat” may not be the most accurate translation of *kappōrēt*, but it has become a recognized technical term, so I use it.²⁵

On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest goes into the Most Holy Place and sprinkles the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā’t* sacrifice on various holy objects. “Only the ‘most sacred’ areas are purged: the adytum, the shrine, and the outer altar (16:14–19).”²⁶ Most importantly, the impurity caused by presumptuous sins is cleansed when the high priest sprinkles the *ḥaṭṭā’t* blood on the mercy seat, ensuring that the Lord will continue to reside there.²⁷ The blood expiates (cleanses) the temple furnishings. This is the only time in the whole year that *anyone* is allowed to enter the Most Holy Place, a particularly holy—and dangerous—place, and a particularly solemn and important day (Lev. 16:29–34).

For most Jews, the *kappōrēt* was always a figure of imagination, known from the teachings imparted, not from the thing being seen. The mercy seat is the golden lid of the ark of the covenant, carved into

22. Milgrom, “Kipper,” 1040.

23. David P. Wright, “Day of Atonement,” in *ABD* 2:73–75.

24. Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology*, SJLA 36 (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 76, 80.

25. “Mercy seat” first appears in Tyndale’s translation; see Daniel P. Bailey, “Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul’s Use of *Hilasterion* in Romans 3:25” (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1999), 6 §7, 174–76. Tyndale seems to be echoing Luther’s German term *Gnadenstuhl* (Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology* [London: Macmillan, 1919], 130). For more on the mercy seat in Rom. 3:25, see chapter 4.

26. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1991), 393.

27. Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology*, 73, 81; Wright, “Day of Atonement,” 73; Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century*, WUNT 163 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 30.

the image of two winged cherubim. Priestly theology claimed that God (or God's *presence*) dwelt between the cherubim. It is "from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim" (Exod. 25:22; cf. Num. 7:89), that God speaks with Moses. "I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat" (Lev. 16:2). To Moses alone does God appear here. Having God dwell at the mercy seat appears to be aimed at legitimizing the sacrificial ideology.

What Jacob Milgrom succeeded in making clear is that sacrifice, in the Levitical texts, is *not* punitive or substitutionary, it is purificatory. The blood of the *ḥattā't* sacrifice is sprinkled in particular places in the temple, cleansing impurity from all the furnishings. The sacrificial blood acts as a kind of "ritual detergent"²⁸ on the temple installations. (Nehemia Polen criticizes this phrase as "too mechanical" and downplaying relational issues.²⁹ Milgrom does overemphasize the "mechanical" aspect of cleansing, but we will see below that he also deals with forgiveness.) This function can be seen in purification rituals in other cultures. The Hittite rite of Ulippi has a sheep's blood being smeared "on the god's statue, the wall of the edifice, and cultic utensils. The text explicitly says this application renders the god and its temple pure."³⁰ Also useful is the metaphor of electricity, which conveys something of the instantaneous and magic-like power of sacrificial blood, which draws off the sin charge from the temple sancta like a lightning rod drawing lightning to itself. This is not a punitive operation, but a cleansing or discharging operation. It is not a punishment of the animal that brings about atonement, but the magical power of blood. By *magical*, I mean the belief that acting on the community's temple will have an effect on the community, the belief that blood sprinkled on the *kappōrēt* will *actually* cleanse the people. The temple seems to be an analogue to the community; purity changes happening to one are reflected in the other.

Milgrom refocused scholarly attention to the cleansing of the temple

28. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 254.

29. Nehemia Polen, "Leviticus and Hebrews . . . and Leviticus," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 218.

30. Wright, "Day of Atonement," 74.

from impurity, but he resisted saying that the sacrifice correlates with the “forgiveness” of persons (Lev. 4:20–35; 5:10–18) and a restoration of relationships. He insists “in the context of the *ḥaṭṭā’t*, *kipper* means ‘purge’ and nothing else. . . . Ritual texts also support this meaning, for they regularly couple *kipper* with *ṭihar* ‘purify’ and *ḥiṭṭē* ‘decontaminate.’”³¹ Roy Gane allows that the *ḥaṭṭā’t* sacrifice purges the sanctuary on Yom Kippur, but vehemently argues that it has a different function throughout the year, where the *ḥaṭṭā’t* cleanses *persons*, not the sanctuary.³² It seems that Gane offers a somewhat extreme thesis (the *ḥaṭṭā’t* throughout the year cleanses persons and *not* the sanctuary) in response to what seems like an extreme thesis by Milgrom (the *ḥaṭṭā’t* cleanses the sanctuary and not persons). Gane at least partially wins his point, since forgiveness is indeed seen in Lev. 4:20, 26, 31; 5:5–6, 10. But there is also blood daubing and sprinkling at certain installations in the temple on these days (Lev. 4:17–18, 25, 30, 34; 5:9). Really, both temple and persons are in view, both on Yom Kippur and throughout the year. It may be that Gane has considered the *ḥaṭṭā’t* in isolation. Christian Eberhart points out that atonement in those texts is accomplished by “combined blood and burning rites,” and indeed, Lev. 4:19, 26, 31, does speak of burning the *ḥaṭṭā’t* animal’s fat, while 5:10 has a second animal as a burnt offering; in both cases, forgiveness is mentioned *after* the burning. Thus Gane “neglects the fact that atonement is accomplished through two distinct ritual components: a blood rite and a burning rite. . . . Blood rites do purge the sanctuary and its components, while burning rites accomplish forgiveness for sins that the offerer bears.”³³ Clearly, the complexity of sacrificial texts requires some scholarly humility and willingness to revise theories in light of new studies. In any case, Milgrom’s scholarship regarding Yom Kippur is relevant for New Testament studies, since both Paul and Hebrews speak of the death of Christ

31. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 255, 1079.

32. Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 142, 176–77, 273–75.

33. Christian A. Eberhart, review of *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*, by Roy E. Gane, *Review of Biblical Literature*, July 1, 2006, 4, http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5068_5341.pdf.

metaphorically as a kind of new Yom Kippur (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:6–15, 21–10:3).

Purification is not concerned only with the temple's condition; cult is not an end in itself. Temple purification stands for both the restoration of the community sanctuary and for the forgiveness of persons, not just the purification of a building. Most scholars affirm something like the view of Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra: "The temple ritual serves simultaneously to atone for the people and to purify the temple."³⁴ Only a few scholars would say, as Stanley Stowers does, that "the person did not receive forgiveness for a sinful act itself but dealt only with the consequences of such acts on the temple. . . . The sacrifices on that day [Day of Atonement] provide a complete purification of the temple, not an atonement or forgiveness of the people's sin."³⁵ This is refuted by cases where *kipper* actually is translated "forgive" (Deut. 21:8; Pss. 65:3 [MT 65:4]; 78:38; 79:9; Ezek. 16:63).³⁶ Stowers is leaning here on Milgrom's emphasis on temple purification at the expense of the effect of the ritual on individuals. But, in fact, Milgrom wanted to stress that something *more* than forgiveness is involved; the person "hopes to repair the broken relationship. He therefore seeks more than forgiveness."³⁷ Both Milgrom's critics and supporters seem to miss this passage, which is understandable, given that his commentary is over two and a half thousand pages long.

It is interesting to notice that the rabbis understood atonement and forgiveness to be equivalent, as seen "from the way in which 'atone' and 'forgive' can interchange" in rabbinic texts,³⁸ although, of

34. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "Atonement, Judaism: Second Temple Period," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 3, *Athena-Birkat ha-Minim*, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 43. See similar observation by Wright, "Day of Atonement," 73.

35. Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 208, 210.

36. Sharon L. Baker, *Executing God: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught about Salvation and the Cross* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 116–17; Jarvis J. Williams, *Maccabean Martyr Traditions in Paul's Theology of Atonement: Did Martyr Theology Shape Paul's Conception of Jesus' Death?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 45.

37. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 245.

38. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 161.

course, their views are postbiblical, and do not prove anything about the biblical period.

Another purification rite is the scapegoat ritual. On the Day of Atonement, the priest lays his hands on the goat's head, confessing all the peoples' sins, and "the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region" (Lev. 16:22). It is not a sacrifice; it is not offered to the Lord. It is a quasi-physical sin bearer. This becomes a very important metaphor for the apostle Paul, so it will be discussed in chapter 4.

Spiritualizing or Metaphorical Understandings

A metaphorical version of purification occurs in the New Testament epistles. A "washed" and "holy" church is held up in Eph. 5:26–27; Jesus will "purify for himself a people" in Tit. 2:14. "The blood of Christ" is said to "purify our conscience" (Heb. 9:14), or it "cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). The purifying function of blood in the cult is here extended to the conscience or the innocence of Christians. This intense metaphorical application of the "sacrifice" of Christ is a major feature in the Epistles and Revelation, but is nearly absent from the Gospels, except for the eucharistic passages (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; regarding Luke, see the section "Luke-Acts Is Not Cross-Centered" in chapter 5).

The Gospels have a unique attitude toward impurity; it is not treated metaphorically, but neither do the Gospels reflect a priestly viewpoint. Jesus touches and heals many "unclean" people; he is never infected by their impurity, as the purity system would indicate; rather, Jesus' life and health are transmitted to them. On one or two occasions, Jesus makes use of the purity ideas that people have. After healing the ten lepers, he tells them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests"; undoubtedly they would have started thinking about purification as they walked; "and as they went, they were made clean" (Luke 17:14).³⁹ Forever after, such recipients of healing would not think of purification as a *ritual* category so much as a *Jesus* category, because of what he did for them.

39. See also Luke 5:14, where he tells a healed leper, "Show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them."