

**BY MEANS OF DEATH**

*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

*And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. (Heb. 9:14-15)*

I feel that at the outset of this endeavor I must entreat my readers indulgence and forbearance, until you have heard me out and given fair consideration to the truth herein expounded. Otherwise, the sensitivity of the subject under scrutiny, and its reverence by the devout through the years, will get me incorrectly charged with denying the blood of Christ. Passions will rise until reason is clouded and I will have failed to communicate my burden.

The prominence of blood throughout the history and the doctrine of redemption is formidable. A few examples within our context vividly illustrate that prominence: Hebrews Chapter 9 vs. 7 “*not without blood,*” vs. 18-22 “*neither the first testament was dedicated without blood,*” “*he took the blood of calves and goats . . . and sprinkled . . .*” “*Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined you,*” “*Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry,*” “*And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*” I Peter 1:18 sums up New Covenant doctrine in telling us that we were not redeemed with corruptibles as silver and gold but “*with the precious blood of Christ.*”

It is quite understandable in view of these scriptures that there has come to be, over the centuries, a commonly misplaced faith . . . a faith and a superstitious confidence in blood. Although this is perhaps an “innocent” error, it is not a minor one, for it is a hope and confidence in a substance rather than a Person, the creature rather than the Creator. And it is at this point that I must make the shocking assertion that there is nothing in blood per-se (its chemistry, composition, substance) to accomplish anything redemptive; not in the blood of animals, not in man’s blood, not in the blood of Jesus Christ. For the blood of Jesus Christ was purely, absolutely, human blood . . . no more, no less. If His blood had been different from our own, He would not have been true man, and could not qualify as our Redeemer. But the scriptures assure that in order for Him to be a merciful and faithful high priest to make reconciliation for the sins of the people He was “*in all things made like His brethren*” (Heb. 2:17).

If blood were all that were necessary to purge away sins, sacrificial animals could have been bled a bit, and kept alive and used repeatedly. It would not have been necessary to slaughter so many unblemished animals. A few prized beasts could have done the job for a number of years. We bleed repeatedly without dying. If it were only blood that atoned for our sins, it would not have been necessary for Jesus to die. He could have been beaten, lacerated, tortured, caused to bleed profusely, and yet survived. He would still be living today in the same mortal body. But all of this is absurd. It isn’t the blood of the transgressor that justice seeks. It is his life! Every sacrificial victim under the Old Covenant was proven **dead** by the presence of his body. The dead body of Jesus was taken down from the cross, wrapped in a shroud, laid in a tomb, and the tomb then sealed.

Death, not blood, is in focus. Something unspeakable ruinous happened in the Garden. All creation went out of kilter in man’s fall. The problem is sin, and the penalty for sin is death, not a pint (or a gallon) of blood. With the entry of sin into the world, and that through God’s image and representative in the earth, all fell into irreparable ruin. God does not redo ruined things. He never modifies, reforms, rebuilds, overhauls, or cures anything which sin has corrupted. He rids the universe of the offense and the offender. He kills, destroys, abolishes the ruined object, and creates a new one. In His economy of redemption, only death will cure or fix anything. The whole of creation now waits for the day in which the existing cosmos will be purged from existence by consuming fire.

Why, then, do we have all this talk of blood and bloodshed in reference to atonement for sin? Bloodshed is a metaphor and synonym for killing, for death in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It survives strongly and clearly in our present day usage. Consider such passages as Genesis 9:4-6, Exodus 22:2 and Leviticus 17:3-4. Every place in the Bible where bloodshed appears, killing or death is in view. Not a single exception may be cited! We are told further that “the life of the flesh” is in the blood (Gen. 9:4, Lev. 17:11). Surely this does not mean that if blood is still in the body, life is still there, or that one could infuse a dead body with blood and thereby bring it to life. It simply means that where the blood of a victim is applied the life of that victim is counted. This permits the redemptive principle of imputation by substitution. A sacrificial victim is first identified with the object of redemption. Under the Old Covenant, this was done by the laying on of hands. In the New Covenant, Christ identified with us by taking on manhood, identifying Himself with us and becoming one with the human race. The sins of the transgressor are then imputed to the victim, and the victim slain. The victim’s death is counted the death of the transgressor, his sin debt paid. The blood (representative of the life of the innocent victim) is then sprinkled upon the object of redemption, counting him (or it) innocent and pure. That is the way all things under the Old Covenant were purged by blood. Because New Covenant realities must be stated to Jews in Old Covenant terms, we have the death of Christ in our stead represented by the shedding and sprinkling of His blood.

Death is further necessary in the case of a change of mode of existence. When God made preparation to bring His elect people out of Egypt, their status as slaves had to be abolished in order to institute their standing as God's peculiar nation. All the slaves had to die, to be abolished, that the nation should be raised up. The whole of Egypt died under the judgment of God on the night of the Passover, symbolically, in the death of the firstborn (the heir) of each family. Every Hebrew slave also died symbolically in the person of the firstborn of each family, or a substitute lamb whose death was testified in its blood displayed on the doorpost of the house wherein the family lived. Under the New Covenant, water baptism of the believer (clearly stated as death, burial and resurrection) typifies this death of the old man and the resurrection of the new creation in Christ.

Death is further necessary in the institution of a covenant or a change in covenants. This is argued in Hebrews 9:16-20 where, once again, we see blood equated with death and the two terms used interchangeably. The Greek word, *diatheke*, meaning a disposition, contract or will, is translated, sometimes "covenant" and sometimes "testament," depending upon the shade of meaning in focus. We use it today when we refer to a will as "the last will and testament." The covenant made at Sinai was dedicated with blood. So must the New Covenant be put into effect by the death of the Testator, Jesus Christ. The heir receives the inheritance only upon the death of the one who earned the inheritance. We become heirs of Christ only if He dies! This Man died, was cut off without a successor (Is. 53:8). He willed us His entire earned estate! That is the force of every statement in which Christ's bloodshed is preached.

The question may now, understandably, be asked, "If atonement is made by death rather than mere blood, why are non-bleeding deaths (strangulation, suffocation, poison) unacceptable under the Old Covenant?" Old Covenant sacrifices had to properly represent New Covenant realities in Christ. Without blood, which may be diffused, there is no visible, tangible, testimony of death. Christ's blood (His dying and death) must be "sprinkled," preached, testified and scattered abroad, to elect believers everywhere. Such preaching and the application of the fruits of Christ's redeeming death and resurrection to all peoples of all times is the only thing that makes any sense of I Peter 1:2. Once again, remember that Peter was writing to Jews and New covenant realities had to be related to Old Covenant types.

Under the Old Covenant, offerings made for sin consisted not only of the blood of the victim by the body as well. The bodies of those slain beasts were eaten either by the priests or the offenders. What was not eaten was burned either on the altar or outside the camp. Then the ashes of the burned bodies were sprinkled "to the sanctification and purification of the flesh" (Heb. 9:13). In like fashion, the offering of Christ was Himself, His perfect Person, His sinless life and His suffering, as the following passages testify: Heb. 9:14 "*who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God . . .*" Heb. 9:25: "*Nor yet that he should offer himself often . . .*" Heb. 9:26: "*but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*" Heb. 9:28: "*So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many . . .*" In the Memorial Supper we are told to remember and celebrate, not only the blood of Christ, but also His body. Living in Christ is said to be in the "drinking of His blood and the eating of His flesh" (John 6:53-57). If we accept the Passover as truly representing the atoning work of Christ, then it would seem that the blood of Christ is for God to see, and His body for us to feast upon. That is, once our faith in Christ is fixed (the blood applied), we are no longer to be concerned with our justification, but should have the eye of faith fixed on the risen, exalted and living Lord, to be occupied with living the Christ life (Gal. 2:20, Eph. 3:16-19, Rev. 3:20), walking worthy of His calling, and rejoicing in Him.

The object of our faith is Christ, in His simplicity, His undivided wholeness, not His work, His life, His body, His blood, His wounds, as priceless and precious as these may be; but Him, Himself. We call upon His Name as the Living God (Rom. 10:13, Acts 3:16). The confidence of our hope rests peacefully and joyfully in all that He is.

- C.M.