

# THE SACRIFICE

By

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Seldom heard in the modern church are the meaningful old hymns that speak of “the blood,” such as: “Power in the blood,” “Nothing but the blood of Jesus,” “Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb,” “There is a fountain filled with blood,” etc. This deletion of blood from Christian hymnody is due to a sad failure to grasp the full meaning of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

When God was ready to deliver the 12 tribes from their captivity in Egypt, He instructed them to kill a lamb, and sprinkle its blood on the lintel and door post of their homes. Death came to all the “firstborn” of every household in Egypt, except to those where the blood of the lamb was found. It was ordinary animal blood, but it was proof of that animal’s death. The significance is quite clear: Where no such death had occurred, the first-born died, but where death (of the lamb) had taken place there was no further death.

Soon afterward the laws of sacrifice were given, sacrifices of the field and sacrifices of the flock. For the atonement of sins, blood sacrifice alone was acceptable. This was not because there was some mystical power in the blood, but because this was the way an animal’s life could be offered. It was the giving of life which was the essential matter.

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life...For as to the life of all flesh, the blood thereof is all one with the life thereof” (Lev. 17:11, 14).

There was no such thing as withdrawing a bit of blood, say a pint or two, from an animal which continued to live, and offering it to God. No, the point of the sacrifice was that the wages of sin is death, and only a death could atone for that sin. The animal deaths were all types or foreshadows of the sacrifice that was to be made by Jesus, who was called the “lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

When, on the night before his death, Jesus took the cup of wine and said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). he was talking about his death that was to take place the next morning. Were it possible for the atonement to take place merely by the giving of a portion of his blood, then his death would not have been necessary for our salvation. The sacrificial element in the cross was primarily in Jesus’ blood, his very life. By shedding his blood, he died to meet the penalty of sin for us. “The Son of man came...to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

Years ago, when I did a lot of singing in revivals, I had a song that included the phrase, “Each drop of blood bought me a million years...” This was god sentimental poetry, but it was meaningless. One drop of blood from Jesus would have had no value in redemption. It was only as the loss of blood brought death that He could purchase our salvation.

Under the Levitical system in the Old Testament the sacrifice of animals was a type “of good things to come,” mainly the death of Jesus and His ministry as high priest. The animal sacrifices had to be offered repeatedly, indicating that they did not give redemption to the worshiper and remove the guilt and sin. Rather the annual sin offerings of the Day of Atonement were yearly reminders of sin, not the removal of it. “But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance made of sins year by year” (Heb.10:3). The writer of Hebrews concludes that this fact in the Levitical system substantiates the truth that the blood of animals cannot remove sin and make complete atonement.

“For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins” (Heb.10:4). Here the writer uses the term “blood” when he is writing about the death of the animal. In the next sentence he writes, “Wherefore when he (Jesus) comes into the world, he says ‘Sacrifice and offering thou would not, but a body didst thou prepare for me...’” And in verse 10, “By which we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” The death of an animal did not meet the requirements of the penalty for sin. That penalty could be met only by the one sinless man, Jesus, who was anointed by God for that very purpose. Also, that penalty was not met by the shedding of some of his blood, but by his complete death, the giving up of his life, just as the animals forfeited their lives in the Levitical sacrifices.

God, in all His judicial system, impressed upon the minds of the people that the penalty for sin was death. There was no such thing as life-imprisonment, much less imprisonment for life under torturous conditions. The penalty for the greatest offenses was death; hence the Levitical sacrifices required death to atone for sin. This was perfectly fulfilled by Christ.

Let me summarize some lessons from these facts concerning the blood of Christ as revealed in scripture:

1. There is “power in the blood” only in that the life of the person is in the blood, and it was the life that was given in sacrifice to make atonement for our sin.
2. The death that Jesus died was not just a half-death, where the body was put to death but Jesus went on living in some spiritual realm. The blood-letting death was the taking of his entire life, so that Isaiah could say, in describing it, “he poured out his soul unto death” (Isa. 53:12).
3. The principle purpose of the Temple was to provide a place for the mercy-seat, upon which the blood of atonement for the people was to be sprinkled each year by the high priest. Jesus became the sacrificial lamb and also our great high priest., and “when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12). No more blood on the mercy-seat, and therefore no more purpose for the Temple, which was destroyed in 70 A.D. under God’s judgment. A re-built Temple could not serve the original purpose.
4. It is written that Jesus was “cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due” (Is 53:9), explaining that the penalty for our sin

was met in the death of Jesus. This had been foreshadowed repeatedly in the Levitical sacrifices, in which the animals were slain. The full penalty was paid when Jesus died, just as pictured by the death of the sacrificial animals. Never were the animals tortured, but died immediately. Jesus suffered the length of time it took to die, and no further. Therefore, if the punishment for sinners is for them to live forever in some kind of life of misery, as is commonly taught, it could hardly be said that Jesus suffered the stroke that was due, or that he paid sin's penalty. Therefore the teaching of unending suffering of the lost dishonors the death Jesus died.

5. In order for Jesus to fulfill all the types of sacrifice, he had to die a flesh and blood death, as stated in Heb. 2:14-15. How, then, can preachers justify their claim that the death the unredeemed face is "spiritual death," a spiritual death that is prolonged eternally, where one lives separated from God?

Christ is the center of God's economy, and his death and resurrection is the power by which fallen and frail man is lifted up to the place where he can be in fellowship with God. John said that he wrote his gospel "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." one third of his book focuses on Christ's death and resurrection.

To confess that Jesus is the Christ is to confess that he is the one who died for us. When we submit to baptism, we are buried into his death, to rise to a new life. When we come to the assembly each week, the worship centers around the Lord's Supper, in which Christ's death is portrayed in the bread and the cup (His body and blood.)

When we come to the Day of Judgment, and must answer for our miserable sins and failures, we will gladly remember the precious blood of Jesus, his death by which our penalty for sin has been met.

John wrote that in heaven "They sang a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and did purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood,  
Shall never lose its power,  
Till all the ransomed church of God,  
Be saved to sin no more.

Let us sing with joy of the precious blood of Christ our Lord and Savior.

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