

The Blood Covenant

By Jim and Carolyn Murphy

There is an old chorus we sang in our church when I was young.

*O, the blood of Jesus,
O, the blood of Jesus,
O, the blood of Jesus,
it washes white as snow.*

Another old favorite was,

*There is power, power, wonder working power
in the precious blood of the Lamb.*

In fact, years ago we sang many songs that boldly extolled the power and virtue of the blood of Jesus. But I have observed that the number of songs about the blood of Jesus has greatly diminished in the last several years. These days in America we can sit through many worship services in which there is never a word about the blood of Jesus. The same holds true of current teaching and preaching. Sadly, in many of our Western churches, today's Christian scarcely ever hears a mention of the blood.

I have often wondered why this is so. I'm not sure I have the complete answer but I believe I know at least part of the reason. There is a strong tendency in our churches today to sanitize everything. It seems to me that the Christian world has been taken over by euphemistic language. (A euphemism is a way of saying something ugly, bad or offensive in nice sounding words. For example, no one stinks anymore, "he has an unpleasant odor.") Here are some Christian euphemisms I hear today:

A man consumed with anger and violence is no longer committing the *sin* of uncontrolled anger; today he has "an *issue* with anger."

A drunk is no longer in *sin*; today he has "a *problem* with alcohol abuse."

The contemporary idea seems to be, "No one wants to hear about unpleasant or gory things like 'blood' when they come to church. There are so many other wonderful things in the Bible that are uplifting and edifying." I'm not saying that the concept of people not wanting to hear unpleasant things doesn't have merit. And yes, the world is depressing enough. When people come to church they do want to be uplifted. But in our zeal to uplift and edify today's Christians we have cheated them by neglecting the fundamental teachings in Scripture regarding the precious blood of Jesus. Consequently, we now have a couple of generations of believers who know little, if anything, about the significance of the blood of Jesus. Yet a proper understanding of this foundational truth gives every believer a greater appreciation not only of the love of Jesus and the great sacrifice He made for our sins, but also of the perpetual cleansing power His blood provides for our daily lives. Furthermore, Jesus' shed blood is the very foundation on which the New Covenant stands.

The Magnitude of Adam's Sin

When God created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, He created him in a sinless but spiritually immature state. Adam had total liberty to do as he wanted in the Garden. There was only one restriction. God commanded him not to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As long as Adam obeyed God's one command, he remained sinless.

The day Adam chose to eat the forbidden fruit, he disobeyed God, he sinned, and his *spirit* died. (Gen 2:17) Spiritual death occurred when man was separated from the source of life, the Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden. (The Tree of Life symbolizes Jesus, who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." (Jn 14:6 NIV, emphasis added.))

Since Adam was spirit, soul and body, when his spirit died, all who were born after him were born *spiritually dead!* "For as in Adam all die. . ." (1 Cor 15:22 NIV) and, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners. . ." (Rom 5:19 NIV) So Adam's actions affected not only himself but all of his descendants. (See 1 Co 15:22, Rom 5:12, 15, 17, 19.) His sin separated all mankind from God. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, made reference to the severity of Adam's sin. "Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not *sin by breaking a command, as did Adam*, who was a pattern of the one to come. (Rom 5:14 NIV, emphasis added.)

Because everyone born after Adam was spiritually dead, even if one disobeyed a command from God, he could not sin to the magnitude that Adam did because he was already spiritually dead. Nor could anyone else's sin condemn millions of others to spiritual death as Adam's did. Thus, our human father, Adam, left us his tragic legacy, not only his sinful nature, but spiritual death as well.

To atone for Adam's sin, God slew an animal in the Garden and used its skin to cover Adam and Eve. Though it isn't mentioned as such in Genesis, this is the first record of a sacrifice. The life of the animal was sacrificed to cover Adam's nakedness. (Gen 3:21) Thus, the principle of sacrifice, a life given in exchange for another's sin, was established.

Types and Anti-types

We can greatly increase our understanding of the Old Testament and its worship rituals if we understand that God employed the principle of types and anti-types to instruct His people, the Israelites. A *type* is a visual representation of the *anti-type*, an unseen, genuine thing. For example, on a sunny day, if one holds his hand out in the sunlight thereby casting its shadow on the ground, the shadow is the type, the hand above is the anti-type.

God instructed Moses in great detail concerning the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The Tabernacle, all its accompanying items, and its worship

rituals, were all types. Every item was a type, or representative, of the genuine located with God in heaven. Speaking of the Tabernacle priests, Scripture says, "They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'" (Heb 8:5 NIV)

Significantly, the animal blood offered for sin atonement was a type of the blood of Jesus.

Old Testament Animal Sacrifice

We find the practice of animal sacrifice continued throughout the Old Testament. The descendants of Adam, the early patriarchs, offered animal sacrifices from time to time. Then, in the Book of Exodus, God established a covenant with Moses, referred to in the New Testament as the "Law." This covenant extended the practice of animal sacrifice to a daily requirement. (See Exo 29:36.) These sacrifices were made to atone for the past sins of the one who offered them. Throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, thousands upon thousands of animals were offered in sacrifice to God. The general purpose of these sacrifices was to teach man about sin and to cover his past sin. There was no provision in the Law for *future* sins. So every time someone left the altar and sinned again, a new sacrifice had to be made to cover that sin.

Even with the thousands upon thousands of sacrifices, Scripture tells us that ". . . it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin." (Heb 10:4 NIV) Scripture also tells us that "the law made nothing perfect." (Heb 7:19 NIV) We then ask the question "Why was the Law given?" Paul answers this question for us. "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his [God's] sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." (Rom 3:20 NIV) So, the Law was not given to make man perfect, but to instruct him about sin. Through the Law, God spent hundreds of years teaching His people what sin was. At the same time He was also teaching them that it was impossible to fully obey the Law. Why? Because man was so bound that he simply was not able to rise above sin on his own.

The Significance of Blood

There is a spiritual law that states, "For the wages of sin is death." (Rom 6:23 NIV) As we have seen in the Law, the animal's life was offered to God to atone for the sins of the people. Leviticus tells us that, "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." (17:11 NIV, emphasis added.) The writer of Hebrews again states the importance of blood for us, ". . . without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Heb 9:22 NIV)

Thus, the life of an animal, its blood, was offered to God to atone for the sins of the people. But the Old Testament blood offerings were only a foreshadow of that which was to come - the offering of Jesus' blood in the true Holy of Holies in heaven itself.

Nothing in All Creation Is Sufficient for Atonement

So it's clear that God established the requirement for *blood atonement* for sin. One dictionary defined *atone* as, "Amends or reparation made for an injury or wrong; in Hebrew Scriptures, man's reconciliation with God after having transgressed the covenant. The redemptive life and death of Christ. The reconciliation of God and man thus brought about by Christ." (I believe this was the reason He favored Abel's offering over Cain's. Abel's was a blood offering while Cain's was not.)

Leviticus tells us that the animal had to be "a male without defect." (Lev 1:3 NIV) But Hebrews states, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." So we know that no animal offered would be sufficient or God would not have required the repeated sacrifices in the Law. Adam's sin was a *spiritual* transgression because it brought *spiritual* death. That too, disqualifies an animal because no animal is a spirit being.

That leaves only human blood as a possible offering because only humans have a spirit. *But every human on earth was spiritually dead because of Adam's sin* and the Law requires that the sacrifice be *without defect*. For a human being to be without defect, or *sinless*, he would also be spiritually alive. Thus, a *human male without sin and spiritually alive is the only being qualified to atone for sin once for all*. Obviously, nothing in all creation qualified. Man was helplessly and hopelessly bound by sin until God Himself intervened.

Jesus, The Last Adam

Jesus, the beloved Son of God, was the way our Father chose to redeem mankind. The people under the Old Covenant had rituals and ceremonies they had to do, i.e., *works* in order to be covered by the covenant. But with the death and resurrection of Jesus, mankind was freed from that hold. Jesus became the "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29 NIV)

Paul explains,

"The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam [Jesus], a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. (1 Cor 15:45-49 NIV)

Now we see God's plan unfolding. Even before the world was founded, God planned to send His Son, Jesus, as the last Adam to complete the work and undo the sin of the first Adam. Jesus was born into this world as fully human, yet fully God. Through Jesus' birth God placed one human on earth who did not have Adam's blood in His veins. Why? First we know that Mary was a virgin. (Mat 1:22,23) We also know that Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit. (Mat 1:20)

But what about Mary's blood? To me, logically, if Mary contributed her egg to the conception event, then Jesus would have had blood from His mother and it would have been tainted by Adam's sinful blood. So what is the only inevitable

and logical conclusion? It has to be that the entire conception was done by God through the Holy Spirit. In other words, Mary provided the setting (her womb) for Jesus' conception, but not the egg.¹

Once the conception took place, then Jesus grew within Mary's womb for the required nine months. Thus, He became fully man from conception on. He was born of woman, grew as a child, and was human in every natural aspect except He was without Adam's blood.

This analysis is consistent with Paul's reference to Jesus as, "the last Adam." (See 1 Co 15, above.) Here I believe Paul was referring to Adam *before his fall*. Remember, Adam was born sinless, just spiritually immature. It was his sin that caused his blood to become tainted, not his human state.

In order for Jesus to maintain His sacrificial qualifications, *He had to remain sinless* His entire life! This He did for Hebrews tells us He lived "without sin." (4:15) Thus Jesus was able to offer Himself as the perfect, spotless sacrifice to God for the sins of all mankind. Jesus' sacrifice of Himself removed for all time the sin barrier that stood between God and man. In so doing Jesus ushered in a New Covenant, superceding the Old.

So from Jesus' death on, people enter into the New Covenant by *believing* Jesus to be the son of God and that His blood cleanses us from sin. Now we enter into the New Covenant by an act of *faith, without works*. Our sins are cleansed as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Ps 103:12 NIV)

Jesus therefore truly is the "last Adam, a life-giving spirit." (1 Co 15:45 NIV)

The Shedding of His Blood

Jesus, knowing the death that awaited Him, instituted The Lord's Supper on the night He was betrayed. Matthew tells of that night,

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is *my blood of the covenant*, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." (Mat 26:27-29 NIV, emphasis added.)

We all know the story of Jesus' crucifixion as told in the four Gospels. He freely gave His life for each of us. John was an eye witness to the shedding of that sinless blood on the cross.

"... one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, *bringing a sudden flow of blood and water*. The man [John] who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled..." (Jn 19:34-36 NIV, emphasis added.)

Paul writes,

"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. . ." (Rom 3:25 NIV)

When Jesus, there hanging on the cross, knew that He had accomplished all the Father sent Him to do he said, "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30)

His Final Priestly Act

In the Old Covenant, on the Day of Atonement at the Tabernacle, when the sacrificial animal was slaughtered, its blood was taken in a vessel and presented to the Lord by the High Priest behind the veil in the Holy of Holies. This act by the High Priest was the climax of the entire year of priestly service. It was the most important of all priestly functions. This act also foreshadowed Jesus' final priestly act.

The writer of Hebrews tells us about the real and final event that Jesus, as our High Priest, undertook.

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but ***he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.***

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ***How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*** For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Heb 9:11-15 NIV, emphasis added.)

Here the "Most Holy Place" is in heaven itself before the throne of God. As the earthly High Priest entered the Most Holy Place in the earthly Tabernacle, he was foreshadowing that which Jesus Himself did in heaven. Thus, once Jesus presented His own sinless blood to the Father, the sins of mankind were fully atoned for -- *once for all!* The complete and final offering for sin has been made by Jesus and accepted by our heavenly Father.

O, the blood of Jesus -- it washes white as snow!

Blood Covenant Benefits

I don't know if it's possible for us to fully understand all of the benefits we have received through the offering of the blood of Jesus. We are, after all, finite beings with limited understanding. But Scripture does list some of those benefits. I will mention a few.

1. A Clean Conscience

"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, *cleanse our consciences* from acts that lead to death..." (Heb 9:14 NIV, emphasis added.) What a wonderful provision! Jesus'

¹ Special recognition is given Dr. Loren Sifring of Rochester, Michigan for his insight into Mary's conception and resultant birth of Jesus as the sinless last Adam.

blood cleanses our conscience from guilt! We need not allow guilt and shame to plague us. All we need do is bring the sin to Him, confess it and ask His forgiveness.

2. Jesus' Flesh and Blood Gives Life

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (Jn 6:53-54 NIV)

Here Jesus is speaking of the *spiritual act* represented in communion. We believers partake of His body and blood and are therefore one with Him and the Father. Hence, we have "life in us." We also have His promise of resurrection at the last day.

3. Redeems both NT and OT Saints

Jesus' sacrificial death and His cleansing blood also had retroactive effects.

"For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance -- now that he has died as a ransom to set *them* free from the *sins committed under the first covenant*." (Heb 9:15 NIV, emphasis added.)

I believe that all the Old Testament saints who died looking forward to their salvation are also redeemed by the blood of Jesus. I come to this conclusion by combining the information in Matthew 27:52, "The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life." with Ephesians 4:8-9, "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? . . .)"

4. Keeps the Destroyer Away

"When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and *he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down*." (Exo 12:23 NIV, emphasis added)

We have already established that blood used in the Old

Testament was a type, or foreshadow of the blood of Jesus. Some of our older Christian brothers and sisters will often pray, "I plead the blood of Jesus" when they are in danger. That is a good thing to do, but the fact is we continually *abide* in and under the covering of His blood.

This is not to say that the devil can't touch or harm us in any way. But *it is* to say that he cannot exercise his destructive will over us as long as we're walking in obedience to the word. We are under the covering of Jesus' blood!

5. Justification

God the Father views us as sinless. In His sight we are justified. It's as if we have never sinned. This is because of the justification Jesus purchased for us. Paul tells us,

"Since we have now been *justified by his blood*, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Rom 5:9 NIV, emphasis added.)

6. Continual Purging of Sin

Many Christians labor under the fear that each and every sin they commit will separate them from Jesus. This would be true if there were no provision made to offset the sins that we commit daily. John explained it this way,

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1 Jn 1:7 NIV)

This verse clearly is meant to apply to the believer who is endeavoring to obey the word of God. The term "walk in the light" implies living in the light of His word, allowing it to direct us daily in our conduct. Such believers' sins are purged by the blood of Jesus on an ongoing basis. Hallelujah!

Conclusion

Going back to the beginning of this article, in view of all we now know of the precious blood of Jesus, how can we continue to keep silent about all that it means? How can we not shout praises and extol the precious blood of the covenant that does all this for us? How dare we NOT diligently teach every generation about these wonderful truths. How precious is the blood of Jesus!

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