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The Covenant of Blood

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The Covenant of Blood

By PAUL G. BRETSCHER

(An Essay Read at the Louisiana Pastors' and Teachers' Conference,
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TO many the Bible appears to contain two different religions. One is the religion of Judaism in the Old Testament; the other, the religion of Christianity in the New. The differences appear to be so great that the two "religions" seem worlds apart. The Old Testament is a religion of Law; the New Testament, of the Gospel. The Old Testament religion is characterized by a complex scheme of sacrifices, by circumcision, by detailed Sabbath regulations; in the New Testament all this is rejected. The Old Testament religion is the religion of a nation; the New Testament religion is to be spread over the whole world.

From the beginning of the Christian Church these differences have been a real problem. Paul and other Apostles in the early Church found it very difficult to convince the Jewish Christians that in giving up circumcision, sacrifices, and other cherished practices of their Ceremonial Law, they were losing not one particle of the real essence of their Old Testament religion. Today many still entertain the notion that because Judaism accepts the Old Testament it is a true religion as far as it goes. Many a Christian today says, "I believe in the New Testament," thereby implying indirectly that there is a fundamental difference between the Old and the New. The relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament is a problem with which also many a theological student and many a Christian pastor has wrestled in all earnestness.

We know that the New Testament places its clear stamp of approval on the whole of the Old Testament as being the very Word of God. We know that the same Holy Spirit is the divine Author of both covenants, that therefore they must contain a unity

which reflects the unity of the eternal and unchangeable God. We accept the theological principle that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old is revealed in the New; as St. Paul puts it, "the vail [which covers the Old Testament] is done away in Christ" (2 Cor. 3:14). All of this suggests that there is a fundamental unity which binds together the two Testaments into one religion. But what is that bond of unity?

This essay proposes to find that one thread of this unity is the concept of blood, with all its implications, in the Old Testament and the New. To the writer, it is this concept which has thrown open wide the glory and beauty of the religion of Old Testament Israel and has added that glory and beauty to the religion of Jesus Christ.

I

THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

The God of the Bible is a Covenant God — a God who does not stay far away from men with a spirit of disinterest and unconcern, but who, out of His own self-contained initiative, showers them with promises of His grace, comes close and talks to them, forgives their sins, and makes them His own. 275 times reference is made in the Bible to the covenant of God with man. God makes a covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses. He promises a new covenant to Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34; cf. Heb. 9:6-9). He gives us His new covenant in Christ. One feature especially should be noted as we trace the history of the covenants God has made with man. It is this, that with the covenant there is always a seal, an external sign and guarantee, in which the covenant is offered. Most commonly, and with only minor exceptions (e. g., the Sabbath as a seal of God's covenant, Ex. 31:12-17), the seal of the covenant is blood. In the Old Testament it is emphasized in passages such as the following:

And Moses sent young men of the Children of Israel which offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins; and half of the blood sprinkled he on the altar. . . . And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said: Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words. (Ex. 24:5-8.)

Gather My saints together unto Me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice [i. e., by blood] (Ps. 50:5).

By the blood of thy covenant I have sent thy prisoners out of the pit (Zech. 9:11).

In the New Testament the seal of the covenant again is blood, the blood of Christ. We see it most strikingly in the words of Jesus as He institutes the Lord's Supper: "This is My blood of the new testament" (Matt. 26:28). The fact that the blood of Jesus Christ is the seal of the new covenant is powerfully emphasized also in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing (Heb. 10:29).

And [ye are come] to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel (Heb. 12:24).

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect" (Heb. 13:20, 21).

In almost every instance, the seal of God's covenant is, or at least involves, blood. One exception of which we might take note is the seal of the rainbow, given to Noah (Gen. 9:8-17). This, as we can readily see, was an exceptional circumstance. It involved a covenant of very specific grace and contains the guarantee and assurance of God Himself that the clouds in which His bow was now set would never again pour down their awful waters to destroy the whole earth. Yet the covenant of the rainbow does not preclude a covenant of blood even in the case of Noah. Three specific references give every indication that Noah also knew God's covenant with sinful man as a covenant of blood — yes, that the covenant of blood was already an inherent part of his religion, anteceding the Flood.

The first such indication is the fact that Noah offers sacrifices of blood as soon as he steps out of the ark. We are told that "Noah builded an altar unto the Lord and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl and offered burnt offerings on the altar" (Gen. 8:20). This is the first mention in the Bible of the

building of an altar; yet we have no reason to doubt that the offering of sacrifices on altars goes back to the very beginning of patriarchal history. In the story of the Flood we have also, for the first time, the distinction made between clean and unclean animals. This distinction can also very well go back to the beginning of life after the Fall; indeed, some distinction becomes inevitable, with the curse pronounced upon the serpent. Notice especially that God Himself has provided the animals for Noah's sacrifice. All clean animals were sent into the ark by sevens, three pairs plus one, the odd one for sacrifice. We shall see later that the true essence of all sacrifice inheres in the covenant of blood. Thus the sacrifices of Noah are our first indication that Noah already lived with God under the terms of the covenant of blood.

The second such indication is the comment of Genesis 8:21, regarding the Lord's reaction to Noah's offerings. "And the Lord smelled a sweet savor." Such reference to the "sweet savor" of sacrifice occurs about forty times in the Old Testament, mostly in Leviticus and Numbers. It certainly has a deeper meaning than the anthropomorphic conception that the Lord enjoys the smell of burning fat. The fact is that this same Lord, who here approves Noah's sacrifice, can become thoroughly disgusted with that identical odor. Witness His word (Is. 1:11):

. . . I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs or of he-goats. . . . Bring no more vain oblations. (Cf. also Ps. 40:6; 51:16, 17.)

Clearly, if the Lord can approve one sacrifice and disapprove another, though the sacrifices are outwardly identical, then there must be a certain meaning and purpose behind that sacrifice. Only when that meaning and purpose finds expression in the heart of the offerer, does the sacrifice bring its "sweet savor" to the nostrils of the Lord. If, then, Noah's sacrifice wins such divine approval, the necessary implication is that the true, divinely intended meaning and purpose of sacrifice was fulfilled in the sacrifices of Noah. It means that Noah offered his sacrifice with a full understanding and humble appreciation of the covenant of blood.

The third indication that the covenant of blood was in force already and with its full significance for Noah comes with God's command in Gen. 9:3-6:

Every moving thing that liveth [animals] shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it and at the hand of every man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.

Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man.

These words, spoken long before the giving of God's Law on Sinai, nevertheless contain every necessary element for a full appreciation of the significance of blood as the seal of God's covenant of grace.

1. Blood is life. The pouring out of blood means the pouring out of life. "Shedding man's blood" stands for murder and comes to mean murder even when the method of murder has not been literally the letting of blood.

2. A profound reverence is here inculcated for blood, a reverence which, we have every reason to believe, anteceded the Flood also, though perhaps obscured in the wickedness of the prediluvian world. Man is expressly permitted to eat the flesh of animals. But blood is excepted from such permission. The blood is held sacred. It is not to be eaten, on the ground that the blood is the life.

3. The life of man is regarded as infinitely more precious than the life of any animal. The reason given is that man is the crown of creation, made in the image of God. Thus man is given power to kill animals and to eat them, power and dominion over their lives. But man has no power over his own life or that of his brother. To take such power is to usurp the authority which God reserves for Himself, and the punishment is death.

4. The dark shadow of Genesis 3 falls upon this passage with profound implications: "The day that thou eatest thereof thou

shalt surely die." "Because thou hast done this . . . dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." Blood means life only when it remains unseen, enclosed in the body and giving life to that body. But when the blood flows, when it pours out before the eyes of men, it carries a message, the message of the horror of death. Never could Noah or any faithful child of God see blood, whether the blood of animal or of man, without being reminded that death is in the world because of sin, that his own life is forfeit, that he is a sinner and therefore has no right to live. Truly, those who saw such significance in the blood would abhor it, would not dream of eating it!

5. There is also hope in this passage. Though the life of man is forfeit indeed, God Himself treasures that life. Though man has turned against God, still God grants him dominion. And God cannot forget that He made man in His own image. Inherent in these words is the message of redemption. Why should God so care for Noah, so richly love and bless him? Is God just playing with man during this life, waiting for the most sadistically enjoyable moment to snatch him away in death for his sin? Impossible. Noah's continued existence, his deliverance from the death the whole world has died in the Flood, the blessings of dominion, the sacredness of his life before God, the command to be fruitful and multiply and repopulate the earth—all indicates that God in some wonderful way has overcome the curse of sin, abolished the horror of death, and won for man eternal victory. The serpent's head is crushed. The devil's victory has been snatched from him. Man is saved.

The significance of the covenant of blood, already known therefore to Noah, and, I would hold, to the Patriarchs before him, is powerfully confirmed in the covenant of Sinai. The richest single passage on the subject is Lev. 17:10-14:

. . . I will even set My face against that soul that eateth blood and will cut him off from among his people.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

Therefore I said unto the Children of Israel: No soul of you

shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood.

And whatsoever man there be of the Children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten, he shall even pour out the blood thereof and cover it with dust.

For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof. Therefore I said unto the Children of Israel: Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof. Whosoever eateth it shall be cut off.

Here we have a clear statement, four times repeated, of the primary significance of blood. "Life is in the blood." "It [blood] is the life." "Blood is for the life." "The life is the blood." This concept, already defined, as we have seen, in Genesis 9, is fundamental. No religious reference to blood in the Bible can be understood without it. It is the basis of the religious conceptions of God's people from the beginning of time. Indeed, the superstitious fear of blood evident in many a pagan religion, perhaps even the revulsion to blood which is almost a part of "human nature," may well be traced to this fact—that blood is life. Imagine Adam and Eve, standing over the dead body of their son, Abel. It is the first time they have seen death in man, the first taste of the ultimate horror of sin. Two inescapable impressions come to them at that sight—one is the dreadful stillness, the immovable rigidity of a body without life; the other is the blood of that murder, spilled on the ground. There, in the blood, is the difference between life and death. The life is in the blood. When the blood is spilled, life flees. And involuntarily all the horror of death is transferred to the blood.

So prominent is this idea that blood (as signifying either "life" or, more often, "death," depending on the point of view) becomes a part of the vocabulary of God's people, yes, and of other people. The Bible is full of such references. It is "the voice of Abel's blood" that cries to God from the ground. Judas betrays "innocent blood." Pilate claims to be "innocent of the blood" of Jesus. The Jews cannot use the thirty pieces of silver in the Temple, because "it is the price of blood." Rarely indeed is the word blood used in the Bible without carrying the religious significance of death.

There is not a particle of heathen superstition in this reverence of the Bible for blood. Rather, it takes us deep into the heart of the religion of the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New. The chief concern of all Scripture goes back to the first chapters of Genesis and their account of the fall of man into sin. There is nothing more serious for man, more to be dreaded, than death. Death is the summary and summation of all the evil of sin. The whole aim of the religion of the Bible is to undo the evil of death. If blood is life, then the shedding of blood, or death, inevitably will play not a minor, but the major part in that religion.

Both Law and Gospel are contained in the concept of blood: Law, because the very sight of blood must always remind man that death, even his own death also, is his own and the world's grimmest reality. As long as the curse of death hangs over him, he is cut off from God, doomed under the just wages of his sin. Hence the profound reverence for blood, as it is inculcated in the Law. Blood is never to be eaten. The hunter must pour out the blood of the animal he takes, pour it to the earth, and cover it with dust. Every sight of blood instills religious awe; for to Israel, blood, whether shed purposefully or accidentally, righteously or unrighteously, on the altar or in the field or at home, always carries the message of the sin and death of man.

But the blood also contains the most precious Gospel, as we see from these words of Leviticus 17: "The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." "I have given it to you upon the altar," says the Lord. This blood is the pledge of God's covenant of grace with His people, a covenant which originates entirely in God's love, a covenant which God "has given" and which man can only receive as a free gift. But if it is received as a free gift, then it is received by faith. Thus in the words "I have given it to you" lie hidden the two great New Testament concepts of justification: the *sola gratia* and the *sola fide*. "I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." The word "atonement" signifies a covering, a protection from wrath, and

thus salvation. We shall discuss it further in the next chapter. Here, however, notice particularly the word "soul." We sometimes forget that the primary meaning of the word "soul" is simply "life." God says He gives the blood of animals on the altar as a covering for the life of men. That is, the animal sheds its blood and dies in order that men may not have to die, but may find victory over sin and death. Here lies the third great New Testament principle of justification, the Vicarious Atonement, life for life, blood for blood, death for death.

But it all centers in blood. The covenant of blood is God's gracious means of redeeming man from death and its curse. At the same time the blood of that covenant is God's gracious means of proclaiming that redemption by word and by sign so that man may find its comfort, and believe it unto salvation.

II

THE BLOOD OF ATONEMENT

In the Hebrew the word which we translate "atone" or "make an atonement" is *kaphar*. It is used 101 times in the Old Testament. In only one single passage does it occur in its native sense, "to cover." This is Gen. 6:14, where Noah is commanded to "pitch," or "cover," the ark within and without with pitch. In all the other passages *kaphar* takes the religious and moral sense of covering over sin. The clearest definition is given by Scripture itself in Lev. 16:30:

On that day shall the priest make an atonement for you [*kaphar*] to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.

A number of other translations of the word, besides "make an atonement," occur in the Authorized Version, and they help make its meaning clear. In Gen. 32:30 Jacob says: "I will appease him [Esau] with the present." In Deut. 21:8 Moses appeals to God: "Be merciful, O Lord, unto Thy people Israel." Prov. 16:14 uses *kaphar* in the sense of "pacify" — "a wise man will pacify it [i.e., the wrath of a king]." Other translations are "forgive," "make reconciliation," "pardon," "purge," "be cleansed."

In the vast majority of instances, however, the Hebrew *kaphar* is translated with the words "make an atonement." About 75 pas-

sages, most of them in Leviticus and Numbers, express the idea that it is the blood of the sacrifice which makes atonement for the soul (i. e., the life) of man, sparing him death, which is the wages of his rebellion against God. Thus, for instance, Lev. 17:11: "It is the blood that maketh the atonement for your souls."

Three nouns derived from forms of *kaphar* might be mentioned in this connection. One is *kapporeth*, used in one sense only, to indicate what Luther calls the *Gnadenstuhl*, and what the A. V. translates as the "mercy seat" of the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the ark lie the condemning tables of God's Law. Covering those tables is the *kapporeth*, literally, the "cover" of the box, but typically "covering" man's transgression of the Law. For the *kapporeth* represents God's atoning and forgiving mercy, which annuls man's disobedience, his guilt, and his death. On the mercy seat, as we shall see, the priest sprinkles the blood of the atonement, the guarantee that death, which man has brought upon himself, is atoned vicariously by the death of the sacrificed animal. Carved on the ends of the *kapporeth*, with their wings stretching over it, are cherubim. We recall that cherubim were placed with a flaming sword at the entrance of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life, lest man eat and live forever. Thus the Ark represents again the twofold aspect of God's covenant—on the one hand, Law, which uncompromisingly condemns sin and punishes it with death; on the other, Gospel, by which the God of all mercy finds in blood the price of atonement for man.

The second noun derived from *kaphar* is *kippurim*, which might literally be translated "atonements." It is used only eight times, and is the standard noun form for *kaphar*. Its most familiar use is in the phrase *yom kippurim*, the Day of Atonement.

The third noun is *kopher*, usually translated "ransom." We shall have occasion to refer to it in the next chapter, when we speak of the blood of redemption.

Any discussion of the blood of atonement brings us immediately into the whole sacrificial system commanded by God to His people Israel. We need not discuss in detail the various types of sacrifice. A brief outline of the general mode of procedure in the offering of sacrifices is necessary, however. We can list seven steps:

THE COVENANT OF BLOOD

1. The animal to be sacrificed is carefully selected. Thirty-nine passages indicate how important it is that the animal be perfect, without blemish. The most detailed list of requirements is that given in Lev. 22:18-25.

2. The man who brings the sacrifice lays his hand on the head of the animal to signify that the animal dies vicariously for him (Lev. 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29).

3. The animal is killed by cutting the throat. The blood is caught in a basin (Ex. 12:22; 24:6).

4. Ceremonial use is made of the blood. Here there is wide variation, depending on the type and purpose of the sacrifice. The blood is sprinkled on the altar (Ex. 24:6; Lev. 1:5); smeared on the horns of the altar (Lev. 16:18); sprinkled on the vessels of the altar and of the Tabernacle (Lev. 16:16); poured out at the base of the altar (Lev. 4:7). In consecrating the priests it is smeared on the tip of the right ear, on the thumb of the right hand, on the great toe of the right foot (Lev. 8:23, 24); and sprinkled on the garments (Lev. 8:30). A similar application of blood is required in the ceremony for cleansing a leper (Lev. 14:14). Blood is sprinkled on the people (Ex. 24:8). On the Day of Atonement it is sprinkled on and before the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (Lev. 16:14). In the Passover it is struck with hyssop on the doorposts and lintels of the houses (Ex. 12:7).

5. The animal is skinned, the fat and certain inside parts are removed, and the carcass is cut up according to a definite pattern (Lev. 1:6-17; 3:9-11).

6. Then the procedure again varies widely, according to the type of sacrifice. There were three main types, each with variations. In the burnt offering (Leviticus 1) the entire animal was burned on the altar. In the case of trespass and sin offerings (Leviticus 4—7) only the fat and inward parts were burned on the altar. The remainder was burned in the place of ashes outside the camp. In some cases the meat of the sin offering, or parts of it, was eaten by the priests. In other cases (for instance, when the offering was made for the priest's sins or when the blood was used within the tabernacle) the sacrifice was entirely burned. In the case of peace

offerings (Lev. 3:7, 11-38), which were in effect spontaneous sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise, the breast and right shoulder was eaten by the priests; the remainder of the flesh by the offerer and his family, with the restriction that only he could eat of it who was morally and ceremonially clean. The fat and inwards were burned on the altar.

7. The ashes from the burnings on the altar were carried outside the camp to the place of ashes, where the sin offerings were burned (Lev. 4:12; 6:11).

The entire pattern of sacrifice, with its significance, can be summarized from the ceremonials connected with the Day of Atonement, as presented in Leviticus 16. All the sacrifices prescribed in this chapter are, of course, additional to the morning and evening burnt offerings of lambs, offered daily throughout the year (Ex. 29:38-44) and for which the fire on the altar was never to go out (Lev. 6:12, 13). Five animals are involved in the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement.

The first is a bullock, which Aaron, the high priest (or the high priests, his sons, after him, v. 32), offers as a "sin offering, which is for himself," thereby making "an atonement for himself and for his house (v. 6)." Aaron takes a handful of incense, and a censer of burning coals into the Holy Place within the veil, and there puts the incense upon the fire, so that the cloud of smoke covers the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat. Then Aaron brings the blood of the bullock he has just killed and sprinkles it before and upon the mercy seat, seven times (vv. 11-14). The fat of the bullock is later burned on the altar (v. 25), and the flesh is burned outside the camp (v. 27).

The second offering is a kid of the goats, a sin offering for the people (v. 15). Two goats are selected originally, and it is determined by lot which shall be sacrificed and which shall be the scapegoat (v. 8). The blood of the goat which is killed, like that of the bullock, is brought within the veil and sprinkled on and before the mercy seat. This sprinkling of blood makes an atonement for the holy place, which is profaned by the sins of the people of Israel (v. 16). The blood of sprinkling also makes atonement for the Tabernacle and for the altar (vv. 16, 19), which also need to be "cleansed and hallowed from the uncleanness of the

Children of Israel." Blood both of the bullock and of this goat is smeared on the horns of the altar (v. 18). The fat of the goat is burned later with that of the bullock on the altar, and its flesh outside the camp.

The third animal involved in the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement is the scapegoat. Aaron lays both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confesses over him "all the iniquities of the Children of Israel and all their transgressions and all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat," and then sends the goat bearing all their iniquities into the wilderness (vv. 21, 22).

The last two animals are rams, offered now as burnt offerings, the first to make an atonement for Aaron himself and the second for the people (vv. 3, 5, 24). The full significance and application of the ceremonies of the *yom kippurim* is summarized in the last two verses of Leviticus 16:

And he [the High Priest] shall make an atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make an atonement for the Tabernacle of the congregation, and for the altar, and he shall make an atonement for the priests and for all the people of the congregation.

And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year. . . .

It will readily be seen, even from this quick summary, that the conception of sacrifice as something man gives to God has no place whatever in Old Testament theology. To all heathen religions sacrifice means that man deprives himself of something or endures suffering in order to win the pity and favor of God. Thus heathen sacrifice becomes in effect man's attempt to bribe God, or to put God in debt to Himself. That any such idea is an abomination to God is indicated in a passage like Rom. 11:35:

Who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?

Or see the richly poetic passage Ps. 50:5-13, in which God reproves His people for imagining that in their sacrifices they are giving something to God—when, in reality, all that they can possibly give belongs to God already:

Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice. . . .

Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee. I am God, even thy God.

I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before Me.

I will take no bullock out of thy house nor he-goats out of thy folds.

For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.

I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine.

If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is Mine, and the fullness thereof.

Will I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? (See also Deut. 10:14, 16, 17.)

Yet even Israel, whenever they lost sight of the real significance of blood, inevitably drifted into this false heathen notion of sacrifice. And again, once their conception of sacrifice had thus degenerated into pious bribery of God, all true distinction between Jehovah and the gods of the nations, it will readily be seen, is lost—Jehovah is just another god. It matters not by what name God is called; yes, it is perfectly reasonable to sacrifice both to Baal in the high places and to Jehovah in the Temple.

The Prophet Micah has a powerful passage (ch. 6:6, 7) showing the folly of any attempt of man to buy the favor of God with sacrifices:

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

This is an interesting list of the stages through which a man may go to still the voice of conscience and to win the favor of God. First he will come with burnt offerings. If this brings him no assurance of peace with God, he may offer greater gifts—thousands of rams, ten thousands of rivers of oil. If these do not satisfy, he may be driven to give God that which is most precious to man, the highest sacrifice a man can think of offering—and pity the

poor heathen who, in their desperate struggle to buy the favor of God, have been willing to offer it—the first-born son, the fruit of the body, for the sin of the soul. All these heathen attempts to quiet the conscience and to find peace with God are truly pathetic, the more so because they rest on the blasphemously false premise that the mercy of God is for sale and that man has the power to earn and to buy God's favor.

The spirit of sacrifice in the Old Testament Law has nothing in common with such heathen conceptions. Nowhere is the slightest impression created that man, in sacrificing to God, is giving God a gift. Rather, through the sacrifice, God gives His gifts to man. In the blood of the sacrifice God is showering on man the riches of forgiving grace. This is the significance of the word "atonement." Again and again in Leviticus we find a sentence such as the following, summarizing the essence of sacrifice: "The priest shall make an atonement for him as concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35, etc.). In the sacrifice, man does not rise to God. Rather, God condescends to man. This great fact is emphasized in passages such as Lev. 1:4:

And he [the man who brings a voluntary burnt sacrifice] shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

Note the words "it shall be accepted for him." God is in no sense obligated. The acceptance of the sacrifice is an act of pure grace, and man remains forever the debtor to God. Or recall again the key passage, Lev. 17:11:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls.

The sacrifice is not man's device to win the favor of God. It is God's device to bring His grace and forgiveness to man; for, says God, "I have given it to you to make an atonement for your souls," i. e., for the life you have forfeited by your sin.

Thus it is perfectly consistent that God demands humility from His people. Never for a moment dare they think that they are better than other peoples, that they have deserved grace. In his last words to Israel, Moses goes out of his way to impress the importance of total, self-effacing humility before God, humility that gives Jehovah all glory. He says, for instance, in Deut. 7:6-8:

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord, thy God; the Lord, thy God, hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people:

But because the Lord loved you [pure grace], and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers [pure faithfulness], hath the Lord brought you out.

Or, again, Deut. 9:4-6:

Speak not thou in thine heart after that the Lord, thy God, hath cast them out from before thee, saying: For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land. . . .

Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord, thy God, doth drive them out from before thee and that He may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Understand, therefore, that the Lord, thy God, giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people.

Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord, thy God, to wrath in the wilderness. . . .

Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you (v. 24).

As a matter of fact, every exhortation to fear the Lord, to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind, to trust Him, to beware of forgetting Him—all this is an exhortation to give the Lord all glory and therefore to complete personal self-effacement and humility.

Furthermore, God demands repentance and confession of sins in connection with the sacrifices His people offer. We have seen how Aaron confesses the sins of the people upon the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. The man who sins and would bring a trespass offering for his atonement is required to "confess that he hath sinned in that thing" (Lev. 5:5). If, when the people have entered the land which God will give them, they become proud and forget Him, then God will bitterly afflict them. But God promises in Lev. 26:40-42:

If they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against Me, and that also they have walked contrary unto Me;

And that I also have walked contrary unto them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity,

Then will I remember My covenant.

With this background we can readily summarize the frame of mind with which the Israelite must offer his sacrifice if it is to accomplish its purpose and bring a sweet-smelling savor to the nostrils of God. He comes in humility, as a condemned sinner, knowing that by his transgression and by the rebellion of his heart against God he deserves only punishment and death. In such humility he knows that there is no goodness in himself which he can offer to God by way of atonement for his guilt. He offers his sacrifice of blood, offers it in peace and joy, for he believes God's promise that God will accept such a sacrifice as a token of the complete and final atonement for his sin. And so he goes to his house justified, victorious over the curse of sin and death; justified by the grace of God, through faith. True, faith is not directly mentioned in connection with the laws of sacrifice. The children of Israel at Sinai know no dogmatic formulation of the doctrine of faith. Yet faith exists powerfully in this whole scheme of atonement. The people are saved by faith even as we are. For faith, after all, is produced in the heart of man, not through the knowledge of its necessity, nor through intensive strivings to have it, but through simple contemplation of God's Word and gracious promises.

The importance of faith is underscored by the many passages in the Psalms and in the Prophets which depict the righteous indignation of God toward His people when sacrifices are performed, not in repentance and faith, but as a matter of religious routine — like the heathen sacrifices by which man seeks to bribe God into submission to himself. Thus:

Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. Thou delightest not in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. . . .

Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar. Ps. 51:16-19.

Here it is clear that the sacrifice is acceptable to God only when it is offered in a spirit of humility and repentance, or in that faith which, by way of the sacrifice, receives for its salvation God's promise of forgiveness and atonement. This same thought is expressed in the Prophets. Thus Is. 66:2, 3:

. . . to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word.

He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrifices a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. . . .

So horribly are the God-ordained sacrifices perverted when they are offered in anything less than a spirit of contrition, humility, and faith in God's Word and promises. Or again, Hos. 6:6:

I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (See also Is. 1:11 ff.; Jer. 6:20; 7:21-23; Hos. 8:13.)

It might be well to note at this point, however, that for all their indignation against the unregenerate coldness in which Israel brings its offerings, the Prophets have no intention of rejecting the sacrificial covenant as such. That the inward meaning of sacrifice has not been changed since the days of Moses and Aaron is indicated in passages such as the following:

For in Mine holy mountain . . . will I require your offerings, and the first fruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. I will accept you with your sweet savor. . . . Ezek. 20:40, 41.

. . . the priests shall make your burnt offerings upon the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord God." Ezek. 43:27. (See also Jer. 33:11, 18; Zech. 14:24; Mal. 3:3, 4.)

One further thought in connection with the Blood of Atonement as we find it in the Old Testament sacrifices. The blood of animals has no intrinsic value to atone for the sin and death of man. In the

final analysis, the blood of the animal is far too cheap to serve as a real substitute for the blood of man. Thus Heb. 10:4: "It is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins." This fact is recognized also, indirectly, in the Old Testament. The scapegoat of the Day of Atonement does not shed its blood in death; and yet it is clearly stated (Lev. 16:10, 21, 22) that the priest makes an atonement with the scapegoat also for the sins of the people. Furthermore, it is interesting to examine the scale of trespass offerings which are acceptable to God, as outlined in Lev. 5:6-13. First a female lamb or kid of the goats is required. But if the man is not able to bring a lamb, then he may bring two turtledoves, or two young pigeons. But if he is not able to bring even these, he shall bring the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. This shall then be burned by fire on the altar, and by this the priest shall make an atonement for his sin, and it shall be forgiven him. It is evident, then, that God is not bound by the covenant which He makes with man in the blood of animals. He can set it aside. He can atone for man's sin without blood, as in the case of the scapegoat or in the case of the offering of fine flour. Clearly, the blood does not save by its own merit. It is not really the price of the sin of man. Rather the blood is the sign, or token of God's covenant, as it is directly termed in the institution of the Passover (Ex. 12:13; cf. Ch. V), and indirectly in connection with circumcision (Gen. 17:11; cf. Ch. IV). The Old Testament sacrifices are thus similar to the Sacraments of the New Testament. Even as Luther asks, "How can water do such great things?" so we might also ask here, "How can the blood of animals do such great things?" And the answer would be much the same as Luther's answer: "It is not the blood, indeed, that does them, but the Word of God, His command and promise, which is in and with the blood, and faith which trusts such Word of God in the blood." Yet this, too, must be added. Just as the promises which God attaches to Baptism and to the Lord's Supper rest directly on the price which He has paid for the sin of man in Jesus Christ, His Son, so also the promises which God in the Old Testament attaches to the sacrifices of His people rest directly on the wonderful truth that God Himself, in the fullness of time, will offer for man the only sacrifice in all existence which literally and intrinsically is

more precious than man and which literally and intrinsically can be man's substitute in death and in all that death implies. That sacrifice is God Himself, in the person of His only-begotten Son.

This blessed truth brings us to the blood of atonement as we find it in the New Testament. It is worthy of note that the word "atonement," though very common in the Old Testament as the A. V. translation for *kapbar*, is used only once in the New Testament, and there as a translation of the Greek *katallagee* in Rom. 5:11: ". . . by whom [Christ] we have now received the atonement." In all other instances where *katalasso* and its noun form, *katallagee*, are used in the New Testament, they are rendered in English by "reconcile" or "reconciliation." There is no harm in this inconsistency, of course, since the English words "reconciliation" and "atonement" (i. e., at-one-ment) are synonyms. The inconsistency is found also in the Old Testament, A. V., where "reconcile" occurs seven times as an alternate translation for *kapbar* (usually rendered, "make an atonement").

More important for our purpose is to see how the Hebrew *kapbar* is rendered in the Septuagint, for it is the Septuagint which commonly sets the precedent according to which Old Testament concepts find their rendition in the Greek of the New Testament. The LXX renders *kapbar* consistently by the verb *exilaskomai*, "to appease, conciliate, be merciful." This particular form, however, does not occur at all in the New Testament. There we find only *hilaskomai*, without the prefix *ex*. Even this occurs only twice. One passage is the plea of the publican in the Temple, "God, be merciful (*hilastheeti*) to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The other is Heb. 2:17: "It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest . . . to make reconciliation for (*eis to hilastesthai*) the sins of the people." The noun form *hilasmos* occurs twice in First John: "He is the Propitiation for our sins" (2:2); and "God hath sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins" (4:10). A second noun derivative is *hilasteerion*. This is the word used consistently in the LXX to translate *kapporeth*, or "mercy seat." It occurs in this same sense in Heb. 9:5. The one other place it is used in the New Testament is Rom. 3:25, where the A. V. renders it like *hilasmos*, "propitiation" — ". . . whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiation through

faith in His blood." Since the word is used so little in the New Testament, it will probably never be decisively settled whether *hilasteerion* in this passage is properly rendered as "propitiation," or whether it ought to be translated "mercy seat." The latter makes good sense when we know the significance of the *kapporeth* in the Old Testament. Just as the mercy seat covers the Law and the wrath of God, so does Christ. Just as it has this power because it is sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice, so Christ shields us from God's wrath by being sprinkled, as it were, with the blood of His own sacrifice of Himself. Just as the Jews were to believe that the wrath of God was appeased by this sprinkling of blood, so we are to have such faith in the blood of Christ. Finally, just as the mercy seat symbolized the very real, local presence of God among His people (Ex. 25:22; Lev. 16:2), so in the person of Christ God is truly and actually present among men. Thus it is perhaps the very intent of Paul that we should translate his words, "God hath set forth Christ to be the Mercy Seat, through faith in His blood."

In any case, whatever the word is by which the atonement idea is conveyed from the Old Testament to the New, this much is clear and unmistakable — atonement in the New Testament is *always* attached to Christ; more specifically, to the *blood* of Christ, who offers up Himself for sin. In Christ the whole Old Testament concept of the blood which makes atonement for the soul of man comes to its perfect climax and fulfillment. This thought is the heart of the New Testament Gospel, and it occurs literally dozens of times. Notice in these samples the constant reference to the blood, i. e., the death of Christ, His sacrifice of Himself:

Rom. 3:25: Whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiation through faith in *His blood*.

Rom. 5:9: Being now justified by *His blood*, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

Rom. 5:10: We were reconciled to God by the *death* of His Son.

Rom. 5:11: By him [Christ] we have now received the *atonement*.

2 Cor. 5:19: God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.

2 Cor. 5:21: He hath made Him to be *sin* for us. (Note: *Hamartia* is the regular LXX translation of the Hebrew *chattath*,

meaning either "sin" or "sin offering." Here the meaning may well be "sin offering.")

Gal. 1:4: Who gave Himself for our sins.

Eph. 2:13: Ye who were far off were made nigh by the *blood of Christ*.

Eph. 5:2: Christ . . . hath given Himself for us an *offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor*.

Col. 1:20: It pleased the Father . . . having made peace through the *blood of His cross*, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself.

1 Peter 1:2: . . . sprinkling of the *blood of Jesus Christ*.

1 John 1:7: The *blood of Jesus Christ, His Son*, cleanseth us from all sin. (Recall Lev. 16:30: "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to *cleanse you*, that ye may be clean *from all your sins* before the Lord.")

1 John 5:6: This is He that came by water and *blood*. . . .

Rev. 1:5: . . . to Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own *blood*.

Rev. 7:14: These are they which . . . have washed their robes and made them white in the *blood of the Lamb*.

John 1:29: Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

No Jew, with his background in the sacrifices and terminology of the Old Testament, would have any doubt whatever as to the meaning and significance of these references. All point to Christ as the Fulfillment of all the promises of God, given in the blood of the Old Testament. Christ Jesus is the final Sacrifice, the End of all sacrifices. The vicarious atonement, the substitutionary death for the death of man, is found in Him alone. His blood is no longer a symbol or a token of the covenant of grace. His death is that covenant. Man is the crown of creation. Therefore in all creation there can be found no substitute precious enough to die his death and endure his hell for him. From beyond creation God the Creator Himself steps into the picture and in the person of His Son becomes a sacrifice of such glorious and intrinsic worth as can fully and fittingly atone for all the sin of all the world of all time.

The most powerful development of this central thought is found in the Epistle to the Hebrews. We cannot here make an exegetical study of this wonderful Epistle. There are, however, five major

thoughts related to the covenant of blood, and particularly the blood of atonement, which I should like to point out briefly.

1. The writer of Hebrews recognizes, as does the entire Bible, that the great, universal problem of man is the problem of sin and death. After glorifying the deity of Christ in the first chapter, he turns in chapter 2 to His humanity. In the 14th and 15th verses the writer defines the basic necessity of that humanity in these words:

Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood,
He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death
He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the
devil, and deliver them who *through fear of death were all their
lifetime subject to bondage.*

The curse of God against sin cannot be abrogated. The curse of death must be borne in full. It is to bear that curse for man that Christ, the Son of God, assumes human flesh. But, above all, note the emphasis on death as the most fearful problem of human existence. All of life becomes useless and fruitless if man must die. Death is the fearful taskmaster, making life itself bondage and slavery. Freedom from death, victory over death — that is the great and universal need of man.

2. The writer of this Epistle recognizes that victory over death cannot be achieved except through death. God's covenant of grace, by its very nature and purpose, requires death, that is, the shedding of blood. This thought, already expressed in the passage quoted above, is developed in Heb. 9:16-22:

Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death
of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead;
otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

Out of the very word "testament" the writer deduces that death is necessary. The very fact that God, the Testator, makes a "will," or "testament," with man, is a clear indication of the necessity of death — yes, even that God, the Testator, expects to die, to bring the Testament into living reality for men. It should be noted that this application of the word "testament," while inherent in the Greek *diatheke*, is not directly associated with the Hebrew word *berith*. Nevertheless, it serves strikingly to illustrate the necessity

of death — which fact the writer now proceeds to prove directly from the Old Testament Scriptures (especially Exodus 24):

Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying: This is the *blood of the testament* which God hath enjoined unto 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.*

The reference in the last verse to "purging" and "remission" by blood recognizes again that it is the sin of man which brings about his death and that victory over death comes with remission of sin. Yet such remission, as demonstrated by the entire Old Testament Ceremonial Law, is possible only through the shedding of blood, that is, through death.

3. The writer makes it clear that the blood of animals in the Old Testament has no intrinsic value to free man from sin and death. It is only a sign, pointing to the sacrifice of Christ. Yes, even the sins committed under the Old Covenant are effectually and really purged, not by the blood of animal sacrifices, but by the blood of Christ. Thus Heb. 9:13-15:

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh [i. e., of earthly garments, vessels, etc.], 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? 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 [deathless] inheritance.

Thus when the Old Testament saints escaped the wrath of God over their sins, it was not because God weakly closed His eyes and went back on His own divine Law. Rather they could be forgiven by a righteous God, in view of the blood propitiation of Christ, the perfect sacrifice to come. This is the marvel of the God who

remains just and yet is the Justifier of him who believes in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

The inadequacy of Old Testament sacrifices is stressed also in Heb. 10:1-4:

For the Law, having a *shadow of good things to come*, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered, because that the worshipers, once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*

4. Jesus Christ, by His sacrifice of Himself, is the End of all animal sacrifices. He is Himself holy, separate from sinners, without blemish or spot. Therefore He needs not, like the Old Testament high priest, first to make an offering for Himself. Being without sin, He is not subject to death and therefore needs no one to die for Him. Yet He, the sinless Son of God, offers Himself willingly into death, once, and for all men of all time. Thereafter no other sacrifice, no more blood, is needed. For the price of the sin of the world has been paid actually and in full to the end of the world. Thus Heb. 7:26, 27:

Such an high priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins and then for the people's; for this He did *once*, when He offered up Himself.

The same thought is expressed in 9:25-28:

Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the Holy Place every year with the blood of others; for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now *once* in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was *once* offered to bear the sins of many.

See also chapter 10:10, 12, 14:

. . . we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*. . . This Man, after he had offered *one sacrifice*

for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God. . . . For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.

5. The writer to the Hebrews points out that the very nature of such a vicarious atonement by the blood of Christ for our sins requires that we believe it, that we receive it by faith. Thus note the following scattered references from the tenth chapter:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart, in *full assurance of faith*, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the profession of our *faith without wavering* (for faithful is He that promised:) . . . (vv. 19, 22, 23).

Now, the just shall live by *faith* . . . but we . . . are of them which *believe* to the saving of the soul (vv. 38, 39).

Since the atonement of man has cost so precious a price, the stern warning is also in place that it is not to be despised:

He that despised Moses' Law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God and hath counted *the blood of the covenant* wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (Vv. 28, 29.)

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (v. 31).

So much for the Atonement. The blood of atonement is the *blood of the covenant* of a gracious God. In the Old Testament it is the blood which God has given to man upon the altar to make an atonement for his soul (Lev. 17:11). In the New Testament it is the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, which cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Yet essentially there is but one covenant, one testament, one way of salvation. Its origin is the pure, undeserved grace of God to sinful man. Its price is blood. Under the old covenant the price is the token blood of animals. It is like paper money—paper money has no value in itself; yet it has real purchasing power nevertheless because there is gold behind it in Fort Knox and because the word of the government supports it. Behind the sacrifice of animals and the giving to these sacrifices the power of atonement stands the Word of God, offering to man the blood of Christ, itself eternally precious, His death eternally

able to deliver all men from the power of death, because He is the Son of God. Finally, the one way of salvation in the Bible asks for nothing more than simple, trusting, repentant faith.

Salvation by grace, for the blood's sake, through faith. This is the salvation of Noah and the antediluvian patriarchs before him; of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of Paul, of each of us. This is the one true religion of all time.

New Orleans, La.

(To be concluded)