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The Covenant of Blood

BY PAUL G. BRETSCHER

III

THE BLOOD OF REDEMPTION

In both the Old Testament and the New the idea of redemption is closely related to that of atonement. Redemption is simply another picture of salvation, another facet in the diamond of God's gracious covenant with fallen man.

Two words are used in the Hebrew, almost equally often, to signify redemption. They are *gaal* and *padab*. A number of passages in which both words occur give evidence that they are to be regarded as synonyms. For instance:

Jer. 31:11: The Lord hath redeemed [*padab*] Jacob, and ransomed [*gaal*] him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.

Hos. 13:14: I will ransom [*padab*] them from the power of the grave; I will redeem [*gaal*] them from death.

Lev. 27:27: If it be of an unclean beast, then he shall redeem [*padab*] it according to thine estimation, . . . or if it be not redeemed [*gaal*], then it shall be sold.

Is. 35:9, 10: . . . the redeemed [*padab*] shall walk there: and the ransomed [*gaal*] of the Lord shall return.

Mention should also be made of a third verb, *qanab*. This is the common Hebrew word meaning to "buy," or "purchase." In a few passages it is used with a definite religious significance, as an additional synonym for *gaal* and *padab*. Thus, for instance, in Moses' song of deliverance, Ex. 15:13, 16:

Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed [*gaal*] . . . till Thy people pass over which Thou hast purchased [*qanab*].

See also Ps. 74:2:

Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased [*qanab*] of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which Thou hast redeemed [*gaal*].

One other word of interest here is the noun *kopher*, usually translated as "ransom." Notice that *kopher* is one of the noun forms

of *kaphar*, "to make an atonement," with which we dealt in the previous chapter. *Kopher*, however, probably derives its meaning from the original sense of *kaphar*, "to cover." Thus the "ransom" is a "covering," much in the sense in which we today put up collateral to "cover" a loan. For our present purpose, it is most important to note that *kopher*, wherever used, signifies the payment of a price. Thus, see:

Prov. 6:35: A jealous man "will not regard any ransom [*kopher*], neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts."

Job 36:18, 19: Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke; then a great ransom [*kopher*] cannot deliver thee. Will He esteem thy riches? No, not gold, nor all the forces of thy strength.

The *redemption* idea, like that of *atonement*, plays a prominent part in Old Testament Ceremonial Law. It is not necessary for us here to define the complexities of the laws regarding various redemptions. Let us look briefly, however, at a few points that do serve our present purpose.

The first, and religiously most significant, of all redemptions is that of the first-born of men and the firstlings of animals. This is defined for the first time in Ex. 13:2, 11-15:

Sanctify unto Me all the first-born, whatsoever openeth the womb among the Children of Israel, both of man and of beast. It is Mine. . . .

Thou shalt set apart unto the Lord all that openeth the matrix and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the Lord's.

And every firstling of an ass [unclean] thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck; and all the first-born of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.

And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him. . . .

. . . when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the first-born of my children I redeem.

Note the following: (1) The life of all first-born males of men and of animals in Israel is regarded as forfeit. Thus it is evident that the Children of Israel were spared the curse of the tenth plague in Egypt, not because they were good and undeserving of death and judgment, but only because the mercy of God planned redemption for them. (2) Israel is forever to be aware that because of their sin their lives are just as forfeit before God as were the lives of those slain in Egypt; they have no right to live. (3) This remembrance is symbolized in the law of *redemption*. The first-born male of any clean animal is to be sacrificed to God. It must die. The first-born male of any unclean animal, such as the ass, must either be redeemed by the death of a lamb for it, or must die by breaking its neck (no shedding of blood here because this cannot be a sacrificial death). The first-born children of men must be redeemed. The manner of this latter redemption is not clearly stated here. The implication at this point seems to be that the first-born son is also redeemed by the death of a lamb or by some other sacrifice. Later, in the Law of Sinai, God takes for Himself the Levites instead of the first-born of all Israel to serve as His priesthood and in His Tabernacle (Num. 3:12, 13). Under this new arrangement the first-born sons of the rest of Israel are now redeemed by money (five shekels, Num. 3:45-51), the money to be used for the service of the sanctuary. The payment of this redemption money was involved when the parents of Jesus brought Him to the Temple to present Him to the Lord and "to do for Him after the custom of the Law" (Luke 2:22, 23, 27). Detailed regulations on this redemption ceremony may be found in Num. 8:17-19; 18:15-17.

Precise legal terms are laid down in the Law also for other redemptions: redemption of fields (Lev. 25:23-34); redemption of men who in poverty have sold themselves into slavery (Lev. 25:47-55); avenging ("redeeming," *gaal*) of blood by slaying the murderer (Num. 35:11, 12, 19, 30-33). In connection with the law of blood vengeance on a murderer, it is definitely stipulated that "ye shall take no satisfaction [*kopher*, "ransom"] for the life of a murderer which is guilty of death . . . the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein but by the blood of him that shed it."

Without discussing in detail any of these redemptions, there is one clear thought in all of them with an intense bearing on our subject—*redemption* inherently, in the very meaning of the word (cf., above, the relation of *kopher* and *qanab* to *gaal* and *padab*), always involves a price. Perhaps the price is a sacrifice, as of a lamb, or the payment of money, or the death of the murderer, but always there is a price to be paid. Always redemption costs something.

Now let us turn specifically to the many passages in which God is called the Redeemer of His people. Are we justified, then, in reading into every use of the name Redeemer, the idea that it costs God something to save man? I hold that this is a very necessary implication of the very word. To be sure, there are a number of passages in which this sense is obscured, in which God's redemption of His people is attributed not to the payment of a price, but to a simple act of His power:

Ex. 6:6: I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments.

Ex. 15:13,16: Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed; Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation. . . . Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they shall be as still as a stone, till Thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which Thou hast purchased [*qanab*].

Ps. 77:14,15: Thou art the God that doest wonders; Thou hast declared Thy strength among the people. Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph.

1 Chron. 17:21: And what one nation in the earth is like Thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be His own people, to make Thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before Thy people, whom Thou hast redeemed out of Egypt?

It will be seen that these passages all refer to a deliverance in which the power of God was most strikingly manifested, specifically the deliverance from Egypt. Yet even here the word "redeem" carries the implication that God must pay some price in order to be the God of mercy to this sinful and rebellious nation and in order that He may use His power for them, not

to destroy them. (See especially the words "in thy mercy" and "purchased" in the Exodus 15 passage above.)

There are other passages in which God's redemption is specifically associated with the idea of a price which God must pay.

Ps. 74:2: Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased [*qanab*] of old; the tribe of Thine inheritance, which Thou hast redeemed [*gaal*].

Is. 43:1-3: Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. . . . For I am the Lord, Thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior. I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee; therefore will I give men for thee and people for thy life.

The interpretation of this passage is difficult. It may refer to some obscure political situation in which the nations around Israel fall victim to conquest, yet Israel herself is spared. In any case, this much is clear, that the payment of a price is implicit in words "redeem" and "ransom."

A most striking passage showing that man's redemption is finally a redemption from death and that the price is higher than any man can dream of paying is Ps. 49:6-15:

They that trust in their wealth and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem [*padab*] his brother nor give to God a ransom [*kopher*] for him (for the redemption of their soul [i. e., life] is precious, and it ceaseth forever), that he should still live forever and not see corruption.

The next few verses poetically depict the hopelessness of every human attempt to escape death. Then the climax (v. 15):

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave [*sheol*]; for He shall receive me.

Thus it is evident that the price of the redemption of the life of man from the death to which it is subject by virtue of sin is far higher than any man can pay. There is only One who can pay that price—God, into whose hands the Psalmist confidently commits himself and in whom he finds victory over "the power of the grave."

What the price is that God must pay for the redemption of the

sinner becomes clear only in the light of the fulfillment. This is not to say, however, that God's people in the Old Testament knew or could know nothing of it. The very *protevangelium* (Gen. 3:15) suggests it. That Seed of the woman, through whom one day the head of the serpent will be crushed and his victory over man snatched away from him, that Seed must also be bitten on the heel by the serpent. He must suffer in Himself all that man suffers through the venom of the devil, including temptation, pain, sweat, suffering, and finally death; for only through such suffering will He win for man the victory.

Clearest of all Old Testament passages, however, on the price of God's redemption of man from sin and death is that found in Isaiah 52 and 53. Here are the highlights of these beautiful redemption passages, which show that the price of redemption is the death of God's elect Servant. The price is blood, and therefore the covenant of redemption belongs to the covenant of blood.

Is. 52:3: Thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be *redeemed* without money.

Vv. 9, 10: Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted His people. He hath *redeemed* Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Vv. 13, 15: Behold, My Servant . . . shall sprinkle many nations. . .

Such sprinkling is the sprinkling of blood, as in Ex. 24:8. The blood of animals sprinkles one nation only. The blood which the Servant sprinkles shall be of universal benefit, for He shall sprinkle "many nations."

Then comes chapter 53, all of which is relevant for our purposes, but we shall comment on only a few phrases.

Vv. 4-6: Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Just as the iniquities and transgressions were laid on the head of the sacrificial animal (Lev. 1:4) or on the head of the scapegoat (Lev. 16:21, 22), so the Servant becomes the Substitute in sin and in death for all men.

V. 7: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter. . . .

This figure is distinct from the "sheep before her shearers," which

immediately follows. The Lamb brought to the slaughter is the lamb of sacrifice, who sheds His blood in the sin offering.

V. 10: His soul shall make an offering for sin.

The Servant becomes the Sin Offering of men by laying down His life (i. e., His soul).

V. 11: He [God] shall see of the travail of His soul [life] and shall be satisfied. . . . He shall bear their iniquities.

The sacrifice of the Servant, dying under the guilt of our sins, is acceptable to God. The redemption price is paid in full, the justice and wrath of God is satisfied.

V. 12: He hath poured out His soul [life] unto death.

The pouring out of His life contains the picture of the pouring out of the blood of the sacrifice. For in the outpouring of blood life flows away into death.

This is the price of the covenant of redemption. That price, the death of the elect Servant of God, must be read into every passage in which God is called the Redeemer of man from sin and from death. Let us look at a few:

Job 33:28: He will deliver [*padab*] his soul from going into the pit [grave], and his life shall see the light.

Job 33:24: Then He is gracious unto him and saith, Deliver [*pada*, rare variant for *padab*] him from going down to the pit. I have found a ransom [*kopher*].

Job 19:25: I know that my Redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.

Ps. 103:4: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction.

Hos. 13:14: I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be thy plagues; O Grave, I will be thy destruction.

In all the passages above we sense a mood of heartfelt relief and deepest joy. Man, who has lived in the dreadful despair and haunting horror of death, now finds salvation and life and victory—not in his own goodness, or power, or ingenuity, but in the redemption price paid for him by a wondrously merciful and

gracious God. Since the Bible so clearly teaches that death is in the world only as the summation of the consequences of man's sin, we are not surprised either to find other passages in which deliverance of man from sin is pictured as the object of redemption. Thus the following:

Ps. 130:7, 8: Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous *redemption*. And He shall *redeem* Israel from all his iniquities.

Is. 44:22, 23: I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions and, as a cloud, thy sins. Return unto Me, for I have *redeemed* thee. Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth. Break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath *redeemed* Jacob and glorified Himself in Israel.

Is. 59:20: The *Redeemer* shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.

Any redemption that removes from man the curse of his sin will also have this consequence, that it wipes out the wrath of God and restores peace between man and his Creator. Thus:

Is. 54:5-10: For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name; and thy *Redeemer* the Holy One of Israel. . . . For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy *Redeemer*. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the *covenant* of My *peace* be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (see also Is. 63:7-9).

The full significance of the price of God's redemption becomes clear in many New Testament passages. It is quite probable that the people of Israel, reading their Old Testament Scriptures and noting the many passages in which their God is called the Redeemer, failed to apply to that word, in these connections, the full sense of the payment of a price. In the light of the fulfillment, however, the fact that our redemption does cost something, and that God alone, in Christ, can pay that cost, rings with brilliant clarity again and again. The price is the blood and death of the Son of God.

Matt. 20:28 (also Mark 10:45): The Son of Man came . . . to give His *life a ransom* for many.

Acts 20:28: The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the Church of God, which He hath *purchased* with His own *blood*.

Rom. 3:24: Being justified freely by His grace through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus.

1 Cor. 6:20: For ye are *bought with a price*.

Gal. 3:13: Christ hath *redeemed* us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.

Gal. 4:4, 5: God sent forth His Son . . . to *redeem* them that were under the Law.

Eph. 1:7: In whom we have *redemption* through His *blood*, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (see also Col. 1:14).

1 Tim. 2:6: Who gave *Himself*, a *ransom* for all. . . .

Titus 2:14: Who gave *Himself* for us that He might *redeem* us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Heb. 9:12: By His own blood He entered in once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal *redemption* for us.

Heb. 9:15: By means of *death*, for the *redemption* of the transgressions.

1 Peter 1:18, 19: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not *redeemed* with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious *blood* of Christ, as of a Lamb, without blemish and without spot.

2 Peter 2:1: Even denying the Lord that *bought them*. . . .

Rev. 5:9: Thou wast slain and hast *redeemed* us to God by Thy *blood* (see also 14:3, 4).

Clearly the Apostles saw in Christ and His death the fulfillment of every prophetic reference of the Old Testament to God as the Redeemer of His people. Thus the New Testament stands on the Old. Its great concepts grow out of Old Testament concepts, even as it pours into the Old Testament the light of a salvation fully accomplished and glorious beyond the dreams of men.

IV

THE BLOOD OF CIRCUMCISION

Scripture contains not a single clear passage which directly and unmistakably draws the covenant of circumcision into the covenant of blood. Lacking such a passage we cannot know with confidence whether the people of Israel ever saw in the rite of circumcision the significance of blood which I see here or whether they drew the inferences I draw. It is evident, indeed, that in most of the history of God's people circumcision was nothing more than a habitual, routine religious work and that few, if any, performed it with a sense of any deeper significance than this, that it was the distinctive, God-given sign of God's chosen people. Nevertheless, the lack of a direct Scripture reference does not prove that the token of circumcision has no deeper meaning; indeed, our common experience with the tokens under which God offers His covenant indicates that the token itself is never only a meaningless sign, but somehow contains within itself the message of that which it signifies. If we look for such a message in the token of circumcision, we can find it at least by inference and deduction, if not by direct statement, in the covenant of blood. Since the major conclusions drawn in this chapter are confessedly deductions, I do not offer them with dogmatic certainty. Nevertheless, to me, circumcision takes on a rich spiritual beauty, entirely within the analogy of Scripture and in harmony with every Scriptural reference to circumcision when it is interpreted in the light of the covenant of blood.

The institution of the covenant of circumcision between God and Abraham is recorded in Genesis 17. See especially verses 10-14:

This is My covenant which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee: Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a *token* of the *covenant* betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised. And *My covenant shall be in your flesh* for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man

child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant.

The terms of this covenant may be outlined simply: (1) It is meant for every male child born into Abraham's household as well as for every male slave bought with money; (2) the normal time of circumcision is the eighth day of a baby's life; (3) circumcision consists in cutting off the flesh of the foreskin; (4) such cutting will leave a permanent mark in the flesh of the man who is circumcised; (5) this mark in his flesh shall be to the man throughout his life the sign and *token* that he lives in a gracious covenant relationship with God; (6) submission to circumcision signifies obedience to God's command and trust in His promises. Therefore he who is not circumcised rejects God's covenant and has no part in it.

This latter point, the importance of *faith* in receiving the covenant of circumcision, is emphasized by Paul in Rom. 4:11:

[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

To Paul the faith which believes in God's covenant of grace is of greater importance than the outward sign of circumcision itself. It is by such faith that Abraham attained righteousness before God. His circumcision became the *sign* and *seal* of his righteousness, that is, of his covenant relationship with God. The covenant thus works in two directions: (1) from God to man in that it carries God's gracious promise of forgiveness and victory and seals that promise in the circumcised flesh of man; (2) from man to God in that the promise and the seal are gladly and humbly received by faith. Again we could adapt Luther's explanation of the power of Baptism: "How can circumcision do such great things? Answer: It is not the outward act of circumcision, indeed, that does them, but the word of God (i. e., His command and promise), which is in and with the circumcision, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the circumcision. For without the word of God circumcision is nothing but mutilation of the flesh; but with the word of

God it is *circumcision*, that is, the token and sign and seal, in the flesh of man, of God's gracious covenant."

One other interesting passage we ought to examine before we proceed to draw the relationship between the covenant of circumcision and the covenant of blood. That is the somewhat obscure incident in the life of Moses recorded in Ex. 4:24-26. The incident occurs shortly after Moses receives his divine commission, and as he is traveling with his wife, Zipporah, and his son Gershom, to return with Aaron to Egypt.

And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him [Moses] and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So He let him go. Then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.

Zipporah and Moses apparently have argued in the past over the question of circumcising their son; otherwise Zipporah would not have drawn the immediate conclusion, when Moses' life hangs in the balance, that it is on account of his failure to circumcise Gershom that God now has smitten him. Zipporah herself is repelled by the bloodiness of circumcision. Yet now, when Moses lies near death, she herself performs the act and brings the bloody foreskin to Moses, casting it at his feet in disgust to show that it has been done. The Lord lets Moses recover. Zipporah's comment indicates that she still does not understand the meaning of the act, is repelled by the bloodiness of it, and has been driven to overcome her revulsion only by the threat to Moses' life.

Of particular interest here, however, is the reference to the bloodiness of the act of circumcising. Does the real religious significance of this particular token of God to His people lie again in the shedding of blood? Is the covenant of circumcision, therefore, just another aspect of the covenant of blood? Recall again the key passage, Lev. 17:11, and let us apply it here:

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.

"The life of the flesh is in the blood." We have already dealt with

the flesh and blood of the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament. Here, in circumcision, we deal not with the flesh and blood of animals, however, but of man himself, even as God has told Abraham, "My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant." We have seen that the blood of animals has no intrinsic value to remit sin, for the animal is inferior to man and not sufficiently precious to be man's substitute in death. Then how about human sacrifice, the blood of man himself? This is an abomination to God (Deut. 12:31; 2 Kings 16:3; Ezek. 23:37-39; Micah 6:7). Furthermore, human sacrifice cannot be the *substitute* for the death of man; man cannot substitute for himself, since his life is already forfeit. Yet in circumcision it is *man's blood* that is shed — shed only in part, not to cause death, yet to remind man that his life is not his own, that he has no right to live, that death is richly deserved as the wages of sin. At the same time circumcision also contains the Gospel of God's grace. For though the blood is shed, yet man lives. He ought to die, still he does not. The one sacrifice precious enough to be a true substitute for man will yet be offered for man by God Himself. "In Him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Throughout his life, then, the man bears in his flesh the sign and token of circumcision. It tells him that he has shed before God some of his own blood, a powerful reminder of the price he ought to pay for his sin. Yet it tells him also that God has wrought for him a wondrously merciful deliverance. This is the beauty of the covenant and its token.

The token itself is distinctive and unmistakable. No other cutting of human flesh, no other letting of human blood, could leave so clear and permanent a sign, yet without impairing any function of the body. Circumcision requires no witnesses, no records on paper, no certificates. The covenant is *in the flesh* of man for an *everlasting* covenant. Though man is circumcised on the eighth day, though he will have no personal remembrance of the act, he will nevertheless know in his own flesh that it has surely been performed. And if he knows the significance of it, his own flesh will constantly remind him that his life is forfeit by sin, yet saved by God's grace.

How about woman? We have noticed in connection with the redemption of the first-born that the laws of redemption apply

only to the male children. Here again circumcision is for the male child only. Does this mean that woman is despised and left out of God's covenant? By no means. It is the consistent view of Scripture that the woman is the helpmeet of the man, that in marriage she and the man are one flesh. The covenant signs of redemption and of circumcision are hers through her husband. At the same time the very fact that woman does not participate personally in circumcision underscores the fact that circumcision is a token of God's covenant, no more, no less. It is not the covenant itself. By its very nature, if it is a token, then it has value only if man realizes what it betokens; if it is a sign, as Paul terms it, it has value only when man is personally aware of what it signifies; if it is a seal, it becomes that only when the man believes what it seals (cf. Rom. 4:11, above). Thus again the blood that man sheds in circumcision is not the blood of his atonement essentially, no more than is the blood of the animals sacrificed on his altars. It is only the seal and token and sign of a more precious blood to come.

Three abuses of circumcision become evident in Scripture and shed additional light on circumcision itself. The first is the offense of man at its bloodiness, as typified in Zipporah, who cries to Moses, "A bloody husband thou art to me, because of the circumcision." The fact that Zipporah is thus offended indicates that she fails to see the spiritual significance of that shedding of blood. Furthermore, she does not in faith yield to God's command and trust in His promise—which she ought to have done, even if she did not understand to the full God's gracious intent. If any man is offended at the bloodiness of circumcision, let him note by contrast what an extremely high value the same God who ordains circumcision sets on the blood of man in other passages of Scripture. Recall, for instance, the words of God's covenant with Noah, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man (Gen. 9:6)." Notice also that circumcision is the only shedding of human blood that God will allow. All other cuttings of the flesh of man are condemned as an abomination unto the Lord. See, for instance:

Lev. 19:28: Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead nor print any marks upon you. I am the Lord.

1 Kings 18:28: They [the prophets of Baal] cried aloud and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out upon them (cf. also Lev. 21:5; Deut. 14:1; Jer. 16:6).

It is evident, then, that blood is highly precious in God's sight. God would not have one drop of man's blood shed unless He had a highly important reason for requiring it. To be offended at the bloodiness of circumcision, and, in fact, at the bloodiness of the Old Testament, is to fail to see the depth of human depravity, or to realize the finality of God's awful and unfailing threat: "The day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."

A greater and far more common abuse of circumcision occurred when its spiritual meaning is lost. So easily circumcision became simply a religious ritual, a human performance of God's Law, which by the very outward act, *ex opere operato*, sufficed to guarantee man's eternal safety under the covenant of God. Thus man forgot that in circumcision God was giving to him a gift so precious as to make man eternally and inescapably God's debtor. Circumcision became a gift that man offers to God and for which he expects to receive the reward of obedience. Circumcision became a symbol of national pride instead of personal humility. Thus circumcision can be degraded and blasphemed by the ungodly sons of Jacob in the Dinah story, Genesis 34; or again by King Saul, who lightly commands David to bring him 100 foreskins of the Philistines as a dowry for his daughter Michal, 1 Samuel 18. It is in opposition to such worldly ideas of circumcision, such failure to appreciate its spiritual significance and to live therefore in the spirit of humble repentance and faith before God, that the many exhortations are directed to God's people to circumcize also and especially the foreskins of their hearts. Thus for example:

Deut. 10:16: Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.

Deut. 10:6: The Lord, thy God, will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Jer. 9:25, 26: Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised:

Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the Children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are *uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart* (cf. also Jer. 4:4).

Rom. 2:28, 29: He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (cf. also Col. 2:11).

The third abuse of circumcision occurred in the days of the Apostles, when Jewish teachers desired to retain it as a legal requirement even after the fulfillment had come in Christ. Circumcision, as we have seen, belongs to the shadows of things to come. The blood of circumcision inevitably fades into obscurity once there is revealed to us the full glory of the blood of the cross of Christ. To cling, then, to the ordinances of circumcision is more than simply a denial of Christian liberty. It constitutes a denial of Christ Himself — in the first place because outward conformity to Law is made an additional requirement for salvation, and so Christ is no longer the complete Savior; in the second place, because the whole significance of blood with its message of Law and Gospel is buried beneath the empty performance of an external work. The man who, seeing the token of circumcision in his own flesh, can say in repentance and faith: "My life is forfeit, I ought to die for my sin; yet God has spared my life and promised to offer another sacrifice in my stead" — that man, when he sees the death and resurrection of Christ, will readily and joyfully understand that here is the fulfillment of his salvation. He will place his whole trust now in Christ Himself and will realize that circumcision is needed now no more than are the Old Testament animal sacrifices, for the one great Sacrifice has been offered. The Jewish teachers, on the other hand, who wanted to insist that the Gentile Christians must at least be circumcised revealed by such insistence that to them circumcision was a work of man's obedience only, not a channel of God's grace. By such obedience man would merit God's favor; he would perform his part of the bargain with God and could now wait for God to reward him. Perhaps there

was also a touch of nationalistic pride in this insistence on circumcision. Desiring to glorify Israel, they forget to glorify the God of Israel.

Any such spirit is totally incompatible with the true religion of God as it comes to its climax in Jesus Christ. Paul devotes almost the entire Epistle to the Galatians to this problem. He pulls no punches. See, for instance, the stirring words in Galatians 5:

Behold, I, Paul, say unto you that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole Law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the Law; ye are fallen from grace. . . . For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love (vv. 2-6).

I would they were even cut off which trouble you [i. e., that they would mutilate themselves] (v. 12).

Or from Gal. 6:12-17:

As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised, only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the Law; but desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. . . . From henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks [not of circumcision, but] of the Lord Jesus.

Thus, says Paul, if you want to bear in your body any mark or physical token of the fact that you are a Christian, let it be not circumcision, but rather the marks of the sufferings which you, as a new creature, have willingly endured for Christ's sake.

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(To be concluded)