

The Blood of the Lamb

The Bible is a very honest book, isn't it? It doesn't hide the sins of the people it talks about, and it is very open about their foolish mistakes and misunderstandings. The four gospels were written by very prominent people in the early church, but the gospels don't hide the fact that the disciples were often confused about what Jesus was doing. It's very tempting for people to tell stories in a way that puts them in the best possible light, but what we see in the gospels is that the disciples often had no idea what Jesus was talking about. That is one of the reasons why it is easy to trust the Bible – it gives us details that only a very honest person would give.

The gospels tell us that the disciples did not understand the ministry of Christ until He died, rose from the dead, and explained it to them in detail. They didn't understand that He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. The thing is, they *should* have understood this. It should have been *very obvious* that this was His purpose in coming, because the sacrificial system in the Mosaic Law had been pointing to Christ for more than a thousand years! God explained everything in advance and yet they still missed it.

What I would like to do today is spend some time in the book of Leviticus. This book doesn't get a lot of attention, and that is really a shame because it lays the groundwork for the gospel. The sacrifice of Christ didn't come out of nowhere. God laid the foundation for it in the days of Moses. If the Israelites had been paying attention they would have understood what was going on.

In the Mosaic Law there are six different types of sacrifices. Each of these sacrifices had its own purpose and pointed to a different aspect of Christ's purpose and ministry. Since we are limited on time I am just going to talk about one of them, and show how God laid the foundation for the gospel in the Old Testament. Interestingly, of these six sacrifices only two of them dealt with sin and forgiveness – but all six dealt with one's relationship with God.

The offering that I would like to discuss today is the *sin offering*. We find it discussed in Leviticus 4. This is the offering you had to make if you *accidentally* violated one of God's commandments:

Leviticus 4:13: “And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty;

14 When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation.”

In this case you didn't intend on sinning. You had no idea that what you did was wrong. Now, it would be easy to think that if you didn't know any better then God would just overlook it. Many people think that God doesn't hold them responsible if they sin in ignorance – but that is not the case. Under the Mosaic Law, if you sinned in ignorance your action was still a sin and you had to make it right. You were no longer in the sight of God and you had to take action.

So what action did you have to take? Well, many people think that if they are just a good person then that is enough to make them right with God. Other people think that if they have enough good deeds to outweigh their bad deeds then that will balance things out. God, though, said that neither of

those things would work. If you sinned you couldn't atone for it by any works on your part. You couldn't just give money to the church, or go on a pilgrimage, or do some great deed. In fact, there was no action you could perform that would make it right! There was only one way to obtain atonement, and that was for an innocent party to die on your behalf.

You see, the penalty for sin is death – not just for the really bad sins, but for *all* sins. Even sins committed in ignorance! When a sin is committed God cannot simply ignore it or hide it under a rug. God is just and He *always* punishes sins. If He didn't then He would no longer be just. This means that in order for you to be forgiven, an innocent party has to be punished for what you did. Someone who had *not* sinned, and who was completely innocent, has to be punished in your stead. Specifically, they have to die.

In the sin offering, when the whole congregation realizes they have been sinning in ignorance, the only way they can make atonement for their sin is to offer a sacrifice. All it takes is one sacrifice to forgive all of them – but once again, notice that forgiveness only comes when someone else dies on their behalf. That is what it takes to purchase their forgiveness.

But that's not all. Leviticus 4:12 tells us the sacrifice had to be poured out “without the camp”. You see, one of the major themes of the Mosaic Law was the difference between clean things and unclean things. You could only stay within the camp if you were clean. If something happened to make you unclean then you had to leave the camp and live outside it, until the problem was resolved and you were clean again. The offering was a holy thing, but when it was offered on behalf of sin it became unclean. That meant it had to be carried outside the camp and poured out there.

Where did Jesus suffer and die for our sins? It was outside of Jerusalem, on Golgotha. When He took His sins upon Himself and suffered in our place, He became unclean – because that's what sin does. This is how Hebrews explains it:

Hebrews 13:11: “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”

When the congregation sinned, an innocent party had to suffer and die in order for them to be forgiven. Even if they had sinned in *ignorance* and had no idea that they were sinning, a sacrifice was still required. (If a sacrifice was required for sins committed in ignorance, imagine how much worse it is to sin knowingly!) This innocent party had the sins of the guilty put upon him, and had to suffer outside the camp in the place reserved for things that were unclean.

Now, God had very strict requirements for these sacrifices. You couldn't just offer any animal you wanted. It had to meet a certain standard:

Deuteronomy 15:21: “And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God.”

The sacrifice had to be perfect. It could not have any fault or flaw at all. God would only accept a perfect sacrifice for sin. Why? Because a person could only take your place and suffer on your behalf, *if he was innocent*. If he was also a sinner then the best he could do is suffer on behalf of his own sins. He could only suffer for your sins if he was perfect and had no sins of his own. In order for us to be forgiven we need a sacrifice – someone to die in our place so that we can live. That someone has to be

utterly perfect, without fault or flaw or sin of any kind. That is the only kind of sacrifice that will save us.

In the Mosaic Law, do you know who killed the sacrifice? It wasn't the priest. No, the person who had to put the sacrifice to death was *the person who sinned*:

Leviticus 4:23: “Or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish:
24 And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the Lord: it is a sin offering.”

Sacrifices were *personal*. He had to lay his hand on the head of the sacrifice, identifying that this was *his* sacrifice being offered in *his* place for *his* sin. He then had to kill it *himself*. It was his sin that was responsible for the death of the sacrifice. He was the reason it had to die. He was the guilty party and the cause of its death.

Now, it is true that none of us were alive when Jesus was crucified on the cross – but we are still the reason why He died. It was our sin that put Him there. We cannot say that the Jews killed Him or the Romans killed Him. Yes, the Jews and the Romans played a role, but our sin is why He died. We are the cause of His death, just as much as if we had driven the nails ourselves.

What a sinful and wicked thing it is to reject this sacrifice, which Jesus willingly made on our behalf! This is why it is such a terrible thing to reject the Lord Jesus. God commands us to believe in Jesus, to repent of our sins, and to accept and honor the sacrifice that our Lord has made. He calls us to respond to what Jesus did for us with love and gratitude. God has terrible things to say to those who reject it:

Hebrews 10:28: “He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot 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?”

God does not take the rejection of His Son's sacrifice lightly. It's not hard to understand why, is it? If you suffered on behalf of someone else so that they might go free, and in return they despised you and mocked you and ignored what you had done, would you not be angry? The sacrifice of one person for another demands a response of *love*, not hatred and mockery.

You see, the sacrificial process was a brutal one. Once the innocent sacrifice was killed, its blood had to be poured out:

Leviticus 4:16: “And the priest that is anointed shall bring of the bullock's blood to the tabernacle of the congregation:

17 And the priest shall dip his finger in some of the blood, and sprinkle it seven times before the Lord, even before the vail.

18 And he shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar which is before the Lord, that is in the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall pour out all the blood at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

Sacrifices were a bloody mess. The innocent sacrifice was killed and its blood was literally poured out. This would have been a gruesome and awful thing to watch – but I assure you that the crucifixion of Christ was not any less gruesome.

If you read through the Bible you will see that it has a *lot* to say about blood. In order for sins to be forgiven blood had to be shed:

Romans 5:9: “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”

Notice how clearly this verse says that the blood of Jesus is what justifies us! It is through the shed blood of Christ that our sins are forgiven. Jesus Himself made that very point in the Last Supper:

Matthew 26:28: “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

Jesus did not say that we are forgiven by our good works, or by being good people, or by going to church and volunteering. No, He said that forgiveness only comes through His blood, which He shed for us. In fact, Jesus taught this repeatedly:

John 6:53: “Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.”

Jesus is saying that our forgiveness can only come at the price of His blood. If we refuse to partake of His sacrifice and instead insist on trying to be saved by our own good works, then we will not be saved and we will not have eternal life. The only way to be saved is to put our faith in Jesus and the sacrifice that He made for us. We can only find forgiveness if we trust in Him alone for salvation.

The Bible teaches this over and over and over again. We can only be saved by the shed blood of an innocent sacrifice. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were not intended to save people. They were intended to point people to Christ. Only the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus can save us from our sins:

Hebrews 9:12: “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

God gave the Mosaic Law to the Israelites to point them to Christ and lay the foundation for His ministry. The sacrificial system taught the people that all sins – even sins in ignorance – required a sacrifice in order to be forgiven. It taught them that good deeds could not obtain forgiveness. It taught them that in order to be made right in the sight of God, an innocent party had to suffer on your behalf. It taught them that this innocent party had to be completely perfect, with no flaws or problems of its own, because only a perfect substitute could take their place. It also taught them that forgiveness could only come if blood was shed on their behalf.

Given all of that information, imagine what the people should have thought when they heard

John the Baptist say this:

John 1:29: “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

In that moment it should have been obvious what would happen next! How do lambs take away sin? They have to be slaughtered. They have to die and their blood has to be shed. John was telling the world that Jesus had come to die in their place so that their sins might be forgiven and they could be made right with God. Israel had been sacrificing lambs for centuries! They knew how this worked. They should have understood – but they didn't. They missed it. Jesus did not hide who He was or what He came to do, but the people just weren't paying attention.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus said it was impossible to be saved apart from Him?

John 14:6: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

The book of Leviticus gives us the answer. There is only one way to obtain forgiveness and that is through the death and shed blood of a perfect, innocent sacrifice. Good deeds can't do it – blood has to be shed. It doesn't matter that you were ignorant and didn't know any better, and sinned without understanding. Your sin still has to be paid for, and that requires a flawless sacrifice. There is only one such sacrifice and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Since there are no other sacrifices that can atone for your sin, there are no other paths to salvation.

This is the heart of the gospel; this distinguishes genuine faith from false faith. The Bible tells us three times that Jesus was offered as a “propitiation”. The first is in Romans:

Romans 3:25: “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;”

The word “propitiation” means to make someone favorably inclined. It refers to an act of reconciliation. It means that because Jesus shed His blood and died, and was punished on your behalf, God has forgiven your sins and is now favorably inclined toward you. It means that Jesus purchased your forgiveness with His blood and His death.

This is a very important point, because many people reject this. Some say that the death of Jesus was just an example of God's love. Others say that it was a demonstration of obedience, and nothing more. I have seen an increasing number of people reject the idea that Jesus suffered in our place and died for our sins – but *that is the gospel!* Look at that verse in Romans again. What forgives our sins? It is specifically “faith in His blood”. If you reject the idea that Jesus suffered and died in your place, and shed His blood to purchase your forgiveness, then you are not saved. That is the gospel. You must have faith in His blood – not in your works, but in His blood.

We find this same teaching again:

1 John 2:2: “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Jesus is the offering that was made for our sins. He was the Lamb of God who suffered and died

on our behalf to save us. He was the innocent party who willingly gave His life and shed His own blood so that we might be made righteous and holy in the sight of God. That is what “propitiation” means. Jesus did this because He loved us:

1 John 4:10: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we hated God, Christ died for us. While we had no love for God, God had great love for us. Jesus was not forced to die on our behalf. He offered His life willingly out of His great love for us:

John 10:18: “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

Jesus willingly offered Himself as the Lamb of God. The reason He did this was to save us from our sins. The reason He had to die is because the wages of sin is death. You see, God takes sin far more seriously than we do. It is easy to take sin lightly and think that God is making too big a deal over it. Many people think that some sins are fairly harmless and aren't really that bad. When God says that He will cast people into Hell for sin, that seems like a huge overreaction. When God says He will force the unrepentant and unforgiven to endure fiery torment *forever* as punishment for their sin, that seems strange. Is sin really that bad? Is sin really so bad that it merits eternal torment? It doesn't seem that bad to us, so how bad could it really be?

I think this quote from the Puritans puts it well:

Let me never forget that I have an eternal duty to love, honor, and obey thee,
that thou art infinitely worthy of such;
that if I fail to glorify thee I am guilty of infinite evil that merits infinite punishment,
for sin is the violation of an infinite obligation.

If you want to understand how bad sin is then take a look at how God treats it. Sin is so bad that it is punished by death. Sin is so bad that it is punished by Hell. Sin is so bad that it is punished by eternal fiery torment. Sin is so bad that it can only be forgiven by the death of an innocent party.

In fact, sin is so bad that the only way Jesus could save us from it is by dying for us and shedding His blood on our behalf. If there was another way then don't you think Jesus would have taken it? The punishment for sin is enormous because sin itself is a staggering act of evil. We are so used to sin that it doesn't seem that bad, but God sees sin for what it really is.

The punishment for sin is horrific, but the love of God is greater. Jesus came as the Lamb of God and died so that we might be forgiven. There is no need for anyone to face the wrath of God, because Jesus offers a pardon to all who have “faith in His blood”, as Romans said.

The sacrificial system illustrates just how bad sin really is and what it takes to purchase forgiveness for that sin. It tells us the price that must be paid – and it points us to Christ, who paid that price. There is only one sacrifice that can make you right with God and purchase your everlasting redemption, and that is the one Christ made. If you have not put your faith in His blood then now is the time to do that. Today is the day of salvation! The price has been paid and the offer has been made. Will you accept it and be forgiven, or will you reject the only path that leads to salvation and mercy?