

Good Friday 2012 (details from In the Likeness of God by Philip Yancey and Dr. Paul Brand)

Hebrews 9:18-22 (ESV) ¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

1 Peter 1:18-19 (ESV) ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

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

The Bible is a bloody book. Skeptics call it barbaric, a holdover from primitive cultures. But let us consider what it is teaching and see if that has any credence. From the very beginning, blood was the acceptable sacrifice to God. Cain offered the best of his crops, while Able sacrificed a lamb. Able's blood sacrifice was the one that was accepted. Sacrifice was mainly about the need for one's sin to be covered. Sin is every way we fail to be godly. It is everything we think, say and do that is unlike God's holy nature. The Bible says we are sinful from birth. Then, when we are able to make choices, we often choose to sin, for it is in our very nature. You could say it is in our blood.

If God is the standard for goodness, and if He is holy, just, and righteous, and if, in love, He only desires what is good for us then sin is opposed to His loving goodness. Cultures develop callousness toward sin and excuse it as normal or even desirable, but that does not change the fact that it is evil, selfish and destructive. By the way, the Bible tells us that is a good description of the nature of Satan, the being who is opposed to God.

So what does this rebellion deserve? What is justice for our rebellion against a loving Creator who only desires for us what is good? What would be justice for our treacherous actions? What can we pay for participating in rebellion against the One who graciously granted us life? Think what the consequences of man's sin has caused in the earth? Pain, loss, depravity, emotional scaring, murder, abuse and I could go on and on. Sin is personally choosing to join those forces. Can we just give money, like paying a fine? Would that not cheapen the seriousness of our rebellion? Why did God prefer and even command blood for a sin sacrifice?

Blood is the life of the creature. Could there be a greater picture of the seriousness of sin than to demand blood? What would you choose as an appropriate act of justice? God is not willing that any person perish and so He is willing to accept a substitute, a ransom. His justice is uncompromising so a just penalty must be paid. We should be grateful for God's uncompromising justice. Without it we would have utter uncertainty. But we also see His love and grace are abundant.

The love of God sent His only Son to be our ransom. His blood was shed, His life given, for us, in our place, so that we might escape the just sentence we deserve for our sin. Jesus told His disciples that that is the reason He came, to give Himself a ransom for many. Rather than barbaric, as some today would claim, it is the greatest expression of the balance of justice and love. Without either of these wonderful attributes of God, life would not be worth living. If there were no justice, evil would be unrestrained. If there were no mercy there would be no hope, for all have sinned.

But not only does blood show us the seriousness of sin, and the love of God to ransom us from what we deserve, **it also shows us the power to cleanse**. Substitution is only justified if the one who is saved will be changed. I have put down bail money for people who went back to their old life. My love was misplaced for it did not have the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus. It only enabled them to continue in their destructive ways.

Here is where modern science meets ancient insight. Why would God use blood as a cleansing agent? If you've ever tried to get blood stains out of clothes, you'd never think of it in that way. What is the picture God is painting when He tells us that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sins? We can see blood as a ransom; it is life for a life. It is a just and full payment. But why would God say it cleanses?

Our circulatory system is an amazing thing. Our heart muscle pumps faithfully almost every second of our life sending blood to every cell of our body. The average heart pumps 2000 gallons a day. It will cycle your blood 2.5 billion times during an average life. From arteries to capillaries one tenth the diameter of a human hair, so narrow that the red blood cells must bow sideways as they deliver life giving oxygen, amino acids, sodium, nitrogen, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sugars, lipids, cholesterol, and hormones to every single cell. Once the blood cells' delivery job to each of the one hundred trillion cells is accomplished, their job switches to carrying away the waste from the cell's activity. They are like little delivery trucks that deliver the needed items and then transform into a garbage truck to haul away the waste.

One fourth of the blood cells with their waste load travel through veins to two amazing one pound organs called kidneys. There each red blood cell is scrubbed of the solid waste. All of our blood will journey to the lungs where it offloads the gas waste, carbon dioxide, and gets a refill of oxygen, back to the heart again, out the aorta and on to every single cell in your body through 60,000 miles of veins. In a single line that would

circle the earth almost two and half times! Have you ever sat and thought about what is going on inside you this second? Blood is constantly nourishing and cleansing every cell in your body and hauling off the waste!

Next time you have your blood pressure checked, try this little experiment. Ask the person to leave it at 200 mm of mercury for a minute. Try making a tight fist over and over. Soon it will become difficult, and then painful, and if you keep it up, your muscles will cramp and you'll be begging the person to release the pressure on that arm cuff. Suddenly you'll feel a rush of relief as the blood flows through your arm. Why? The blood cells are carrying off the buildup of waste that was causing the pain and immobilizing your arm. In just one minute the buildup of the carbon dioxide and urea waste becomes cripplingly painful. **How we take for granted the constant cleansing work of the blood!**

No wonder then that God chose blood as not only the ransom, but the cleansing agent for our soul. No wonder He gave us the ceremony of communion, to remind us that He is our life. It was His life blood poured out in death as our ransom, but also His life blood we drink that pictures His blood filling every area of our life with His. He brings nourishment to every part of our being. He washes us from all sin wherever it may hide within our soul, constantly, continuously.

Transfusions can literally resurrect a person. Communion is a metaphor, like a transfusion from Jesus. It pictures Jesus giving us dead sinners His everlasting life! He came not only to be an example of how to live, but to give us life itself. **Repentance is not something we do to receive the transfusion, rather it is what happens in us when our soul lets go of all its toxins as the blood of Christ carries them away.**

Paul Brand tells of working with Dr. Reeve Betts in India. A patient would come in for a serious surgery and need blood for the operation to be performed. At that time there was no blood bank in India or storage facilities. He tells the story of a young girl who needed to have a lung removed to survive. He needed three pints of blood. The family thought, like most Indians, that blood was life. They offered to buy it, but there was none to purchase. Finally the family put forward one of their elderly women relative, skinny and frail and offered her blood. The doctor looked at the strapping young men and began to rebuke them in Tamil. He then lay down and asked Dr. Brand to take his blood. Dr. Brand was obedient but warned the doctor that he had given so much blood already that he might be unable to perform the operation. As the young men watched the blood flow from Dr. Bett's arm, they were ashamed. How could this white doctor give his life for their daughter? They finally stepped forward to offer their own blood.

God looked down from heaven on sin sick humanity. The infection of sin doomed us all. No man's life could be a substitute for my sin or yours, let alone the whole world. Only the sinless blood of the Creator of all mankind would be a just substitute. Only the

sinless Son of God could provide us with a transfusion that will not only save us, but cleanse us from all sin. It was the ransom price, the price of justice, but it also has that wonderful secondary effect of cleansing us from all unrighteousness as it goes to every part of our soul.

And so we take the cup of the new covenant in His blood. We are starting to understand the wonder of the cleansing power of blood in our own physical body, and by it we can begin to understand the power of the blood of Jesus, offered for us, that we might be partakers of His holiness. (Hebrews 12:10) Pagan cultures saw demanding gods that wouldn't be satisfied unless we sacrificed something special to us. The Hebrew culture saw the seriousness of sin and the mercy of a just God that provided a substitution.

The more we learn about the amazing qualities of blood the more we see the Bible was right all along. The life of the body is in the blood. It is blood that cleanses us. The old hymn says, Have you been to Jesus for His cleansing power, Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb, Are your garments spotless are they white as snow, Are washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Grotesque? No! It's about the loving mercy of our gracious Savior who gave His own blood to nourish every bit of our soul and then rid our souls of the paralyzing toxin of life called "sin". He does this so that we might not stumble around controlled by our sinful nature, but come to a full realization of our humanity. Justice and grace have met on the cross, and we are the blessed beneficiaries.

Adapted from a poem by George Herbert

Who knows not love come if thou wilt
And taste the juice on the cross spilt
Ask him then what he dost think
If ere the like he did drink
Love is that liquor sweet and divine
Which my God felt as blood, but I as wine