

397 “He shall bear his iniquity”

As we “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” the Old and New Testaments we soon encounter the great importance that God gives to the shedding of blood in His dealings with this, His sinful, fallen creation.

After the Fall of Genesis 3, which has affected everyone on the earth ever since, God told the murderer Cain, “the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground” (Genesis 4.10, KJV). After the terrible global Flood of judgment (Genesis 6 – 8), God told Noah, (in what is termed a “creation ordinance” as it pre-dates the covenant with Abram), “... surely your blood of your lives will I require ... Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (from 9.5-6).

After the Exodus God set two key spiritual principles at the heart of the priestly Tabernacle rituals which His covenant people were to observe so meticulously. The first principle is that sin of any form, unless there is forgiveness somehow, leads to the banishment and death - the shedding of the blood - of the sinner, for God is utterly holy and righteous and no sin survives in His presence; hence the exile of Adam and Eve from Eden (Genesis 3.22-24), and phrases in Leviticus for example such as a sinner being “cut off from his people” (Leviticus 7.20, 21, 25, 27); “blood shall be imputed” (17.4); “he shall bear his iniquity” (17.16); and “their blood shall be upon them” (20.27).

The second principle is that God’s forgiveness is granted if the blood of an innocent substitute is shed on the sinner’s behalf, and that sacrifice is then claimed as such by the sinner. So the Lord God instituted the priestly system of sacrifices of innocent animals “without blemish” on behalf of His sinning people (eg., Leviticus 17.11-14), a gory but highly effective “visual aid” which taught the people the potency of sin, and the removal of its effects being possible only by the shedding of innocent blood.

Now those animal sacrifices could only ever be tokens of God’s gracious forgiveness of sinners, and under the New Covenant of grace the two principles about sin and shed blood still applied (eg., Romans 6.23a / Hebrews 9.22b, quoted from Leviticus 17.11). So we see that the whole Law-based, priestly system was a “holding operation”, based solely on the coming of Jesus, the real, true, unique “Lamb of God” who would indeed “take away the sin of the world” (John 1.29,36).

Sure enough, by God's grace and mercy, "By his own blood he (Jesus, as High Priest) entered in once unto the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption [for us]" (from Hebrews 9.11-15). We are now "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (see Romans 3.22-30; 5.9-11 / Ephesians 1.7; 2.13 / Colossians 1.14-15, 20-23 / Hebrews 4.14-16; 7.22-27; 10.19-20).

Now sadly we are all conscious of how these vital divine principles about sin and death on the one hand, and the unique sinless, Innocent Substitute Jesus Christ on the other (John 14.6 / I Peter 2.21-25) are widely ignored these days. Truly Jesus is still "the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence" for so many (I Peter 2.6-8 / Isaiah 8.14), yet He alone is the Key to forgiveness for any who will humbly take Him at His word and confess Him as Lord and Saviour (egs., John 6.37,40,44,47-58).

There seems to be around us little fear of death or of divine judgment, and little concern over the reality of a lost eternity which so many people are casually approaching. Do we not all come across folk who either never give God a thought, or who assume that they are just fine with Him, for both now and in the hereafter? But when the time comes to face their Creator, tragically such people will arrive "bearing their own iniquity", their sins being still unforgiven if they have not claimed the shedding of Christ's blood on their own behalf (eg., Revelation 20.11-15).

These are solemn old truths for these turbulent times. The Lord God in His forgiving mercy appoints us to make these solemn truths known, with warnings as solemn as necessary - for the Good News of forgiveness and peace through Jesus Christ only makes sense when the Bad News of sin and death is made very clear.

Romans 10.11-15.

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