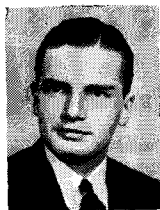


Moses' Gospel of the Blood

By the REV. RICHARD W. GRAY

Pastor of the Covenant Presbyterian Church, Orange, N. J.

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life" (Lev. 17:11).



Mr. Gray

IN THE church of our day there are two distinct attitudes toward the blood atonement. To the Modernist it is repulsive, nauseating, shocking to the sensibilities of his cultured mind, and therefore a taboo. It is a vestige of the ancient slaughter-house religion, a remnant of savage paganism. On the other hand, to the Bible-believing Christian it is precious, indispensable, necessary to salvation, and therefore a touchstone. This latter is the attitude of The Presbyterian Church of America. To us if a minister does not preach the blood he is anathema.

Can you sympathize with the Modernist in his attitude toward the blood atonement? I can! Blood makes us think of death, of war, of murder. Blood is gory, horrible, awful, obnoxious. Yes! It really is unpleasant to the cultured mind. Why then do we retain it in our preaching?

Why is it necessary to preach the blood in order to preach the gospel? Is "the blood" just a meaningless stock expression that we have picked up from the current parlance of the Christian world? Shall we not drop this offensive word for one which is more becoming to the dignity of the gospel of Christ?

But, in order to act with due forethought, let us make one final investigation to see whether or not the Bible makes the blood indispensable to the gospel of Christ. Since the heart of the gospel, the atonement of Christ, is described in terms of the sacrificial atonement of the Old Testament, it is there that we can look most profitably for the answer to our question. Perhaps the best concise statement is

Moses' gospel of the blood set forth in our text.

Its Dire Necessity

The English word "atonement" means the state of being at one. That suggests that before atonement is made, the two parties concerned are not at one, but at odds. When Moses speaks of making atonement, therefore, he is mindful that God and man are at odds. He recalls how God at first walked with Adam in the cool of the day in the Garden of Eden, but later drove man out of the garden. This breach came about because Adam sinned. Sin always causes a breach between God and man because it is an assault on the law of God, the expression of His very nature.

It is because sin is so serious that God does not merely turn His face away from the sinner, but He also sentences him to death. So man is in dire need of someone to intervene and cause God to be at one with him. Without such an atonement man is doomed to destruction.

Its Essential Nature

The good news of such an atonement Moses announces and defines in our text. "I have given the blood upon the altar to make atonement for your souls." The English word "to make atonement" literally means, as we have suggested, "to cause to be at one"; the Hebrew word literally means "to cover." Rather than seek to describe the essential nature of this atonement or covering, let me direct your attention to the actual enactment of it in the drama of the great day of atonement.

Here is the most important religious day of the year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. All the people of Israel are solemnly gathered at the door of the tabernacle. The high priest has laid aside his official ornaments and is simply clad in white linen. The climax of this day of many ceremonies is reached when two goats are brought to the high priest. Slaying one of the

goats, he takes his blood into the Holy of Holies, and sprinkles it upon the mercy seat. Taking the other goat, he places his hands upon his head and confesses all the iniquities of the children of Israel. This goat he sends into the wilderness. The second animal pictures to the people with remarkable vividness just what happened when the blood of the first was sprinkled on the mercy seat as a covering for the sins of the people. For with the laying of the hands of the high priest on the goat and the subsequent confession of the sins of the people, the guilt of their sins was transferred to their substitute. As the goat went off into the wilderness never to return, so the sins of the Israelites were removed never to be remembered again. This phase of atonement is sometimes called expiation.

That is not all there is to atonement. Nor is that all that happened on the Day of Atonement. When the sins of Israel were removed by the sprinkling of the blood on the mercy seat, God's displeasure toward Israel was turned away and He communed with Israel through their high priest in the Holy of Holies. This turning aside of the wrath of God is called propitiation.

Atonement, therefore, in the gospel of Moses is the covering of man's sin and the turning aside of God's wrath, thus causing God to be at one with man.

Its Indispensable Means

Moses not only proclaims the necessity and the nature of atonement, but he also describes how atonement is accomplished. It is by means of the shedding of blood. "It is the blood that maketh atonement." Just how the blood accomplishes this will be seen if we notice just what happens when an Israelite brings his offering to the priest. As we see the Israelite approach at a distance we note that his shoulders are drooping from the weight upon his back. The weight is a bleating little lamb with not a spot nor a blemish on his fleecy coat. That

burden on his shoulders is not half as heavy as the burden on his heart. There reclines the heavy load of sin, made heavier by the fact that the law requires the death of the sinner. There is a connection between the weight on his back and the burden on his heart. As he enters the court of the tabernacle, he hands the lamb to the priest. He turns his head aside as the priest raises the axe to slay the helpless little animal. The life of his lamb is poured out in blood upon the altar. This done, the Israelite turns about and leaves for home. This time he walks upright for the burden is gone from both his shoulders and his heart. What, his heart also? Yes! For the burden of sin and its sentence of death was rolled away at the altar. Does that mean that the death penalty which was held against that Israelite has been *suspended*? Most assuredly not! The death penalty was *enacted*. That man died! He died through his substitute. Instead of the blood of that Israelite being poured out on the altar, the blood of the lamb was substituted. And the blood made atonement by reason of the fact that it was life poured out in death. That is the significance of the blood: it makes atonement by reason of the fact that it is life. It is death through the shedding of the blood of a substitute that removes sin and turns aside the wrath of God. My friends, if you have sinned the death sentence abides on you. The only way you can escape is through a substitute.

Its Gracious Character

In conclusion, let us note the character of the atonement that Moses preached. It was a gospel of grace. The word "atonement" tends to be misleading because it suggests the idea of a peace treaty between two equal parties. Further, it suggests that the offending party must give or do something in order to repair the breach. In the Versailles Treaty, Germany paid money, land and privileges in order to heal the rupture she had caused with the Allies. Not so with the treaty that heals the breach between God and man. Even before the breach, man was subordinate. How much more after! Consequently there is nothing he can do to reconcile God. Any atonement which is possible, therefore, is possible only by virtue of the free and sovereign grace of God.

Right here is the immense gulf be-

tween Christianity and all other religions. In pagan religions man appeases the wrath of the gods by his gifts and sacrifices. But in Christianity God, and God alone, provides that which will satisfy His justice and appease His wrath. So the fact that God has deigned to provide a substitute to suffer that death which His justice demands of the offender is ample evidence of the gracious character of the blood atonement. Another evidence is that under the old dispensation God allowed the death of an animal to be substituted for the death of a man. Would it not be strange if a certain state would allow a lamb to be strapped to the electric chair in the place of a murderer? That would be grace to the *n*th degree. That is just what God did in the time of Moses. But, you say, is that not grace at the expense of justice? But let us look further. The life of a lamb is a mere irrational, physical life, whereas the life of a man is a rational existence of a person capable of fellowship with God. Further, the wages of sin is not merely physical death but it is also spiritual death and eternal separation from God.

How, then, could God in Old Testament times accept the mere physical death of a dumb animal for such a death? There is one reason, and that reason plunges us into the fathomless depths of the mystery of the grace of God. It is that God in His eternal plan

had provided an adequate, a suitable, yea, an infinite sacrifice in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. Though it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin, their blood was accepted in the Mosaic dispensation because the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ was to be shed on Calvary's cross. And so, my friends, without the shedding of blood there is no removal of sin, there is no turning aside of the wrath of God, there is no "at-one-ment" between God and man. Therefore, it is necessary that we preach the gospel of the blood! Therefore, it is indispensable that sinners in all ages sing:

"There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that
flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."

A Christian Sanitarium

IS IT not a pity when Christian people who are suffering from nervous or mental diseases do not receive Christian care? Think of the sorry plight of one who suffers from a mental disease. If anyone needs Christian mercy it is he. Yet in a public institution this is not and cannot be given him. And think of the wonderful curative results that have come to patients who were treated in a Christian sanitarium.

But is there such a sanitarium where Protestant people may send their patients? Happily there is such an institution at Goffle Hill, New Jersey. Goffle Hill is beautifully located just outside of Paterson. It is far enough from the main highway to provide rest for the patients. It overlooks miles of rolling country that stretch to the Palisades and the Ramapo mountains.

The institution is sponsored by a group of Christian people of Reformed persuasion, on a non-profit basis. Full information may be obtained from Mr. Richard De See, 75 North 16th Street, Prospect Park, New Jersey.

For those living in mid-western territory there is a similar institution at Cutlerville, Michigan. Information concerning it may be had by addressing the Christian Psychopathic Hospital Association, R. R. 1, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

—C. VAN TIL.

Your Subscriptions in Memory of Dr. Machen

LAST year at this time many subscribers sent gift subscriptions to The Presbyterian Guardian in loving memory of Dr. J. Gresham Machen. Those subscriptions are now renewable, and we earnestly urge all who so generously and willingly cooperated with us last year not to allow their Machen Memorial subscriptions to expire. Your renewal of these gifts at this time will be of vital assistance in helping us to fulfill the hope of Dr. Machen for The Presbyterian Guardian. In addition, you will be giving a full year of encouragement, blessing, interest and information.