

Have you ever noticed how often we talk about blood as Christians? We often talk about the blood of Jesus. We talk about the blood of the Lamb. We talk about blood being shed, being washed in the blood, cleansed with the blood, and so forth. We talk about blood all the time. In fact, think of how many times we've talked about blood in our service already and will talk about it as we go along. In our very first hymn, we sang: "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness." Later in the service, we will receive the blood of Christ in communion. And in our communion hymns, we will sing: "Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me." And again we will sing: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." We talk about blood all the time.

Well, why? we might ask. What's so important about blood? Some of us might feel a little squeamish about the idea of blood or at least the very sight of it. And maybe it seems a little strange or even a bit morbid to talk about blood so much. But Christians, blood is important. Blood is central to understanding the Bible. Because as Hebrews 9, verse 22, tells us: "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins." So without the blood of Christ, then, we cannot be Christians at all. That's how important blood is in our understanding.

But to fully understand why blood is so important, we have to first understand what sin is. Because if we have a wrong idea of sin, Christians, we won't understand the purpose of blood in the Bible. So sin is something we often hear a lot about, but what does it mean exactly? What do we mean when we talk about sin? Is sin making mistakes, so that we mess up here or there in following after God? That can't be quite it, because if that was true, then that would suggest that we're doing okay most of the time and just slipping up here and there. But that would go against what Jeremiah says in chapter 17, where he says: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick. Who can understand it?" So sin is something more than just making mistakes.

Is sin a matter of bad influences? That we run with the wrong people or we're living in a bad environment, and that's what leads us to sin? That's not quite it either, because if that was true, then we could be in a perfect environment and we would never sin at all. But consider young children in this connection, Christians. If we've spent any time around young children, we know how much sin they're capable of. Who taught a young child to be greedy? Who taught a young child to be selfish? Who taught a young child to be violent? They didn't have to teach them any of these things. They came forth from a corrupted heart, because as Genesis tells us: "The intention of man's heart is evil from his youth."

No, Christians, sin is anything that we do, anything that we say, anything that we think that goes against the will of God. Sin is turning away from God. If we can imagine two parallel lines, for example, one of which is God and one of which is ourselves, we would want those lines to be perfectly parallel forever, that they would go to the same place. But even a small deviation, even a small, little change at the beginning will make them end up in two completely different places. They will go further and further apart the farther they go. So even a small sin, Christians, is enough to take us away from the will of God. It is something that is serious. As John tells us in 1 John 5: "All wrongdoing is sin."

But the great trouble is that sin causes two problems for us. And the first one of these problems is that it takes us away from God. It separates us from our God and Father. Because God is holy,

Christians. God is perfect. There is no such thing as sin in God. There is no such thing as sin in his presence. If we were to come before him as we are in our sins, we would be destroyed, because God's holiness is like a fire, a fire which will consume us. Yes, Christians, God is perfect, and for that reason as long as our sin remains, we cannot come near to God.

But the second great problem that sin causes, Christians, is death. Because death is the just punishment for our sin. Every evil thought we've had, every evil word we've spoken, every evil act we've done deserves that judgment. As Romans 6 tells us: "The wages of sin is death." And if we think that that is harsh or somehow unfair or going too far, it shows that we have not understood just how serious sin is. We have not seen it for the blackness that it is. We have not seen it for the corruption that it is. Because God as our Creator gave us everything, Christians. He gave us all that we have and all that we are, and we turned away from him, wanting to become god instead. So yes, this is the due punishment for our sins. And so sin takes us away from God, and sin condemns us to death. And as long as our sin remains, Christians, those problems will also remain.

But God in his love doesn't want it to stay that way. God wants it to change. God wants to be with us. God wants the evildoer to turn from his wickedness and live. But he can't just ignore sin. That would not be right. So he has to do something else instead. And that something else, Christians, is to give us a substitute, to give one thing in place of another. So God gives a substitute so the one who is guilty will live and the substitute will die in their place. Life given for life. One dies so that another may live.

And because death is the just punishment for our sins, that death has to occur. Something must give its life so that we would be forgiven. And Christians, this then is the purpose of blood in the Bible. Blood shows that a death has occurred, because blood is life. If we didn't have any blood in our bodies, we wouldn't live for very long. Blood is what gives us life. And so as Leviticus 17 says: "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." So the blood is shed then, Christians, because of death. It shows that something has died. And that blood is put on the altar. In other words, it is given to God as a payment for the sin. And that blood brings atonement. It becomes the substitute. One dies so that another may live. Life is given for life.

And in the Old Testament, Christians, this substitute was an animal: a bull or a goat or a heifer or a lamb or whatever it may have been. The animal became the substitute for the sins of men. Their sin was put upon them. Their sin was borne by the animal. And then the animal was slain, and their blood was poured out on the altar. Even the high priest took the blood of animals into the tabernacle so that the sins of Israel would be forgiven. The animal died in place of the man. The animal died so that man didn't have to die, because the death had occurred. Without blood, there could be no forgiveness, because there was no death. But with blood, there is forgiveness, because something had died as the Law required.

But there was one more problem that still remained, Christians. Animal blood was imperfect. Because an animal cannot truly be the substitute for a man. Animals are not people. People are not animals. That's simply how it is. And an animal cannot choose between good and evil. It doesn't know what good and evil are. It doesn't have morals. And for that reason, at best the

animal could become a symbolic substitution. At best, a perfect animal was given to show that the perfection would be given to them. And this is why animal sacrifices had to be repeated over and over and over again, because it was imperfect. The high priest took in blood every single year, because it was imperfect. Rivers of blood flowed out of Jerusalem from the animals that were slain, because it was imperfect. It was never good enough. An animal cannot be a true substitute for a man, certainly not a permanent one.

And this is why Hebrews 10 says, then: "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Animal blood could purify outwardly, like washing your hands and taking dirt off of them. It could do that. But it couldn't purify inwardly. It could not take care of the real problem of sin. And this is why the people of Israel, even though they had given these sacrifices, could never really come near to God, because sin still remained. The problem of death still remained. Something more had to be done.

And Christians, God always had that something more in mind, something that all of these animal sacrifices pointed towards, and that was the giving of his Son, Jesus Christ. Because Jesus, Hebrews tells us, is our great high priest. And as the great high priest, Jesus went into the great and heavenly holy places. But he didn't go in there carrying the blood of bulls and goats. That wouldn't be good enough. But he went in by means of his own blood, the blood which he shed on the cross. And because he shed that blood, Christians, Jesus became the perfect substitute. Jesus is a man, after all, just like us in every way except without sin. And Jesus could choose what is right or what is wrong. Jesus chose what is right perfectly, so that he became the perfect sacrifice. And our sins have been laid onto him, and he took all of them to the cross where he died to take them away. Jesus's death is the perfect substitute for our sins. Jesus has taken them all away by his blood. And he doesn't have to die over and over and over again, the way that the animals did. Jesus died once for all, so that our sins have been dealt with forever. Because Christians, if the imperfect blood of bulls and goats could wash away the outward problems of sin, how much more can the perfect blood of Christ deal with the real problem of sin? How much more can the perfect blood of Christ purify us inwardly, so that we can now come to God? The blood of Christ, Christians, has done it all forever! And because of that blood, we have been brought back to God.

Therefore, Christians, as Hebrews 10 tells us: "Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Because we believe that the blood of Jesus Christ forgives us our sins, we can come near to God today. And Christians, if some past sin troubles you, so that you feel like your conscience will never again be at peace, come to God, because the blood of Christ covers all of your sins. If you wonder how God could ever possibly love you, knowing the things that you have done, come to God, because the blood of Christ purifies all your sins. If you feel like the stain of sin is something that you're never going to wash out, like you feel like you're never going to be clean again, come to God, because the blood of Christ will wash you and make you white. And if you wonder what you could ever do to pay for your sins, to take care of those things that you have done, come to God, because the blood of Christ has already paid it all, Christians. It is finished. That blood will make you clean. That blood will wash your sins away. And you can come near to God today because the blood of Christ has forgiven you your sins.

So this is why we talk about blood so much, Christians. It's why we sing about blood. Because the blood of Christ forgives us our sins. The blood of Christ makes us righteous in the sight of God. And the blood of Christ enables us to do what is pleasing in his sight. Without that blood, Christians, we are nothing; but washed in that blood, we are everything. The blood, Christians! The blood of Christ is everything! So let us praise Christ and his precious blood now and forevermore.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have forgiven us our sins through the blood of your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that you would help us always to draw near to you in full faith, knowing that Jesus has opened the way. In his name we pray. Amen.