

Blood, Blood, Glorious Blood

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[0 : 00] But we're going to read now in our Bibles together. Stephen Bellingall has been taking us through some studies in the book of Leviticus. And many people find this a difficult book, and I suppose it's often neglected.

But we've been finding very rich themes here, and you'll see as we read together in Leviticus chapter 17 this evening, that there is so much here that is fundamental to the very heart of what it means to bring about forgiveness of sin.

And that is at the very heart of the Christian gospel. So we're going to read the whole of chapter 17 of the book of Leviticus. If you need a Bible, there's some at the front and the sides, and just feel free to go and grab one so you can follow along.

Leviticus 17 and verse 1. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, He has shed blood.

That man shall be cut off from among his people. This is to the end, that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to the Lord, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the Lord.

[1 : 44] And the priest shall throw the blood on the altar of the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and burn the fat for pleasing aroma to the Lord. So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons after whom they whore.

And there shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations. And you shall say to them, And you shall say to them, Any one of the house of Israel or any of the strangers who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to offer it to the Lord, that man shall be cut off from his people.

If anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people.

For 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. And therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.

[3 : 04] Anyone also of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten, shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.

For the life of every creature is its blood. Its blood is its life. And therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat of the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood.

Whoever eats it shall be cut off. And every person who eats what dies of itself or what is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or a sojourner, shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.

And then he shall be clean. But if he does not wash them or bathe his flesh, he shall bear his iniquity. Amen.

And may God bless to us his word. Well, you may wonder what all this reference to blood and why it's so important. But of course, it's important because it lies at the very heart of the great sacrifice, at the heart of the universe, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 22] Good evening, friends. Please do keep your Bibles open at Leviticus chapter 17 as we go through this passage together. Last Sunday evening, we looked at the Day of Atonement, the great resetting of the stage for God and Israel.

The Lord forgave their sin and gave them a clean slate with which they were to devote themselves to him. And tonight, we see Moses start to work out some of the implications of the atonement.

And we'll hear from our passage that the Lord wants his people's allegiance, for he is the only God who provides atonement.

Moses wants his readers to nail their colours to the mast, to show allegiance to God alone and commit to serving him and no other.

Because trusting in the Lord and having allegiance to him alone brings life in his name. As our God is unlike any of the idols of the world around us, because he is the God of life itself.

[5 : 31] And trusting in him and his means of sacrifice brings life. The Lord hasn't saved his people so that we can be consumerists, shopping around the different idols of the day, blending them together with him into some kind of pseudo-Christianity.

He wants to guard us from abandoning him in case we end up running into the arms of a false God who promises much, but only delivers death. Instead, we are to bind ourselves to our God and King as a husband and wife bind themselves to one another on their wedding day and for every day following on throughout their marriage.

God wants his people to choose him because he is the only God and he is the only one who promises and delivers life to those who trust in his name.

That's what we'll see tonight. And this chapter contains four laws, each beginning with the phrase, if any one of you does. And we'll take the passage in two halves, each with two laws within.

Seeing firstly, allegiance to the Lord in verses 1 to 9. And then seeing atonement from the Lord in verses 10 to 16. So firstly, in verses 1 to 9, we have allegiance to the Lord.

[6 : 52] And in this section, the Lord makes clear that Israel is to be an idol-free zone. They are not to pick and choose who they bow down to, but are to worship the Lord their God and none other.

So let's go through the first of these laws, which really builds the picture as you go through them. If you come to conclusions too early, then you'll probably end up getting the wrong end of the stick. So, verse 3.

If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the Lord in front of the tabernacle of the Lord, blood guilt shall be imputed to that man.

He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people. And this initially appears to be speaking of any animal, killing any animal at any time.

That the Lord wouldn't want Israel to kill any beast unless they are brought to the tabernacle. Although if that were the case itself, then it would make the punishment quite severe. End of verse 4.

[7 : 58] God would count that death of an animal as murder. The person would be blood guilty, and therefore cut off from the people, sent away from the camp of Israel, away from the God of life.

So let's read on. Verse 5. This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices, that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to the Lord, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the Lord.

So all these animal sacrifices are to be done at the tent of meeting, the tabernacle. That's repeated and emphasized that the location really matters in terms of these sacrifices.

Not out in the open field, unregulated, but are to be brought to the tent of meeting to be sacrificed as peace offerings to the Lord. And now, the Lord's not being greedy for himself here, or stopping his people from enjoying a good barbecue.

He's no killjoy, because the peace offering, the one that the Lord commands here, was one that the offerer shares in too. That's the offering you can read of in Leviticus chapter 3, where part of the meat went to the Lord, part went to the priest, and the largest portion of it actually went to you, the offerer.

[9 : 17] It's the only offering where the person giving it would get some in return. So the Lord certainly wasn't wanting to stop them enjoying a good meal. It goes on. Verse 7.

So, they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore.

And everything clicks into place. It's not primarily about the place of worship, but the person of worship, ensuring proper and true worship of the living God alone, treating him with faithfulness.

In short, they're being told to be faithful to the first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me. And this might all come as a bit of a surprise, because really, how could Israel be this stupid?

They've had incredible experiences of God's glory and power before their very eyes. They have his house, his presence, right there in their neighborhood. And this follows directly on from the Day of Atonement, this great, clean slate that Israel was given to serve the Lord with, and devote themselves to him with.

[10 : 32] But, often it is after a great spiritual high that we can be most vulnerable to falling again, isn't it? And the Lord knows what his people are like. And he knows the ways in which they will be tempted towards sin.

Israel had just come from Egypt, and they were about to travel into the Promised Land, and the threat of idolatry was very real. It was a live issue. The mention of goat demon has Egyptian connotations.

But not only that, not long before this had happened, they had together as a whole nation engaged in idolatrous worship of a golden calf. And, they were about to go into the Promised Land, where there were many other idols to choose from, many other options for them to worship.

But here, the Lord says to Israel that you must nail your colors to the mast, and only worship him and him alone. That's because, as he says in verse 7, worshiping false gods is an act of prostitution, of committing adultery against the Lord.

And that shocking language helps us to see that our relationship with the Lord is like that of a husband and wife, where complete fidelity is expected.

[11 : 45] We're not just friends, we're not just business partners, but we are in a marriage relationship with him, tied together, united in the promises of the Gospel. And it's a really helpful picture the Lord gives, because saying yes to be with your spouse necessarily involves saying no, to being with anyone else.

When a man and his wife are married, they say no to any sexual activity outside that relationship. And that's the only way for good and healthy marriage to flourish. In the same way, when the Lord is joined to his people, there's to be no other sacrificial worship outside of that relationship.

The people weren't to worship the Lord on the Sabbath, and then sacrifice to the fertility gods during the week. They couldn't turn up to the tabernacle one day, and then the next day be making sacrifices to the false gods, hoping that they would help their business.

That would be just like a spouse turning up to their anniversary dinner, dressed up for the occasion, ordering the best meal, having the best wine, looking like they're having the most wonderful time. Well, every chance they get, they make excuses to go away and check their phone to see how their dating apps are doing.

Saying yes to God involves saying no to other false gods. It's an utterly exclusive relationship. There were to be no split loyalties.

[13 : 11] Israel weren't to be part-time believers in the Lord, but were to be wholly devoted to him above anything else. Christians today must worship him alone in the way he asks to be worshipped.

And that's key, because he's told us clearly in his word how he wants to be worshipped, so we are to follow his ways. If the Lord is our king, then his word will be our law above anything else.

A kind of do-it-yourself spirituality was to have no place in Israel, and it's to have no place in us too. You might think that all this talk of idolatry is from a different era, that we could never fall for such nonsense, and granted, it would take a lot, I hope anyway, it would take a lot for one of us to bow down to a lump of wood or a piece of metal, or to wander into a mosque or Sikh temple.

However, in our secular age, the idols are still man-made, but instead of being made by hands, they are made by the human mind. They're not made of wood or metal, but concepts and ideas.

John Calvin famously said that the human heart is a perpetual idol factory. And that factory is still in production today, as we constantly try to put other things above the Lord himself.

[14 : 32] And in our current age, the idol we are most tempted to worship is that of self, of our own personal freedom to define ourselves and rule ourselves.

That weaves its way through much of our culture, particularly seen in the pride movement in its most potent form, although it filters through the rest of our world in many ways. There might not be weekly services in honour of the self, but worship is not just about looking religious.

It's about what you devote the service of your hearts to. It's about what or who you have allegiance to. Who calls the shots in your life? And that identity of self can filter its way into the way we worship the Lord as his people.

We might not bow down to an idol, but we might start putting ourselves at the centre of our relationship with God. Our likes and our dislikes rather than his.

We might be tempted towards a consumerist, do-it-yourself version of Christianity that's totally tailored to us that is false and therefore idolatrous. And what I mean by that is that we might find ourselves wanting to do things differently to have our own unique kind of faith.

[15 : 50] That like Israel, we would rather sacrifice where we are instead of having to traipse into the tabernacle every time. Because it's easier here and we like it more here. We'll do the Sabbath stuff, but we'll have our own interpretation the other six days of the week.

That we can change the faith of our fathers while retaining just enough biblical language to make it sound credible. That the gospel of repent and believe becomes the gospel of be true to yourself and believe.

So when churches start going against God's word, whether it's in redefining God's gift of marriage or rewriting prayers and practices or trying to cut out parts of the Bible, then we know that these people are engaging in idolatry.

They're not merely innocent mistakes, but these are idolatrous, adulterous, putting themselves at the heart of worship rather than the Lord who has offered them his blood.

Wanting all the benefits of religion, but not obeying the God who they belong to. People like that are bowing down and devoting themselves to the God of self.

[17 : 01] They're worshipping themselves, really. Worshipping the gods of apparent freedom and love, but utterly divorcing that from the God of true freedom and true love. The Lord has redeemed his people to be his people, and they are to be devoted to him alone, because only with him will you receive life.

Saying yes to the Lord means that we must say no to things that will draw us away from him, because they only lead to death. That's why the penalty for idolatry, for moving away from the Lord, is just so severe.

End of verse 4. The guilty party is cut off from among his people, which is repeated at the end of verse 9. Cut off, meaning that they were evicted from the camp, away from the people, as a sign that they had walked away from the Lord's offer of eternal life.

It was an earthly sign of an eternal reality. They'd walked away from the Lord. They wanted nothing to do with him. And that sin was to have no place in the camp. That's why Israel was to be so ruthless with cutting this out and sending it away.

As soon as this consumerist idol culture developed, it was to be cut off in case it spread to more and more of God's people who belong to him.

[18 : 22] And secondly, in our passage, we'll see atonement from the Lord in verses 10 to 16. Atonement from the Lord. And here we see that the Lord wants his people to be devoted to him because he is the God who provides atonement.

He is the God who provides life. Idols may promise much, but he alone grants eternal life. Moses shifts focus from sacrifices to blood and how God's people were to interact with it.

You'll see in verses 10 to 12 that it's about eating the blood of an animal generally. And then verses 13 to 16, that's about the blood of animals that are hunted or die naturally outside the camp.

In the first law in 10 to 12, verse 11 is the key which unlocks it. Framing it on either side are two warnings which repeat almost exactly the same thing.

that any Israelite or foreigner living among them is not to eat blood and if they do, the Lord will cut them off and set his face against them. Although the warning amps up a little bit, it's quite personal.

[19 : 31] Verse 10 says, I will set my face against them. I will cut them off. This is a serious offense with exclusion from God's people again being the punishment.

So why is it such a big deal for people to eat the blood of an animal? Well, the action of eating blood really indicates that the person has actually already turned their back on the covenant God.

If they are deliberately misusing the very gift God has given them to find forgiveness, then it shows that they have already rejected their allegiance to him as they are wasting, treating like dirt, profaning the blood of the covenant.

Look at verse 11 with me which explains why blood is so important to the Lord here. For 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. The blood represents life, the life of the flesh and the Lord has given Israel in this blood as the means of restoring their relationship.

[20 : 46] This isn't generally about animals being valued and their lives being important. That would be a misreading of the passage. If you took it that way, then you'd have a difficult time squaring it up with the huge amount of animal sacrifices that Leviticus requires.

The Lord is indeed the author of life and his creation is not to be abused and misused, but as true as that is, that's not the truth that Moses was wanting to put across here. Moses was wanting to convey to his readers something greater than that because it's what blood represents that makes it important.

The Lord says that blood represents life as at its simplest form, when blood leaves the body, life leaves the body. It's the obvious physical element to use to symbolize life itself.

And the Lord has given Israel these animals that they might make use of them to restore their relationship. He's given them the means of atonement that they might grab hold of it and be made at one with them.

There's nothing magical or mystical about the blood here. It doesn't have particular properties which atone for sin. Of course it doesn't. Hebrews is emphatic about that. It is impossible for the blood of goats and bulls to pay for sins.

[22 : 00] It was always pointing to something or someone greater. But since God had established blood as the means of their atonement, it was to be respected.

Every animal was to be treated with the consideration that its blood carried the potential to restore their relationship with God. It was like all these animals, these oxes, these goats, these bulls wandering around Israel, every one of them carried the cure to their deepest disease.

So we're to be treated with the deepest respect as a result. And that's the point that's carried over to the last law in verses 13 to 16. That even if you are going out to hunt for an animal for your dinner, then that game still has blood, which Israel and the foreigners living there also could not eat.

So if they went out hunting and they killed a clean animal, like a deer or something similar, then end of verse 13, you're to pour out its blood and cover it with earth.

Even an animal you weren't sacrificing ritually still had the lifeblood, the means of atonement with the Lord. So it was to be respected. It's not yours to do what you want with and treat like it doesn't matter.

[23 : 16] And verse 15, animals that die as a result of another animal's attack, well, Israel can eat them, that's fine, but they were to wash after in case they'd come into contact with any uncleanness. And that example is a little bit more unusual because there's no mention of blood in that part of the law, probably because as a result of being torn apart by other animals, their blood would already have been soaked into the ground or been feasted on by these other animals.

But the key truth that the Lord was teaching Israel there through these laws is that he is the provider of life. He is the one of salvation and life is found only through allegiance to him.

The Lord wanted to build into their life daily routines, a reminder that every time they had meat for dinner that the Lord provides his sacrifice.

Trusting in the Lord and having allegiance to him alone leads to life in his name. That's what Israel were being promised as they accepted his sacrifice for their sins and committed themselves to him.

It would have been a great reminder of that at every family celebration when the fattened calf was slaughtered and served up that they were only in relationship with the Lord because of the blood of another which he provided for them to cling to.

[24 : 34] Every time they poured out the blood into the earth they would know that the blood of another was poured out for them. And that blood, verse 11, is provided by the Lord.

He says, I have given it for you that you may take it and be atoned for. I have given it for you. The Lord, the party who has been wronged in our relationship with him, the innocent one, takes the initiative and provides a way back into relationship with him.

And you'll know that in any relationship. If in something like a marriage adultery has taken place, the guilty person can't make it right themselves. No amount of gifts they offer, no amount of apologies they give, no public shows of regret and affection can ever truly remove what happened and fix everything.

Instead, the person who has been so mistreated, the person who has been treated like dirt, that's common. They are the only one who can grant forgiveness. It has to come from them.

And God, in his grace, reaches out and offers forgiveness to his people. The wronged party makes the first move. He provides this blood and he wants Israel to take it for themselves and enjoy fellowship with him.

[25 : 58] He is so unlike the idols of our day and of history where the onus is on you as you need to do various acts or to find something within yourself to be made right, to be a good person.

Our world generally believes that our sin or our brokenness is separate from us, that we as humans are broken because of external circumstances.

Maybe it's been because someone's been through a difficult experience or they've been provoked in some way or they've been ruined by society, by something out there. And to find redemption, we need only look into ourselves, make free of these systems that were forced upon us, and then, only then, may we find liberty and happiness, finally being a good person, whatever that means.

But friends, that is utter nonsense and we know it. The guilty party can't find anything in themselves to make things right with a holy God. Your righteousness doesn't come from anything within because you're a sinner.

We need something outside of ourselves to make us clean and that is what God provides in the gospel. And not only does he provide the blood, he bears the cost himself.

[27 : 15] Because we know that these animals were pointing forward to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. We know that he is the one who all the blood of bulls and goats was pointing to as his blood, the perfect blood, provides salvation for the Lord's people today.

And now, when we think about how to apply this today, of course we don't have the same attitude to the blood of animals. We don't do exactly this today as we find it in chapter 17 because the means of atonement has changed.

The blood of animals does not make us clean now, but we are made clean by the blood of Jesus. He is the means of our atonement and his blood is that which is sacred, set apart for us to grab hold of, to cling to, to be made clean with God.

And one of the implications of Christ's coming is that animal blood no longer has this protected, atoning purpose. So the blood laws came to be obsolete because a better blood has been offered.

So friends, good news, you can continue to enjoy that barbecue in your back garden, you can enjoy your steaks on the rear side, and you can enjoy the most underrated and unsung hero in the Scottish cooked breakfast which is the black pudding.

[28 : 31] Thank the Lord. As Jesus comes, he actually takes these laws and he turns them on their head. He says that to be saved, instead of abstaining from blood, you are to drink his blood.

That is the only way of salvation. We heard that last Sunday morning with Edward in John chapter 6. For anyone to receive eternal life, they must drink Christ's blood.

And of course that's done symbolically through us trusting in his blood. And putting our hope of salvation in him alone, showing allegiance to him. And we are still to be a people who worship the Lord his way, only coming through Christ and his word.

And we are to be a people who continue to respect the blood of the covenant which the Lord has provided for us. Hebrews chapter 10 picks up on this idea when the author says, how much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has profaned, made common, treated like dirt, the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the spirit of grace.

For we know him who said, vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[29 : 59] every human's fate hangs on how they treat the blood of Jesus. Israel were being taught that in the old covenant and we see the fulfillment of that in Christ's blood today, in the new covenant made in his blood.

And we today have been offered a better blood. We have been provided a better sacrifice and we are to show respect for Christ's blood by reaching out and taking hold of him, of drinking his blood.

His is the only way of salvation. We need his blood, the blood outside of ourselves that God has provided so that we might be atoned for and have life in his name.

Anything that leads us away from that will only lead to death and judgment from the living God. Anyone who despises Christ's blood will meet the Lord not as their father and savior but as avenger and judge.

So friends, how much more are we to respect the blood of the atonement by showing allegiance to our God today? He is the one who has bought us at such great cost to himself.

[31 : 14] Christ shed his blood and he offers it to us that we might become his and receive eternal life in his name. And at this point of Leviticus, once atonement has been made, Moses is saying that this atonement is not to lead to complacency but to more and more commitment to the Lord.

It's the same as when a man and woman make vows promising to be faithful to another on their wedding day. Well, that faithfulness is only to grow and grow and grow. And our allegiance to our Lord who has saved us is only to grow.

because he is the one who has taken the initiative. He has provided his son's blood for our atonement with him. So let us nail our colours to the mast as worshippers of him alone.

Let's pray. our Father God, we thank you that you are the God of life, the only God who can and does offer atonement and eternal life to all who trust in him.

Please strengthen our trust in you. Help us to grow in obedience to you and to treat the blood of your son as the holy and life-giving gift that he is.

[32 : 41] In Jesus' name. Amen.