

Leviticus 17:10-16 AM

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[0 : 0 0] So, we're talking about blood today, and we're going to view Leviticus chapter 17. You can turn there in your Bibles, page 96, remind you, through the lens of Hebrews chapter 9, because the key point is this.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Can you imagine a world without forgiveness? Endless cycles of revenge, bitterness that never softens, and separation that never reconciles.

A guilt, that sense that I've done something wrong that never lifts, or shame, that sense of who I am as a problem that never subsides. Can you imagine a world where forgiveness of sins does not exist?

And it makes us want to pay attention to that word, without the shedding of blood. There is no forgiveness of sins. So, the main question is, why is blood necessary for forgiveness?

What role does blood play in our relationship to God? And that's what Leviticus chapter 17 is trying to push at, trying to answer for us. But before we dive into the details, I want to remind you of why we are in Leviticus in the first place.

[1 : 1 8] It's part of our Lent sermon series, The Holy God Draws Near. We are spending five weeks in Lent in the book of Leviticus and the book of Hebrews.

Leviticus is about how the holy God draws near to an unholy people and makes a way for that unholy people to draw near to him, the holy God. And then Hebrews tells us about how ultimately God has done that through the supremacy of the person and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

So that our relationship to God is now mediated by the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And it means that we can have confidence by the blood of Christ to enter into the sanctuary of God and draw near to the holy one in our times of need.

Because we know that the throne of holiness is a throne of grace. And so, in our five-week sermon series, we are doing something like this. This is the first time I've ever used slides before in a sermon.

So, this is pretty fancy stuff. Yeah. I just want you to see what the sermon series is supposed to look like. I didn't design it.

[2 : 2 4] Ryan Spear did. And he did a marvelous job doing it. One of the Artizo interns. Notice how it begins with the holy God. Everything begins with God. And then this week, we look at blood and the cost of sin.

And then next week, we look at the day of atonement. How God provides a way for blood to be shed that is not our own in order that we may be saved and preserved in his presence.

And then everything that flows, all the blessings that flow out of that day of atonement, the fourth week is about how blood is now our confidence in Christ to be in the presence of God.

And then in the fifth week, it's how God through that blood is not just allowing us to be in his presence, but he is making us into a holy people that reflect him. And so everything hinges on next week.

But this week in particular is about blood and the cost of sin, because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. So two points this morning.

[3 : 2 7] Without blood, number one. Number two, no forgiveness. Without blood. Multiple times in Leviticus chapter 17, the people of God are told not to eat the blood of the animals.

It's a weird thing to be telling them not to do. I said to David this last week, I think the application is that rare meat is not allowed at restaurants anymore.

And so in verse 11, you see this phrase, it's the life of the animals in the blood. And then in verse 14, it's blood is its life. And those of you who have worked on farms will understand the imagery

that's being portrayed here.

When you kill an animal, normally you slit its throat and you drain out the blood out of its body. And then you clean it and you butcher it and you process it and do whatever you're going to do with it. So this image of warm blood draining from motionless flesh as the heart comes to a standstill is an image of death.

It's an image of the life of a creature being poured out. You think of Jesus on the cross, for example, having breathed his last breath. What does the soldier do to make sure that he is dead?

[4 : 37] He pierces him with the side. And what does John tell us? Out of the side, blood drained out. It's the sign that Jesus is completely dead.

He has poured out his life to the end out of love for his own. And in the world of Leviticus, blood functions, this pouring out of life unto death functions in a very specific way in God's relationship with his people.

So slide number two, here we go. This one is slightly more complex. You can blame David for that. I got this from David. But it's really helpful to understand that in Leviticus, there's the sense that all of life, like every detail of life is lived in the presence of the holy God.

Like every moment is holy. Every detail is holy. That's why God speaks to it. And so all of life can be categorized in three different areas. It can be categorized as holy, clean, or unclean.

And people or things can move up and down these categories from holy to clean to unclean, or clean, unclean to clean to holy, depending on whether they're involved in sin or sacrifice.

[5 : 45] So sin is the way that you move down from holy to clean to unclean. And sacrifice is the way you move up from unclean to clean to holy.

And in this worldview, blood operates in both directions. So blood can make you unclean through putting you in touch with death, i.e.

eating the blood of an animal. Or blood can make you clean by the giving of a life over to death.

So for example, the sprinkling of blood before the altar in God in the tabernacle. So this is part of the reason why in Leviticus, it is sacrifices necessary in order for unholy people to draw near to the holy God.

It is the form of mercy that honors God's justice and his holiness. That he cannot dwell with what is unclean. He cannot dwell with what is polluted.

[6 : 45] It must be cleansed by sacrifice to be in his presence. And so the whole sacrificial system in Leviticus is not people trying to figure out how to make God happy with their sacrifices. It is God saying, this is the way in which you draw near to me and you get close to me.

God commands his people to make sacrifices, not because he needs something from them, but because they need something from him. And so the whole system of sacrifice is a way of God drawing near to his unholy people in grace and a way of allowing his unholy people to draw near to him in faith.

And that's why some of the sacrifices in Leviticus, not all of them, involved blood. So for example, if you look at the first seven chapters, you get like grain offerings and peace offerings and thank offerings and free will offerings and all these different sacrifices that can be offered to God.

Because they are intended to foster a type of relationship with God. A relationship that is marked by spontaneity and gratitude and praise and peace and joy.

And so not all sacrifices in Leviticus involve blood, but all sacrifices in some sense are dependent on blood. That's why chapters 16 and 17 are right in the middle of Leviticus.

[8 : 03] They are the heart of the book. God is teaching his people that bloody sacrifice is the doorway to all the other blessings of God. All the other joys of the Christian life are not possible without blood.

Because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. So let's get into verse 11 of chapter 17. It takes us straight to the heart of the matter. Verse 11.

This Hebrew word nefesh means life or soul or self. And it occurs three times in this verse. Look at it with me. For the life, there it is, nefesh, of the flesh is in the blood.

And I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls. It's the same word, nefesh, for your lives. For it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

The same word, nefesh. This is the word that's used in Genesis chapter 2 when God forms humanity out of the dust of the earth. And he breathes into their nostrils the breath of life.

[9 : 06] And humanity becomes a living creature. The word is nefesh. They are a living creature. It is what God gives to the creature that makes it alive.

And at the beginning and end of verse 11, this word life is used in relation to blood. It is life that is given over to death. And then right in the middle of those two uses, the word is used in relation to life that is protected or preserved or covered or saved by the death of another.

So what's happening here is atonement. That word literally means to cover. Think, for example, of the Passover in Exodus 12, where God instructed his people who were living in Egypt to slaughter a lamb and smear some of its blood on the doorposts to their house.

So when God visited their house that night, he would see the blood and he would pass over their house. And the death of the lamb would be a covering or a protection for the life of his people.

And that's the image that's at the heart of verse 11. It's this substitutionary covering. This substitutionary atonement. One life is given over unto death instead of another.

[10 : 24] And this, we are told, is the gift of God for the people of God that stands at the doorway of all the other blessings of God. This is what God does.

I have given it the blood for you. In 1962, a Canadian Christian missionary named Don Richardson moved to New Guinea in Indonesia.

He moved there with his wife and seven-month-old child to live and work amongst the Sawi tribe.

And Don went there because he wanted to learn the language, learn the culture, and then be able to translate the scriptures into that culture and share the good news of Jesus with them.

But as he was doing it, he found that there were a whole lot of cultural barriers to understanding and accepting the teaching of Jesus Christ. And one of the biggest ones is that honored among their culture was treachery.

So it was actually seen as a noble and valuable thing, even a heroic thing. If you could befriend somebody, betray them, murder them, and maybe even eat them. And so in their eyes, when they heard the gospel story, they said, Judas is the hero, not Jesus.

[11 : 35] Judas. And he didn't know what to do. And this cultural value bred so much violence between the different villages in this tribe that it got so violent that at one point, Don and his family were considering leaving, but the tribe didn't want them to leave.

And then an unlikely event happened that brought the concept of the substitutionary atonement of Christ right into the heart of the village life. To end the killing and the violence, one of the tribal leaders went to his enemy camp and literally took his baby son with him and offered his son to his hated foes.

And the deal was, in this case, it wasn't to shut his blood, but in this case, it was as long as the son lived, peace would reign between the tribes. The son was called from then on a peace child.

This son's life was given over to his enemies so that nobody else's life would be taken. And witnessing this painful sacrifice that was made by this father and mother, the Sawi people suddenly saw the beauty of God's own sacrifice illustrated.

Don called it the peace child. One life was given so that another life would not be taken. In a similar way, I think the book of Leviticus, through this imagery of bloody sacrifice in this whole system, God is furnishing our imaginations for the coming and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

[13 : 06] He wants us to understand the depth and the significance of that substitution. And I think that is the ultimate reason why God prohibits the eating of animal blood in Leviticus. Because he's saying, all of life belongs to me, and I want you to start to see and start to learn and start to be sensitized to the way in which the shedding of life, the shedding of blood, will be the means by which I accomplish my saving purposes in the world.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. So that's point one, without blood. But point two is no forgiveness.

And here Leviticus gets very acute, in a way that the Bible often is. Leviticus does everything it can. I mean, it's an ancient text, but it's inspired by the living God.

And so it does everything it can, even today, to resist the modern tendency either to domesticate the holiness of God, or to soften the seriousness of sin in his presence.

So look at verse 10. If anyone of the house of Israel, or of any strangers who sojourn among them, eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and I will cut him off from among his people.

[14:27] Skip down to verse 14. Towards the end. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, you shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is in the blood, and 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 native or a sojourner, shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until evening. Then he shall be clean. But if he does not wash them or bathe his flesh, he shall bear his iniquity. Did you notice the severity and seriousness of the language?

Set my face against. Cut off. Cut off. Bear his own iniquity. And that last image of bearing iniquities comes straight from chapter 16. If you flip the page over, this describes the day of atonement. And in verse 20, we're told that there's this provision or this image of a scapegoat. And when he has made an end of atonement for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, this is verse 20, he shall present the live goat.

[15:37] This is Aaron. Verse 21. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the goat and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel and all their transgressions and all their sins.

And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear, here it is, the language, shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area.

And he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness. So it's this image of God's graciousness. He's taking the sins of his people.

He is putting it on another, a scapegoat, literally, to bear the iniquities. You just think of Jesus Christ coming to bear our iniquities. And he says, if you refuse to approach, if you refuse to kind of honor the way in which I am providing for you to approach me through blood, then you will bear your own iniquities.

I'm providing a way for another to bear your iniquities. But if you do not approach me by the means which I am providing for you and seek another way of approaching me, then you will end up bearing your own iniquities.

[16:51] And you will be cut off from the source of holiness and life and mercy. And the lesson is this. If you do not trust the salvation that God has provided through the sending of his son, in the way that God is providing it through the shedding of his blood on the cross, then you will not be able to enjoy the presence of God's holiness or his people's presence in forgiveness.

And my dear brothers and sisters, it doesn't bring me a whole lot of joy to deliver this severe and serious truth this morning. But God wants you to understand that sin is serious and its cost is very significant.

Leviticus 17 wants to awaken our spiritual senses to our deep need for a savior. It's what Peter experienced on the beach that morning as his boat was sinking under the weight of fresh fish, falling down at Jesus' knees, crying out, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

Leviticus presents us with searing images of crimson blood on the altar of a holy God who is a consuming fire so that our hearts may tremble with conviction.

Until we come to see ourselves as God sees us, we are not likely to cherish the cross of Jesus Christ. And this is one of the magnificent things in the New Testament is that this image of the cost of sin that we get in the Old Testament becomes the image of the graciousness and the mercy of the Holy God in the New.

[18:26] And we could just repeat verse after verse after verse. Romans 5, Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God?

Or Ephesians chapter 1, In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace. Or Colossians 1, In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, whether in heaven or on earth, making peace by the blood of his cross.

In 1 John 1, 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. See all the blessings of God, justification and salvation and redemption and reconciliation and peace and cleansing, come through the cross. And forgiveness is the gateway to them all. That's why blood matters. Because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

And what I want to conclude with is simply the opposite of the positive of the negative. Without blood, no forgiveness, but with blood, forgiveness.

[19 : 47] And forgiveness is this covering of sin, this lifting of guilt and shame, this restoring of broken relationship, and this making of trust and intimacy and presence possible again.

Ever since Genesis 3, we have been seeking to cover our sin and hide our shame in any way possible. Dealing with things in our own way.

So sometimes this takes the form of simple distraction, like social media consumption, hiding from God or others. Sometimes this takes energetic action, like leading to impressive achievements, hiding from others.

And sometimes this takes the form of deep addiction, where we're just numbing out, and we're hiding from ourselves altogether. But there is this impulse to hide because of our sin, and to find ways to cover our shame.

And we are told throughout Scripture that this is not our job. Our job is to confess and uncover and not hide anymore. It is God's job to provide the covering.

[20 : 52] It is God's job to make the atonement and provide the blood and offer the forgiveness and cleanse from unrighteousness. And the epitome of sin is doing what God alone can do.

Or at least trying to do what God alone can do. And so Leviticus presents us, I think, each of us with a very searching question. Am I trying to relate to God on my own terms, or am I relating to God on the terms and the means and the ways that he has provided for me?

Am I trying to cover my own sins and hide my own sins, or am I trusting that God has provided the sacrificial covering through his Son that is needed for me to enter into his presence?

It is a question not of what we do with our sin. It's not just a question of whether I'm sinful or not, holy or not. It's a question of what do I do with it?

Someone once said to me in a season when I was working way too much, are you trying to atone for your sins? They were half-joking, but I think they had a point.

[22 : 00] What is the source of my drawing near to God? What is the source of my significance and my meaning in his presence and in the presence of others?

From where or what or whom do I derive my identity and my sense of belonging in life? What makes me acceptable to God and other people? Is it the fact that the Holy God sees me and he sees all the hiddenness of me and he sees all the iniquities that I bear and he forgives me and he welcomes me in his holy presence through the blood of the Lord Jesus?

Or is it the fact that I'm getting really good at hiding certain parts of myself and then just presenting the best parts of me? Because one path leads to eternal life and joy in God's presence and the other leads to death in the wilderness, the scapegoat carrying the iniquities of the people.

Therefore, says the author of the Hebrews, therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he has opened for us, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with a heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

God has made a way. Without shedding of blood, no forgiveness, but blood has been shed, and so forgiveness opens the way into the presence and all the blessings of God.

[23 : 42] I speak these things to you, my brothers and sisters, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.