

Atonement in Symbols— Part One



“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19, NIV).

Sacrifice and Redemption

INTRODUCTION

1 John 2:2

The Old Testament sacrificial system was not meant to desensitize people to the act of killing. There was no sport involved. There wasn't a hunting season specified as "sacrificial hunting." There were no arrows, guns, or tracking. An innocent lamb would be taken from its home, bound with ropes, and then killed. This wasn't an act that was watched from a faraway safe place. People didn't sit in front of their television sets with the ability to change the channel if the spilling of blood became too much to tolerate. This was an act that each individual had to take part in in one way or another. The Old Testament sacrificial system was a constant reminder that Christ would be coming to die so that they could have redemption.

Cruelty to animals is considered one of the worst crimes a person can commit. I know many people who have to change the television channel if they're watching a show where a dog is hurt. Pets look to their owners for protection. Sheep have to be protected from predators, as do dogs and cats. The death of a person is even more painful.

**There was thought put into
His death.**

Christ was not only sacrificed, He was executed by the capital punishment of His day. There was thought put into His death. The phrase "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa.

53:7, NIV) is a fitting symbol for the atonement Christ made on our behalf. Christ was as innocent as a lamb. He had never sinned. He was God on earth. Yet He was taken away from His friends and His disciples. He was led to His death. Human hands nailed Him to the cross, just as human hands shed the blood of the sacrificial animals.

This death penalty was meant for each of us. As sinners, we deserve to die. But Heaven gave us a Substitute. The Old Testament sacrificial system points toward His death and helps the world understand why Jesus came to earth. By taking our death penalty upon Himself, He made it possible for all of us to have eternal life. Through His death, Christ redeemed us.

REACT

1. How would you feel if the Old Testament sacrificial system were still in place?
2. What light, if any, does Christ's sacrifice shed on the death penalty for a crime?

Searching for the Meaning of Sacrifice

Sunday
November 2

EVIDENCE

Gen. 22:2; Rom. 3:25

When searching on the Internet for information regarding the Old Testament and sacrifice, I was struck by the types of sites brought up. These sites covered everything from the Old Testament and Judaism to Christ as a sacrifice to current animal sacrifice and its negative use. I expected to find references to Christ's gift of forgiveness, but I didn't expect to see references to animal sacrifice still taking place. It's shocking to think of sacrifice occurring today for any reason. Most animal sacrifices taking place today are negative. I bring this up to point out that after Christ gave His life, and sacrifices were no longer needed, it was possible for their meaning to be changed from a positive to a negative.

The taking of life has changed dramatically since Christ died on the cross. In the Old Testament, the sacrificial system pointed to Christ's sacrifice on the cross for sin. Thus, the sacrifices were symbols of faith and obedience. They were both symbols of obedience and faith. By these sacrifices, one was showing repentance and asking for forgiveness. God did not ask people to sacrifice to be cruel. Sacrifice had great meaning. Sacrifice was not a hidden or secret endeavor where people would commit the act while hiding behind trees. It was a public display.

**We have all sinned. We all
sin many times a day.**

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son points specifically to God letting His Son, Jesus Christ, be sacrificed. Without this incredible sacrifice, it would be impossible for us to be forgiven and saved. We have all sinned. We all sin many times a day. Taking refuge in Christ's blood washes this sin away.

REACT

1. How has the treatment of animals and people changed from the Old Testament to today?
2. What has God asked you to sacrifice for Him, and how did you react when He asked you to do it?

The Spilling of Blood

LOGOS

Gen 3:21; 4:3–5; Lev. 17:11; Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:11–13; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19

The Sign of Sin (Gen. 3:21)

The Garden of Eden was originally created as a place of peace and tranquility. Man and woman were clothed in light alone. They were not afraid of their nakedness, of their flesh. In today's society, nakedness is considered a sign of vulnerability. After sin entered both the Garden and the world, an understanding of the purpose of clothing was introduced. Henry David Thoreau was correct when he said, "Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes." For Adam and Eve, this new enterprise was a life with sin. It is interesting that by wearing clothes, they were now covering the most important aspect of sacrifice, one's flesh and blood. After entering into sin and wearing clothes, Adam and Eve were required to begin the sacrificial system which would lead to the final sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. The act of killing something similar to humans, as animals are, showed

in part how immense the final sacrifice made by Christ actually would be.

The blood of Christ is more powerful than earthly belongings.

Flesh, Not Fruit (Gen. 4:3–5)

Cain, Adam and Eve's son, chose not to spill the blood of animals. It is unclear as to whether or not he understood the complete implication of his actions. Cain brought fruit as his sacrifice. Fruit is one of the elements needed to sustain life. Yet this food was not enough for the sacrifice. Ironically, Cain would make a sacrifice of flesh when killing his brother, Abel. Fruit does not think for itself. There is no pain when it is picked or when it falls from the tree. It does not know the difference. Pets and livestock require attention and care. They are innocent. By sacrificing a breathing, innocent animal, one was in fact snuffing out breath for the sole purpose of staying alive.

The Lifeblood (Lev. 17:11)

When animals were sacrificed, their blood was taken. Without blood, life dies. " "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" ' " (Lev. 17:11, NIV). The blood which was to be sacrificed was provided by God. The ability to commit the sacrifice was provided by God. The meaning

behind the sacrifice was provided by God. We can only be saved through the shedding of sacred blood.

All Bear the Sign (Rom. 3:23)

We have all sinned. The Bible is clear about this. No one is perfect. Because we have all sinned, we all must die. When we say something unkind, when we think impure thoughts, when we show anger, we are sinning. Sin is part of our lives since conception. Sin began with Adam and Eve and continued with their children, Cain and Abel. There will always be strife in the world and the need for atonement. Sacrifice has been a much-needed symbol of atonement—a symbol showing that all is not lost, that God thought of a way in which we could each be saved. Because of Christ's sacrifice, we need not die.

Parting With the Flesh (Eph. 2:11–13)

Another way used to set God's people apart through sacrifice was the act of male circumcision. Through this sacrifice of flesh, men were given to God. This was a mark of distinction which separated God's believers from unbelievers. This was a mark that also reminded each individual of Christ's death on the cross. Unlike animal sacrifice, circumcision is an act that is still done today.

The Final Act (1 Pet. 1:18, 19)

As the first people on earth, Adam and Eve had the chance to live a perfect life in the Garden of Eden. However, they chose to sin, to let temptation sway them, and so they were cast out of the Garden as sinners. It is said that the sins of the fathers will be passed down to their sons. We can see this to be true. We are each sinners in need of forgiveness. We need to be humble when we come to Christ to ask for forgiveness, and we can only gain forgiveness through His blood. Before Christ came down and died on the cross, people had to sacrifice pure and unblemished animals as a reminder of what was to come. Christ had to sacrifice Himself and die in a painful way. His blood was shed when it dripped from His hands and feet as He hung nailed to a cross. Because Christ is the unblemished lamb sacrificed to save us, we no longer need to sacrifice animals. The blood of Christ is more powerful than earthly belongings, money, silver, or gold. We can have eternal life because of Christ; all we have to do is come to Him and ask.

REACT

1. How do you feel about killing animals?
2. Why was Cain wrong for trying to sacrifice the produce that he grew? How does this relate to one's need for forgiveness?
3. How often should you come to Christ for forgiveness and atonement? Explain your answer.

It's All About the Blood

TESTIMONY

Gen. 4:3-5; Lev. 17:11

Cain and Abel “were tested, as Adam had been tested before them, to prove whether they would believe and obey the word of God. They were acquainted with the provision made for the salvation of man, and understood the system of offerings which God had ordained. They knew that in these offerings they were to express faith in the Saviour whom the offerings typified, and at the same time to acknowledge their total dependence on Him for pardon; and they knew that by thus conforming to the divine plan for their redemption, they were giving proof of their obedience to the will of God. Without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin; and they were to show their faith in the blood of Christ as the promised atonement by offering the firstlings of the flock in sacrifice. Besides this, the first fruits of the earth were to be presented before the Lord as a thank offering.”¹

**“We are to give the Lord
our own individual lives.”**

“Cain and Abel represent two classes that will exist in the world till the close of time. One class avail themselves of the appointed sacrifice for sin; the other venture to

depend upon their own merits; theirs is a sacrifice without the virtue of divine mediation, and thus it is not able to bring man into favor with God. It is only through the merits of Jesus that our transgressions can be pardoned. Those who feel no need of the blood of Christ, who feel that without divine grace they can by their own works secure the approval of God, are making the same mistake as did Cain. If they do not accept the cleansing blood, they are under condemnation. There is no other provision made whereby they can be released from the thralldom of sin.”²

“In every offering to God we are to acknowledge the one great Gift; that alone can make our service acceptable to Him. When Abel offered the firstling of the flock, he acknowledged God, not only as the Giver of his temporal blessings, but also as the Giver of the Saviour. Abel’s gift was the very choicest he could bring; for it was the Lord’s specified claim. But Cain brought only of the fruit of the ground, and his offering was not accepted by the Lord. It did not express faith in Christ. All our offerings must be sprinkled with the blood of the atonement. As the purchased possession of the Son of God, we are to give the Lord our own individual lives.”³

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 71.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 73.

3. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1086.

Sinful by Nature

HOW-TO

Rom. 6:19

Ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve, humankind has been sinful by nature. Before Christ came to die for our sins, He required His people to offer sacrifices that pointed to His atonement.

It is important for us to realize that although Christ has since come and shed His blood for our sins, we are still sinful by nature. Christ still wants us to recognize that we still have a sinful nature and that He alone can save us. We need to take the steps to redemption still, though not by physically sacrificing animals. By coming to Christ, we are letting nothing else absorb our attention that could cause us to forget His sacrifice for us.

Acknowledge that you have sinned. Christ wants us all to acknowledge the fact that we are sinners and that the wages of sin is death. But there is hope. During Old Testament times, God's people were reminded daily of their sin and the hope of salvation through the sacrifices of the sanctuary services. What daily reminders do we have of sin and the hope of salvation?

Confess your sins. Once we have acknowledged that we have sinned, we must take those sins to Christ. Christ doesn't want us to

bring our sins to Him so that we'll feel ashamed or guilty, but so that we may be free of the burden they cast over our lives in order live an abundant life. Through prayer, Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines, we can take to Him the sins we have committed and grow in His grace.

Take responsibility and repent. This step is very important. Christ knows our hearts. He hears more than just our words. This means that it takes more than just saying, "Please forgive me." It means recognizing that we have sinned and honestly wanting Christ to forgive us.

Let God handle the rest. Once we acknowledge our sins, take responsibility, and confess them to Christ, we must let Him be Lord of our lives. We must let Him release us from carrying the burden and trust Him to take care of us. With the Holy Spirit's help, we can live a Christian life, knowing that God has washed away our sins and that we are saved.

**Christ knows our hearts.
He hears more than just
our words.**

Thursday
November 6

The Perfect Transfusion

OPINION

Eph. 1:7

“Give life” is a phrase we hear a lot when the blood bank comes to town, although it is not often connected with the Old Testament sacrificial system. There are key differences, of course, such as the “sacrificial donor” staying alive when donating to the Red Cross. But the idea of giving our blood to a blood bank is, if weak and human, a symbol of both the sacrificial system and Christ’s sacrifice. Though our own transfusions are imperfect, they can still help save lives.

Blood banks are always looking for compatible blood. For example, they will never take my blood. I have a minor disorder that makes the iron in my hemoglobin consistently low. I’ve tried to give many times.

There is another worry with blood besides incompatibility. Blood also can carry toxins. Look at dirty needle scares, for example. The worst thing that can happen when someone is pricked with an infected needle is that the toxins will get into the bloodstream.

In the Old Testament sacrificial system, there was a double meaning in the sacrifice. The petitioners acknowledged

He is the perfect transfusion.

that they were sinful and deserved to die. Their sacrifices also showed their faith in God’s ability to save them. In the same way, the blood flowing through our veins is the vehicle

that declares us mortal and carries the life that Christ bought for us with His blood.

Christ’s blood is the perfect match for all of us. His blood is always compatible with ours in different ways, according to each of our needs. He can meet each of us exactly where we are. He is the perfect transfusion. And we know that He’s not infected with sin the way we are. He is perfect.

REACT

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of comparing the donating of blood to the sacrifices of the sanctuary services instituted by God?
2. Does giving blood to blood banks fulfill a Christian duty? Explain.

What It Was All For

EXPLORATION

1 Pet. 1:18, 19

CONCLUDE

When Adam and Eve sinned, it was as if they had inflicted a gaping wound on creation itself. Everything living they saw around them began to die. Eventually they themselves would die. The strong would prey on the weak. Men would lord it over women. The rich would oppress the poor. The sacrificial system makes it clear that sin was not a little thing. May we never stop trying to root sin out of our own lives, and may we also encourage one another to become better people by following Christ's example of self-sacrificing love.

CONSIDER

- Drawing, painting, or photographing any material thing you value highly. Imagine you have to give it up. Perhaps even destroy the representation to add realism to the experience. How does this make you feel?
- Monitoring your thoughts and actions. You may be prone to anger, for example. How many times in a given period do you have angry, vengeful, or unkind thoughts? How many times do these thoughts lead to acting or speaking out? Like all of us, you have "issues." But God wants to help you overcome them.
- Singing or listening to Michael Card's song "God Will Provide a Lamb." Think about how God not only sacrificed, but became a sacrifice for our sakes.
- Preparing a meal for someone who may need the help. Make it a meal you would like to eat. Use the best ingredients, etc. Sacrifice means giving God our best, and sometimes giving to God means giving to other people.
- Making the first move to reconcile with someone you may have an outstanding conflict with. Put your pride on the altar.
- Studying a given animal, plant, or natural phenomenon. How does it show God's creatorship? Conversely, how does it show that sin has become part of the very fabric of nature?

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, "The Plan of Redemption."
Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary*, chaps. 1, 2.