

"Blood" and "Water." What do they mean?

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It is an historic fact recorded by the Apostle John (19: 34) that a soldier with a spear pierced the side of the dead Christ, and "forthwith came there out blood and water." From the solemn way in which the Apostle pauses to attest this fact as a personal eyewitness (John 19: 35) we might naturally conclude that he attached some very special importance to it, even if no further reference to it were made.

We are not, however, left to surmise, as in his first Epistle the same Apostle returns to the subject and supplements the historic *record* of his Gospel with instruction as to the *bearing* of the fact. He says, "This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood" (1 John 5: 6). And further, in 1 John 5: 8 he speaks of the Spirit and the water and the blood as the three witnesses to the Son of God.

The meaning of these words is not by any means apparent at first sight. Two things, however, do lie upon the surface.

1. Both blood and water are connected with the DEATH of Christ.

2. Though connected they are distinct, so distinct that they can be cited separately as witnesses. They must, therefore, be carefully *distinguished* in our thoughts.

We find in the Scriptures that *cleansing* is connected with both blood and water, e.g.:

"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1: 7).

"That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5: 26).

Now let us seek to rightly distinguish between the two cleansings referred to. Speaking in a broad sense, we may say that they connect themselves with the two great effects of sin, viz. its guilt and its defiling power.

The Blood sets before us the death of Christ in atonement for our sins, thus cancelling our guilt and bringing us forgiveness. We are thereby cleansed judicially.

The water indicates the same death, but rather as that by which our sinful state has been dealt with in judgment and ended, so as to deliver us from the old condition and associations of life in which once we lived.

Thereby we are cleansed morally and the power of sin over us is broken.

Toplady was surely right when he sang:

"Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

The virtue and power of the blood of Christ are set before us in Hebrews 9 and Hebrews 10; indeed, the efficacy of that Blood in contrast with the inefficacy of the blood of bulls and of goats is the great theme of those chapters. We find there:

1. The Blood of Christ purges, or cleanses the sinner's conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9: 14).
2. It has removed the transgressions of saints of old which had been for centuries accumulating under the first Covenant, i. e. the Law (Hebrews 9: 15).
3. It has ratified a new covenant of grace (Hebrews 9: 15-18).
4. It has removed the believer's sins and laid the basis for the putting away of sin in its totality (Hebrews 9: 22 and 26).
5. It has so completely done so for faith that ONCE purged, the believer's conscience is cleared for ever as far as the judicial question of his sins is concerned (Hebrews 10: 2).
6. It therefore gives the believer boldness to enter into the very presence of God (Hebrews 10: 19).
7. It has once and for ever sanctified, set apart the believer for God (Hebrews 10: 10 and Hebrews 10: 29).

Bear in mind that the great subject here is the believer's access to God in virtue of the blood of Christ. His judicial clearance is perfect by that one offering, and never needs to be repeated. Hence the word which characterizes these chapters is "one," "once" (see Hebrews 9: 12, 26, 28; Hebrews 10: 2, 10, 12, 14). Seven times over it is repeated, lest we should overlook the sufficiency and the singular glory that is connected with the precious blood of Christ.

But though judicial cleansing by Blood is the great theme of these chapters, the need for moral cleansing is not forgotten. We draw near to God having not only "our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience," but "our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10: 22). This is doubtless an allusion to the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priestly office recorded in Exodus 29. They were washed with water (Ex. 29: 4) as well as sprinkled with blood (Ex. 29: 20). They had the shadow, we have the substance — THE DEATH OF CHRIST. It acts in both directions, as BLOOD cleansing us judicially and giving us a perfect standing before God, as WATER cleansing us morally, by cutting us off from the old life in which once we lived, and bringing us into the new.

In the very nature of things this moral cleansing by water needs to be kept up; the idea of repetition is therefore appropriate enough here. We find it if we refer to the type. Aaron and his sons were bathed with water from head to foot at their consecration, as we have seen; *that* was not repeated, but nevertheless a laver was provided (Ex. 30: 17-21), and there the priests washed their hands and feet. The instructions were most explicit: "When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not."

When we turn from type to antitype the same thought appears. In the upper chamber in Jerusalem, probably just before He instituted His supper, the Lord Jesus girded Himself, and, pouring water into a basin, began to wash His disciples' feet (John 13). Peter's reluctance brings forth the truth that such washing is necessary if communion with the Lord in His heavenly position was to be enjoyed. "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me" (John 13: 8). His rapid change to enthusiastic haste leads the Lord to say: "He that is washed (i.e. *bathed*) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit" (John 13: 10),

Here the twofold way in which cleansing by water is presented in Scripture is very carefully distinguished. Once for all we have been "bathed." The death of Christ has cleansed us from the old life, but for all that we need the constant application of that death to our souls day by day, moment by

moment. We cannot approach the sanctuary nor enjoy "part with" Christ without it.

With these thoughts before us we may perhaps return to the words quoted at the beginning from 1 John 5, and find a greater depth of meaning in them.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came by water and blood; by *both* these things was His coming characterized. The Spirit of God specially guards this point, saying: "Not by water only, but by water and blood." Why so? May not one reason be that there has

always been a tendency — now fast growing and ripening into apostasy — to teach that Christ did come by water only? He came, so it is now widely said, to cleanse man morally by setting before him the highest ideals, and living out those ideals Himself as an incentive to others. He came by such means to make at-one-ment between God and man. Such is their theory. The idea of atonement they scornfully reject.

Foreseeing this dark and deadly error, the Spirit says, "not by water only, but by water and blood." Not by moral cleansing only, but by moral cleansing AND *expiation for sin*, and it is the Spirit that bears witness and "the Spirit is truth."

And so the three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, remain: the Spirit the living, acting, speaking Witness; the water and the blood two silent witnesses, like mighty pillars rearing their heads into heaven's blue dome through eternal ages; and all three agree in one. They testify that He who came in this way is the Son of God, the fountain of eternal life, and that in Him eternal life is ours, who believe on the name of the Son of God.

Thanks be to God, we may fervently exclaim, that when upon the cross a soldier with a spear pierced his side "forthwith came there out *blood AND water!*"

Has not the life-work of Christ, the mocking and scourging He suffered at men's hands, some part in His atonement made for sins?

None whatever. Scripture plainly says, "His own self bare our sins in His own body on *the tree*" (1 Peter 2: 25). Nothing short of death is the wages of sin. Hence all that He did and suffered in His wonderful life wrought no atonement for sin. It is sometimes urged that the passage which says "by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5: 19) teaches otherwise, but a careful reading of the whole passage, Rom. 5: 12 to 21, shows that really it exactly confirms the scripture quoted from Peter. Paul was contrasting the two Heads, Adam and Christ — the sin of the one with its attendant train of disaster, the righteousness, the obedience of the Other with its attendant train of blessing. It is a question of the "one offence" and the "one righteousness" (Rom. 5: 18, margin). Christ's ONE righteousness was obedience even unto His DEATH.

But though Christ's life-work and sufferings had no part in His atonement for sin, they were indeed His qualification as man, so to die. Just as no beast under the Law was eligible as a sacrifice for sin except it was "without blemish," so He could not have suffered as a sacrifice apart from the perfect life that He lived.

If the Blood cleanses us from all sin, what need is there for the water?

Let us answer that question by asking another. Is it not true that men as much need cleansing from the *love* of sin as from the *condemnation* of sin? There is great need for the "water." That we should hate sin as God hates it is very necessary.

To be bathed all over as were the priests at the start means that, being made possessors of a new

life, we abhor and forsake the old life, seeing that Christ's death was necessary to put away all that we were. His death was ours.

Moreover, that daily cleansing of which the laver speaks. Do we not need it in this defiling world? Is there not much about us personally that needs removing, to say nothing of the subtle influences of this world which often insensibly affect us? Every Christian with a sensitive conscience will surely agree that there is.

Is it not scriptural, then, to speak of being repeatedly washed in the blood for daily cleansing? It says "cleanseth" in 1 John 1: 7.

Nowhere in Scripture do we find the idea of daily recurrence for cleansing to the blood of Christ. The argument inferred from the use of the word "cleanseth" in 1 John 1: 7 is not admissible. True, the word is in the present tense, but it is used simply to point out the inherent property of the precious blood. We so use the present tense in ordinary conversation. For instance, the other day a man brought a sack of quicklime into my yard and deposited it in a quiet corner out of harm's way, remarking, "It will be all right there, the rain will soon settle it. Water slakes lime, you know."

What did he mean? Not that the water was going to slake that lime repeatedly, almost every day, for lime can be slaked but once; he just referred to the well-known property of water in regard to lime, a property that holds good at all times and everywhere.

It is thus that the Apostle speaks in 1 John 1: 7.

But Scripture does speak, as we have seen, of our repeatedly being washed in the water; and to insist on this clear distinction is not mere theological accuracy of a technical sort. To teach that we must have repeated recurrence to the blood for fresh applications thereof does great harm in a twofold way. First it dishonours the blood of Christ, almost putting it back on to the level of the blood of Jewish sacrifices offered under the Law; and second, it repeatedly puts back the saint into the place of the sinner to go through the cleansing and justifying process over and over again.

The truth is that "by *one* offering He hath perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10: 14). Let us hold fast to that.

Tell us a little more about this daily cleansing by water. How do we get it?

By the Word. The water and the Word are clearly connected in such a passage as "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5: 26).

The Word of God it is which brings home to our souls the death of Christ in its power and wealth of spiritual meaning. Sin in its true hideousness stands revealed, and our affections are cleansed thereby. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word" (Ps. 119: 9). We often overlook this cleansing effect of God's Word, while eager, it may be, for a better textual acquaintance with it.

A believer once lamented to an old saint of ripe experience the difficulty she had in remembering the points of Christian teaching to which she listened. He bade her go with the sieve she held in her hand to the pump hard by and bring him a sieve full of water. She thought it a strange request, but complied, and by the time she reached him every drop was lost. He bade her do it again, again, and yet again. She affirmed it to be a useless task, when he explained his parable by pointing out that if not one drop of water had been permanently retained, at any rate the sieve was MUCH CLEANER *for the process!*

Let us dwell much upon the Word of God. We may never become deeply versed in scriptural lore — that is a secondary consideration — our lives and ways will at all events be cleansed thereby.

In John 3 we read of being born of water; is there a connection between that and what we are speaking of, or does it refer to baptism?

It links itself with that of which we are speaking. By the water of the Word applied in the power of the Holy Spirit of God we are born again — made to possess a new life and nature which carries with it the condemnation of the old. It is typified by the bathing of the priests from head to foot (see Ex. 19: 4 and John 13: 10).

It does not refer to baptism. A quiet consideration of the passage makes this manifest. Notice (1) the Lord only speaks of *one* new birth. This new birth (2) is said to be "of water and of the Spirit." The water the instrument, the Spirit the Power, and (3) it is expressly declared by the Lord to be in its nature undefinable and completely uncontrolled by man (v. 8). Baptism is easily definable and completely controlled by man, and therefore NOT that of which this passage speaks.

Is it only when we sin that we need the water?

We *do* need it when we sin, but even apart from actual sins, being in a world of defilement, we need it if we would worship, hold communion with, or serve God. Read Numbers 19, and you will find in type the water as purification from sin; then turn to Exodus 30: 17-21, and in type you have water removing every earthly defilement in view of drawing near to God in the sanctuary without reference to actual sins. In the New Testament John 13 is more connected with the latter aspect than the former.

How dependent we are upon not only the Blood, but the Water!