

February 22, 2015 by Steve Brandon



Life In the Blood

Leviticus 17

1. Seek Unity (verses 1-9)

2. Seek Life (10-16)

Sometimes it's good to step back and reflect upon what you believe. And when it comes to Christianity, many of our beliefs can sound a bit strange, especially to the outside world.

We believe that God came to earth as a man. We believe that Jesus raised from the dead. We believe that we will be raised from the dead.

But, perhaps, none of our beliefs can match the strangeness when it comes to our attitude toward blood. People often think about blood as a detestable thing. Some people faint at the sight of blood. And yet, Sunday after Sunday, we gather here in this place and sing about blood.

We sing, "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." We sing, "And can it be that I should gain, an int'rest in my Savior's blood?" We sing, "There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins?" We sing, "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

We sing about blood with joy! We rejoice in blood. We even call the blood of Christ, "precious" (1 Peter 1:19). Have you ever thought to think of how strange this is? It goes further. Jesus said, ...

John 6:53-56

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

And the practice of the Christian church has always been to celebrate the Lord's Supper, when we remember the night in which Jesus was betrayed. He took bread and said, "This is my body, given for you." He took Jesus lifted the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

And in the first century, Christians were accused of being cannibals, because they ate the flesh of another person. Now, of course, we understand how all of this can happen. People don't understand the words of Jesus. Even He, Himself, clarified what he meant, saying, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63).

Furthermore, people don't understand why we are so fixated on the blood of Jesus. It's because his blood has brought us life! And the Bible speaks often of what the blood of Jesus has done for us!

"We have ... been justified by his blood" (Romans 5:9). "In him we have redemption through his blood" (Ephesians 1:7). "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). "Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood" (Hebrews 13:12). "the blood of Jesus ... cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). And Acts 20:28 says that Jesus Christ has purchased the church with his own blood.

And so, we sing about the blood. We sing about the cross; because, to quote Robert Murray M'Cheyne, "The mighty cross has become a tree of life to me."

We live because of his death. And so, we gladly sing about his blood, because he died for us. Warren Wiersbe said this, "Any theology that ignores or minimizes the blood isn't founded on the Word of God."

Now, I say all of that, because our text this morning is a bloody chapter, Leviticus, chapter 17. We see blood mentioned 13 times in these 16 verses. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bibles to Leviticus 17.

As we enter Leviticus 17, we find ourselves more than half-way through the book of Leviticus. Here's a picture of the book of Leviticus. The first fifteen chapters describe how we come to God. The central idea of the book comes in chapter 16, when, on the 7th month and 10th day, the high priest would enter the holy place and offer up a sacrifice to cleanse the entire nation. The last eleven chapters describe how we live for God. Chapters 17-27 have also been described as, "The Holiness Code." That is, the way that the Israelites were to live.

Chapter 17 pertains specifically to how they should treat the blood of their sacrifices. Let's read the entire chapter.

Leviticus 17:1-7

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

"Speak to Aaron and to his sons and to all the sons of Israel and say to them, 'This is what the Lord has commanded, saying, "Any man from the house of Israel who slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or who slaughters it outside the camp, and has not brought it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, bloodguiltiness is to be reckoned to that man. He has shed blood and that man shall be cut off from among his people. The reason is so that the sons of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they were sacrificing in the open field, that they may bring them in to the Lord, at the doorway of the tent of meeting to the priest, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the Lord. The priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of the Lord at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and offer up the fat in smoke as a soothing aroma to the Lord. They shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons with which they play the harlot. This shall be a permanent statute to them throughout their generations.'"

In verses 1-7, we see regulations concerning sacrificial animals. The basic command is this: you cannot sacrifice an ox or a lamb or a goat anywhere you wish. You must bring it to the camp of meeting, and present it to the priest so that he can, in turn, sprinkle the blood at the base of the altar and burn the fat upon the altar as a peace offering.

So, for instance, if you were going to have a party and you were going to sacrifice a goat to serve all of your relatives at the party, God said that you can't just do that in your home. You must bring the animal into the tabernacle. You must give it to the priest so that the blood may be sprinkled and the fat may be burned.

That's all that's being talked about in these verses. Now, the reason come in verse 7, ...

Leviticus 17:7

They shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons with which they play the harlot. This shall be a permanent statute to them throughout their generations."

Now, we don't know exactly what these "goat demons" looked like. Our best guess is that they looked like satyr's from Greek mythology. Perhaps like C.S. Lewis' character of Mr. Tumnus. But, we don't really know.

What we do know is that there were idol worshipers in the camp of the Israelites who were sacrificing to these goat demons, rather than to the LORD. They were thereby breaking the first two commandments. You shall not have any gods before me. And you shall not worship any idols.

That's why the punishment was so severe. Verse 4 says that "that man shall be cut off from among his people." This could mean banishment. It could mean death.

At any rate, such a one would be expelled from Israel. He would no longer be among the people of God. Perhaps this severe penalty helps to explain why we know so little about these goat demons, because those who worshiped them were quickly removed from Israel.

Now, if you think about this command for a bit, you might be struck by how impossible it would be to carry out. If every time you wanted an ox or a lamb or a goat for dinner, you had to bring it to the tabernacle? What if you lived near the Sea of Galilee? That's a several day hike! You could get your animal there, but without refrigeration, you would never be able to get it back home in time for the feast without spoiling. So, how's this going to work?

The key to understanding this is to think of the original readers. They were wandering in the dessert. When they camped, they all surrounded the tabernacle. Even with a million people in the camp, it would only be a few hours walk to the tabernacle, not several days.

Furthermore, their main diet when wandering in the wilderness wasn't ox and lamb and goat. It was Manna, which God rained down from heaven (Numbers 16). Meat was the luxury, eaten only on a rare occasion.

And also, there was a provision in the book of Deuteronomy that changed this requirement. Deuteronomy is the record of Moses' final instructions to Israel before they would come and take over the land. "When you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the LORD your God is giving you, ... you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your towns, as much as you desire, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you" (Deuteronomy 12:10, 15). And so, what we have in the beginning of Leviticus 17 was only applicable for about 40 years of history.

As we think about the application of Leviticus 17:1-7 to us today, we find that it's application stopped with Deuteronomy. When the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan (under the direction and leadership of Joshua), those commands ceased to be applicable to them. But, notice, the only reason we stopped their application is because of an express commandment in the further revelation of God, which brought its application to an end.

So, how in the world to we apply this today? I mean, what's the point for us? Here's my take.

1. Seek Unity (verses 1-7)

Seek the unity of the camp. As the Jews would bring their animals for the sacrifice, it was a way for the people to show their support for the entire mission in the wilderness. They weren't off simply doing their own thing. They were submitting themselves to the leadership of the camp. They were seeking their blessing on their activities. They were giving thanks to the LORD. They were uniting together with the entire

purpose of the camp, saying, "we are in this together."

Now, it's not that you need to come to the elders of this church with everything that you are seeking to do, and looking for a blessing from us. The Israelites didn't come to the priests every time the people were doing something. But, when the Israelites were celebrating some special feast, they were publically acknowledging God in their activities. They were seeking His blessing. They weren't off doing their own thing. They were supporting the unity (verses 1-7), ...

And I think that this is the application of our next two verses as well.

1. Seek Unity (verses 1-9)

Leviticus 17:8-9

"Then you shall say to them, 'Any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to offer it to the Lord, that man also shall be cut off from his people.'

In other words, there is only one place to offer up your sacrifices. It's at the tent of meeting. An Israelite simply couldn't offer up sacrifices anywhere that he wanted to. He couldn't be out doing his own thing.

Notice how verse 8 isn't saying that these sacrifices are being offered up to demons or to any other god. No, if anything, the sacrifices described in verse 8 are sacrifices to the LORD. Though the location of the tabernacle changed locations, from the Wilderness to Shiloh to Jerusalem; though the structure of the tabernacle changed into the permanent temple during the days of Solomon, the principle remains the same. Sacrifices must be offered by the priest at the place designated by God!

Good intentions aren't good enough! The LORD required that His worship be centralized at the tent of meeting. He wanted it to be where Aaron and his sons served as priests. He wanted the blood to be poured out at the base of the altar. He wanted the fat to be burned on the altar.

It's all about seeking unity. God wanted a unified nation. He didn't want a divided nation. He wanted it to be clear that His people worship Him together!

Now, when it comes to us by way of application, we certainly don't offer up sacrifices. Jesus was our sacrifice. So, we don't need to come to Jerusalem.

But, we need to gather together to worship the LORD. Remember, the book of Hebrews is the divine commentary on the book of Leviticus. And it speaks about how we gather in our day and age. Consider what it says in Hebrews 10:19-25.

Hebrews 10:19-25

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

I stress here the point about gathering together, because, I believe that this is a good way to apply Leviticus 17 to us today. God's point in that passage was to keep the worship in the wilderness united, at one place under the oversight of the priesthood. And today, we can "seek unity" by gathering together in one place to worship the LORD.

Now, all of you are here this morning. I don't need to tell all of you the importance of gathering together. You are here. But, as a church, we gather every Sunday morning at 10am. And I encourage you to make an effort to be here. But, our church is far more than simply sitting in a pew.

Did you notice what surrounds the exhortation to gather together? Exhortations to "stir up one another to love and good works" (verse 24). Exhortations to "encourage one another" (verse 25). This is one of our main purposes in gathering. It's for building us up. It's for encouragement.

There is enough in this world to tear you down. There is enough in this world to discourage you. But, our Sunday morning gatherings are designed to help counter the downward pull of the world. We do this by seeking the LORD, in song and in prayer and through His word. We do this by reminding you of the gospel, of everything that you have in Christ Jesus.

And I don't think that our formal service is complete without opportunities to speak into the lives of others. Our prayer meeting before the church service, and our fellowship time after the service, are opportunities for you to speak with others and discern what encouraging word they need to hear. And to then speak it to their encouragement.

The gathering together goes beyond Sunday mornings. The writer to the book of Hebrews didn't simply say that people were neglecting Sunday church services. He said that they were neglecting the "gathering together." I believe that this is throughout the week, on a daily basis. They were gathering together often for mutual encouragement to combat our wayward tendencies.

So, I would encourage you to seek unity at Rock Valley Bible Church by making a great effort on Sunday mornings to be here. And to make a great effort to be with fellow believers throughout the week, as much as your time and schedule allow.

Many of us heard a great example of this yesterday at the funeral service for Andy's mother, Juanita. Toward her later years, she was unable to drive, and was confined to an electric scooter chair. But she really wanted to come to church. She would call others at church to see if they could pick her up for a ride. If the first three couldn't do it, she would call a fourth. She wanted to gather to be with God's people. She was relentless in her zeal for the LORD. So much so that someone told me after the service, I guess we (able-bodied people) don't have any excuse for missing any church gathering.

Listen, don't just go down in your mind and think of how often you are here on Sunday mornings and how often you are not. There may be circumstances in your life that prevent you from being here. God fully understands that. And I, as your pastor, am very quick to make excuses for you of why you just can't make it on any given Sunday. And know that I'm not a strict judge based upon Sunday church attendance. I know of travel, sickness, occasional special events in your life, family needs.

But, I would say this, consider your opportunities to gather with the saints. Are you walking into those opportunities? Or, are you walking away from them.

Sadly, there are many in our land who think that Christianity is "Jesus and Me." "I've got my Bible. I'm watching a good John Piper sermon on the internet this morning. I'm good. I don't need to go to church." On the contrary, you do. "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment" (Proverbs 18:1). You need the body. The body needs you.

Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Seeking unity in the body is difficult sometimes. It's very stretching. That's why Paul said in verse 2, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love," True unity requires humility. True unity requires gentleness. True unity requires patience. True unity requires bearing with one another. True unity requires love.

But, God desires it. In the wilderness, He required the entire congregation to come to the tent of meeting with their sacrifices.

Let's move on. Seek Unity (verses 1-9). And, ...

2. Seek Life (10-16)

It's here where we see the focus of the passage center upon the blood. We read of it ten times in these seven verses.

Leviticus 17:10-16

'And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.' Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood.' So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.

"For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.' When any person eats an animal which dies or is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or an alien, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he will become clean. But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt."

You can see in verse 10 how strongly the LORD feels about "eating blood." It's not simply that the one who does so should be "cut off" from among the people (as we saw in verses 4 and 9). But, God, Himself, says that He will see to it!

Verse 10 again, ...

Leviticus 17:10

'And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and (I) will cut him off from among his people.

Two reasons are given. Both are in verse 11. First, the life of the flesh is in the blood. Second, God has given blood to make atonement for our souls. The first reason has to do with physical life. The second reason has to do with spiritual life.

Let's consider the first reason. First, the life of the flesh is in the blood. Blood is amazing. Here are some facts about blood.

Blood is comprised of several components: red blood cells, white blood cells, plasma, platelets. Human blood is red because it contains iron. Healthy bone marrow makes a constant supply of blood. The average adult will have about 10 pints of blood in his body at any given time, comprising about 8% of total body weight. Blood is about 45% cells and 55% plasma.

Red blood cells carry oxygen to the body's organs and tissues, servicing 100,000 miles of blood vessels in an average human being. Red blood cells typically complete a circuit from heart to lungs to heart to body in about 30 seconds. Red blood cells live about 120 days in the circulatory system.

In one small drop of blood, there are millions of red blood cells. In a milliliter of blood, there are normally 5,000-7,000 white blood cells, but this goes up when you are sick. White cells are the body's primary defense against infection. Granulocytes, a type of white blood cell, roll along blood vessel walls in search of bacteria to engulf and destroy.

Platelets promote blood clotting and give those with leukemia and other cancers a chance to live.

Plasma is a pale yellow mixture of water, proteins and salts.

Over your lifetime, your heart will pump nearly 1.5 million barrels of blood, which is enough to fill 200 train tank cars.

Blood carries oxygen and the essential chemicals to where they are needed in the body. At the same time it picks up the waste.

Blood cells carry heat around our bodies, to keep our fingers warm. Blood cells carry heat away from our liver, heart, muscles, and brain, so that they don't overheat.

Mosquitoes prefer those with type O blood. [\[1\]](#)

And since today is George Washington's birthday, you might find it interesting to know that he woke up at 2 a.m. on Dec. 14, 1799, with a sore throat. After a series of medical procedures, including the draining of nearly 40 percent of his blood, he died that evening. [\[2\]](#)

Blood is amazing! Without blood, life simply would not exist. And God calls the Israelites to abstain from blood. He calls them not to eat it, because it represents life.

And when a Jew would slaughter an animal for food, the blood must be drained (verse 13). This is true today for Jews. In order for food to be considered Kosher, the blood must be drained from the slaughtered animal.

Gordon Wenham puts it all in perspective. "At a basic level this is obvious: when an animal loses its blood, it dies. Its blood, therefore, gives it life. By refraining from eating flesh with blood in it, man is honoring life. To eat blood is to despise life. This idea emerges most clearly in Gen. 9:4ff., where the sanctity of human life is associated with not eating blood. Thus one purpose of this law is the inculcation of respect for all life." [\[3\]](#)

I think that this is why when you are out in the field hunting your game and drain the blood on the ground, you are to cover it with dirt, because you want to give the blood a proper burial (verse 13). I think that this is why you are not to eat an animal that has died in the fields someplace, because its blood hasn't been drained it is still in the flesh. And, to eat the flesh is to eat the blood as well (verse 15). So, let's seek life by not eating the blood, because the life of the flesh is in the blood.

Now, this raises all sorts of questions for us today. Is it OK to have that rare steak? Is it OK to drink blood today? It's difficult, because eating the blood isn't grounded in Jewish dietary laws. It's grounded in creation. God told Noah, "You shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Genesis 9:4). Yet, Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19). Because, we are not defiled by what goes into us, but by what goes out of us.

So, I think that it's permissible to eat the blood today. Jesus said that we aren't going to be defiled by blood. But, if it causes offense, I would abstain. If the connection with the occult is too close, I would abstain. If it's gross, I would abstain.

Perhaps you remember the first counsel of the church (in Acts 15), when they battled the question of whether or not a Christian needed to be circumcised, which led to the bigger question: Is there anything in the law that a Christian is obligated to keep?

The apostles said, "No," you don't have to be circumcised. But, they sent a letter out with a few restrictions for the Gentiles to follow. These restrictions were not for salvation, but for unity of the church. They said, ...

Acts 15:28-29

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

For the sake of unity with the Jews, the Gentiles were told to abstain from blood. And so, I say this, when in doubt, just stay away. So, if you really enjoy your blood sausage, have at it. Just don't invite your Jewish friends over for dinner.

Let's turn to our second reason. God has given blood to make atonement for our souls.

And this is where we think about Jesus. This is where we are drawn to sing about and rejoice in the blood. The principle set in the Old Covenant is this: Atonement takes place through the blood.

As the writer to the Hebrews says, "Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22). Haven't we seen this over and over and over again? Leviticus 1 - The Burnt Offering - Blood was shed. Leviticus 3 - The Peace Offering - Blood was shed. Leviticus 4 - The Sin Offering - Blood was shed. Leviticus 5 - The Guilt Offering - Blood was shed.

The only exception to this was the grain offering, in which no blood was shed. The grain offering was usually a thank offering, given to support the priesthood. But, in one instance, in the case of extreme poverty, it was accepted in the place of a blood sacrifice, when you can't even afford a few small birds to atone for your sins.

Yet, the writer to the Hebrews says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22). May it be that God looked upon the grain offering for sin and does the same thing that he does with us? He reckons our faith as righteousness. He sees our faith and gives us righteousness in return. May it be that God looked upon the grain offering and imputed forgiveness in the same way?

After all, the sacrifices of the Old Testament were simply pictures of the coming atonement. Any forgiveness that they extended was short-lived and limited. All of the sacrifices anticipated the sacrifice of Christ. But, the pattern of the Old Testament is this: Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

And Jesus shed His blood for us, to forgive us our sins. Consider what the blood of Jesus has accomplished. We come back to the verses we read earlier this morning, ...

"We have ... been justified by his blood" (Romans 5:9). "In him we have redemption through his blood" (Ephesians 1:7). "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). "Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood" (Hebrews 13:12). "the blood of Jesus ... cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (Revelation 1:5).

At this point, you need to be careful, because there are many who look superstitiously to the blood of Jesus, as if it had some mysterious power. Somewhere people have picked up the practice of "pleading the blood of Jesus" in their prayers. But, such a practice has no foundation in Scripture. And at times, it can be seeking to manipulate God as the powerful blood of Jesus has been invoked in the appeal. But, such isn't the case with the Biblical references to the "blood" of Jesus. As one man said, "Most of the occurrences of the word, 'blood' in the Old Testament indicate a death by violence. The focal point of the mention of blood was thus not of blood flowing through the veins but rather on blood shed, which indicated that life had ended." [4]

It's not so much the blood of Jesus that atones as it is the shedding of his blood, that is, His death. His death is what atones. He died, that we might live. And in his dying, he bled. And in his dying, He justified us; He redeemed us; He brought us near; He sanctified us; he cleansed us; He washed us; He purchased us; He freed us.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 22, 2015 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://www.bloodcenters.org/blood-donation/facts-about-blood-donation/>; <http://www.factslides.com/s-Blood>; <http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=152&id=2250>.

[2] <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/bloodletting-blisters-solving-medical-mystery-george-washingtons-death/>

[3] Gordon Wenham, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Leviticus, p. 245.

[4] Rooker, p. 236.