

The Blood of Christ

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Nothing is more precious to the Christian than the blood of Christ. Many favorite hymns of the Church have the blood of Christ as their theme, for example, "Are You Washed in the Blood," "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood," "There Is Power in the Blood," "Nothing but the Blood," and "Saved by the Blood." Although the blood of the cross may be repugnant to the world, to believers it is the power of God unto salvation (I Cor. 1:18).

While a fundamental Christian cannot deny the importance of the blood, neither should he go to the other extreme and emphasize only the material aspect of the blood. He must contend for what the Scripture teaches, but he must not go beyond what the Scripture clearly declares. After stressing the absolute necessity of the blood atonement, this article will attempt to put forth a biblical and balanced view of the nature of the blood of Christ and its preservation.

The Necessity of the Blood

The necessity of a bloody sacrifice is an important doctrine in the Word of God. Christianity is a bloody religion. William Evans states: "The atonement is the scarlet cord running through every page in the entire Bible. Cut the Bible anywhere and it bleeds; it is red with redemptive truth."¹ The trail of blood runs all the way through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

In the Old Testament

The Hebrew word for blood (*dam*) occurs 360 times in the OT, mostly in those books dealing with the sacrificial worship, namely Leviticus (88 times) and Ezekiel (55 times). It also appears

frequently in Exodus (29 times), Deuteronomy (23 times), and the Psalms (21 times). With the exception of a few figurative references to wine (Gen 49:11; Deut 32:14; Eze 19:10), the Hebrew word always refers to the literal blood of a man or an animal.²

The necessity for the shedding of innocent blood to atone for man's sin begins as early as Genesis 3:21 when God provided the coats of skin for Adam and Eve. Apparently the requirement of a bloody sacrifice was made clear to that first family because when Cain refused to bring a bloody sacrifice it displeased the Lord (Gen 4:3-7). Noah was obviously aware of the need to present a bloody sacrifice to the Lord since he offered up several animals upon leaving the ark (Gen 8:20-21). The offering of the Passover Lamb was a vivid picture to the Israelites of the necessity of blood. If the death angel saw the blood he would pass over them and judgment would be averted (Ex 12:1-28). Of course, the full development of the blood sacrificial system awaited the institution of the levitical law (Lev 1-7; 16-17). It was then that the necessity of a blood atonement for sin was dramatically displayed.

Thus, the necessity of the blood in the OT is indisputably clear. As Victor P Hamilton states, "There can be no doubt that theologically the primary teaching of the OT about the blood is its role in the forgiveness of sins. God promises atonement for sin and cleansing by the blood of a guiltless substitute."³ Similarly, Lewis Sperry Chafer argues, "The truth of God's requiring a bloody sacrifice as the righteous ground for the remission of sin was established beyond all dispute in Old Testament times."⁴

In the New Testament

The Greek word translated blood (*haima*) occurs ninety-eight times in the New Testament. The words for shedding of blood (Heb 9:22) and diseased with an issue of blood (Mt 9:20) each occur one time. According to the Arndt and Gingrich lexicon the word *haima* speaks literally of human blood (see Mark 5:25; Luke 22:40) and of the blood of animals (see Heb 9:13). It is also used figuratively to refer to "the seat of life," "to blood and life as an expiatory sacrifice," and to "the red color" (see Rev 6:12; Acts 2:20).⁵

Out of a total of ninety-eight times that the word "blood" appears in the NT, it refers to the blood of Christ forty-one times.⁶ The blood is the favorite term used by the writers of the NT to refer to the atonement. It occurs nearly three times as often as

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“the cross” of Christ, and five times as frequently as the “death” of Christ.⁷ Thus, it is clear “the blood” is absolutely essential as far as the NT writers are concerned.

It is highly significant that the word “blood” occurs so frequently in Scripture. Clearly a bloody sacrifice is required to atone for sin (Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22). This was impressed upon the Israelites in the animal sacrifices, but, in the final analysis, it was only the blood of Christ that could take away sin (Heb 10:4). It was not the blood alone, however, that was required; it was also death.⁸ Only a bloody death could accomplish man’s redemption (Rom 5:8-10; I Cor 15:3; Heb 9:15). Christ could not simply bleed without dying, neither could he die without bleeding; both were necessary for man’s salvation.⁹ Thus, both the necessity of blood and death must be held dogmatically, neither can be surrendered without compromising fundamental Bible doctrine.

The Nature of the Blood

Medically Considered

Some have stated that blood is inherited only from the father.¹⁰ This is biologically an incorrect statement. One can only properly understand inheritance of the blood when he first understands the composition and origin of blood as well as basic genetics and embryology.

What is commonly referred to as “blood” is in medical terms known as “whole blood.” As the term denotes there are multiple elements comprising whole blood. The largest single portion is comprised of erythrocytes or red blood cells. These cells are derived from the liver initially and later from the bone marrow. Hemoglobin, which gives blood its distinct red color, is contained in the erythrocytes and is vital in carrying oxygen from the lungs to the various tissues. A smaller component of whole blood is made up of white blood cells which are manufactured in lymphoid tissues and in the bone marrow. The white blood cells aid the body in fighting off infection; they are equally as important as red blood cells in sustaining life. A large portion of whole blood is also composed of a wide variety of noncellular elements such as platelets, clotting factors, immunoglobulins, and albumin. Most of these proteins are made in the liver, lymphoid tissue, or bone marrow. Finally, the cellular and noncellular elements are suspended in water containing specific minerals. The water and minerals must always be in proper concentrations in order to sustain life. No part of whole blood is more important than the other; all must work together.

Human beings, like all living creatures God has created, have a specific genetic code. This code is what makes the physical difference between a dog and a cat, a tree and an ant, and a man and a monkey. This also makes the physical difference between two people (or likeness between identical twins). All of God's creation is specific in genetic terms, and all must by God's ordained natural laws reproduce after "its kind" (Gen 1:24-25). In simple scientific terms this genetic code is comprised of chromosomes. Each living cell with a nucleus has a specific type and number of chromosomes depending on whether or not it is a tree cell, monkey cell, human cell, etc.

The human cell consists of forty-six chromosomes. Where did these forty-six come from? Through a process called "reduction division" each human sperm and egg contains exactly twenty-three chromosomes. Thus, at the union of the egg and sperm (moment of conception) an individual has forty-six chromosomes and is genetically unique. It is important to note that except for the male sex characteristics, both parents determine every physical feature both internally and externally of the new child.

Shortly after conception the fertilized egg travels down the fallopian tube and is implanted into the uterus. As pointed out previously, this embryo or developing individual is genetically different from its mother (and father). Thus, for immunological reasons a living barrier is established between embryo and mother which in later development is known as the placenta or in lay terms "after birth." Early in development the embryo develops its own blood supply. The blood of the fetus travels to and from the placenta and—by means of a transport mechanism—oxygen, nutrients, and waste are exchanged across a blood barrier with the mother's blood. At no point during gestation is there a normal mixing of fetal and maternal blood, nor does the mother ever directly contribute to the fetal blood supply.

With the above brief review in mind, consider several statements made by the late M R De Haan, MD. In his book *The Chemistry of the Blood*, Dr De Haan states:

It is now definitely known that the blood which flows in an unborn babe's arteries and veins is not derived from the mother but is produced within the body of the fetus itself only after the introduction of the male sperm. An unfertilized ovum can never develop blood since the female egg does not by itself contain the elements essential for the production of the blood. It is only after the male element has entered the ovum that blood can develop.¹¹

De Haan further states:

Since there is no life in the egg until the male sperm unites with it, and the life is in the blood, it follows that the male sperm is the source of the blood.... All the blood which is in that child is produced within the child itself as a result of the introduction of the male sperm. The mother contributes no blood at all. ... every drop of blood in an infant's body is the contribution of the male parent, whereas the mother furnishes all the flesh of the little body.¹²

De Haan correctly states that no blood is directly derived from the mother. What he fails to state, however, is that neither is any blood directly derived from the father. The sperm cannot produce blood any more than can an unfertilized ovum. It is only when both are united that a living organism is created which forms and develops its own blood.¹³ The genetic basis for the formation of blood, liver, heart, brain, etc., comes from both parents equally. Furthermore, the fact that blood is truly "whole blood," made up of multiple elements produced from a wide variety of tissues, speaks against the father contributing solely to its composition.

Finally and more specifically, the science of blood typing destroys the idea that the blood is inherited solely from one parent. A blood type is the genetic makeup of a person's red blood cell membrane. Blood typing has been well studied and utilized since the early 1900's. Its use is critical in safe blood transfusions. It is a well established fact that a person's blood type is determined not by the father alone but by both parents.¹⁴ Clearly, the genetic contributions of both parents determine the blood type of their offspring.

Thus, it is medically incorrect to say that the blood of Christ came solely from His Father. Christ's blood no doubt originated from His liver, His lymphoid tissue, and His bone marrow like all other humans. Certainly, the conception of Christ was miraculous as the Scriptures clearly affirm. To state, however, that the natural result of this supernatural conception was that Christ's blood was divine and not human is not true medically.

Theologically Considered

According to the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ, the human nature of Jesus Christ must be genuine and complete. This would also require ordinary human blood just as it requires ordinary human flesh, ordinary human bones, etc. The Scriptures confirm this truth (Heb 2:14: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same").¹⁵ There can be no mixture of the divine and human

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attributes. The attributes of the human nature cannot be communicated to the divine nature nor vice versa.¹⁶ Thus, it is theologically impossible to think of the blood of Christ as being divine. The blood must have been genuine human blood; if it were not, then Jesus Christ would have been something other than genuinely human. If he were not genuinely human, then he could not be the savior of the human race. He had to be both fully God and fully man in order to redeem man. His blood, therefore, must have been true human blood.¹⁷ It is infinitely more valuable than any other man's blood, however, because Jesus Christ was not just a man; He was the God-man.

The Preservation of the Blood

Some contend that Christ took His literal blood to heaven to present to the Father and that it is eternally preserved there. One of the earliest proponents of this view was J A Bengel.¹⁸ Bengel maintains that in the suffering of Christ all of his blood was poured out, not one drop was left. He maintains that this blood did not corrupt ("the preciousness of that blood excludes all corruption"),¹⁹ but is preserved in heaven today. He argues that Christ "as the high priest carried his own blood, in separation from his body, into the sanctuary, and at the time of his entry or ascension Christ kept his blood apart from his body. His body was bloodless."²⁰

The advocates of this view usually set forward four lines of evidence in support of their theory. First, they argue that the typology of the Old Testament day of atonement demands a literal offering of the blood of Christ in heaven. Clearly, there are similarities between the sacrifice of Christ and the OT sacrifices; however, types can never be pressed into literal conformity on every point. If it were pressed in this case, then the High Priest would have had to kill the Lord Jesus, apply the blood to the mercy-seat, burn part of the body of Jesus on the altar, and burn the rest of Jesus' body outside of the camp (see Lev 16:15, 24, 25, 27, 28).²¹ The truth is that Christ Himself, not the sprinkling of His blood, is the propitiation for sins (1 Jn 2:2). The atonement was completed on the cross when Christ cried, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

The second line of proof usually given is that the book of Hebrews teaches the literal offering and preservation of the blood of Christ in heaven. The two references cited most often are Heb 9:12 and Heb 12:24.²² Actually, these verses lend no support

whatever to this teaching. In Heb 9:12 it is said that Christ entered heaven "through" (*dia*) not "with" (*sun*) his own blood.²³ The idea is that Christ entered into the presence of God after he had obtained eternal redemption by virtue of his shed blood.²⁴ In other words, after Christ had purchased salvation on the cross by shedding of His blood He was received back into the presence of God. The Father's approval of Christ's sacrifice is seen in that He is welcomed into heaven and seated in the highest place of honor, the right hand of God (Heb 1:3).

In Hebrews 12:24 the word "blood" is clearly used as a metaphor referring to a violent, bloody death. The point of the verse is that the murder of Abel cried out to God for vengeance whereas the violent death of Christ cries out to God for mercy and forgiveness. The death of Abel resulted in condemnation; the death of Christ results in justification. To take this verse literally results in the absurd conclusion that Abel's blood and Christ's blood actually spoke. If the verse teaches that Christ's blood is literally preserved in heaven, then it must teach that Abel's blood is also preserved in heaven. Such a contention is obviously ridiculous.

The third proof of the doctrine usually offered is that I Peter 1:18 teaches the incorruptibility or imperishability of the blood of Christ. I Peter 1:18 says that one is not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold but with the precious (*time*—infinitely precious or highly valued) blood of Christ. Note that the verse says Christ's blood has lasting value; it does not say that the literal blood would never perish. It is contrasting the temporal value of silver and gold with the infinite and eternal value of Christ's blood.

The fourth evidence sometimes advanced is that the risen Lord had a body of "flesh and bones" but no blood (Luke 24:39). It is reasoned that since blood is not mentioned, His body must have been bloodless. There are at least three problems with this view.²⁵ First, it is an argument from silence and results in illogical exegesis. On the same principle of logic one could argue that the risen Christ has no skin nor hair, but only flesh and bones. Using the same logic in exegeting I Cor 15:50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," one would conclude that the resurrection body of believers will not only be without blood but also without flesh. Second, the normal conception of flesh involves the presence of blood as a component part. Third, and most significant, the whole purpose of Christ's statement is to silence those who might have supposed that He was only an immaterial spirit. Thus, He said, "touch me and see; a spirit does

not have flesh and bones, as ye see I have." Obviously, He could not invite them to see or to touch His blood.

Conclusion

The blood of Christ is a very important and even essential doctrine of the Christian faith. The repeated references in Scripture demonstrate that God places a great deal of importance on "the blood." Bible-believing Christians should never be ashamed to preach the necessity of the blood atonement for salvation. At the same time, however, one should be careful to say only what the Bible says. The Bible does not teach that sin is transmitted through the blood line. Neither does the Scripture (nor medical science) teach that a child's blood is derived from the physical father. Thus, to argue that Jesus Christ was free from sin simply because he had no human father goes beyond what the Bible declares. The Bible states that Christ was free from sin; but it does not specifically explain how that came to be. Why not be content to leave the answers to such questions with God? Likewise, the preoccupation with what became of the blood of Christ involves unnecessary speculation. As Hughes argues,

It is wrong-headed. . . to be curious or concerned about what happened to the blood which Jesus shed. The important thing is that it was shed—by virtue of the incarnation, which made it possible for Christ, as Son of man, to shed his blood for man. Being truly human blood, it was susceptible to the same consequences as happen to other human blood that is shed. . . . The preciousness of the blood of Christ inheres not in the physical blood as such but in the perfection of the unique sacrifice of himself which he offered and of which the precious blood is a synonym.²⁶

The fact that Jesus shed his blood and that man may now be reconciled to God is the matter of prime importance. What became of the blood that was shed is of minor consequence.

Notes

¹ *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1912) p 70

² Francis Brown, S R Driver and Charles A Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (London: Oxford Univ Press, 1906) sv "dam"

³ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed R Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) I, 191

⁴ *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Sem Press, 1948) VII, 53

⁵ William Fredrick Arndt and F Wilbur Gingrich *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1957) sv "haima." In the majority of occurrences, this word means literal human blood. The phrase "flesh and blood" is somewhat of a technical term to refer to man (see Mt 16:17; I Cor 15:50; Gal 1:16; Eph 6:12).

⁶ See Matt 26:28; 27:4, 24, 25; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20, 44; John 6:53, 54, 55, 56; 19:34; Acts 5:28; 20:28; Rom 3:25; 5:9; I Cor 10:16; 11:25, 27; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:14, 20; Heb 2:14; 9:12, 14; 10:19, 29; 12:24; 13:12, 20; I Pet 1:2, 19; I John 1:7; 5:6, 8; Rev 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11; 19:13.

⁷ See Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1945) p 177, n 2

⁸ Some scholars, most notably B F Westcott, have argued that the blood symbolizes life not death. *The Epistles of St John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd) pp 34-37. This contention is largely rejected by biblical scholars today. For example, A M Stibbs maintains: "So blood directly suggested death, particularly a violent death. For when blood becomes visible and begins to flow, it means that damage has been done to someone's life; when the blood is poured out in quantity, and so to speak, though of in isolation as now separated from the body in which it flowed, it means that a life has been taken. So 'blood' became a word-symbol for 'death.'" *The Meaning of the Word "Blood" in Scripture* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1954) p 9. See also Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Pub Co, 1956) pp 108-24.

⁹ John MacArthur's discussion of the blood allows for misunderstanding. By his strong emphasis on equating blood with death, he leaves the impression that only the death and not the blood was essential. See *Commentary on Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983) pp 201-03. R B Thieme Jr, in a different way, also diminishes the importance of the blood of Christ maintaining that it is symbolic of His spiritual death. See *The Blood of Christ*, 4th ed (Houston: R B Thieme Jr Bible Ministries, 1979) p 23.

¹⁰ See MR De Haan, *The Chemistry of the Blood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ House, 1943)

¹¹ Ibid, pp 31-32

¹² Ibid, pp 32, 33, 42

¹³ The logic that De Haan used to prove his point could easily be reversed. He says, "Since there is no life in the egg until the male sperm unites with it, and the life is in the blood, it follows that the male sperm is the source of the blood" (Ibid, p 32). One could just as well say, "Since there is no life in the sperm until the egg unites with it, and the life is in the blood, it follows that the female egg is the source of the blood." The truth is neither is the sole source of the blood; both together form an embryo which in turn forms its own blood.

¹⁴ See J J Nora and F C Fraser, *Medical Genetics: Principles and Practice* (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1974) and J S Thompson and M W Thompson, *Genetics in Medicine* 3rd ed (Philadelphia: W B Sanders, 1980)

¹⁵ De Haan writes concerning this verse: "When we read that Jesus 'took part of the same' the word is *metecho* which means 'to take part but not all.' The children take both flesh and blood of Adam but Christ took only part, that is the flesh part, whereas the blood was the result of supernatural conception" (p 36). There are two problems with De Haan's argument. First, the words *koinoneo* and *metecho* are "practical synonyms" (A T Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932) V, 348. De Haan's distinctions between these words are not found in any standard lexicon. Second, the plural direct object *ton auton* points to the fact that Jesus shared both human flesh and human blood. The verse literally reads "he took part of the same things."

¹⁶ This is the historic position of all Protestant denominations with the exception of the Lutherans. See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publ Co, nd) II, 405-18.

¹⁷ There is considerable misunderstanding concerning the transmission of sin.

Sin is not material or tangible; it is an attitude or an action.

Some authors, such as De Haan (pp 24, 25, 31), teach that the inclination to sin is passed down from generation to generation through the blood line. He seems to be implying that the source of sin is to be found in the human blood. This is biblically incorrect. Sin is not something material or tangible. It is an attitude or an action. It is a spiritual not a physical problem. As the Westminster Confession states: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." If the source of sin were somehow in the blood of man, then to get rid of the blood would be to get rid of sin. Obviously, this is absurd, as the men in Hades are still sinners although bodiless and bloodless. To make sin something material that is carried in the blood is dangerously close to Gnosticism which maintained that everything material is evil and only the spirit is holy. It is true that the fall of Adam has brought corruption to the human race, but this is not primarily a physical corruption but a spiritual corruption. Man is alienated from God. His spirit rebels against his creator.

¹⁸ See John Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, 5 vols, rev and ed Andrew R Fausset (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1857-95) on Heb 9:12 and 12:24. Bengel also quoted Calvin as holding to the literal presentation of Christ's blood in heaven, but his claim is dubious. See Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) pp 330-31.

¹⁹ Bengel at Hebrews 12:24. M R De Haan also refers to the blood of Jesus as "perfect, sinless, incorruptible, precious, eternal blood." *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959) p 129. Similarly, Oliver B Greene states: "The value of the blood of Jesus cannot be estimated in the words of man, for His blood was the blood of God (Acts 20:28) . . . 'His own blood' was incorruptible (I Pet 1:18, 23). His blood that purchased our redemption and made possible our eternal life cannot corrupt or pass away like the blood of other men, nor like the blood of animal sacrifices." *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour Inc, 1965) p 349.

²⁰ Bengel at Hebrews 9:12

²¹ As E Schuyler English notes: "We must not infer that He carried His actual blood into heaven when He entered there. There is nothing in Scripture to warrant such an assumption. Of course, we are aware that the levitical high priest carried the blood of sacrifice with him into the holiest on the day of atonement. But the shadow, or type, need not be followed in exactness to be efficient. Were this so, then our Lord must have been slain by the high priest, and His blood must have been literally sprinkled upon the mercy-seat seven times, etc. Christ entered into the Holy places, not with His blood but by it, that is, by virtue of its having been shed." *Studies in the Epistles to the Hebrews* (Travelers Rest, SC: Southern Bible House, 1955) p 253.

²² Sometimes John 20:17 is also advanced as teaching a prior ascension of Christ for the purpose of offering His blood to the Father. It is argued that Mary

is prohibited from touching the Lord lest she defile Him before He ascends to the Father to offer His blood. This is impossible; however, because the Greek construction (*me* with the present imperative) reads literally: "Stop touching me" or "stop clinging to me." See H E Dana and J R Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan & Co, 1957) pp 301-02.

²³ John Owen, the great Puritan commentator, argues that the writer to the Hebrews purposely uses *dia*: "... He useth it on purpose to exclude the sense which *sun* would intimate: for he doth not declare with what the high priest entered into the holy place, for he entered into the holy place with incense as well as with blood; but what it was by virtue whereof he so entered as to be accepted with God...It is a vain speculation, contrary to the analogy of faith, and destructive of the true nature of the oblation of Christ, and inconsistent with the dignity of his person, that he should carry with him into heaven a part of that material blood which was shed for us on the earth." *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 4 vols (Wilmington: Sovereign Grace Publ, nd) on 9:12. B F Westcott holds: "The use of *dia* as marking the means but not defining the mode is significant. . . . The earthly High-priest took with him the material blood: Christ 'through his own blood' entered into the Presence of God, but we are not justified in introducing any material interpretations of the manner in which he made it efficacious." *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd) pp 258-59. Thomas Hewitt states: "The gross and crude conception of Christ taking His blood was not in the author's mind, and he is careful to avoid this by use of *dia*." *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960) pp 158-59.

²⁴ "Having obtained" is an aorist participle which usually expresses action prior to the action of the main verb ("entered"). See A T Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934) p 860.

²⁵ See Hughes, p 331

²⁶ Hughes, p 334. Sir Robert Anderson states, "to suppose, as Bengel's theory implies, that there is a coffer of some sort in heaven on which Christ sprinkles His material blood, is a vagary of exegesis which is as deplorable as it is amazing. . . . Does this mean that the material blood of Christ is sprinkled upon us sinful men? The question has only to be stated to expose its error." *Types in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, nd) pp 166, 167.

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