

5. The Blood of Christ

The blood of Christ has an importance in Tyndale's theology that demands a chapter of its own, rather than including it with his theology of Christ as the Second Person in the Trinity, or with regard to Christ's place in man's salvation. Tyndale's doctrine, as we will see, separates him from other Reformers. This Chapter seeks to identify the ways in which Tyndale's doctrine of Christ's blood is different from the references to Christ's blood in the theologies of other Reformers. Alan Stibbs, in his booklet, *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture*, wrote, 'As Vincent Taylor has pointed out, the "blood" of Christ is mentioned in the writings of the New Testament nearly three times as often as "the Cross" of Christ, and five times as frequently as the "death" of Christ'.¹

It is impossible to read Tyndale's writings without realising that the doctrine of the blood of Christ was central to his theology. In the Parker Society edition of Tyndale's writings, the total number of pages Tyndale's writings occupy is about 1060; within which the 'blood of Christ', in various forms, occurs theologically (omitting the times Tyndale mentions it sacramentally), 375 times, there are also some references in marginal notes.

Tyndale very rarely mentions the Cross of Christ in a theological sense preferring to write 'the blood of Christ' as more Scriptural. Tyndale's use of Christ's blood has led to the idea that theologically Tyndale's use of 'the blood of Christ' equates to the use of 'the Cross of Christ' by the other Reformers. In this chapter we will see that although in some cases these two phrases are interchangeable, in most cases to try to equate 'the blood of Christ' with 'the Cross of Christ' is not possible. Indeed, in those places where they could be interchanged the use of 'the Cross of Christ' does not convey the importance attributed to the meaning of 'the blood of Christ' in Tyndale's theology, quite apart from those places where he wrote of both the blood and the cross of Christ, although the 'cross' was not important, 'there is no other remedy but to run to Christ, which shed his blood, hanging upon the cross, and to his everlasting testament and

1 Stibbs, A.M., *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture*, p.3

merciful promise, that it was shed for us for the remission of sins'.¹ Some important doctrines involving the blood of Christ will be touched on in this chapter, but they will be dealt with more thoroughly when considering specific doctrines in later chapters.

Tyndale considered the Old and New Testaments to be a single covenant intended by God to undo the harm Adam's disobedience had done to his creation and to restore it to its original state, thereby destroying Satan's power. The Bible teaches us how 'our Saviour Christ hath bought us with his blood'.² In the Old Testament we see God's plan unfolding and God's chosen people being taught by God the way of salvation. Through the shedding of blood and the sacrificial blood being sprinkled on them, God was teaching and preparing his people for the coming of Christ and the shedding of his blood, thus opening the way for all mankind to be saved and creation restored.

Tyndale quoted from John's Gospel and Paul's Letter to the Ephesians to emphasise his belief that God chose those who were to be his children. 'Christ, of whose 'fulness we have received favour for favour, John i.; that is, God's favour was so full in Christ, that for his sake he giveth us his favour, as affirmeth also Paul, Eph. i., "He loved us in his beloved, by whom we have," saith Paul, "redemption through his blood, and forgiveness of sins." The forgiveness of sins, then, is our redemption in Christ, and not the reward of works. "In whom", saith he in the same place, "he chose us before the making of the world," that is, long before we did good works'.³

The fact that everyone has been created by God means that every human being is a child of God, and we are all brothers and sisters through creation. So when God commands each one of us to, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'⁴ this applies to every human being, for Christ shed his blood for them as well as for us, 'because, we be all equally created and formed of one God our Father, and indifferently bought and redeemed with one blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ'⁵. This applies not only to Christians, but to every human being, of whatever religion or of none.

Let us put our trust in the mercy of God through Christ, that we know it our duty to keep the law of God, and to love our neighbours for their Father's sake which created them, and for their Lord's sake which redeemed them, and bought them so dearly with his blood.⁶

This does not mean Tyndale was a universalist, but rather that he believed

1 Tyndale, William, *Sacraments, PS-1*, p. 356f

2 Tyndale, William, *Answer, PS-3*, p. 57

3 Tyndale, William, *Mammon, PS-1*, p. 110f

4 Leviticus 19:18, also several times in the New Testament

5 Tyndale, William, *Prologue to Jonas, PS-1*, p. 464

6 Tyndale, William, *Prologue Matthew, PS-1*, p. 474

regardless of who a person is they are created by God. As Christians we are to do good to everyone. ‘Them that are good I love, because they are in Christ; and the evil, to bring them to Christ’.¹ Referring to the Lord’s Supper, Tyndale wrote,

First, ye see by these words, that the body was given to death, and the blood shed, for the remission of sins, and that for many. But who are these many? Verily, they that turn to God, to believe in him only, and to endeavour themselves to keep his law from henceforth. Which many yet, in respect of them that love not the law, are but very few, and even that little flock, that gave themselves wholly to follow Christ.²

Tyndale links the Passover and the Lord’s Supper, both of which took place before God’s people were freed from slavery. The Israelites had to sacrifice a lamb or a kid and

strike the doorposts with the blood, to be a sign to them, and a seal of the promise that God would deliver them that night both out of the hands of Pharaoh, and also from the smiting of the angel that went about all Egypt, and slew the first-born in every house. And this sign Pesah, beside that it was a seal of the promise to be delivered the same night, to stablish that faith, and commanded to be observed ever after yearly, to keep the benefit in memory; it was also a very prophecy of the passion of Christ. . . . In whose stead is the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ come, as baptism in the room or stead of circumcision.³

As the Passover meal was celebrated the night before the Israelites were freed from their slavery in Egypt, so too was the Lord’s Supper celebrated before Christ’s crucifixion and the freeing of his people from their slavery to Satan. Therefore, referring to the Passover, Tyndale wrote ‘it is the same thing that it was when Christ institute it at his last supper. If it were then the very sacrificing of Christ’s body, and had the same virtue and power with it that his very passion after wrought; why was he sacrificed so cruelly on the morrow?’⁴

But it was the blood that was all-important, for it was only when the angel saw the blood on the door posts that he passed over, and only the firstborn were slain in those houses which were not protected by the blood.

The blood stricken on the posts saved them, that they were not plagued with the Egyptians, and delivered them out of the captivity of Pharaoh. And the blood of Christ, stricken on the posts of our consciences with a sure faith, delivereth us from the captivity of Pharaoh the devil, and smiting of his angels, &c.⁵

1 Tyndale, William, *Obedience, PS-1*, p. 299

2 Tyndale, William, *Sacraments, PS-1*, p.363

3 Tyndale, William, *Sacraments, PS-1*, p. 353f

4 Tyndale, William, *Answer, PS-3*, p. 178

5 Tyndale, William, *Sacraments, PS-1*, p. 354

The day after the Passover meal was eaten God's chosen people, the children of Israel, were freed from Pharaoh's slavery through the sacrificial blood of the Passover lamb. The day after the Lord's Supper was eaten, God's chosen people, the elect, were set free from slavery to Satan through Christ's blood shed on the Cross.

Throughout the Old Testament, it was through the shedding of blood that the Israelites became God's people. They were kept faithful to God through the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood for every occasion, and not just for the forgiveness of sin, but for every aspect of their lives that affected their relationship with God. All the Old Testament sacrifices looked forward to the time when God's Son would become the final sacrifice and, once for all, shed his blood, thus bringing to an end the need for the sacrifice of animals. Now it is through the sprinkling of Christ's blood that the Christian is kept pure from sin and able to enter God's presence. Tyndale clarifies this as he discusses Christ's sacrifice in his *Prologue to Leviticus*,

For Christ is Aaron and Aaron's sons, and all that offer the sacrifice to purge sin. And Christ is all manner offering that is offered: he is the ox, the sheep, the goat, the kid, and lamb; he is the ox that is burnt without the host, and the scapegoat that carried all the sin of the people away into the wilderness: for as they purged the people from their worldly uncleannesses through blood of the sacrifices, even so doth Christ purge us from the uncleannesses of everlasting death with his own blood; and as their worldly sins could no otherwise be purged, than by blood of sacrifices, even so can our sins be no otherwise be forgiven than through the blood of Christ.¹

In that way, from the Old Testament, we can understand much about our lives as Christians, and how the whole of our life is dependent on the blood of Christ, and everything Christ has done for us.

In Christ's blood are we blessed from that bitter curse and damnable captivity under sin, wherein we were born and conceived. And Christ's Spirit is poured into us, to bring forth good works, and our works are the fruits of the Spirit; and the kingdom is the deserving of Christ's blood; and so is faith, and the Spirit, and good works also.²

As a result, one of the good works Christians should do is to proclaim Christ, 'and in him ought we to teach all men to trust; and to expound unto all men the testament³ that God hath made to us sinners in Christ's blood'.⁴

1 Tyndale, William, *Prologue, Leviticus, PS-I*, p. 427

2 Tyndale, William, *Mammon, PS-I*, p.83

3 Tyndale used different words to express God's covenant with men – 'testament', 'appointment', and 'covenant' being the normal ones, although sometimes 'promise' is used to imply the covenant God has made with man

4 Tyndale, William, *Mammon, PS-I*, p.95

But if Christians are to teach everyone the testament which God has made to everyone in Christ's blood, they have to know the power of the blood of Christ in their own lives.

In Tyndale's theology the natural man is totally separated from God and powerless to do anything that is good and pleasing to him. He therefore requires the blood of Christ to deliver him from his sins; for he, in himself, is incapable of deliverance by his own actions due to his powerless state.

By nature, through the fall of man, we are children of wrath, heirs of God's vengeance of God through birth, yea, and from our conception; (we have our fellowship with damned devils under the power of darkness and Satan's rule,) while we are yet in our mother's wombs. Although we don't show the fruits of sin in our lives; yet we are filled with the natural poison from which all sinful deeds proceed.¹

There is only one way by which the sinner can be rescued from Satan's captivity and rule.

It is impossible for a natural man to consent to God's law, that it should be good, or that God, who made the law, should be righteous, because man's wit, reason and will are so fast glued, nailed and chained to the Devil's will. Neither can any creature free man from those bonds: but only the blood of Christ. This is the captivity from which Christ delivered us, redeemed us and loosed us. His blood, his death, his patience in suffering rebukes and wrongs, his prayers and fasting, his meekness, and fulfilling the uttermost point of the law, brought us peace from God's wrath²

This is echoed in the Lollard Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent, where the preacher spoke of the importance for us,

how profitable it is to hear the word of God, and keep it, and work there after. For he that so doth is blessed of God, whose blessing

1 Tyndale, William, 1525, *The Prologe*, p. 6f. 'By nature through the faule of adam / are we the chyldren of wrath / heyres if the vengeance of god by byrth / ye and from oure concepcion / we have oure fellowshippe wth the danmed devylls vnder the power of derknes vnd rule of satan / whyle we are yette in oure mothers wombes though we shewe nott forthe the freutes of synne /yett are we full of the naturall poyson where of all synfull deds sprynge'

2 Tyndale, William, 1525, *The Prologe*, p. 6f. 'It is not possyble for a naturall man to consent to the lawe / that hit shuld be good / or that god shuld be rightewes / which maketh the lawe. Mannes witte / reason / and will / are so fast glued / ye nayled and cheyned vnto the will of the devyl. Nether can eny creature lowse the bondes / save the bloud of Christ. This is the captivite and bondage whence Christ delyvred vs / redemed / and lowsed vs. His bloud / his deethe / his pacience / in suffrynge rebukes and wrongs / his prevaers and fastings / his mekenes and fullfyllinge of the vtmost poynte of the lawe / peaced the wrath of God . . . '

is more worth and brings more pardon, that is, more forgiveness of sins to sinful souls, and more profitable than all the bulls of all sinful prelates here in earth, from the highest to the lowest, for he [Christ] is true pastor and bishop of all our souls, that gave freely his heart's blood for salvation of his sheep.¹

Every aspect of our Christian life depends on Christ's blood and without it we remain completely separated from God. In the *Prologue upon the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews*, Tyndale wrote,

in the tenth chapter, . . . For he maketh a comparison between Moses and Christ saying: 'If he which despised Moses' law died without mercy, how much worse punishment is he worthy of, that treadeth the Son of God under foot, and counteth the blood of the covenant, by which blood he was sanctified, as an unholy thing, and blasphemeth the Spirit of grace?' By which words it is manifest that he meaneth none other by the fore words, than the sin of blasphemy of the Spirit.²

Through the blood of Christ we are the elect, the chosen of God³, and the Holy Spirit is in us, for it is 'Not that our works make us the sons of God, but testify only, and certify our consciences, that we are the sons of God; and that God hath chosen us, and washed us in Christ's blood; and hath put his Spirit in us'.⁴ We are born anew⁵ and our Christian life is under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, who 'leadeth them, through repentance, unto the mercy that is in Christ's blood;'⁶ for 'the faith of a repenting soul in Christ's blood doth justify only'.⁷ Everything we do in our Christian life depends on Christ's blood, 'And Christ's Spirit is poured into us, to bring forth good works, and our works are the fruits of the Spirit; and the kingdom is the deserving of Christ's blood; and so is faith, and the Spirit, and good works also'.⁸

It can be further demonstrated that Tyndale believed that everything we can do as Christians depends on Christ's blood, and without it all we do is sinful. The importance of Christ's blood for Tyndale will be seen as his doctrines are compared with those of other Reformers in the following chapters.

1 Cigman, Gloria, *Lollard Sermons*, p. 174. 'hou profitable it is to here *the* worde of God, and kepe it, and worche *ther* after. For he *that* so *dothe* is blessid of God, whos blesing is more *worthe* and bringeth more pardoun, *that* is: more forgyuenes of synnis, to synful soulis, and more profitith *then* alle *the* bullis of alle synful prelati here in *erthe*, fro the hiest to the lowest, for he is verrey pastoure and bisshop of alle oure soulis, *that* gave frely his hert blode for sauacion of his shepe'

2 Tyndale, William, *Prologue Hebrews*, PS-1, p. 523

3 Tyndale, William, *Answer*, PS-3, p. 35

4 Tyndale, William, *Mammon*, PS-1, p.72

5 Tyndale, William, *Pathway*, PS-1, p.18

6 Tyndale, William, *Exposition 1 John*, PS-2, p. 183f

7 Tyndale, William, *Answer*, PS-3, p.172

8 Tyndale, William, *Mammon*, PS-1, p. 83

Luther had not the stress on ‘the blood of Christ’ that we find in Tyndale. One passage where Luther does similarly emphasise the importance of the blood of Christ is found in his ‘Sermon on the Gospel for the Festival of the Epiphany’. He states,

For you should not think that if he became king and priest for you and has granted you such great benefits, this was achieved without price or with little cost or came to you by your merits. In him and through him your sin and death are overcome and you are granted grace and life, but it cost him much and was achieved with hard work and bitter sweat since he paid for it most dearly with his own blood and life. For it was not possible to overcome God’s wrath, judgement, conscience, hell, death, and all evil things, and indeed to gain all benefits, unless God’s righteousness received satisfaction, sin was given its due reward, and death was overcome by justice. Accordingly, St Paul generally refers to the suffering and blood of Christ when he proclaims the grace of God in him, in order to indicate that all the benefits that are given to us through Christ, are granted only because of his ineffable merit and the price he paid. Thus in Romans 3 [:25] he says: ‘God has put him forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith’. And in 1 Corinthians 2[:2]: ‘For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified,’ etc. To sacrifice myrrh, then, is to confess the great price and work which it cost Christ to be our priest and king.¹

Despite this, for Luther it is our faith alone that enables us to claim the work of Christ. As Althaus wrote,

Luther’s theology revolves round the assertion that we receive justification and therewith salvation through faith alone. God’s promise applies to us apart from every condition on our side. We have only to trust ourselves to God’s promise; this is what Luther calls faith. All this is true not only of the beginning of the Christian life but also of its continuation until the Last Day and thus also of the final judgement. Now it cannot be denied that in the New Testament the certainty of salvation is often connected not only to faith as pure receiving but also of love.

Althaus mentions 1 Cor. 13:2 and James 2,

Such statements of the New Testament present a problem for the central theses of Luther’s theology. And Luther constantly made new attempts to arrive at a true understanding of these passages which would bring them into harmony with his basic insight.²

Luther’s problem comes from his basic theses, the theology of the Cross, and also of the importance of our faith. As we have seen, neither of these have an importance in Tyndale’s theology, apart from the blood of Christ.

1 Luther, Martin, *Works vol 52, Sermons*, p. 280

2 Althaus, Paul, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, p. 446

Whilst both Luther and Tyndale held the doctrine that justification is by faith alone, their interpretation of this doctrine is different. For Tyndale every aspect of the Christian life, from God's election of those he has chosen before the foundation of the world, through to the Christian's entry into heaven, is only possible through the blood of Christ. The Persons of the Trinity were going to destroy Satan and his hold over creation through man's disobedience to God; in this way creation would be restored to its state before Adam sinned. To enable this to take place, the Persons of the Trinity entered into a covenant: God the Father covenanted to choose those who were to be saved from sin and death: God the Son covenanted to become man and shed his blood as a sacrifice for man's sin: God the Holy Spirit covenanted to sprinkle Christ's blood on the elect so that they would be given the faith to believe and be cleansed from their sin.

It is through the blood of Christ that God's elect are born again, for 'we are the sons of God; and that God hath chosen us, and washed us in Christ's blood; and hath put his Spirit in us:'¹ and we become part of God's new creation.² For

Christ is no hypocrite, or disguised, that playeth a part in a play, . . . he is ever a Saviour, and ever anointeth with grace, and ever maketh God with us, and ever sanctifieth. Neither is there any other to save and sanctify from sin, or anoint with grace, or to set God at one with men. And these things, which his name signify, doth he ever unto all that have trust and confidence in his blood, as soon as they repent of the sin which they desire to be saved and sanctified from.³

'For the Spirit of God is in his heart, and comforteth him, and holdeth him fast to the rock of the merits of Christ's blood, in whom he is elect'.⁴ Tyndale thus tells us to 'cleave fast to the rock of this profession, and tie to thy ship this anchor of faith in Christ's blood'.⁵ In similar ways Tyndale wrote about the importance of Christ's blood for every aspect of our Christian life. Through the Holy Spirit sprinkling the blood of Christ, we are enabled to pray and worship God,⁶ and we are empowered to do

1 Tyndale, William, *Mammon*, *PS-1*, p. 72

2 Tyndale, William, *Pathway*, *PS-1*, p.24. God has 'created us again, in the blood of his beloved Son'

3 Tyndale, William, *Prologue*, *Exposition John 1*, *PS-2*, p. 182f

4 Tyndale, William, *Mammon*, *PS-1*, p. 78

5 Tyndale, William, *Exposition Matthew*, *PS-2*, p. 15

6 Tyndale, William, *Obedience*, *PS-1*, p. 280, 'To pray one for another are we equally bound, and to pray is a thing that we may always do, whatsoever we have in hand; and that to do may no man hire another. Christ's blood hath hired us already'

good works,¹ and to love and serve God and our neighbour. 'We also serve, not as servants unto masters; but as they which are bought with Christ's blood serve Christ himself'.² We also, through that love, serve our neighbour. 'If I be not ready to help my neighbour at his need, so I take his due honour from him, and dishonour him, and him that made him, and him also that bought him with his blood, whose servant he is'.³ In fact the Christian is powerless to do anything to the glory of God except through the blood of Christ.

Even where the Wycliffites or sixteenth century Reformers mention the blood of Christ in a theological sense, they do not share Tyndale's theology of the blood of Christ. Although Tyndale's theology of the blood of Christ covers the same doctrines as Luther's Theology of the Cross, and the doctrines of other Reformers relating to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, Tyndale's theology is much more comprehensive. This is because Tyndale considered Christ's blood related to the restoration of God's creation to its state before Adam listened to Satan and disobeyed God's command. The whole of this restoration is the work of God alone, and that includes man who was the cause of creation's problems. It is through the blood of Christ the Christian can repent, have faith, pray and worship God, do good works, for the whole of the Christian life is only possible through the blood of Christ. To repair every fault the Holy Spirit has to sprinkle Christ's blood on each broken part, then, having been repaired, those parts were able to work to the glory of God.

1 Tyndale, William, *Exposition Matthew, PS-2*, p. 126. 'If a king minister his kingdom in the faith of this name, because his subjects be his brethren and the price of Christ's blood, he pleaseth God highly. . . . Thus is faith the goodness of all works'

2 Tyndale, William, *Obedience, PS-1*, p. 334

3 Tyndale, William, *Answer, PS-3*, p. 57f