

1. Introduction

That their spirit reign above their flesh, leading it to virtues, and not the flesh above the spirit, leading it to vices. And that Christ spend not in vain his precious blood on us. Psalm 20:2

(*Two Revisions of Rolle's English Psalter Commentary, vol 1.*
(EETS O.S. 340), p. 255)

“The meaning of the word ‘blood’ in Scripture is obviously of great importance to all Christian students of the Bible, because of its frequent use in connection with Christ Himself and with the Christian doctrine of salvation.”¹ These are the opening words of Alan Stibbs’s monograph, *The Meaning of the Word ‘Blood’ in Scripture*. Although it is dated the second updated edition being published in 1954, much of what he writes about academia’s view of the biblical use of ‘blood’ still holds true. Alan Stibbs’s explanation of the scriptural meaning of blood is, I believe, relevant today. And in this book we will be considering Tyndale’s understanding of the blood of Christ as it affects our relationship with God and the whole of our Christian life.

Alan Stibbs continues:

What we need ultimately to discover, and to be sure of, is the theological significance of the word ‘blood’ in its use in the New Testament with reference to the sacrifice of Christ. This is the more important because in this connection the word is used so often. 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. The term ‘blood’ is, in fact, a chief method of reference to the sacrifice of Christ, particularly in contexts which define its efficacy.²

Stibbs wrote of our need to discover “the theological significance of the word ‘blood’ in the New Testament”. I am certain he would have agreed

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

2. Ibid. (See Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in N.T. Teaching*, 1945).

with Tyndale about the importance of ‘the blood of Christ’ as he made the theological link between the sacrificial blood in the Old Testament with Christ’s blood in the New.

There are many positive references in the New Testament, linking it to the sacrifices in the Old Testament, especially in *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, that teach us much of what we need to know about our Christian faith. The context in which we are told, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8), links the Old Testament sacrifices for sin with Christ’s sacrifice for sin – for the “yesterday” refers back in time to the Mosaic sacrifices; “today” refers to the time of the Christian Church, from Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross; whilst “for ever” is to be understood that Jesus Christ will be with us throughout all eternity. For unlike most Christian theologies, Tyndale did not consider that there is a complete break between the Old and the New Testaments. He believed that there is a continuity between the two periods. God has not changed; he is the God who drove Adam out of the Garden of Eden and the same One who chose Abraham and promised him that he would have many descendants. He is the same God who told Abraham to sacrifice his only son, who, when Isaac was going to be sacrificed, provided a lamb to take Isaac’s place. He is the God who provided the Israelites sacrificial lambs for their sins. He is the same One who gave Jesus Christ, his only Son, to be a sacrifice for our sins, for he is “The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). He is the same God who gave the Israelites the Passover Lamb, and who gave us his Son, for “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). So, He is the same for ever to those “whose names are written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). Tyndale understood that ‘yesterday’s’ blood in the Old Testament sacrifices pointed forward to ‘today’, when we look back to the time Christ sacrificed his blood for us on the Cross at Calvary.

It is obvious that Tyndale realised the importance of those facts, for one does not have to read far into Tyndale’s writings to realise the importance of the ‘blood of Christ’ in his theology. Whatever doctrine we choose to consider, we find that it depends on the blood of Christ if we are to understand it. Yet, often academics believe that Tyndale’s theology of Christ’s blood is the same as Luther’s theology of the Cross, even though the Cross is relevant to only a few doctrines. The error of that belief will be made clear as we examine Tyndale’s theology of Christ’s blood. Although there are a few instances where Tyndale’s mention of ‘blood’ could be replaced by ‘cross’, the vast majority of these are where ‘cross’ would not make any sense. From the number of times Tyndale refers to verses from *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, it is obvious that the link between that Epistle and the Old

Testament sacrifices was important for Tyndale's theology of the blood of Christ. The covenant of salvation that God made with his chosen people is sealed with Christ's blood; in fact, Tyndale's theology is summarised at the end of *The Epistle to the Hebrews*.

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep with the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20, 21).

Hebrews clearly links the blood in the Old Testament sacrifices to Christ's sacrificial blood shed on the Cross in fulfilment of the 'eternal covenant'.

Moses offered half the blood to God, and sprinkled the people with the other half, to confirm the covenant and to bind both parties: neither was there any covenant made that was not confirmed with blood, as it is rehearsed in Hebrews ix.; and as we see in the books of Moses, whose custom of blood-shedding was not only to confirm those old covenants, but also to be a prophecy of the blood that should be shed to confirm this testament.¹

To those who insist that Tyndale's theology, following the teaching of the scriptures, of Christ's blood is the same as Luther's theology of the Cross, I ask them to replace 'blood' with 'cross' in Hebrews 9:11-22, especially, "all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission". Yet, it is clear that this refers to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

As we are only considering one doctrine – even though 'the blood of Christ' relates to every part of Tyndale's theology – there will be a certain amount of overlap, and I will, in places, refer to a passage that has already been quoted, rather than quoting it again. In many of the chapters, we will find an incomplete explanation of Tyndale's theology, but only the importance of Christ's blood in that doctrine. Unfortunately, this can give us a sense of 'incompleteness', and I can only refer you to my earlier books.² I consider that by looking at different aspects of a single doctrine, we are following the line of a concentric spiral. No part of the spiral is completely separate from any other part, but there are times when several aspects of the doctrine appear closer vertically between different rings in the spiral than to those aspects we considered

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

2. R.S. Werrell, *The Theology of William Tyndale* (2006) and *The Roots of William Tyndale's Theology* (2013).

just before or after it. Frequently, we find that when Tyndale mentions ‘the blood of Christ’, apart from its referring to our main doctrine, he draws our attention to other related doctrines. For Tyndale is not writing a theological handbook, but about the Christian’s life as a child of God. When Tyndale mentions the blood of Christ, he often refers to more than one doctrine. Where possible I have tried not to repeat the same quotation in a different context.

We must remember that Tyndale used different words for covenant, but his covenantal theology remained the same from 1525 to 1536. Clebsch attempted to fit Tyndale’s theology into some preconceived theological *schemata*, and regarding the change Tyndale made of testament to covenant, Clebsch wrote, “Although any continuous narrative of Tyndale’s career from 1532 until its end in 1536 builds on supposition after supposition, his theology, newly organized around the idea of covenant as a bipartite, divine-human contract binding upon both parties, shouts itself from every writing attributable to the period.”¹ Clebsch believed that Tyndale wrote ‘testament’ in his early writings; then his theology changed to a more Reformed theology, and so we find ‘covenant’ in his later writings. Tyndale realised that his readers might get confused by this change. So, in his writings that bridged the time he made that change, he wrote that ‘testament’ and ‘covenant’ meant the same. But Clebsch totally ignored this point. Tyndale wrote, “God . . . hath made a testament or covenant, and hath bound himself, and hath sealed his obligation with Christ’s blood.” Again, “to testify and confirm the testament or covenant made in Christ’s blood and body.”²

Clebsch believed that Tyndale’s *Prologue to Romans* (1526) was a translation of Luther’s *Preface to Romans*; therefore, Tyndale’s theology between 1525 and 1530 was Lutheran. Yet, I have been unable to find where, during those years, Tyndale’s theology disagreed with his later writings, which Clebsch says were not Lutheran. Clebsch’s theory basically depended on Tyndale’s use of some of Luther’s writings. He took those early writings where Tyndale used Luther as a base text for what he wanted to write, without considering why, so often, Tyndale kept breaking off from his good translation, changing or deleting Luther’s words and inserting his own. These changes altered Luther’s theology. There are also many places where Tyndale inserted theological material of his own, where Luther thought it unnecessary.³

Leonard Trinterud analysed Luther’s *Preface* and Tyndale’s *Prologue*

1. W.A. Clebsch, *England’s Earliest Protestants*, p. 181.
2. William Tyndale, *Obedience, PS-I*, p. 292; *Sacraments, PS-I*, p. 381, et al.
3. Ralph S. Werrell, “Tyndale’s Disagreement with Luther in the Prologue to the Epistle to the Romans”.

to *Romans* and concluded that one eighth of Tyndale's was a good translation of half of Luther's. I have been surprised at the way in which Clebsch's work was accepted as accurate, as he had not taken the findings of Trinterud into account.¹ Also, the academic reluctance to accept the findings of Paul Laughlin, who started his doctoral research to prove Clebsch was right in his theory, and ended up being forced to state that Clebsch had not understood Tyndale's theology and therefore had stated as fact what was untrue.²

There are two covenants that are important in Tyndale's theology. First, there is 'The Covenant', made between the Persons of the Trinity, as God the Father, who elects those he shall save from fallen mankind; as God the Son, who became man and shed his blood for man's salvation; and as God the Holy Spirit, who sprinkles the blood of Christ on those being saved, enabling them to become children of God.³ Second, there is the 'General Covenant', made between God and man, effecting man's salvation. This covenant is multiple, for, as Tyndale wrote, where we find God making a promise to us, there is a covenant. "Wherefore I have ever noted the covenants in the margins, and also the promises. Moreover, where thou findest a promise, and no covenant expressed therewith, there must thou understand a covenant."⁴ Tyndale was determined to help those who read the Word of God:

I thought it my duty, most dear reader, to warn thee before, and to shew thee the right way in, and to give thee the true key to open it withal, and to arm thee against false prophets and malicious hypocrites; whose perpetual study is to blind the scripture with glosses, and there to lock it up where it should save the soul, and to make us shoot at a wrong mark, to put our trust in those things that profit their bellies only, and slay our souls.⁵

In Chapter 2, we consider the covenant between the Persons of the Trinity. We begin our consideration of the blood of Christ where man's salvation seems to have a secondary place: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). So, we start with the covenant made between the Persons of the Trinity, as it applies to us from before the beginning of the world to its end – for God knew what was going to happen after he had

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1. L.J. Trinterud, "A Reappraisal of William Tyndale's Debt to Martin Luther".
 2. Paul Laughlin, "The Brightness of Moses Face".
 3. Tyndale does not spell out this covenant, but there are passages in his writings that link the work of the three Persons of the Trinity in a way that can only be understood as covenantal: see, *Answer, PS-3*, p. 111f.
 4. William Tyndale, *Prologue Matthew, PS-1*, p. 471.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 469.

created the earth. God knew how Satan was going to tempt man and that man would fall to the Devil's temptation. God also knew how he was going to break Satan's hold on man and the worlds, destroy the Devil and restore man and his creation to its original state.

In Chapter 3, we pass from Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve to man's Fall and to man dying spiritually to God. Man was then cast out of the Garden of Eden, but God started his work of restoring man and breaking Satan's power. We then follow the early stages of man's salvation, and the way by which God revealed his final purpose, by signs revealing how man would finally be set free from his slavery to sin. We trace the progress from Adam's Fall which led to man's slavery to the Devil's power; to God's plan to set man free from his bondage to the Devil. God made a promise to Abraham that one of his descendants would liberate man from that slavery. The history of the Israelites illustrated this. They became slaves to Pharaoh, and, through God's call to Moses, the blood of the sacrificial lamb liberated them from their slavery so that they became the children of God. It was through Christ's blood, portrayed by the blood of the Passover lamb, that the Israelites were freed from Pharaoh's power. In the same way, Christians are freed by Christ's blood from bondage to our Pharaoh, the Devil's power. For the blood of the Passover and the blood of the sacrifices were, figuratively, Christ's blood that would be shed when God the Son shed his blood in fulfilment of his part in the Trinitarian Covenant. This enabled man to be created anew and become a child of God the Father.

In Chapter 4, we are concerned with the world, that had been destroyed by Adam's sin, being re-created. God fulfils his plans for his new World. Fallen man who is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) becomes a new creation in every aspect of his Christian's life through the Holy Spirit sprinkling the blood of Christ on him.

Chapter 5 brings us to the life of a child of God, to the worship of the Christian Church and to the place of the Sacraments for the Christian community. The continuity of God's purpose from the Old Testament to the New Testament becomes clear to us from our study of Tyndale's opening of the Scriptures and his explanation of its unity, for in both Testaments the blood has the same power for man's salvation.

Chapter 6 considers the different ways in which the Church has erred in its understanding of the blood of Christ and the way in which the Church has introduced various traditions that are not found in scripture, which are the result of the teaching of the pope's Church.

Chapter 7 sums up what we have discovered of the importance of the 'blood of Christ' in Tyndale's theology.

We then, finally, have the Appendices, detailing the use of Christ's blood

in Tyndale's writings. The Appendices will draw to our attention some important references to 'the blood of Christ' that were omitted in the main text to ensure that the text was not overloaded. Often, these will only be references of where they may be found in Tyndale's writings.

We will see that the blood of Christ, in Tyndale's writings, covers every theological doctrine: from man's election "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4), through God's dealing with man through the Old and New Testaments, even to the end of time; for "apart from shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22) of sin.

SAMPLE