

Silver, Gold, and Blood

The apostle Peter was an uneducated man, a Galilean whom the religious leaders of the day found nothing less than contemptible¹. Yet, from the lips of this lowly fisherman came one of the most profound utterances to be found in all of the Scripture.

In his short epistle², Peter declares, "...ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot...". Following is the declaration in its context:

"13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: 15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. 17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: 18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: 20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, 21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. 22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: 23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. 24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

— I Peter 1:13–25

While the declaration of Peter is overwhelming in its profundity, it also is one of the most striking instances of ironical

expression to be found in all of literature. And it is nothing less than remarkable that the irony in the declaration appears to have escaped the notice of most readers, commentators, teachers, and pastors.

Throughout history, men have valued silver and gold. The characteristic which makes these metals desirable is their inherent resistance to corruption³, whereby they are considered to be durable or lasting. Unlike so-called 'base' metals such as iron which eventually disintegrate when exposed to the environment, 'noble' metals such as gold and silver are almost impervious to attack, retaining their integrity irrespective of the environment. And while silver does tarnish when exposed to compounds containing sulphur, the dull layer of tarnish is easily removed, leaving the silver essentially unharmed.

Conversely, with respect to susceptibility to corruption, blood stands in stark contrast to gold and silver. Indeed, few substances are so perishable as is blood. Once a creature dies, or once blood has been withdrawn from a body for the purpose of transfusion, blood almost immediately commences to decompose, soon becoming foul in nature, odious in smell, repugnant in appearance, and utterly worthless.

So here we have that which, arguably, is the greatest of all ironies, and one which has a multiplicity of aspects. The substances which man values more than almost anything else, namely, gold and silver, are utterly devoid of redemptive value in the eyes of the Lord God, who considers them corruptible or perishing (*phthartos*). And the substance which man finds most contemptible—blood which, having been shed, has no value to man—the Lord God views as precious or honourable (*timious*).

Of course, not all blood is in view in this passage; the blood is that of Christ Jesus—the Lamb of God⁴. Nor—and contrary to the claims of many teachers—is the blood the *literal* blood of Jesus. Blood is representative of the life of the creature, Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:11. Conversely, the *shedding* of blood is representative of death, Leviticus 17:11.

Some in ignorance argue on the basis of passages such as Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, and Hebrews 9:22 that it was necessary for the Christ to "*die a bloody death*" in order to accomplish atonement for sin. But such arguments reflect blindness with respect to the Scriptural, and indeed, the general, use of the term '*the shedding of blood*'. No objective reader can survey the numerous passages of Scripture which speak of the 'shed-

¹Cf. Acts 4:13; the Greek word which the King James version translates as 'unlearned' is *agrammatos*, meaning illiterate; the word translated as 'ignorant' is *idiotes*, meaning one who has not received formal training or education. It appears that the region of Galilee was held in low esteem by the Jews of Jerusalem; cf. Acts 2:7.

²Contrary to popular notion, there is but one epistle of Peter in the Canon of Scripture. The document purported to be the second epistle of Peter is a forgery, which obviously shares a common source with the epistle of Jude, which also has no legitimate place in the Canon of Scripture.

³Not in view in this passage is the ability of both silver and gold to withstand fire without harm. Indeed, both silver and gold are purified by fire, that is, by heating them to the point of melting; cf. Zechariah 13:9 and I Peter 1:7. Once the metal has been brought to a molten state, impurities float to the top and may be skimmed off. And because of their ability to withstand fire, the Scripture uses silver and gold to represent that which is of lasting value, in contrast to wood, hay, and stubble, which are consumed by flame and thus represent things which have no permanent value; cf. I Corinthians 3:12–15.

⁴John 1:29.

ding of blood' and fail to understand that to 'shed blood' is to kill and that the 'shedding of blood' is the infliction of death, irrespective of the means and irrespective of whether blood actually leaves the body of the victim. Thus, the declaration of the Scripture is *not* that "Christ bled" or that "Christ shed his blood", but, rather, that "Christ died", Romans 5:6, Romans 5:8, Romans 8:34, Romans 14:9, Romans 14:15, I Corinthians 8:11, I Corinthians 15:3, II Corinthians 5:14.

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*These, having put the world in commotion,
are also here present...and these all do contrary
to the decree of Caesar, saying another
to be king—Jesus.*

– Acts 17:6–7

We ought obey God rather than men.

– Acts 5:29