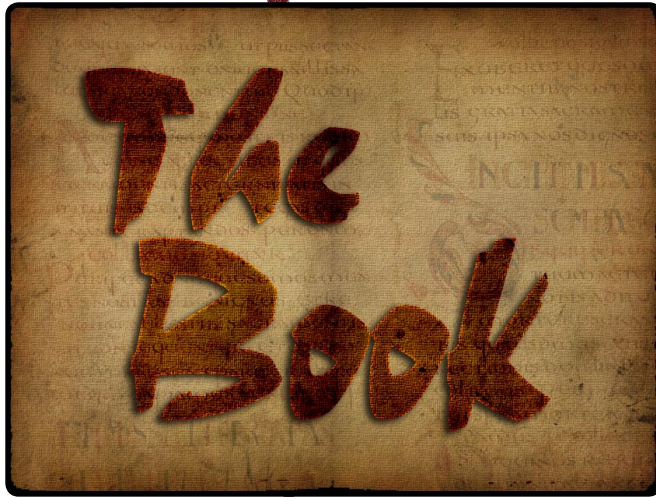


Things they never taught me in School



When we merely say that we are bad, the “wrath” of God seems a barbarous doctrine; as soon as we perceive our badness, it appears inevitable, a mere corollary from God’s goodness.

C.S. Lewis

MOST PEOPLE’S FIRST MISTAKE IS TO CAST GOD IN THEIR OWN IMAGE. The flower child of the ’60s, with dope in her lungs and the forbidden fruit of free love in her senses, will expect a God of sweet, absolving license, one who smiles a lot, surrounds Himself with naked little children with daisies in their hair, and who blushes even at the thought of jealous wrath.

By contrast, the European child of the ’40s is rather *expecting* a God of wrath. He is all too familiar with the sound and fury of anger dropped from the sky, of the acrid stench of hell wafting across a scorched earth, bodies tortured and twisted in their dance of death. He knows the hard sweetness of revenge and retribution that lies like a cold lump in his breast. He knows the full flowering of hate, and he knows the words of prayers that beseech God’s wrath upon a hateful foe.

But then the American child of the placid ’50s is more comfortable with a God of sterile order, one slightly distant and detached, but one who is logical, clean, well-spoken, and,

above all, sensible. His God relies upon church tradition—well-established, orderly—to hold sanity against the rigors of madness flitting all about. Everything on the fringes may be slipping horribly into the abyss, but, for this one, there is the reassuring constant of a Sunday morning suit, Sunday morning Sunday School, and a Sunday morning message followed by Sunday noon pot roast and baked potatoes. His God is in charge. He doesn’t know much about Him, but he depends on Him, and sleeps well at night knowing He is there.

A CONTEXT OF HIS OWN

When asked to give His name, God told Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” Swimming freely through the full depth of that succinct description (for it *is* a description), is the tacit recommendation that we not try to change who God is. He is everywhere, He holds everything in His hand, and He does not depend on the fantastical imagination, or context, of His created ones for definition.

Those who care to read of Him may be surprised by some of the things God has said and done. For no matter what decade or century crafted one's image of the Almighty, He is at once none and all of the above. What we do know of Him is little more than a thimbleful in the ocean of His personality, and what we don't know of Him can be shocking—even scandalous to moderns.

A BLOODBATH

Learning about God through the words of someone else, while potentially worthwhile, is like getting to know a distant relative through snapshots sent through the mail. Reading His word through, however, from beginning to end, is like *living* with Him. You begin the journey at the point of His first moment with this world and man: the Creation. You end the journey at the moment at which this world, as we know it, ceases to exist, and a *brand new* relationship with God begins. Between these two epochal end caps lies a fascinating tapestry of deity creating, shaping, and mingling with the grind of life upon this earth.



Those who have the habit of uttering the standard line after a natural disaster: "A loving God would never have done this."—or those who ascribe holy impotence to their God after a human disaster by proclaiming: "God is weeping."—should read through the Bible some time. His Book—especially, but not limited to what we refer to as the Old Testament—is literally *drenched* in blood and death.

"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."

Leviticus 17:11

God declared early on that the life force of a living thing was held in its blood. He declared that only blood could satisfy His wrath against the sins committed by a people born into depravity. Blood would be required to atone for sin. God's specific, detailed instructions for sacrifice under the Mosaic covenant describe a system of consecration, atonement, and corporate purification that was a literal bloodbath.

"Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. You shall slaughter the bull before the Lord at the doorway of the tent of meeting. You

shall take some of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger; and you shall pour out all the blood at the base of the altar. You shall take all the fat that covers the entrails and the lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, and offer them up in smoke on the altar. But the flesh of the bull and its hide and its refuse, you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering. You shall also take the one ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram; and you shall slaughter the ram and shall take its blood and sprinkle it around on the altar."

Exodus 29:10-16

For page after page in His word, God tells Moses how the imperfection of human life is to be systematically reconciled before His presence.

"When a leader sins and unintentionally does any one of all the things which the Lord his God has commanded not to be done, and he becomes guilty, if his sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a male without defect. He shall lay his hand on the head of the male goat and slay it in the place where they slay the burnt offering before the Lord; it is a sin offering. Then the priest is to take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering."

Leviticus 4:22-25

The modern mind cringes at all the slaughter. It is hard to read of it and not wonder why—why would God require all this carnage? Why would He require individuals to bring a pure, spotless lamb or goat—an innocent one at that; the lamb had done nothing to deserve death—and sacrifice its life for their sin?

The first answer, made clear when reading through God's word, is that God does as He pleases because *He is God*. Modern man does not like to be reminded that there is a supreme God who may do as He pleases, without answering to anyone. But there it is: He is God. There is no other. He has no peer.

NEW COVENANT

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 1:29

The second answer—also a message for modern man—is found in the portion of the Bible we

refer to as the New Testament. Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world as a *new* covenant—to replace, once and for all, every one of those innocent four-legged animals that had given their blood in place of man's.

After saying above, "Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin you have not desired, nor have you taken pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will." He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 10:8-10

God requires a sacrifice of blood for sin. He always has. But as the entirety of His word makes clear, in the sacrifice—suffering, death, and resurrection—of His only Son, Jesus Christ, that requirement has been met once and for all.

For all time.

The Bible's insistent discussion of blood sacrifice may be unsavory to modern sensibilities, but when one places it in the context of the entirety of Scripture, it becomes a marvelous narrative of God's plan for salvation in Christ.



You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:14-15

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