

THE ORDINANCE OF THE PASSOVER: ITS PERPETUITY

Give ear, O my people, [to] my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide [them] from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know [them], [even] the children which should yet be born; [who] should arise and declare [them] to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. (Psalm 78:1-7)

God has established a testimony and ordained that it be perpetuated in power and purity. The perpetuation of this testimony is not to be secured in stones, books, buildings, monuments, denominations, schools, seminaries, movements, foundations or creeds. These all have too much of the meddlings of men's minds and hands to be reliable. No, God has established His testimony in His people, in a repository to which only He has the key, the fleshy tables of the heart (II Cor. 3:3).

This testimony gained no increased credibility, power or mobility with the invention of the printing press. Nor has it benefited by modern innovations of mass communications in radio, television, satellites, tapes, records and, more recently, computer programs. In fact, all this human claptrap has served to confuse and confound God's testimony with that of man, for it is used with more vigour and adeptness by the purveyors of false religion than by true Christianity. They are more suited to the creature than the Creator, the fleshy than the spiritual, the earthy than the heavenly. Burn all the books, tapes, records, writings and programs, blow up all the electronic technology, and God's testimony will have lost nothing. It is established in His people. The epistle of Christ is written with the Spirit of the living God in fleshy tables of the heart.

The perpetuation of this testimony is from father to son, parents to children. That way it is always fresh, vital, living and powerful. "Fathers" are not necessarily biological but spiritual fathers. He who passes to us the testimony of God is our spiritual father. Those to whom we effectively pass on the testimony of God are our spiritual children. We shall see that the fathers both do and speak this testimony, and that the children both see and hear it.

Our text gives us three characteristics of this testimony:

It is old. That generation of "Athenians" who spend their time in hearing or telling some new thing has not perished from the earth. Beware of any "new" discoveries or revelation. On its face it must be false, for God's testimony is unchanging. If it cannot be found in Genesis, in Exodus, and repeated over and over all through the Scriptures, it is not the testimony of God. It is new to those who have not heard it before, but it is the same old testimony. To those of us who have heard it before, it is no more stale, wearisome or redundant than the daily fare of oxygen, water and food in which we delight. It is old, but ever fresh, vital and delightful.

It is about the power, the grace, the salvation, the glories of God. Its purpose is that His people will put their hope nowhere but in God, that by having this infallible living testimony constantly before them, they will not forget God's works, but keep His commandments, and hopefully, be better men than their forbears (Psalms 78:8).

This testimony is communicated "in a parable," "dark sayings." Jesus made use of parables in order to reveal the truth to some while hiding it from others. He is the God who reveals the truth to babes, the humble, broken, lowly and despised, while He hides it from the wise, proud, haughty and mighty (Matt. 11:25-26). We will see that parables and dark sayings make much use of signs, tokens, symbols, metaphors, figures, and types.

For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgment: I [am] the Lord. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye [are]: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy [you], when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever . . . And ye shall observe [the feast of] unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance forever . . . And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons forever. And it shall come to pass when ye come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as He hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall

say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped . . . And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, [This is done] because of that [which] the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thy hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the Lord brought thee out of Egypt. Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year . . . And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that open the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem. And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt. (Ex. 12:12-14, 17, 24-27, 13:8-10, 14-16).

We have been expounding the Passover and its ordinance. This feast, which typifies Christ and redemption in Him, has succeeded to us, who now live in New Covenant reality, under various names of varying validity. To some it is a Sacrament, others the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, Communion, a Memorial Supper. Most of Christendom imagines that the ritual itself imparts some sort of spiritual grace, if not salvation proper. They make much of the ceremony and know little or nothing of the reality it represents. They confound the symbol with the substance, mistake the figure for the reality, and transfer faith from the Lord to the sign.

Natural Israel, which had none of the grace of God in their hearts, utterly missed the spiritual significance of Old Covenant ceremony. When Christ ushered in the New Covenant, they were left still blindly trusting in Circumcision, Days, Feasts and other ceremonies to justify them before God. Much of Christendom does little better. What high church Sacerdotalism calls a Sacrament, Fundamentalism reveres as an ordinance, both superstitiously imputing magical graces to the ritual.

On the contrary, the Passover Feast *typifies* the believer's hope, the saint's full salvation. It speaks of not only justification, but sanctification as well, our entire life in Christ. It embraces the whole of our spiritual pilgrimage on this earth, from our deliverance from the bondage, penalty and power of sin, to the blessed redemption of our bodies. That is the true substance prefigured in the Old Covenant Passover, and continually signified in the New Covenant memorial supper. Our passover is Christ, our peace and communion with God, and our peace and communion with one another.

This "feast" is to be perpetuated forever. It is not only God's salvation that continues, but the testimony of it established of old. It is to be perpetuated in a people. As one generation passes on, the next will have it in possession to pass on to their children. Men may wrangle and quibble over the accuracy and reliability of translations and books. They may strive over jots and tittles, grammar, syntax and semantics, but God has transcended all of that. The Spirit of the living God works this testimony in the souls of men from generation to generation. Therefore the Word of God is as eternal and unchangeably pure as God Himself. Let the earth and all that is in it consume away; the truth and testimony of God are unscathed and unchanged.

Exodus 13:9 tells us that the feast shall be "a sign upon the hand, a memorial between the eyes, and a law in the mouth." The scribes and Pharisees *literalized* these spiritual words by affixing Scriptures to the cuffs or borders of their sleeves, and to a band worn around their heads, "between the eyes." Those who wished to give the impression of superior devotion distinguished themselves by widening these borders to accommodate more Scripture (Matt. 23:5).

This present generation, for the most part, still misses the spiritual significance of language which speaks of a sign or mark or seal upon the forehead or hand. Fascination with the "Mark of the Beast" of Revelation 13:16-17, and the endless speculations about it, may be laid at the feet of such literalizing of the spiritual. It is almost universally thought to be a literal mark or number on the forehead and the hand. Utterly ignored are the passages where the redeemed bear the "mark of God," the Creator, rather than the "mark of man," the creature (Rev. 3:12, 7:3, 14:1). Also such passages as Psalm 37:37, Song of Solomon 8:6, Isaiah 49:16, Romans 16:7 and Phil. 3:17, clearly indicate that marks or seals are not necessarily to be taken literally, but in a figurative and representative sense.

To "mark" a man means to identify that person and to take note of what he is. It is to put him in a particular category to which all future dealings and considerations shall bear reference. To "seal" a person is to put a mark of authenticity upon him, to ratify as valid, to signify official acceptance and ownership. This is the sense in which we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). The sure foundation of Christianity bears the "seal" of God's personal knowledge of His own, and their practical sanctification (II Tim. 2:19).

The space between the eyes, or the *forehead*, speaks of the person's mindset, what he thinks and how he thinks, what he believes, what his heart is in, his will and intentions. It signifies the underlying rationale, affections, love and hate, as well as the objective data that motivates and guides the person in his words and deeds. The *hand* always has reference to

a person's works, his deeds, actions. Thus, they who bear the mark of God in their foreheads are those who believe, love, worship and serve the Creator. Those who bear the mark of the "beast" (literally, living creature) in their hand and forehead are those who think in creature terms, who believe in, love, worship, and serve the creature (Romans 1:25). This is the correct Biblical hermeneutic to be applied to God's Law of the Passover in respect to its perpetuation.

It is God's way to capture our attention first with a sign before revealing a truth to us. The advent of our Saviour was first heralded with the sign of His virgin birth. He came upon the scene performing signs and wonders (John 4:48). The apostles who immediately succeeded Him also worked signs and wonders. These were not intended to be a permanent pattern of church evangelism, but to call the world's attention to the Saviour through the work of truth. Indeed, the Lord graciously entreated skeptical Jews, "though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me and I in Him" (John 10:38). Although the signs and wonders which appeared in the early church were temporary in nature, the principle which they served is a permanent institution that predated and succeeded them.

The Law of the Passover prescribes that the fathers are to bear "signs" upon their foreheads and hands to provoke the attention of their children. People do not listen to that in which they have no interest or curiosity. That is one reason why the unconverted masses have no interest in the Word of God today. Most of what passes for the visible church has nothing about it to provoke interest or curiosity.

The Law of the Passover envisions a time when its signs shall provoke the interest of the children and they shall say to the fathers, "What does this service mean?" (Exodus 12:26), when "thy son asketh thee in time to come saying, What is this?" (Exodus 13:14). That is then the father's opportunity and warrant to preach to them the gospel. Exodus 13:9 gives the sum total of this provocation: "a sign upon the hand, a memorial between the eyes, and a law in the mouth."

The sign upon our hand speaks of the good works in which God has ordained us to walk. Our Lord exhorts us to "let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). We must not expect one generation to adopt the faith of its fathers if the fathers deny it in their works. What we *believe*, we *do*. If we do contrary to our profession, we deny it and destroy our credibility.

Christian works, if they are to capture the attention of the unconverted, must be peculiar, different, unusual. They must *contrast* with the works of men who bear the marks of the creature. The Gospel is indeed "to the Greeks foolishness and to the Jews a stumbling block." Because of this, many try to blend in and conform to the world in order to escape the reproach and scandal of the Cross. When they do so they lose their warrant to be heard.

How then shall we insure that we bear a sign with our works of sufficient contrast to provoke the interest of sinners? It is only by the "memorial between our eyes." We are to remember something, meditate and reflect upon it. We will relate our experience and history in the grace of God to our present circumstances, decisions and actions. And when we open our mouths to reply to the children's inquiry it will be the testimony of God's power and glory that comes forth, not that of man.

We will remember that we were an enslaved people, locked into an iron bondage which we were powerless to break. We were not innocent victims, but willing sinners, wicked rebels against God, given over to the idols and empty pursuits of this world, hateful and hating one another. We were by nature children of wrath, no different from any one else. When we were awakened to the ruin, the death, the insanity and hopelessness of our condition, we found we had no power to save ourselves. We exhausted all our resources struggling to extricate ourselves from tangled tentacles of the flesh and the devil which were dragging us down to hell ("Pharaoh would hardly let us go" Exodus 13:15). Then God heard our desperate cry. He saw the afflictions of His people, knew their sorrows, and came down to deliver them (Exodus 3:7-8). We will sing Samuel Stennet's hymn,

He saw me plunged in deep distress,
And flew to my relief.
For me He bore the shameful Cross
And carried all my grief."

All this we shall tell the children. They shall hear the testimony and the law in our mouth. God appointed a Substitute Lamb, an Innocent Victim to receive the punishment for my sins. His Blood stood in the doorway between me and God's righteous wrath, stopped death at the door, and cleared me in the tribunal of Eternal Justice. Then He turned His wrath upon my cruel taskmaster, broke his chains of sin and slavery, and set me free. When this enemy sought to recover me and drag me back into bondage, He led me through a sea, brought me safely through on the other side, and destroyed my previous master, burying him beneath its mighty waters. "Our old man is crucified with Christ," "buried with him in baptism into death," "that henceforth we should not serve sin," "for he that is dead is freed from sin" (Romans 6:4-7). He put a gulf between me and my past and promised that I would "see those Egyptians no more forever."

Should our son stop at this point and inquire if we had seen none of those enemies since then, we may reply: "Yes, I have seen many of them, but they were all dead on the sea shore, powerless to do me harm or enslave me" (Exodus 14:13,30, Romans 6:2. Gal. 5:24).

We will then continue and say: God then brought me into unspeakable joys and unimaginable blessings which I did not earn or deserve or think of the slightest cause that I should have them other than His bountiful goodness. "Great and goodly cities which I built not, vineyards and olive trees which I planted not" (*Please read Deuteronomy 6:6-12*).

Now how does all this translate into a present-day, real-life situation? If the signs of the testimony of the Lord are indeed upon the hands of the parents, then the following sort of questions might be put to the father by the son.

"How is it that we have this good home, food, and clothing and are unlike the poor families to whom we are always giving? How is it that you have such a good job and we are not deep in debt, on government welfare? Why are you not sick and disabled, unable to provide the needs of your family like some of our neighbors to whom we minister? Why do I have two devoted parents who love, correct, and teach me, unlike so many of my friends who have only one, or no parents, or whose home is a squalid den of fighting, cursing, lying, stealing and violence? Why do we believe the Bible, the Word of God, have a good church home? Why are you not a drunkard, my mother not a prostitute, or both of you on drugs like so many of my friend's parents? Why do you not squander your money and time and energies on sports and fun things and current fads like most of my friends do?"

The daughter might ask the mother: "Why are you not a part of the feminist movement like so many of my friends? Do you not wish you had pursued a career in the business world for yourself rather than giving your life to make a home for husband and children? I hear women who do this are nothing but slaves and sex objects of men. Why do you choose to live a life of chastity? Have you never had a desire for another man, or even perhaps a woman? My friends say we all have these desires, that they are natural and we ought not be ashamed to indulge them. Why am I sheltered against these ideas?"

If the testimony of the Lord is not in the mind, then the father will have no law of God in his mouth. He will ascribe his prosperity to his honesty, integrity and hard work. He studied hard, went to the right schools, joined the right trade union and social clubs. He will give praise to the unions, clubs, insurance, political parties and powerful officials with whom he has been clever enough to curry favor. He followed shrewd business practices and made wise decisions. He was smart enough to pick a good wife, and trained her well. Early on, he got some good moral and religious convictions. He and the other deacons saw to it that the church implemented them in the constitution and by-laws of the church. He either saw through the foolishness of drugs, tobacco and alcohol, or was rescued by Alcoholics Anonymous or good psychological counsel. And he is simply wise enough to not waste his energies and resources chasing all the silly fads of this world.

The mother might look at the daughter aghast, shocked that a child of hers should even have such ideas in her mind. Be a feminist, a fornicator, or lesbian? Forsake husband and family to compete with men? "Why, I'll have you know that such things as those never entered my mind. Shame on you for even thinking of such things! I have kept myself pure from a child. That is just the kind of person I am. I am not like those wicked women you speak of. I have always been, and always will be a respectable, virtuous Christian, and you had better be one, too."

But if the testimony of the Lord is upon the minds of the parents, if they meditate on His law day and night, then it will be His law, His word, precepts and testimony that will be in their mouths. The children will hear as the Psalmist, "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work *thou* didst in their days, in the times of old. How *thou* didst drive out the heathen with *thy hand*, and plantest them; [how] *thou* didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but *thy* right hand and *thine arm*, and the light of thy countenance, because *thou* hadst a favour unto them." (Psalm 44:1-3, emphasis mine).

The memorial of the Passover will flow from the father's lips. "My son, we have no other than Almighty God to thank for all these wonderful blessings we enjoy. But for His grace and kindness we would be more wretched and miserable than any of these you see about you. It is true that I applied myself to studies, worked hard, and followed wise principles of business and conduct. But you must know that it was the Lord who gave the mind, the strength, the health, and, most of all, the desire and will to do right. I have not always been kind, generous and compassionate. Selfish, greedy, hateful and hating, I was not the one whit better than the worse scoundrel you see in the world. All the lazy, self-centered, rebellious, mean, lustful wickedness in them raged and lived in me.

But God mercifully opened my eyes to see my ruin and the awful penalty for my sins. He then showed me that He had given His Son to pay the penalty for my sins and give me everlasting life. He changed my heart, delivered me from the love of this world, broke the terrible bondage of sin, and became my Guide and Counselor, my beloved Friend, as well as my Sovereign Lord. He replaced the hate and selfishness with love and compassion for all men, and brought me into the blessed communion of saints who, like myself, have been redeemed by the blood of Christ.

That is why we are different. God has set His love upon us, separated us to Himself. If you would be wise, a better man than your father, you will seek the Lord early, and give yourself to serve Him all the days of your life."

The mother might gather her daughter in her arms and speak something like this: "My sweet child! You must know that your mother has not always been a virtuous woman. Those frightening passions, desires, thoughts, ideas and urges that now trouble you once burned and ruled in me. I was a wicked woman, and no better than the worst you hear about. If God, in His great mercy and kindness, had not rescued me through Jesus Christ our Saviour, you might well have a dissolute, adulterous, drug addict for a mother. It was no virtue or moral resolve of my own that gained for me a good husband, children, home and, most of all, joy and contentment in motherhood and homemaking. It is the great God who rescues sinners from their destructive insanities, gives them a sound mind, and teaches them the way of peace through His Word. He will save you also, my daughter, from the terrible urges you feel inside, from the taunts and jeers of your peers, from the God-denying lies of the world. Jesus came to bring His people life, abundant life. If you see in your father and me that which you would have for yourself, then take heart and be of good cheer! Christ receives all who come to Him. What He did for us, He will do for you."

Proverbs 13:22 tells us that a good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children. If we leave the next generation nothing more than lands, goods and money we shall have given them a stone, a scorpion, a serpent, a dart in the heart which will not only kill the body but rot the soul. They will wrangle and fight over it, and then use it to dig themselves a pit in hell.

Happy indeed are those children who, from their fathers and mothers, inherit the love, reverence and worship of the Lord; and whose hearts and minds are indestructibly fortified by the Word of God for the issues of this life and eternity shortly to come.

- C. M.