

## The Ordinance of the Passover: The Participants

*Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, [was] four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It [is] a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this [is] that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations. And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, This [is] the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof. But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you. Thus did all the children of Israel; as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they. (Exodus 12:40-50)*

The most significant event in the history of redemption is the Passover. It is the night to "be much observed" by all the children of Israel of all generations. Our Lord tells us that when Moses wrote, he wrote of Christ (John 5:46). The Apostle Paul reminds us that true Israel is not outward descentance from Abraham or circumcision in the flesh, but is to be found inwardly in the heart and spirit (Romans 2:28-29), that we who are Christ's are Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:26-29). Therefore, the significance of the Passover comes in full force to us for whose admonition these things were written, upon whom the ends of the world have come (I Cor. 10:11).

We have noted previously that all men must have a "passover," that is, a hope that they will not have to pay the consequences for their sins. All men must have this hope, be it ever so thin, flimsy and irrational, for they cannot live in any semblance of peace without it. These passovers range all the way from the fool's "no God," through imagined merits which outweigh sins, to a bald refusal to believe that God will put anyone in hell.

Our Passover is Christ (I Cor. 5:7). We fully acknowledge our sins, our wickedness, and our merit of eternal punishment. We also concur with the righteousness of a God Who cannot pass over sin unless its penalty has been satisfied. But we believe that satisfaction was exacted and paid in full by our Substitute, Jesus Christ, in His death on the Cross. This perfect Lamb earned, in His sinless life, eternal life for us. He now reigns as our Lord and King, having obtained eternal redemption for us. This Christ is our hope and confidence that God will pass over us when He comes, taking vengeance on this Egypt in flaming fire.

Our Passover is our communion, reconciliation, and peace with God and with one another (I Cor. 10:15-16). The passover marks our spiritual birthday, the "beginning of months" (Exodus 12:2). But it is also our entire spiritual life in Christ. We must abide in the house, feasting on the Lamb, until the night is past and the Sun of Righteousness returns. We are those blessed who "sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 8:11) and "eat bread in the kingdom of God" (Luke 14:15). Our feasting is to do the will of Him who has called and sent us, and to finish the work which He has given us to do (John 4:34).

The Scriptures we are about to explore are called "the ordinance of the passover." These are immutable laws of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, typified in the Old Testament feast and fulfilled in Christ. This unchanging law of the passover serves not only to expose the counterfeit "gospels" with which the devil is always seducing men, but also to confirm and assure us who are partakers of the salvation decreed by Almighty God in the Everlasting Covenant, wrought by the Eternal Son, and applied to us by the Holy Spirit.

### The Exodus of the Participants

Passover participants are "Exodus" people, *out* people, outsiders, if you please. They have been brought out of Egypt and, although sojourning through this world and living in it, are not of it. They have no portion in it, are not recognized by it, and have no friendship with it. They seek a better country. Their days in Egypt ended with the Death of the Firstborn. All that ever lived to this world were under the power and sway of the devil, were at enmity with God and His judgment, and died in the Passover Lamb. The new creature that comes out of Egypt, therefore, has no history, lineage, or future in this world. He is a child of heaven from the word "go."

Only the Death of the Firstborn could avail to effect this miraculous thing that our Lord has now revealed as the New Birth. Nothing of this new creation lived until then. Four hundred and thirty years in Egypt, struggling against

Pharaoh's bondage, eighty years of Moses' preparation, the miracles, plagues, judgments, diplomatic negotiations - all accomplished nothing except to shut the elect sinner up to God's *one way out*, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ does not live in us until Adam dies. But when Adam is brought to death with Christ at the Cross, it is the end of him. He is no more. He is buried with Christ, yet he does not rise with Him. The new creature that is a partaker of the blessed first resurrection is temporarily clothed with the garb of this world, Adam's flesh; but that body is dead because of sin; and the spirit is life because of righteousness (Romans 8:10). This new life in Christ does not wait on a "second blessing," progressive sanctification, or the putting off of the mortal body and the putting on of the immortal. The New Birth is a crisis, an immediate transformation. "The selfsame day . . . all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt" (Exodus 12:41,51). We must wear this cursed mortal body, endure its limitation, infirmities, and mortify its sinfulness until we are clothed with our immortal habitation from heaven; but our *life* is not in it. It is in the spirit (Romans 8:9), hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).

Christ accomplished eternal redemption for all the elect the day He died on the Cross. But the application of that redemption awaits regeneration and conversion of each one individually. Until then, though their redemption is certain, they are yet in Egypt's bondage, and appear no different from other children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). When gospel repentance and faith are worked in the sinner's heart, the redeemed and bought appear as the delivered and freed. They are God's special, brought-out people.

### **The Exclusiveness of the Participants**

Certain specified persons are expressly excluded from this Feast. All who fit these descriptions can never partake of the Passover that is Christ. They may, and often do, company with God's people, but are no more than spots in our love feasts, feasting with us, "feeding themselves without fear: [they are] clouds without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 12-13).

No stranger or foreigner may eat of this Passover. This is not a general dinner. The Lamb is not public domain. It is *God's Lamb* Who takes away the sin of the world. This is essentially the *Lord's* Passover. It is not up for grabs or refusal. Christ died for the church, not the unbelieving world. The God with whom we have to do is called the "God of the Hebrews" (Exodus 3:18; 5:3; 9:1,13: 10:3). Multitudes in this Egypt call upon a God who cannot save. Idols and gods are many, but the God of the Hebrews is the one true God Who alone can save us. This is a covenant God, and only those in covenant with Him may eat at His table. His covenant is unilateral, not bilateral. That is, our communion with Him is not based on an agreement struck by negotiating the input of two parties. Covenant terms are laid down by the only Party qualified and capable, the Almighty Creator, Owner, and Sustainer of all things, infinitely wise, gracious, and holy. His covenant is both freely offered and sternly commanded. We may not spurn it with impunity. He binds Himself to be our God and Father, our Saviour, Provider, Defender, Guide, and Eternal Home. Nothing is required of us except to know, feel, and confess our sin and helplessness, and to commit our souls in trusting obedience to Him. Those who do so, though once strangers and aliens from His covenant and afar off, are brought near by the blood of His Son and made citizens with all the saints and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:12-19).

No hired servant may eat at the Lord's table. Persons employed by the Hebrews to do domestic chores and tend their flocks went out of Egypt with their employers, but they had no interest whatever in the Hebrew's faith or God. It would be a grievous mistake to assume that since they went out under the blood of the Passover Lamb that they had any interest in that Lamb. The only reason they were among them was their livelihood and monetary gain.

These hirelings are always among God's people. The more the church prospers, the more they proliferate, because more services are sought, and better wages paid for them; more goods are bought, and better prices paid for them, more profit in their industries. Today's Christianity is literally drowning in a sea of publications, seminars, services, high-tech clap-trap, and general religious paraphernalia. All those engaged in this business claim to be "born-again Christians" performing a "vital Christian ministry." This religious Babylon's fall will be accompanied by the wails of earth's merchants who mourn her ruin only because of the loss of revenue from merchandising with her in everything from gold to the "souls of men" (Rev. 18:11-13). The church was very early laid hold of by those greedy leeches who learned they could garner better wages with lies than with truth (Titus 1:10-11). And gullible sheep, taking their cue from the world, think the preacher who demands and gets the highest wage is the best minister. May we not with more money buy ourselves a better gospel and a better, more productive parson? Is not gain godliness? But the truth of God stands fast. God has "chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him" (James 2:5). And the true servant of the Lord will happily earn his own bread, if necessary, and serve God's people without sufficient compensation just for the privilege of sitting at the same table with Christ and His redeemed.

The hireling, on the other hand, flees when he "sees the wolf coming" (John 10:12). Let hard times fall upon the church, persecution arise, hell's fury be unleashed on and among the saints, and this money-grubber will count his wages too

low. He will "feel led" to move on to something that either pays better or has less unpleasantness to cope with. Let him go. The church has suffered no loss. This one has never been to the Table anyhow. God has sent a wind to blow him away.

This exclusion of hirelings also highlights the grace aspect of the New Covenant. From the strictly ethical standpoint of economics, a person should earn his wages, and his earnings, no more nor less, should be paid him. He works for what he gets and gets what he works for. Nothing wrong or unrighteous about that. It is just.

But that is not the principle that undergirds the Covenant of Grace. In grace, the punishment we have earned by our sin is paid to another, Jesus Christ. The eternal life He earned by His obedience is paid to us. It is the only way God could be just while justifying the ungodly. We whose Passover is Christ are welfare cases. We are poor objects of charity, having earned nothing of Christ's riches with which we are rewarded.

He who vainly imagines himself atoning for his sins by his penance and good deeds, and earning an eternal reward by his fleshy labors, is yet blind to the deep depravity of his heart and the sensual contamination of his most noble acts. Nor has he a glimpse of the purity and splendors of divine perfections. He offers a blemished sacrifice for his sins, spurns the spotless robe of Christ's righteousness, and intrudes on the King's wedding feast clad in his own rags. When the veil of nature's night is removed from the sinner's heart, and he sees God's glory and his own ruin, he will quickly abandon efforts to earn anything and humbly join the poor, the maimed, and the blind, who bring nothing to Christ's table but their trusting need and unqualified submission.

No uncircumcised person will be permitted to eat at this table. It will be helpful in appreciating the full significance of circumcision to remember that this ritual was given as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham. The promise of a son through which Abraham should become the father of a great nation was not given to him until he was an old man, and his wife far past child-bearing age. It would be impossible for anyone to consider Isaac simply the fruit of Abraham and Sarah's mortal bodies. *All hope and confidence in their flesh were gone.* That is the essence of spiritual circumcision. "We are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have *no confidence in the flesh*" (Phil. 3:3). We are the true Israel of God, the covenant-circumcised who have lost, renounced, and utterly repudiated all confidence in flesh. Our hope is in God alone.

Many there are who have no objection to having Christ's merit laid to their account but who recoil in horror at being stripped of their own. "What? Disown reliance upon any good, any obedience, any standards of righteousness of my own, for which I have worked and fought so hard? Why, that would leave me naked and helpless if Christ did not avail for me." Exactly! That is the very stuff of which faith is made. It leaves us no safety net but Christ. Then there are those who are too strong, too competent, too wise, able, polished. It is quite all right for others who do not possess such excellencies as they to have to rely on Christ alone, but these have no such need. It would be unreasonable, they judge, to discount such quality flesh. Like King Saul, whose disobedience was betrayed by the howling and bleating of the "best" of what God had judged all bad, they bring this "excellent" uncircumcised flesh to God's feast. What? Should they be humbled and brought down to the level of the foolish, weak, base, and despised (I Cor. 1:26-28)? Such despisers of Christ's spotless garment will be bound hand and foot and thrown into outer darkness (Matt. 22:11-13).

This prohibition of the uncircumcised is comprehensive - Israel as well as strangers; moral, upright church-members as well as murderers and thieves. There must be an utter putting off of the old before there can be a putting on of Christ, a transference of faith from self to the Lord, from flesh to spirit. The firstborn is dead, under the judgment of God. Renounce him. He is no more.

### The Inclusiveness of the Participants

The Apostle Paul has heard that there are schisms among the church at Corinth and judges the report to be partly true. Then he asserts that there must also be heresies among them so that the approved may be distinguished from the disapproved (I Cor. 11:18-19). This is another way of saying "the elect from the non-elect" (or reprobate).

People's heresies (fixed, inflexible opinions, desires, views) will ultimately testify to what they truly are, for these are nothing less than an accurate outward response of the inner man. These heresies, therefore, will exclude the foreigner, the hireling, and the uncircumcised. They are necessary, in that they divide what can never be unified.

Schisms, on the other hand, are scandalous. A schism is a tear, a rip, a pulling apart of what is essentially whole. The Corinthian church could not eat the Lord's supper because of these factions (I Cor. 11:20-22). They were separating themselves into various little groups, some individuals even pulling off to themselves, excluding the rest of the Lord's body. We may not thusly partake of the Lord's body. It is one unbroken whole. We either partake of it in its entirety or not at all. We might meet with *our* crowd and eat *our own* supper, and satisfy our carnal religious flesh, but we cannot so eat the Lord's supper. It is constituted by all His body.

The Bible knows of no communion in Christ that is "closed," that is, excluding all but a designated portion of His body. This table is all-inclusive. "All the congregation of Israel shall keep it," - all that is, of Israel that is true Israel and all nations that are true Israel - the strangers and foreigners who have come into covenant with Jacob's God, submitting to His salvation, walking with His people, circumcised in heart and spirit. "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11).

Christendom, deeply penetrated and motivated by the works of the flesh (emulations, strife, seditions, heresies), divides itself according to its many classes, categories, non-essential doctrines, tastes, convictions, and movements. Here is the church of the affluent. Over there is a poor-man's church. There meets a group of ignorant enthusiasts. But now here is the denomination of the intellectual - a few elite super-spiritual saints, greedy to wallow in what they imagine to be their high spiritual station, their apprehension of deep mystical doctrines and experiences, having no time or patience for other Christians whom they perceive as non-initiated spiritual low-life. Calvinists of this stripe sneer in contempt at Armenians. Armenians of this breed ignorantly slander and rail on Calvinists. More absurd than these are those whose claim to exclusive authenticity rests in a name, as "Christian," "Church of Christ," or a tradition and succession as "Catholic" or "Baptist." Even local churches of one brand yet splinter themselves with further fleshy divisions. "Children's church," "Youth Ministries," "Young Married Fellowships," "Singles Clubs," "Senior Citizen Sectors," however well-intentioned they may be, fail to comprehend the spiritual unity of the body of Christ and the universal suitability of the passover feast to all, irrespective of age, culture, or social status.

All of this is a disgrace to the name of Christ and a horrible slander on His body, a disease that corrupts and eats away the life of the church. These fail to "discern the body of Christ" (I Cor. 11:29). They wrongly judge of what it is constituted, for they not only exclude genuine Christian brothers and sisters; but include great hordes of false professors who bear no fruits of grace, included simply because these uncircumcised strangers and hirelings subscribe with them to a common fleshy criteria.

What? Did not Christ take *us all* into covenant with Him? Is He not the One Who is unashamed to call *us all* brethren? "And again, Behold I and the children which God has given me" (Hebrews 2:13). Are we too spiritual, orthodox, sophisticated to fellowship with all with whom He fellowships? How arrogant and blasphemous the thought! Did He not suffer and die for us all *together*? Did He not raise us up *together* with Him? Are we not seated in heavenly places *together* with Him? Are we not joint heirs *together* with Him? Surely, then, we inherit *together*, not separately.

Schismatics have their attention focused not on the body but the supper . . . their "own supper" in particular. Their fellowship centers, not on Christ, but the peculiarities of people. So long as they do so they will abide among those who, like the Corinthians, are sick and dying under the chastening of God because of their failure to discern the Lord's body.

The way out of this mess will not be facilitated by trying to abolish denominations through some modern ecumenical movement which aims to destroy the doctrinal foundations of the Christian faith. Nor may it be found in alliances and "cooperative efforts." These are only outward patches, external gestures that leave the inward division intact. In fact, these will exacerbate the divisions, for closer external contact will only stir up inward hatred and prejudices.

*We may eat this Supper in true spiritual oneness by turning our attention, not to one another or the reconciling of our differences, but to Christ Himself.* The rivers of living waters spoken of in Ezekiel's prophecy (Ch. 47), by the Lord in John 7:38, and again in Revelation 22, are not meaningless metaphors. There is a mighty spiritual union, oneness, communion, flowing from Christ's wounded body, which sweeps away all petty hostilities and alienations, burying them in an avalanche of love that passes knowledge, and joy unutterable and full of glory. They simply disappear, and we wonder that we were ever so small, stupid and spiritually senseless to have given them a second thought. For those of us whose

Passover is Christ, there is only one congregation of participants. All are partakers of Him Who made us one. May our whole soul, spirit, and body be drawn out to Him of Whom we all are. As in Cousin's hymn of Rutherford:

The bride eyes not her garment,  
But her dear Bridegroom's face;  
I will not gaze at glory,  
But on my King of grace.  
Not at the crown He giveth,  
But on His pierced hand:  
The Lamb is all the glory  
In Immanuel's land!

- C. M.