

Conclusion

You can live in one of two ways. You can set your eyes on the visible and follow your natural mind and walk in the flesh. Or you can set your heart to see the invisible and walk in the spirit. The first of these is the way of the old covenant. The second is the way of the new covenant.

The living bread is not something that man can give you by a ceremony or a set of rules or techniques. It is Jesus himself, and you can only know him in the spirit and feed on him by faith.

The wine of the spirit is the life of Jesus poured out for us to drink and drink and be satisfied.

The Passover has not been replaced by the Mass or Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper, but wonderfully fulfilled in Jesus and transformed from a dead observance into a living experience.

Let us then leave the dead works of the law, and learn to live by faith in the living reality of its glorious fulfilment in Jesus.

This and other writings available from:

Robert Beecham
30 Church Rd
Barnes
London SW13 9HN

or from website
www.GrowthInGod.org.uk

November 1993

Bread and Wine

The Lord Jesus,

on the night he was betrayed, took bread,
and when he had given thanks,
he broke it and said,

“This is my body, which is for you;
do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after supper
he took the cup, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood;
do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

1 Corinthians 11: 23-25



In Remembrance of Me

The third significant thing that Jesus said at the last supper was, “**Do this whenever you do it in remembrance of me**”. We have already noted the impact these words would have had on their first hearers. What do they now mean for us?

The first followers of Jesus lived in a time of immense transition. They were accused of turning the world upside down. Jesus did not demand or expect from the Jewish people a total and immediate break with all their past. The apostles continued to visit the temple and observe Jewish festivals. Even quite late in the book of Acts we find Paul hurrying to be in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:6) and shaving his head in accordance with the Nazarite vow (Acts 18:18). Gradually his thinking changed. He wrote to the Colossians, “**Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ**” (2: 16). To the Galatians he wrote more strongly, “**You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you**” (4: 10, 11).

Dispensationalists have taught that on the day of Pentecost we moved abruptly from one dispensation to another. The age of law finished and the age of grace or church age began. The church age has continued unchanged since then and will continue unchanged until the rapture instantaneously brings in the next.

I believe God is not so sudden. He phases out the old and phases in the new. His usual order is birth and growth rather than spontaneous generation. The old wears out and fades away. The new is born and grows to fullness.

For me, and I believe I speak for many, communion services or breakings of bread have gone dead and lost their meaning. Feeding on Jesus is everything. Inward realities have replaced outward ceremonies. “**We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal**” (2 Cor 4: 18).

Perhaps the words of Jesus are deliberately indefinite, “**Do this whenever you do it in remembrance of me**”. No fixed time is set. No rules are given. The Holy Spirit must lead. The book of Acts records how the Holy Spirit led those first followers of Jesus step by step out of the Jewish fold. The old wineskins could not contain the new wine.

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated

The glorious liberating truth is that Jesus is all sufficient. If we eat his flesh and drink his blood we will have life.

This is My Blood

Jesus' second major statement at the Last Supper was "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). In 1 Corinthians 11:25 we have it as, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood..." In the old covenant blood flowed continually. Sacrifices took place day after day in the temple, and annually at the Passover in huge numbers. Blood placed on the lintels of the doors at the very first Passover saved the Israelite households from the angel of death as he passed over.

The blood of the old covenant was limited in what it could do. Like everything else in the old covenant, its operation was essentially external. It covered sin, but did not remove it. Covered sin was the basis of forgiveness. God saw the sin no longer and forgave the sinner. His heart, however, remained sinful. His consciousness of guilt remained.

Blood was often sprinkled on the altar and on Aaron and his garments and on the people. This made atonement for sin. The Hebrew for atonement is *kippur*. (Most people have heard of *Yom Kippur* - the Day of Atonement.) The word *kippur* means covering. Sin was covered, but not removed. We could almost say it was swept under the carpet. Its root and power remained unchallenged and unchanged.

The blood of Jesus was the blood of the new covenant. It was to be applied in a completely new way. Jesus told his disciples to **drink** it. He did not tell his disciples to **wash** themselves in his blood, but to **drink** it. There is a big difference between sprinkling and drinking. Sprinkling is external and drinking is internal. The blood of Jesus represents his life, which he poured out for us when he gave himself for us on Calvary. He poured it out, and we must drink it in. This is of course a spiritual drinking, not a physical drinking. We are receiving into ourselves his perfect life.

When we truly drink the blood of Jesus we are internally made clean from sin. The perfect sinless life of Jesus enters us and drives out the old self made in Adam's likeness. We become part of the new creation in Jesus.

Introduction

Most people who call themselves Christians assemble to eat bread and drink wine. Many do it once a week. Some do it more often and some less often. The Catholics call it the Eucharist or the Mass. The Church of England calls it Holy Communion. Others call it the Lord's Supper or the Breaking of Bread.

Some put more emphasis on it and others less, but all believe that when they partake of the bread and the wine they are obeying the instructions of Jesus himself. He instituted the ceremony as something to be observed faithfully until he returned. Let us begin this study by thinking about how it all began.

The Passover

The Passover was one of seven feasts described in Leviticus chapter 23 that were kept by the Jewish people. It was a highly important annual occasion. It commemorated the night when the Israelites came out of Egypt and their nation was born. It was their independence day.

July 4th is the American Independence day. It commemorates the day when America became independent of England and every year the Americans celebrate it. Fireworks illuminate the sky and everyone has a good time. Many other countries have independence days to commemorate the day when the colonialist flag was lowered for the last time, and the national flag flew in the breeze in its place.

Many countries are proud of their origins and like to think back over their histories and remember their past, but I don't believe there's any country that had a beginning to compare with Israel's. Search the history books of countries small and great, but I don't think you'll find any story as dramatic as the one recounted in the book of Exodus.

For more than 80 years the Israelites suffered as slaves working for their Egyptian taskmasters, and lived in poverty and misery. Then God intervened in history, as never before or since. By the hand of his servant Moses he struck Egypt, the foremost ancient nation, with ten dreadful plagues until Pharaoh humbled himself and agreed to let God's people go. With a mighty hand he parted the Red Sea before them, and drowned the Egyptians behind them, and thus their nation was born. It was certainly a day and a night to be remembered.

In Exodus chapter 13 Moses instructed the Israelites, “Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand ... you are to observe this ceremony in this month ... On that day tell your son, ‘do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ ... This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand ... You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year... In days to come when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’”

Thus Moses, inspired by God, ordained the Passover festival for the Jews to remember year after year the incredible acts of God that had accompanied the founding of their nation.

For several centuries after Moses had inaugurated it, the people of Israel largely forgot and ignored the Passover and the other festivals God had given them. In 2 Kings 23:21-23 we read: “The king gave this order to all the people: ‘Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant’ Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, had any such Passover been observed. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem.”

During and after the time of the Babylonian captivity things changed. People living away from their own country feel a need to keep their identity. The law took on new meaning and synagogues were established. Ezra the scribe publicly read to the people from the books of the law and encouraged them strongly to obey what they heard. It is interesting that this was probably the beginning of Fundamentalism, a way of thinking and acting that has manifested itself in all kinds of ways in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

They never again, at least till recent times, became the powerful independent people they had been under King David and King Solomon. Jewish people were scattered throughout the Greek and Roman empires, but they continued to look to the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem as the centre of their national identity.

The Passover was a time when according to the Law of Moses all Jews should go up to Jerusalem to appear before the Lord. It was a great time of national solidarity for a people scattered over the known world, and, in their own country, subject to hated foreign rule.

ministries are precious gifts from the ascended Jesus to his people, and we cannot afford to be without them. However we must notice the important word **until**. These God-given ministries are to feed the **young** believer. The true minister must feed spiritual children **until** they learn to feed themselves. No less and no more. Starved infants are one kind of tragedy. Children that are kept in childhood and never allowed to grow up are another.

Jesus taught and fed his disciples for three years, and then said, “It is good for you that I go away”. The Holy Spirit could not come while he was still with them in his physical body. While he was physically present with them they would always look to him. When he left them they would come to know the Father for themselves. Paul followed the same pattern. He spent three years with the believers at Ephesus before he moved on. He spent 18 months with the church at Corinth. Maybe this was not enough, as it seems from Paul’s letters that the Ephesians reached maturity but the Corinthians didn’t. He wrote to the Corinthians (as quoted above): “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly - mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.”

Spiritual Maturity

From childhood we must progress through adolescence to maturity. John speaks of this state in his first letter: “As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in him” (2: 27). This is the place of direct feeding on Jesus to which we must progress. We find a similar thought in Hebrews 8:11, in the passage that speaks of the new covenant: “No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” True spiritual maturity means direct unmediated relationship with God through Jesus. We feed directly on him. No longer are we dependent on pastors and teachers and meetings and conferences. Jesus is our all in all.

Spiritual maturity is not an unobtainable ideal. It is not total sinless perfection. Rather it is normal spiritual adulthood. We should expect to reach it as much as we expect to reach physical maturity.

The church has wanted to keep believers in childish dependence on itself. Not many priests, ministers or pastors are willing to point people away from themselves and their churches and their meetings to Jesus the true and living bread. Their position, prestige and livelihood are too often at stake.

be reduced to a set of rules. Isaiah expressed this truth for us in words that are not too well understood: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (ch 55: 8, 9). The spirit is on a higher plain than the mind, just as the mind is on a higher plain than the body. Spirit understands spirit. Spiritual understanding comes by revelation from God, not by application of the mind.

Jesus said most plainly to Nicodemus: “I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born from above (alternative translation) ... no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”

Without a spiritual birth you cannot understand spiritual things. Degrees in theology, Hebrew and Greek are in vain. They may be great for the mind, but the mind is in a lower realm. Nicodemus probably had a diploma in theology, but he was still spiritually blind and in darkness.

The new birth gives you an initial spiritual understanding. If you then feed on the right food you grow, as Jesus did, in wisdom and understanding. You grow from infancy through childhood and adolescence to mature manhood. You progress from spiritual milk to spiritual meat.

Spiritual Childhood

The process of spiritual growth parallels the process of natural growth. The spiritual infant, like the natural infant, is generally unable to feed himself or to distinguish good food from bad. He is dependent on others to feed him.

This imagery is very apparent in the New Testament. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly - mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready” (1 Cor 3: 1, 2).

To the Ephesians he wrote: “he gave some to be apostles, ... prophets, ... evangelists, ... pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **until** we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (ch 4: 11-14).

Many people are rightly aware of the five ministries named in these verses and can expound their purposes. This is good and profitable, as these

The Last Supper

It was the Passover that Jesus was celebrating with his disciples the night before he died. Thousands of other people around town in Jerusalem were doing the same thing. This is the context of and background to his well known words, “**Do this whenever you do it in remembrance of me**”.

The church has taken this occasion and these words as the institution of its most important ceremony. Millions if not billions of people have been taught that Jesus was giving the church a ritual to be kept by all its members for all time. Is this true?

“**Do this in remembrance of me.**” What did these words of Jesus mean to their first hearers? They must have sounded like blasphemy. Jesus was taking their most important national and religious festival that commemorated their incredible and dramatic deliverance from Egypt, and totally changing its meaning. “Forget all that about coming out of the land of Egypt,” he was effectively saying. “I am doing something more important than that. The deliverance that I am bringing will put Moses into the shadow! From now on, as long as you go on keeping the Passover and taking the bread and the wine, do it in remembrance of me instead”. Today’s religious world would hardly be more shocked if a man stood up on Christmas day, and asked everyone to treat it as his birthday from now on!

The shock and thrill of his words must have shaken his disciples to their bones. What a claim! What was he saying? How would you have reacted if all your national aspirations and traditions were being turned upside down by someone whose claims implied that he was more important than everyone and everything that had gone before? Yet deep inside themselves they knew his words were right and true. This humble man with whom they had spent the last three years was greater even than Moses - was more than all that had gone before.

Jesus was not instituting a new ceremony. He was proclaiming a new meaning for an old ceremony, the Passover. He had no intention of replacing old rituals with new rituals. Rather he was elevating the old to something wholly new. He had not come to destroy the Law, or to replace it with new laws, but to fulfil it. This meant a going up from a natural meaning to a spiritual meaning. The Passover in the old covenant meant a *natural deliverance from natural slavery* in Egypt. The Passover in the new covenant means a *spiritual deliverance from a spiritual slavery to sin, self and Satan*.

Natural and Spiritual

Many people may react to this thought in the way the Jews must have reacted to Jesus. “You are taking away from us our most precious sacrament and ceremony.” He took it away because he had something better to give them. He wanted to replace shadow with reality. A shadow is a two dimensional thing of no substance. It is, however, a perfect replica of some three dimensional object. It is the three dimensional object that has reality and value. That is the relationship of the old covenant to the new. The old covenant was good as a perfect indicator and foreshadowing of what was to come. The new covenant is infinitely better, as it alone is the reality. Jesus was introducing the spiritual reality of which the Jewish Passover festival was no more than the shadow.

Frequently in the gospel narratives we read the words, “... and they did not understand what he said”. This was not because Jesus was a bad communicator who could not make himself clear. Rather it was because he was on a higher plane. He was from above and his hearers were from below. He was above in the realm of reality while they were below in the realm of shadows. He was from God who is Spirit. They were still natural or carnally minded. They wanted a natural deliverance from the Romans. He brought a spiritual deliverance from sin. Their physical eyes could see the glory of the temple made of stone. *His spiritual eyes were more interested in the spiritual temple made of flesh and blood.*

The cross speaks death to the natural and life to the spiritual. It is an offence to those who glory in the flesh, but a wonderful deliverance to those who seek God in the spirit.

For the Jews at the time it meant an end of boasting in their great national traditions. To be a Jew by natural birth was to mean nothing. The new spiritual birth meant everything. Jerusalem on earth was only a shadow. The real glory was in the heavenly Jerusalem. The earthly temple was given to the Romans to destroy. The heavenly temple would endure for ever. Even the great Passover festival and the other great feasts were nothing more than shadows of their greater spiritual counterparts.

All this is death to the flesh. We renounce what our natural eyes can see, and embrace the things that only spiritual eyes can see. To the world we are foolish, but to God we are wise.

Most of the Jewish people rejected Jesus and his message. He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. The cross is death to national pride, as it is to all other kinds of pride. They preferred their visible traditions, given

by God as they were, to their greater but invisible fulfilments. They would not relinquish what their natural eyes could see to get the greater things that only faith can grasp.

To think that we are automatically wiser or cleverer or humbler than the Jews of Jesus’ time is a great mistake. It is not a great achievement to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the son of God when that has been taught in your country for hundreds of years. You can believe that and be quite as blind as any Pharisee in the past ever was. The Jews clung tenaciously to the laws and festivals and rituals that God had given them. They followed the laws of Moses and the divinely inspired Old Testament. Our generation clings to heathen festivals, buildings and priesthoods, much of which had its origins in paganism. Jesus commended the teaching of the Pharisees, but told his disciples not to be like them. Much of church teaching he would not even commend, but would spue it out of his mouth.

Revelation from God is the only thing that can open blind eyes. To many today Jesus will speak the words, “You say, ‘I am rich; I have got wealth and do not need anything.’ But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

This is My Body

At the Last Supper, Jesus made three highly significant statements. “This is my body”, “This is my blood”, “Do this in remembrance of me”. We will consider each of these in turn.

The first of these bears an obvious relationship to his words in John chapter 6 verses 53 to 56: “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”

Earlier in the same chapter he said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Catholics may tell you that you feed on Jesus when you take the sacraments. Protestants may tell you the Bible is your daily bread. Both are robbing Jesus of his true place. Both want to replace the invisible by the visible. **Jesus**, and **Jesus only**, is the bread of life. We must feed on him.

How do we feed on Jesus? I can give you no formula. Jesus is spiritual food, and the spiritual realm is higher than the realm of the mind. It can never