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Dear Fellow-laborers,

Passover is almost here. Normally, God's people face many trials in the days leading up to the Passover. We can get discouraged and feel helpless sometimes. I felt I needed to write to you before the Passover in the hopes of encouraging all of you. I know that I need encouragement, and I am sure you do too. The Passover is one of the most important ceremonies we can participate in as Christians. The meaning of the sacred Passover is so much more inspiring and encouraging if we focus on WHY Jesus instituted this special ceremony.

As True Christians, the ceremony we call the *New Testament Passover* is very important for us. It is so important that Jesus created a new ceremony with new symbols – just for His true followers!

Some people call this ceremony “Communion” or “Lord’s Supper” or some other name. Some Christian denominations hold something similar to this ceremony 4 times a year or once a month or any number of times per year. One very large denomination does it every week or every day. Others just do it anytime they decide.

Some wash each other’s feet. Others do not. Some take actual wine. Others take grape juice. In the Catholic Church, the people eat a wafer called the “host”, while the priest drinks the wine! Another large denomination uses water *instead* of wine. What confusion! So much of the meaning of the ceremony and its very important symbols have been watered down or changed that, in some cases, it is almost unrecognizable!

But what should we do? What is the correct way to keep the Passover and symbolically partake of the body and blood of Jesus? As well, what connection does the New Testament Passover have with the Old Testament Passover?

For answers we must turn to the Bible. The Bible is our instruction book. God did not leave us in the dark, because Jesus gave us very clear instructions. The Bible does not contain the instructions or traditions of men. It contains the WORDS of GOD! Let’s examine the ceremony, as Jesus instituted it, in the words of the sacred scriptures themselves.

Matthew 26:26-30

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” NKJV¹

¹ *New King James Version* throughout unless otherwise noted.

In **Mark 14:22-25** it says almost exactly the same thing:

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.””

In **I Corinthians 11:23-26**, Paul says we are to observe this New Testament Passover the same way that Jesus and His disciples did as a memorial to His death. He set the pattern and we are supposed to follow. Jesus never said we could change the pattern He set for us:

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.””

Jesus shared the symbols of the New Covenant in an intimate setting with His disciples only. This group included Judas Iscariot, which makes his betrayal of Jesus even more detestable. Today, we understand that only baptized members of the Body of Christ – the Church of God – should participate in sharing the bread and wine. This ceremony is a replication of the close, personal relationship that Jesus had with His disciples.

The Passover is NOT for those who DO NOT have a covenant relationship with Jesus. Therefore, it is not for the un-baptized; nor is it for children.

Notice that the two symbols mentioned are:

- The *bread* = Jesus calls the bread symbolic of “His body”.
- The *wine* = Jesus tells us that this “fruit of the vine” is symbolic of His “*blood of the New Covenant*” which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Jesus gave His body to be beaten and tortured for us. His physical body is symbolized by the bread that is blessed and then broken. It is interesting that Jesus likened His body to the Bread of Life in the Book of John:

John 6:35-36

“And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.””

John 6:53-59

“Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, 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 food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because”

of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven -- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

These divine words shocked the Jews! They even shocked most of His disciples! All but the 12 left Him over the offensive idea of eating His flesh and drinking His blood! They just did not understand the spiritual significance of His teaching.

What about us? Do we understand the SPIRITUAL significance of sharing the *body* and *blood* of Jesus with His brothers and sisters on this solemn evening ceremony? Look carefully at Jesus' words. IF we EAT the Passover symbols of His body and blood, He continues to dwell in us and we in Him. We have ETERNAL LIFE because of this indwelling of our Lord and Savior. No other ceremony of the New Testament Church has anything like eating Christ's body and drinking His blood! The ceremony Jesus instituted has very serious and deep SPIRITUAL meaning for those who participate.

The symbolic eating of the flesh and blood of Jesus each year on the 14th of Nisan according to the Bible calendar shows that we are, spiritually speaking, becoming like God because we are ingesting the nature of God. It is like the old saying, "you are what you eat." In our case, "we are *becoming* what we eat." Because we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, we have eternal life in us because God is in us.

At NO TIME did the Old Covenant ratified at Sinai include the promise of ETERNAL LIFE! Even the Old Testament Passover did not include the symbolic drinking of Our Lord's blood! In fact, only the meat of the sacrificial lamb was eaten with unleavened bread. The blood was put over the doorways.

It was the blood of the Passover lamb that gave the Israelites salvation from physical death. It is the blood of the Lamb of God that gives us salvation from SPIRITUAL death.

The eating of these two symbols – the bread and the red wine – make up the main part of the Passover ceremony.

In addition, there is the foot-washing. Some Christian denominations choose to leave this out. But the Holy Bible includes it for a reason. In fact, the Church of God fellowship I was trained in traditionally put the foot-washing at the beginning of the Passover ceremony. However, the Apostle John puts it at the end.

Foot-washing symbolizes the level of humility that leaders are to exercise with those they serve and the kind of meek and unassuming spirit we are to have toward fellow Christians.

John 13:2-17

"And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"

"Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!"

"Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"

“Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.”

“So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

Some of the congregations of the Churches of God in Burma put an interesting twist to these scriptures. The ministers and their wives must wash the congregation’s feet! However, Jesus *did* say that we should *wash one another’s feet*.

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”

The above passage “shoots in the foot” the idea that we don’t have to include foot-washing in our Passover ceremony! Jesus commands it. Therefore, we should do it! He also said that we would be blessed if we follow His example and do it according to His pattern.

So, we now have the 3 main components of the New Testament Passover Ceremony. Each of these have very significant symbolic meaning to our relationship with Jesus the Christ and fellow Christians who also observe the Passover according to the pattern Jesus set.

If we change that pattern; or change the day; or change the symbols; or change the number of times we hold this important ceremony, we make it less significant. We make our Lord’s sacrifice less important to our lives as true Christians.

This is exactly what Satan wants. He does not want us to know the powerful significance of the Passover. In the early New Testament Church, the Passover was *one of the first doctrines* he attacked! The Quartodecimen Controversy raged between the Eastern churches and Rome over whether or not the church should observe Passover on the 14th of Nisan (hence the term “quartodecimen”) or Easter. The Easter faction eventually won. As a result, very few Christians today observe the 14th Nisan Passover. Most denominations observe Easter with sun-rise services, colored eggs and candy rabbits or they have a form of the true Passover, but it is watered down to a monthly “communion” or a “Lord’s Supper”. Few understand the Passover’s most profound significance.

This makes it even MORE important for us who do understand, to continue to observe the TRUE Passover on the *correct night* and with the *correct symbols* as instituted by Our Lord and King; *AND* gather together before God in the right attitude toward one another.

In the First Century Church there were problems with attitudes. Paul had to write a corrective letter to the Corinthian Church members about their attitudes toward one another at the Passover ceremony. It appears that, in the Early Church, a meal was held on the same evening as the taking of the Passover symbols. Paul had some very sharp words to say (*I quote from the “Today’s English Version” for better clarity*):

1 Cor 11:17-22

“In the following instructions, however, I do not praise you, because your meetings for worship actually do more harm than good. In the first place, I have been told that there are opposing groups in your meetings; and this I believe is partly true. (No doubt there must be divisions among you so that the ones

who are in the right may be clearly seen.) When you meet together as a group, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For as you eat, each one goes ahead with his own meal, so that some are hungry while others get drunk. Don't you have your own homes in which to eat and drink? Or would you rather despise the church of God and put to shame the people who are in need? What do you expect me to say to you about this? Shall I praise you? Of course I don't!" TEV²

Obviously there were factions and divisions in the Early New Testament Church. Sound familiar? Paul had to rebuke the Corinthians because the various factions demonstrated their divisiveness even at the Passover ceremony itself. During the meal that apparently was held on the Passover evening, some were contemptuous of their brethren and demonstrated that contempt by not sharing their food with their less fortunate brethren. Some were even getting drunk!

The rebuke Paul gives them goes so far as to tell them that they could well be inviting the judgment of God down upon their heads for their lack of discernment of what the Body of Christ means!

1 Cor 11:26-34

"This means that every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. It follows that if anyone eats the Lord's bread or drinks from his cup in a way that dishonors him, he is guilty of sin against the Lord's body and blood. So then, everyone should examine himself first, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup. For if he does not recognize the meaning of the Lord's body when he eats the bread and drinks from the cup, he brings judgment on himself as he eats and drinks. That is why many of you are sick and weak, and several have died. If we would examine ourselves first, we would not come under God's judgment. But we are judged and punished by the Lord, so that we shall not be condemned together with the world. So then, my brothers, when you gather together to eat the Lord's Supper, wait for one another. And if anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that you will not come under God's judgment as you meet together. As for the other matters, I will settle them when I come." TEV³

Paul makes some very severe statements about what happens if we take the Passover in a way that shows we do not understand the meaning of the Lord's Body. He says we need to undertake some serious self-examination BEFORE we take the bread and wine. Paul warns us to come together in a spirit of humility and acceptance of one another or we put ourselves in danger of God's judgment! That is scary!

Is our modern Church of God full of factions and divisions? Yes it clearly is. Perhaps God is scattering us to be better able to accomplish His Will in the End of the Age. I really don't know. God doesn't call me up every morning and tell me His latest plans! But WHY we are divided is much less important than HOW we treat one another, especially at the Passover season.

If we need to be separated into various organizations and fellowships for the time being, so be it. But at least we should recognize one another as true brethren in Christ. Let's show the kind of respect Paul was talking about. Let's show one another honor in the Spirit of humility and Godly kindness. I for one certainly do NOT want to be in an attitude of contempt for any God calls His children when I eat the Lord's Body and Blood. All of us should be

² Today's English Version.

³ Ibid.

much more careful about our attitudes and opinions about fellow brethren throughout the year, but especially at Passover. Let's all do some serious examining of our hearts before we take the Passover this year..

If there is offense (*and there certainly IS offense!*), then we will have to resolve this by doing as Jesus commanded. He knows the way to peace with one another. He TELLS us the way to peace! In fact He explains that God WILL NOT FORGIVE US IF WE DO NOT FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER!

Matt 6:14-15

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

The best way to forgive is to go to our brother. But many times this is not possible or practical. Sometimes the person who hurt us has moved away or even died. That does not mean we cannot forgive our brother! Forgiveness is unilateral. It is an act of pardon extended by you alone. We all must remember that Jesus died for our sins BEFORE we repented! Jesus did not say that we should forgive ONLY if the other person has repented of their offenses toward us. Instead He said simply, "*forgive men their trespasses,..*" without reservation.

We all would like the people who have offended us to fall on their knees and beg our forgiveness. But in most cases, that is just not going to happen. Some few *do* see the error of their ways and ask us to forgive them. But forgiving others their offenses is not dependent upon their repentance.

I know some are rigid in the idea that we should forgive others only if they repent. But that idea is not Biblical. God forgives sins upon repentance. That is true. But we are not God and do not possess His prerogatives! Jesus commands us to forgive 70 times 7 (see Matt 18:21-22). This obviously means we are to forgive EVEN if the person is *not* learning to recognize his/her sins.

The Corinthians were not seeking peace with their brethren.. They were fighting among themselves in factions INSIDE the Corinthian congregation itself! They were separating themselves from one another! What did Paul say in 1 Corinthians 11 is the result of such conduct?

"...he brings judgment on himself as he eats and drinks. That is why many of you are sick and weak, and several have died."

The hurts and offenses were not being resolved! The result was sickness and even death. This is true in the Church today as much as it was in the first century! Church brethren today complain to me that the Church is not moving forward or not accomplishing the preaching of the Gospel like it used to. I think we can all agree that this is true. It is also true that we are separating into more and more factions. Perhaps all this has more to do with our lack of forgiveness for one another than any other single factor. WE all should think about this BEFORE we take the Body and Blood of Our Lord at the Passover ceremony this year. Please pray that God gives us all a Spirit of reconciliation. We may be apart in physical organization. But we DO NOT need to be apart in the SPIRIT!

Now let's continue to discuss more about the meaning of the Passover.

The Passover wine symbolizes the blood of our New Covenant relationship with God. The Old Covenant was also ratified with blood.

The ratification of the Old Covenant between God and the children of Israel took place at Sinai, the Mountain of God. Let's look at that ratification ceremony:

Ex 24:3-8

*“So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has said we will do." And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "**This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.**"*

That was the Old Covenant. God wanted to have an intimate relationship with a people He could call His own. He wanted to be a father and king to them. He made a contract with them that He would be their King and God and they would be obedient and serve only Him.

This Old Covenant failed. It failed not because the laws on which it was based were faulty. Rather the people **BROKE** the covenant through their disobedience and adultery with other gods.

Heb 8:7-13

*“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because **finding fault with them**, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; **because they did not continue in My covenant**, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”*

The problem was not God. He kept His end of the bargain. The problem was that the people could not keep God's laws because they were not internalized. They had what I call a “CARROT and STICK” relationship with God. They obeyed Him to receive reward or to avoid punishment. They did not obey Him because they believed He was right and His laws good. Even if they had wanted to – they couldn't obey God perfectly. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit was not part of the contract.

It was necessary for God to make an entirely **NEW COVENANT** with His people. In Hebrews it says it is based on *better promises* (**Hebrews 8:6**).

If we eat His flesh and drink His blood at Passover, we have a New Covenant relationship with God. We will continue to take on the spiritual nature of Our Lord Jesus Christ and will be resurrected or changed into spirit beings possessing **ETERNAL LIFE**.

Heb 13:20-21

“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ”

The New Covenant includes the promise of the Holy Spirit and the promise of Eternal Life! The Old Covenant did not include these promises.

The Old Covenant was ratified at the foot of Sinai with the blood of oxen. The New Covenant was ratified in the Heavenly Temple by the presentation of Jesus’ own blood.

Heb 9:11-15

“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

The blood of Jesus cleanses us from the defilement of sin. We can now be acceptable to the Almighty God. It also continues to clean our hearts so that we can live our Christian lives in a way pleasing to Him.

There is so much symbolism and meaning to the Passover; I don’t think we will ever learn it all until we become spirit!

SHADOW AND REALITY

Now let’s compare the Old Testament Passover to the New Testament Passover.

According to the pattern set on the Passover night, the Israelites were supposed to select a lamb or goat from the flocks and kill the lamb on the 14th of the first month, the month now known as Nisan or Abib. The lamb was to be a male of the first year and without blemish. This clearly symbolized the future Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Ex 12:3-7

“Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man’s need you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.’”

The selected lamb symbolized the True Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world!” The killing of that first Passover lamb symbolized the death of Our Lord Jesus on the cross killed at the VERY SAME TIME that the Passover lambs were being killed in Jerusalem!

Ex 12:7-11

“And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire -- its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover.”

The Passover lamb's blood on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelites' homes symbolized the blood of the True Lamb that “covers” our sins so we do not have to incur the JUDGMENT of Almighty God – DEATH! (Romans 6:23)

Ex 12:13

“Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”

If any Israelite did not remain inside – he or she would not be *under the blood* and therefore, not protected by it.

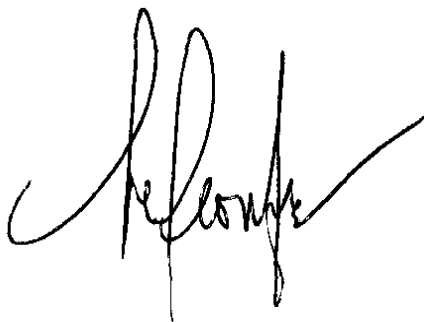
I don't know how the symbolism could be any plainer. It was the Passover lamb's blood that saved the Israelites from the judgment of God. It is Jesus' blood that saves us from God's judgment for sin – *spiritual death*. Jesus is OUR Passover!

1 Corinthians 5:7 *“For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”*

Jesus created a NEW ceremony because it is a NEW relationship – a NEW covenant; one based on spiritual principles – NOT physical. Jesus replaced the sacrificial lamb. JESUS BECAME THAT LAMB by shedding His own blood for our salvation. The receiving of Eternal Life is central to the New Testament Passover. It was *NEVER* part of the OT Passover. The Old Testament Passover was a shadow of the reality that was fulfilled by the death of Jesus on the Passover day nearly 2000 years ago.

I hope this letter proves encouraging to you during the Passover season. Gloria and I will be visiting Burma again this year for the Passover. We will be taking the Passover bread and wine and washing the feet of our Church of God brethren who live under difficult and very repressive circumstances. Please pray for our brethren in Burma; pray for us in our journey and we will pray for you. May God grant all of you a peaceful and spiritually invigorating Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread.

In service to the Lamb of God,



T. Leon Sexton