

Church of God, The Eternal

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Will We Offer an Acceptable Passover Sacrifice This Year?

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Dear Brethren,

God's appointed new year is quickly approaching, and this means the Passover season will soon be upon us. Among those who were called to understand God's Truth and the significance of Holy Days in the plan of salvation, Passover has always been a focal point. Regardless of each one's continuing level of commitment to live the truths of God throughout the year, the Passover service is the one sacred occasion that seems to generate lasting awareness for many. In the world, many professing Christians who never seem to sacrifice their secular pursuits at any other time of the year often make it a point to attend a worship service on Christmas or Easter. These are commonly called the "C and E Christians." Likewise, within the true church, even many who have abandoned their faithfulness to weekly Sabbaths and other Holy Days still seem to tremble at the thought of missing a Passover service. It is as if this very personalized, physical ceremony including the partaking of bread and wine as the representation of Christ's body and blood is too compelling to give up, even if it has become more like a superstition to them.

But of all those who will physically participate in a Passover service of some kind this year, very few will be honored or accepted by God. Many may pacify their own consciences through the exercise, but there is much more to observing the Passover than appearing and performing a ritual. There is someone making a ritual offering who is actually despised by God:

A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts (Malachi 1:6-8).

There are likewise many this year who will be offering polluted bread before God as they partake of the emblems of Passover because they also claim in one way or another that the table of the Eternal is contemptible. In the last issue of the *Monthly Letter*, we were admonished to evaluate whether we are partaking at the table of God or the table of demons.

But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils (1 Corinthians 10:20–21).

Merely making declarations about our personal righteousness is not sufficient to avoid condemnation. All human beings believe they are right. The sad truth is, many of those called to a knowledge of the Truth have turned to self-deception, maintaining certain trappings of ritual worship, but in every other way denying the very Christ they claim to accept.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of (2 Peter 2:1–2).

How can we be sure we are not denying the Lord who bought us? We need to recognize some of the very specific indicators God has provided to allow us to act with legitimate confidence as we prepare to take the Passover.

Where Will God Be?

God does not honor every assembly that is called by men in His name. Just using the name of God and Jesus Christ provides no assurance of His approval. Otherwise we would have to believe the global worship services of every deceived group claiming to be Christian are approved sacrifices. But if just anyone using the name of Christ can be accepted, why are we toiling to observe God's commandments? "He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:6–7). Someone is worshiping God in vain. It is those who claim to be of Christ but deny everything that He taught. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:4–6).

This is much less a denunciation of the deceived masses in the world than it is of the chosen, who should know better, yet have totally corrupted themselves in perverting the Truth. More wretched than anything is the polluted bread offered by the very ones God granted knowledge of His priceless way.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood (Isaiah 1:11–15).

Someone's solemn meeting, even the Passover, is despised by God. Many so-called Passover services this year will be spurned by the very Christ they will claim to honor. How will you choose the place to keep Passover, having full confidence that Jesus Christ is present, honoring that very assembly with His Spirit? It will be at an appointed place—a place God has selected and determined through the appointment of faithful servants—servants holding the very doctrines of God in absolute fear and reverence.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1–3).

Just as the Apostle John was taught directly by Christ, and as an eyewitness proclaimed faithfully everything he had been given, so we also received the same Word of life from an end-time servant whom Christ inspired directly. And just as the Apostle Paul, likewise a witness, taught this same Truth faithfully, so he also ordained other men into the ministry of Jesus Christ and commissioned them to proclaim the very same Word. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16).

Therefore, as Timothy was admonished to proclaim faithfully only the original, revealed doctrine, so the faithful ministry of the last days will be those continuing in absolute continuity

with the divine revelation given through the last-day servant. The attempts of many to discount doctrine in favor of an ecumenical reconciliation on the basis of false love is a prime example of polluted bread offered before God. Likewise, anyone who claims there is no faithful ministry remaining today is guilty of denying Christ.

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world (1 John 4:2–3).

Such perversion of Truth is an abomination! Christ's own words confirm how critical it is to know those whom He has sent—those who act legitimately in His name. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (John 13:20).

God does not follow after each one of us, waiting to see where we will choose to worship Him, and then appear there to honor our personal choices. No, God determines through His faithful ministry where approved assemblies will be called, and then He waits for us to appear there before Him!

Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the Passover unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there (Deuteronomy 16:1–2) [emphasis ours].

Notice, it is the place which God chooses. He places His name in a specific place, and that is where He appears in Spirit. Those who appear there in His presence can acceptably keep the Passover. Anyone attending in a place not appointed by proper authority might just as well forego keeping the service at all. Such a service is not acceptable to God, and He will not honor it nor any of its participants. Therefore, recognizing the faithful ministry God promised to sustain (Matthew 28:19–20) is absolutely imperative to keeping Passover. It is that ministry which bears authority to select places of convocation as delegated by God, and He promises to honor those selections with His presence (Matthew 18:18).

But what about those who are isolated or infirmed and unable to convoke where a minister is conducting a service? Recognizing the scattered nature of God's faithful remnant in these last days, we have always provided a taped service to be used by designated lead men for smaller convocations. These, however, are also included as appointed places. We have also approved certain ones to partake of Passover alone using this same taped service when they are sufficiently challenged to make it impossible to convoke in one of the appointed assemblies. Please note that

the taped service is not provided as a convenience to allow each one to choose arbitrarily to observe Passover on his/her own. God evaluates our hearts and knows who is capable—even with some inconvenience—of attending in an appointed place, and those who are legitimately prevented from doing so. Those who make such decisions honorably before God can partake of Passover acceptably.

But is it enough just to select the correct place of assembly for the Passover service? What other things are required before God will accept our sacrifice?

We Must Agree With Christ

The entire Passover experience is an exercise which reconfirms our agreement with Christ. That agreement is enacted as we participate in each commanded element of the solemn service. This is why Paul admonishes us to test deeply our personal motivations through self-examination before partaking of Passover.

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (1 Corinthians 11:27–30).

First, do we discern the Lord's body? Paul says many are spiritually weak and sickly, even spiritually dead, because they do not recognize the body of Christ. Who is that body? "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Corinthians 12:18, 27). What does Paul say about that body, the Church? "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12–13). That body which Christ claims is His own is not divided and confused.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:4–6).

Do we agree with Christ when He says His body is one; or do we defy Him by claiming various, discrepant groups are all separate manifestations of His body? "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). No, we show agreement with Christ only if we admit He will never be manifested with a conflicted, divided mind.

Why Foot Washing?

The first element of the solemn Passover service as Christ delivered to His disciples is foot washing. Christ set the perfect example of self-sacrifice and instructed His disciples to do likewise.

So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them (John 13:12–17).

This act of humility is not intended merely as a single, isolated ritual once each year at Passover. By participating in the foot washing service, we are actually pledging to God our commitment to serve our brethren year-round in a spirit of self-denial and personal sacrifice. It is the perpetual mental orientation which Christ intended:

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:10–18).

If we allow ourselves to be consumed much of the year with the defense of personal rights, engaging in activities to improve our image at the expense of the feelings of others, we can hardly claim to be fulfilling our role as a real servant. Washing feet is the most menial of work, for the most lowly of servants. Christ wants us to view ourselves in this light year-round—willing to bear the burdens and weaknesses of others, not wearing our hearts on our sleeves or becoming offended and retaliating at the actions of others. Menial servants do not puff up and demand respect or rights. They meekly carry out their duties, knowing and accepting their given roles. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3). Therefore, the amount of real faith we possess is shown by our level of tolerance one to another. Those without a full measure of real faith are prone to becoming embroiled in personal disputes.

When we participate in the foot washing service this year, will it require special effort to condescend in mind, or will it only be a comfortable continuation of the same humble orientation we have been manifesting all year? Our participation can either be honest or hypocritical. If we will resolve to fight the natural inclination to justify self—that urge to seek personal vindication—we can acceptably become the menial, spiritual servants God requires of us. It is those willing to sacrifice all trappings of personal elevation now, that God promises truly to enlarge at the return of Jesus Christ. If this is our true orientation, and we are willing to live with vision—subjugating self—then we show evidence that we agree with Christ.

Do We Respect Christ's Body?

What does it mean when we partake of the bread in the Passover service? With what is it we are claiming to agree? That unleavened bread represents the broken body of Christ. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26). But what does that broken body signify for us?

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:4–5).

The physical torture Jesus Christ endured was a sacrifice for our physical healing. If we agree with Christ, then we trust Him as our Healer, and not the counterfeits found within man's medical sciences. Those professing agreement with Christ by partaking of Passover declare they accept Christ as Healer. Therefore, anyone who participates in this service while consistently running after the traditional—or even the alternative—medical practices of men, are actually offering polluted bread before God. God does not work through the sciences of men—none of them!

... And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee (Exodus 15:26).

Even if we show weakness and become guilty of breaking God's health laws, we can be forgiven and receive His merciful intervention as a special miracle, if we are willing to admit responsibility and root out those habits that generate illness. Some of us may also bear particular physical afflictions which God intends for us to endure for reason. In either case it requires real faith to believe in God's promises and avoid looking to man's systems for salvation. Those with a proper orientation concerning the body of Christ can partake of Passover with confidence.

The Blood of Christ

Next, Christ commanded that we partake of His blood, represented by the Passover wine. "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:27–28). We know that Christ was offered as a perfect sacrifice so that we could each be absolved from the penalty of death. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Romans 3:23–25). Therefore, partaking of the wine in the Passover service is a declaration to God that we have faith in His blood as our only means for salvation.

Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:10–12).

Those who were baptized into the Body of Christ through the ministry of God's last-day servant—who accepted the words preached as from the very Word of life, the divine revelation of the risen Christ—renew their vow each year in the Passover service, asserting by participation that they still believe in that immutable Word and His personal sacrifice. He revealed Himself to us through the preaching of a chosen servant. Anyone who now denies that the original doctrine of the Church was of the Word made flesh, denies Christ. Anyone who partakes of the wine at Passover with such beliefs thereby puts Christ to an open shame.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy [Spirit], And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:4–6).

How many people will participate in some kind of a Passover service this year, thinking they are honoring Christ, all the while putting Him to an open shame by their despicable orientation of compromise?

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses'

law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26–29).

We should all think very soberly about the vows we are making when we participate in a Passover service. There is so much more we are saying to God by our actions than the mere performance of ritual. Will we offer an acceptable sacrifice before God this year? We can, if we recognize the real significance of each emblem in the Passover experience and examine ourselves properly, confirming honestly that we truly accept the real Christ, including everything He represents.

Our special love and appreciation continues ever strong for those dedicated to that priceless way of life.

Yours faithfully in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby