

April 2016

Dear Brethren:

Are we prepared for this year's Passover? Are we truly ready to receive the bread and wine in a right attitude and in faith?

The Apostle Paul was inspired to write a sobering statement about preparing properly before partaking of the Passover. Paul asserts:

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27) [*New King James Version* throughout].

An "unworthy manner" involves approaching the Passover as a matter of routine, lacking proper respect for what is involved and failing to prepare for this important annual event. To help us prepare ourselves for a meaningful Passover, the apostle instructs:

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (vv. 28–29).

The required self-examination is to be more than just saying, "I am sorry, I am not the person I should be." This annual spiritual checking should instead be a thorough, yet positive, examination of our motives, actions and attitudes. We are to analyze, investigate and scrutinize what we are doing and why. We are to do this with the idea of striving to live more in harmony with the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. Our goal is to bring our attitudes and actions closer to the standard outlined in the Word of God for every facet of our lives (Matthew 4:4).

The self-examination process is designed to help us detect sin in our lives and begin to eliminate thoughts and actions that hinder our growth in becoming more like Jesus Christ.

It is not surprising that First Corinthians mentions a number of important areas of our lives that are worth examining as we approach the Passover. At this time of the year we should remind ourselves just how awful sin really is. For it slowly and surely rots and destroys the quality of human life, and finally if not deeply repented of DESTROYS even the possibility of continuing life throughout eternity.

What can be done about the terrible problem of sin? "And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). Sin then must be paid for by shed blood!

Let us all carefully review the original Passover account in Exodus 12. Note again that a perfect, unblemished male lamb was to be slaughtered as a type of the coming Savior (v. 5). Its blood was to be put on the door post and lintel of the house where the Passover lamb was eaten.

For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt . . . [then God commanded the Israelites] 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 (Exodus 12:12–13) [emphasis mine].

So God would PASS OVER them that night if they were "under the blood." Today, each one of us needs to ask: "Am I really under the blood of Jesus Christ? Have I truly repented of SIN and of self? Did I genuinely BURY the old selfish self when I was baptized? Or do I still walk in the flesh, hating, lusting, being filled with selfishness and self-will?"

And we also need to ask, "Have I really forgiven my brother or sister from the heart?" For many people, even in God's church, harbor bitterness and carry old grudges for many years. They just cannot seem to forgive and forget! Yet Jesus Christ tells us, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). The Bible outlines both the way to peace and the cause of strife; Christians are to develop skills in practicing peaceful interpersonal relationships. Yet Paul has to remind members of the church of their lack of growth in this vital area. He writes, "for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3). Paul points out that we must build on the foundation we have been given, and what we build will be tested with trials (vv. 10–14). We must learn to be peacemakers in real-life situations.

Are you an "in-your-face" type of person? Or have you learned that "a soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1)? Do you still bristle and try to solve problems with confrontation, shouting down your opponent? Or are you easy to approach? (James 3:17–18). Have you learned how to be a conciliator? Are you able to pour oil on troubled waters when the occasion arises? Have you learned to work smoothly with your neighbor—leading where you can contribute and following where others are given the lead? Or perhaps, are you constantly seeking to control others and get your own way—which is

Satan's approach? The more skills we develop in applying God's principles, the more peace will be engendered and enjoyed (Proverbs 16:7).

Jesus taught that we should attempt to peacefully resolve differences before coming to God (Matthew 5:23–24). The season before Passover is a time to carefully evaluate our tendencies in this area.

Another issue Paul addressed is how church members view their calling. Apparently some in Corinth failed to appreciate the rare and priceless opportunity God was offering them. Even today, many are being told that their calling is not that "unique" since there are untold millions of true Christians in the world, in any number of different "denominations," believing any number of different doctrines.

However, this is not what the Bible reveals! Paul states:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise . . . that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).

Jesus taught: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). He also referred to the church as a "little flock" (Luke 12:32).

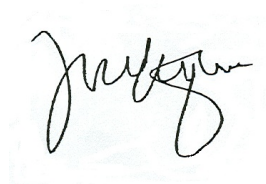
Paul explained to the Corinthians that what they understood about the plan of God is a mystery to the world (1 Corinthians 2:7–8). Their spiritual understanding was the result of repenting and receiving God's Spirit (vv. 10–14), which is only given to those who obey the laws of God (Acts 5:32). That Spirit enables true Christians to really understand the Bible (John 16:13). Some of us, no doubt, tried to convert our friends and relatives after we ourselves first discovered God's Truth. But while millions profess Christianity, the Scripture reveals that "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His" (Romans 8:9), and the only way to receive that Spirit is to be called, to repent, to be baptized, to receive the laying on of hands and to live in obedience to the laws of God (Acts 2:8; 8:17–18; 5:32).

Do you grasp just how privileged you are because of your calling? Do you place a high value on that calling? Are you doing your part to regularly nourish God's Spirit within you (2 Corinthians 4:16), or are you allowing it slowly to be quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19)? Do you desire to be constantly led by God's Spirit (Romans 8:14), or are you always seeking your own way, resisting or resenting what God instructs in His Word (v. 7)? The only way to grow as Christians and become instruments in God's hand is to see and value our calling, nourish and use His Spirit, and resist the temptation to do our own things.

Dear brethren, let us CRY OUT for ourselves and for one another at this Passover time, that these called members of God's Church may be cleansed and healed of bitterness, resentment, and envy, and erase selfishness that so often manifests itself even among God's people. Let us all do everything we can to build a radiant spirit of love, kindness, patience and mercy toward one another and toward all men.

Then we can partake of God's Passover with a clean heart and a pure mind, and His special blessing and presence will be with us this Passover season and throughout the entire year as we continue to walk with Him.

Your Brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mario Y. Roque', written in a cursive style. The signature is centered below the text 'Your Brother in Christ,'.

Mario Y. Roque