

Perpetual Faithfulness (Exodus 13: 1-22)

I God expected the Children of Israel to keep two ordinances in perpetuity. (People usually remember things that are important to them, like birthdays, or wedding anniversaries. This occasion, the deliverance of the Children of Israel from Egypt, was important to God. Not that God would have any problem remembering it, He remembers everything. Rather, God wanted the Children of Israel to remember their 430 years of slavery in Egypt bitterly, so that they would appreciate their deliverance from it more fondly. Specifically, God wanted them to remember how they got out of Egypt: by His power. God wanted the Hebrews to remember *Him*.)

A We can see that Jesus followed both ordinances, in the New Testament. (This complete obedience to all the Laws and Ordinances in the Old Testament were part of the perfection that defined the righteousness of Christ. There could be no deviance from any command or precept in the Old Testament in the life of Jesus. While Jesus was a baby He was too young to obey any of it on His own, so Joseph and Mary obeyed for Him. That is, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple when He was 8 days old, to make the redemption sacrifice for Him, or in other words, to pay the redemption tax. Then as an adult (any time after He was 12 years old), Jesus would have been obliged to keep the Laws and Ordinances for Himself. This is why Jesus was in Jerusalem the night of the Last Supper. He was celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread with His Disciples.)

B True believers keep two ordinances, too. (That is to say, Jesus instituted two ordinances for the Church. They were the Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Then there is a third, and very practical ordinance, although it was not made by Jesus Himself. It is Church membership and attendance. It is the means by which

believers share in the mystical union in the Body of Christ, and with all saints from all the past.)

II The first ordinance for Israel was the consecration of their firstborn.(Many people see this as a means by which God could provide Himself with priests, since the eldest son in the family and the chiefs of the tribes customarily served in the role of priest anyway. We may also see that the redemption sacrifice, or tax, was a way to limit the number of priests available for service to a number that represented real utility, as opposed to redundancy; but if we interpret Chapter 13 in terms of the institutional priesthood only, then we miss the point with God.)

A The Death Angel had spared the firstborn of the Children of Israel. (We saw in Chapter 12 how God sent the Angel of Death through the land of Egypt on the night of the first full moon after the spring equinox, and every firstborn child and every firstborn animal in Egypt died. The Hebrews put the blood of their Passover Lamb on their door posts, and God did not permit the destroyer to enter their houses. Now from God's point of view, the only thing standing between the Angel of Death and the Firstborn among the Children of Israel was the blood on the door posts. They would have died, had they not been in a protected house. So what will protect them, when they leave that house? Only the forbearance of God; which He was happy to continue for children who were *redeemed* by a sacrifice. God demanded the sacrifice for all the firstborn animals too, because they also would have died on Passover Night, had it not been for the blood of the Passover Lamb. And we see that it is O.K. with God if they broke the necks of their firstborn donkeys instead of redeeming them.)

B Now a *redemption tax* was instituted. (It will spare firstborn animals from being sacrificed when flocks and herds are small, and it is a kind of exemption tax too, for excusing firstborn sons from service as priests, or to redeem a

daughter (who could not have become a priest anyway). The Bible sets out a variety of options for people to choose from, if they are so poor that they cannot afford the sacrificial animal or the monetary tax, and apparently Joseph and Mary took one of the Poor Man's options, for Jesus, in Luke Chapter 2.)

C Joseph and Mary kept this ordinance for Jesus (Luke 2:22-24). (Let's read these verses together. We see that they did this to comply with the redemption requirement for firstborn children; and we say again, that this obedience on the part of Mary and Joseph was part of the righteousness of Jesus. In order to be the perfect sacrifice for all sins of all men of all time, Jesus would have to be perfect in every way, in ceremonial perfection as well as in moral perfection. We have no way of knowing how much of the spiritual symbolism Mary and Joseph would have understood, we can only see that they *did what was right* in terms of Old Testament Law. We should see, also, that it is an important lesson for any parent to teach to any child, that they do what is right by the Bible. They, especially the children, might not understand it all, but insufficient understanding does not constitute an excuse for not following the Word of God.)

III The Second ordinance was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (It took the Children of Israel approximately 7 days to get from the Land of Goshen to the Red Sea. They were slaves on the run, so there was no time for them to have a picnic in the park. There probably wasn't much time for campfires and cooking, either. Their unleavened bread was a practical thing.)

A The feast commemorated their departure from Egypt. (We saw in Chapter 12 that they were in a hurry to get out of Egypt. The night of the Passover, there was no time for dressing and seasoning meat; they were to roast the entire lamb—head, entrails, and all—over a fire. There was no time for sitting down to a pleasant meal and having coffee or ice cream for dessert, either; they were to eat

with their cloaks tucked in their belts and their staves in their hands. There was no time for bread dough to rise, so they made unleavened bread. The re-enactment of that hasty dinner would be their commemoration of the Passover, and their feast of unleavened bread would commemorate the seven days journey out of Egypt, to the Red Sea. As we said, God's memory needed no aid; but He wanted *them* to remember, not just the event, but the reason for it and the Power behind it, too.)

B Now let us distinguish *holy* from *secular* celebrations. (We may wonder at the choice of words used for this commemoration, because in our minds, celebrations are happy times, and pleasant events. We may wonder at the menu for this special celebration too. Bitter herbs and spices would not have been any more palatable to the Hebrews than they are to us. When we celebrate a birthday, we use cakes and ice cream. When we celebrate a special holiday we use good things to eat and amusing games. This is because our celebrations are secular; March 1st and August 15th might be holy to Koreans, but for everyone else they are only two days on a calendar, and for God, any two days on our calendars are a lot like any other two days. That is, we either honor Him on those days or we don't. A very *holy* holiday, like Passover, for the Hebrews, or the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, for believers, is a memorial for us of a time when God did something very special. We should remember God's Actions differently from the actions of ordinary men. And we need to be careful *how* we go about honoring God with our celebrations, too, because pagan symbols (like Christmas trees and Easter bunnies) honor pagan deities, not God. The Hebrews were to celebrate freedom from slavery in Egypt by remembering how bitter those 430 years were; hence the bitter herbs and spices. They were to celebrate the fact that God spared their firstborn children and animals even as He killed their Egyptian counterparts;

hence the commemoration of the Passover. And they were to celebrate their Exodus from Egypt by commemorating the seven-day journey to the Red Sea with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. These things were holy because the Power of God made them happen. God foresaw all the times and ways that they would be tempted to be unfaithful; but *He* wanted them to remember Him.)

C Jesus kept this ordinance the night before He was crucified. (As we saw in Chapter 12, the Passover was a symbolic representation of the Gospel message. That is to say, God timed the Passover to coincide with the Crucifixion of Christ (and it was not the other way around). Now for the Hebrews, Messianic prophecies were mystical, perhaps even opaque statements of promises about covenants between God and Adam and Eve, or between God and Noah, or Abraham, or the other Patriarchs. They could very easily have looked on their present circumstances and interpreted everything we call Messianic Prophecy in terms of pragmatic secularism, just as believers in our times do, when they try to reconcile the Biblical record with evolutionary science and archaeology, for example. Given the paradigm of atheistic secularism, too many believers are willing to interpret scriptures allegorically and metaphorically, rather than risk being labeled as *fundamentalists* or have their faith derided as *uninformed and therefore irrelevant*. We would do well to recognize that God uses another paradigm. It is the unalterable and immutable Truth of His own sovereignty. We who believe thus are certainly a minority in the modern world; and Hebrews who believed so in the Old Testament (the Patriarchs and Prophets, specifically), were just as likely to be scorned as credulous fools as anyone in the modern world is.

We speak thus to show that, while Moses and Aaron probably (at least, eventually) understood that they were sacrificing lambs as a symbolic vicarious atonement, the rest of the Hebrews could well have thought that they were just

doing something useful with the lamb's blood while they were getting dinner ready—and we don't want to blame them for insufficient spiritual understanding. When, during the rest of the Old Testament, God's prophets were telling the Israelites to repent secularism and be faithful to the (Messianic) Covenant with God in spirit as well as in deed, the rest of the people, even kings and priests, might well have thought that the prophetic messages were unnecessary—certainly unwelcome—moralistic interferences with their enjoyment of the benefits of being God's Chosen People. We might think that blaming them for not understanding the Messianic Covenant is unjust, but we should remember that by the Kingdom period, they had had some 400 years of experience with living under the Law of God and His Ordinances, or rather, not following them very well and suffering invasions and wars, famines and pestilences, as God tried to correct their misunderstandings and bad behavior. Jesus certainly blamed them for following the letter of the Law without following the Spirit of it.

This brings us back to the problem of sin, and evil, and atonement. Men were irremediably depraved because of the Original Sin. *Every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, from his youth up*, as God told Noah (Genesis 6:5). In order to redeem man from sin, the Messiah must suffer and die; this was the symbol of sacrificial animals since the Garden of Eden, and of the Passover Lamb (whether the Children of Israel understood it or not), and the reality symbolized by the death of the Passover lamb on the Day of Atonement was the once for all Atonement of the Death of Christ. Jesus understood this, even if His Disciples (and the Temple priests) did not, at that time. And let us remember that Jesus must be absolutely perfect in every respect in order to be that *spotless Lamb of God*, and so He was just as much obliged to observe the Ordinances (e.g. the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread) as all other Jews were.)

IV True believers should keep two ordinances, too, and properly. (Jesus set down two ordinances for the church, and most churches observe them in some form. But we need to remember that each of them has a purpose for us, just as these Old Testament ordinances did for the Children of Israel. And, just as there was a right way and a wrong way to commemorate the Passover, and a proper time and proper way to make the redemption sacrifice, there is a right and wrong way, and time, for our two ordinances too. We should be careful not to be so hasty in baptizing someone that we do it before they are born again; and let's not get in such a hurry to commemorate the Lord's Supper that we do it in the wrong way, or in the wrong spirit, failing to discern the Body and Blood of Christ.)

A Baptism symbolizes our new birth in Jesus. (The human soul is dead when it is born, in trespass and sin. Baptism by immersion symbolizes the burial of a dead body, and death is the penalty for sin. Then we bring the body back up out of the water to symbolize our resurrection after death, and our new life in Christ. Now when does the new life in Christ begin? Jesus said we must be born again, by water and by spirit. If that new, spiritual birth is not a historical fact, in the same way that our natural birth is a historical fact, then the baptism has no meaning, and it is inappropriate. Worse still, it provides a false sense of hope, especially to young people, whose mothers tell them that they believed *for* them even before they were born. If that young person also attends church every Sunday and exhibits good moral behavior (at least while anyone is watching) they grow up thinking that they *are* Christians, without ever repenting or forsaking sin. That repentance and forsaking of sin is important too: it is the stuff of the new birth. Otherwise, what should we say about the sins that child commits by being foolish and irresponsible, as children tend to be? The Bible says *there is none righteous, no, not one* (Psalm 53:1-3); *all have sinned and come short of the glory*

of God (Romans 3:23); and *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us* (I John 1:8,10). So we hold that infant baptism is unscriptural; and baptism by any means except by immersion is the wrong symbol. Baptism neither accomplishes the new birth nor delivers grace to anyone. There must first be conviction of sin, then repentance and forsaking of sin, and a public testimony of these historical facts; then baptism is appropriate. It is a ceremony that symbolizes for every believer that another believer has joined the Family of God.)

B The Lord's Supper is our memorial of the Death of Christ. (Most of us have heard the words of the Communion Service so many times that we could repeat them from memory: *On the night He was betrayed Jesus took the bread and broke it... now let us be sure that it was unleavened bread; it was not bleached white flour or rice cake. He took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them and said, drink ye all of it... we can be sure that the cup Jesus shared with His disciples contained wine, not grape juice, or plain water. He said, as oft as ye do this do it in remembrance of me.* Let us be sure that the antecedent for the pronoun *it* was the commemoration of the Passover; and after the dinner it was time to start the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We can be certain that Jesus was following Old Testament ordinances about these things, correctly—and that means precisely. The substitutions churches make for the communion elements are meant to pacify someone's sensitivity about drinking anything with alcohol in it, or about using something that is commonly available so that no one needs to go out of their way to provide *unleavened* bread. Well enough, for the liberals who do not respect scriptures anyway; but the child of God needs to *discern the Body and Blood of Christ* in the communion elements, and to be blunt, only real unleavened bread and real wine were used by Jesus for this purpose. That is what

we should use, too. Incidentally, a little further along in the Old Testament we will see what God says should be done with what is left over too; the officiating priest should consume it (as they do in the Roman Catholic masses.)

C Church meetings symbolize our union with Christ in God. (This might well be the only legacy of Roman Catholicism that is actually good for the Church. Jesus did not, in fact, tell His disciples to meet regularly every week, on the first day of the week. His Disciples were all devout Jews, as was Jesus Himself, and they did their religious exercises on the Sabbath Day in the Temple, as did all other devout Jews—at least until they were no longer welcome at the Temple because of their message. Jesus rose from the dead on the First Day of the week, and that is the only reason why most churches meet on Sundays. The Seventh Day Adventists, by the way, read and obey the same Bible that we do, only they meet on Saturdays, in honor of the Fourth Commandment. In all other respects they are as sincere about following Jesus as we are.

Let us set aside our discussion of on which day we should meet by authority of Romans 14:5, momentarily, and consider the greater issue of membership in and meetings of the Church. Let us specify that Church means real, spiritual, blood-bought, born again, believers in Jesus (the Capital C-Church, as we say), and that church is not a multi-million dollar brick-and-mortar, glass-and-steel institution. We all believe that church members should meet together, but for what purpose? Jesus did not command the meetings, He only promised to be with us when two or more of us meet in His name.

So let us begin there, to state our reasons for meeting. If one of us believes that something is true without any rational proof of it, then we might or might not be correct. If two or more of us believes the same thing to be true, then our faith takes on a kind of life of its own, called a proposition, and our sharing that

common belief together becomes the reason others attribute to us for our meetings. Now we have what the Bible calls *fellowship*, which some (those who share the belief) can enter into, and those who do not, cannot. Now we could list several things that could qualify as that faith in the truth of a proposition, without any rational proof of it: our spiritual re-birth, the second coming of Jesus, and our own resurrection from death to share the eternal life of God in Heaven, for example. You will notice the conspicuous absence of *the Resurrection of Jesus* from this list. The Resurrection is not included in the list because it is a different kind of proposition. The Resurrection of Jesus was a historical fact, not a theological proposition. We would do well to remember that all the Disciples believed the Resurrection because they met the Resurrected Christ; for them, it would have been foolish to say that Jesus was still dead and buried. Our entire Christian Faith depends on the historical reality of the Resurrection of Jesus, because that fact is the justification for our faith in the theological (soteriological) propositions of New Testament writers.

Now let's get back to these two or three who meet in the name of Jesus, to share the fellowship of their common faith. What if they are two- or three-hundred, or two- or three- thousand people, who share the same common faith? That faith, affirmed by the multitude, becomes both the substance of the fellowship and the answer to the critic. We are instructed in 1 Peter 3:15, to *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you*. We say that our church meetings symbolize our union with Christ in God, because they provide us an opportunity to agree with one another in matters about which we pray *Thy Will be done* together; and with a forum in which to build up one another *in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of*

Christ: (Ephesians 4:12), which we call the edification of believers. Thus Hebrews 10:25 (and not Jesus) tells us not to forsake *the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*. We may say that Jesus did not ordain church meetings because the ordinance was unnecessary; He knew that true believers would meet together even without His telling them to do so, in order to encourage one another and help each other; to share the love of God and their material prosperity with one another; and to continue thus until He returned. In all cases then, churches have good reasons to meet together even without Christ's ordaining the meetings.)

V God's faithfulness is perpetual. (God used a lot of verses in Exodus to remind the Children of Israel that He was keeping His promises (Covenant) with their forefathers, and He commanded them to be faithful to Him in this Covenant relationship as well. Jesus also promised never to leave us or to forsake us, even until the end of the world; and He wants us to be just as faithful to Him. We can probably imagine human parents who are disappointed by the selfishness and rebelliousness of *their* children; can we not understand God's jealousy for the faithfulness of His? We should consider passages like John 10 as warnings for people who think their ideas about church work are better, or smarter, than God's are. Jesus said, *my sheep know my voice, the voice of another they will not follow*.)

A God wanted Old Testament Israel to be just as faithful to Him as He was to them. (God was compassionate; He gave them His Law on tablets of stone before He demanded that they follow it. He was considerate; He explained His law and His ordinances in considerable detail throughout the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And God was patient; He not only provided the Children of Israel with instructions for how to stay on His good side, He told

them how they could get back on His good side after offending Him, and then He sent them many prophets to tell them when they needed to repent something. God commanded them to love Him and obey His Commandments; and He patiently waited for them to repent and turn back to Him when they fell short.

And all the time, God was preparing them, and the geo-political arena of their era, for the coming of the Messiah. God commanded their love for Him, but they were blinded by their humanism and could not love Him properly. They were so blinded by their humanism that they did not even recognize the Messiah when He came. This, too, was part of the plan that we call the Foreknowledge of God. Finally God sent the Messiah, and the Jews rejected Him just as Pharaoh in Egypt had rejected Moses. God commanded their faithfulness, even knowing that they would not be faithful, just as God commanded Pharaoh to let the Children of Israel go out of Egypt, even knowing that his heart was too hard to obey. The command to be faithful fell on deaf ears; thus God included even the Jews under sin, so that the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God could avail for them too. They still do not understand; and ironically, we only understand because of our New Testament Covenant with God in Jesus Christ.)

B Christians need to learn how to be just as faithful with our lives. (We see a bad example, of unfaithfulness, in the story of the Children of Israel, but it is an instructive example nonetheless. How can we, believers, benefit from their bad example? The following observations summarize our benefit briefly:

1) God is patient, but not forever. We should note that just as God gave Pharaoh 10 chances and the Children of Israel several centuries to get it right, so the Bible promises that *if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (I John 1:9). Confessing sin precludes making excuses for it. We have until the Second Coming of Christ to get it right.

2) God gave the Children of Israel two ordinances, of which we read in Chapter 13, by which to remember Him and commemorate what He did for them. He did not give them any ordinances, or any permission even, to remind Him of what they were doing for Him. Amos tells us that God had no use for substitutions for His ordinances: *I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols* (Amos 5:21-23). If God spoke so harshly to Old Testament people who abandoned His Law and ordinances for humanistic substitutions, why do we think that contemporary humanistic substitutions are any more acceptable? They are not. We have no scriptural basis for changing either the symbols and ceremonies of Baptism and Communion, or their meanings and roles in the Church.)

3) Our three ordinances (membership and attendance in Church meetings, the Baptism, and the Lord's Supper) are the means by which the Grace of God is communicated, or spread and shared, throughout the Body of Christ. They are the means of communication of Grace, not the mechanisms of delivery of it. The exact mechanism is called the mystery of Christ, in Mark 4:11, Romans 11:25 and 16:25, and especially Ephesians 3. It is a mystery because it is hard to understand, even hidden from most people; but we can see the results as grace works its way into and through our lives, even if we cannot see the mechanism. The result of our keeping of the ordinances of the Church is the growth of the Grace of God among us. Grace grows among us who are faithful to Christ, in a sort of symbiotic proportion to that faithfulness, because God is faithfulness to us. Then let us redouble our efforts to be faithful to Him.)