

Celebrate The Lord's Supper

Celebrate

The Lord's

Supper

And

Enjoy The Benefits

At Home and At Church

Ed Horak

Celebrate The Lord's Supper

(Alternate Title)

Enjoy / Experience

**God's
Goodness**

**The Lord's Supper
At Home and At Church**

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Celebrate The Lord's Supper

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Celebrate The Lord's Supper

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Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ came to bring us a brand new and living way based on His grace and truth and not on some sort of reworked religious set of rules and regulations. When Jesus came to live among us, He was described as being ‘full of grace and truth’ – He simply overflowed with it. Whenever anyone touched Him in faith they were changed for the better. The sick were healed, the lame walked, and the lepers were cleansed. Those bound by sin were set free and then empowered to live holy lives. The ignorant were taught God's ways, and the disciples were called and trained to pass on the message of good news that God had come to save and restore mankind.

At the cross, Jesus finished the work that God had set before Him, and we now live in a dispensation or realm where God is calling all mankind to enjoy His salvation in Christ.

This book concentrates on what God has already done in Christ, and how we can now appreciate, receive and enjoy this magnificent provision as His free gift to us through celebrating the Lord's Supper.

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God is personally interested in every facet of your life – spirit, soul and body, and as you participate in this teaching devotional, He will surely manifest Himself to you in a special way as He enriches you with His life.

God (the Word) dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ and gave us an opportunity to behold His weighty substance or glory up close and personally. Up to this time God was mostly seen through the lens of a mostly perverted religious institution, but when Jesus came this all changed.

John 1:14-15

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

As you read on, let the full supply of God's grace and truth in Christ meet your every need.

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Chapter 1

The Intended Blessing

God's heart or delight is to bless man so much with His goodness that we all turn to Him (repent) with a heart of thankfulness for having forgiven us of all our sins and begin to adore Him in worship for His holiness.

The first thing to recognize is that He is full of goodness to give! Unfortunately, many have a warped understanding of God: that He is looking down on us, waiting for us to slip up so that He can punish us in some way. This cannot be further from the truth.

The wonderful truth in the record shows that the punishment for our sin has already fallen on Jesus at the cross. He has already suffered in our place and paid the price for our salvation. The just claims of God have already met!

The way is now open for all mankind to receive God's abundant forgiveness and blessing as His free gift to us...this is the good news that we spread.

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‘With Fervent Desire’

Jesus made this remarkable statement when He celebrated what has been called the ‘Last Supper’ or Passover on earth with His disciples:

Luke 22:14-15

14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. 15 Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ...

He had celebrated at least two other Passover meals with them before, but His focus and fervent desire had all along been on this one. He knew He was about to suffer for them and us at the cross, and knew that His substitutionary sacrifice would open the way into the Father's presence in a brand new way never experienced before.

He was fulfilling prophecy before their eyes, and was totally committed to establishing a permanent relationship with His disciples. His death would lead to their life for eternity and His desire for this was rooted in all consuming love. He ‘burned’ to consummate His life's work with the greatest act of love ever, and so He sat with them and shared these moments of intimacy just before His betrayal.

The disciples had only to receive what He was to about to do. At this point none of them comprehended the magnitude of God's love about to be poured out on them, yet He pursued them nevertheless. This is the heart of God: He pursues, we eventually respond.

God's goodness must be received, for He will not force His will on anyone. The following scriptures highlight God's goodness towards us.

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Psalm 86:15

15 But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.

John 1:12

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Romans 2:3-4

4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Romans 5:16-17

17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:9

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

1 John 4:9

9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

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Each scripture describes some benefit that we enjoy because of God's love for us.

God's nature and will are perfectly made manifest to us in the person and work of Jesus. Jesus said that if you have seen Him, you have seen the Father (John 14:9). At the Last Supper When He blessed the bread, broke it and then gave it to His disciples, He was in essence giving Himself to them. His heart's intent was to bless them through this covenant meal.

This was not the time for discipline or even self-examination. He had just washed their feet in an act of supreme self sacrifice. They were cleansed by what He had done for them, and not by what they had done or even were later to do for Him. Grace (God's unmerited favor) was abounding towards them, and all they had to do was to sit and receive it.

A Celebration Of Blessing

Celebrate

'To move in a circle, reel to and fro, dance'

The Lord's Supper has always been and ought still to be a celebration of His goodness and mercy, where the focus is on His grace and not on self introspection. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians the correction he brought was in response to gross error and selfishness in that church at that time. To rightly divide the Word today his words of correction, as they apply to the Lord's Supper, ought not to be the standard for the church today every time it is celebrated. I will share more on this matter in a later chapter.

God has created us for close fellowship with Him, and thankfully His blood alone has paid the price for this.

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No amount of human effort, repentance or even self examination brings us closer than we already are through His blood.

Ephesians 1:7-8

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,

The redemption and forgiveness we enjoy is according to the 'riches of His grace' and **not** according to the depth of our repentance, our sorrow or even our religious efforts to in some way prove to God we are worthy to receive His blessing. An 'unnatural and religious' fear of God may seem appropriate to some, but is rooted in self effort (works) and not in the completed work or grace of Christ.

Neither is our intimacy with God guaranteed simply because we are familiar with a particular way of celebrating The Lord's Supper. In fact familiarity and ritual can sometimes stand in the way of intimacy. Expectant faith is always the essential ingredient of a vital relationship with God through Jesus (Hebrews 11:6).

God's intended blessing through the Lord's Supper is freely given and must be freely received with thanksgiving. His kingdom rule is marked by righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17), where joy is that deep sense of well being that is the fruit of an abiding trust in what the Lord has already done for us. Kingdom joy is represented by the wine of the Lord's Supper.

God is a joyful happy God who enjoys celebrating! Sadly many have a picture of God as still angry with

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mankind despite the fact that His just anger was poured out and exhausted on Christ at the cross!

In addition God has often put a celebratory stamp on His dealings with us. For example, the Day of Pentecost in the New Testament speaks of an outbreak of joyful abandon as the Holy Spirit was poured out on receptive and yielded disciples. This was no somber religious moment; rather a time where so much blessing flowed into and through their hearts that the onlookers thought the disciples were 'drunk' (Acts 2:12-21)! It was in fact totally different to the first Pentecost at Mt Sinai, fifty days after the first Passover in the Wilderness when the Israelites received the Law. That fateful day three thousand died, whereas Pentecost in the New Testament saw three thousand come to the Lord in joyful salvation! Whereas the letter (of the Law) kills, the Spirit now gives life!

This ought to be the focus of our celebration.

The 'new wine' of God's freedom in Christ still perplexes many. Even Jesus' first miracle where He turned water into wine at a wedding feast shows that God is in fact pro joyful celebrations. He is not sour but sweet. Who are we to turn The Lord's Supper into a time where we focus on our shortcomings instead of His majesty and perfection? When we focus on our imperfections we take the focus off the very one who is willing and able to change us from glory to glory.

Moreover, the 'cup' of communion is described as the 'cup of blessing' (1 Corinthians 10:16). It is not a cup of cursing, but a cup that signifies an overflowing, 'more than enough' blessing. Let us therefore purpose to open our hearts to God's intended blessing through The Lord's Supper, something that can be enjoyed both at home and 'in church'.

Chapter 2

The Lord's Supper Defined

If you have been around Christian circles for a while you will probably have experienced a 'communion service' of some sort, or what some call 'The Lord's Supper', 'Breaking of Bread', 'Mass', or even 'Eucharist'.

The celebration of communion or The Lord's Supper is one of two (and two only) ordinances or obligatory acts commanded by the Lord Jesus for His church, passed on as tradition by the Apostles and practiced by the early church.

Whereas 'water baptism' dramatically pictures our **entering** into covenant with Jesus Christ by faith; 'Communion' or 'The Lord's Supper' portrays our **continued fellowship** with Him. In this covenant meal we **remember** what the Lord has already done for us by His grace, and we respond in continued faith and obedience to His wonderful provision. Quite simply, our lives as Christians are wrapped up between the realities of the spiritual truths found in these two expressions of our faith.

This book will explore twelve focus points designed to develop our intimacy with our Father in Heaven, so

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before we begin let us look at some useful working definitions to avoid any confusion.

Some Useful Definitions

Different Christian groups or traditions use different terms to refer to the same basic practice. Here are the main ones.

'The Lord's Supper' – 1 Corinthians 11:20

Jesus instituted this Christian meal during the Jewish Passover just before His betrayal and arrest before He went to the cross (Matthew 26:26-29), and the practice was historically celebrated on 'The Lord's Day', the first day of the week (Sunday) which honors Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

'Breaking Bread' – Acts 2:42

Here, the connection is made with Jesus when He 'broke the bread' at the Passover meal, the night of His betrayal. The bread symbolized His body that was 'broken' for us so that we might no longer be 'broken'.

'Holy Communion' – 1 Corinthians 10:16

Two versions of the Bible translate the Greek Word '*koinonia*' as 'communion' which primarily means 'fellowship'. Other versions translate the word as 'sharing' and 'participation'. Through time, because the word was used commonly, The Lord's Supper became known as 'communion'.

'Eucharist' – Matthew 26:27

When Jesus took the bread at The Last Supper, He 'gave thanks' – Greek '*eucharistia*'. It means 'thanksgiving' or giving of thanks (to God). In the context of celebrating

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'The Lord's Supper' as Christians today, we are thankful for what the Lord has done in sacrificing Himself for the forgiveness of our sins and the healing of our bodies.

'Mass' – No Bible Reference

Typically used in The Roman Catholic Church to refer to The Lord's Supper or Communion. The non - biblical term from the Latin '*missa*', is possibly derived from the term used in the service when the deacon is dismissed at the end of the service.

In the Mass, Catholics typically believe that the bread and wine are literally transformed (transubstantiation) into the body and blood of Jesus at the time of the 'Mass'. Forgiveness of sins comes through the act of eating the bread (wafer) as a repetition of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Most non Catholic churches prefer to see The Lord's Supper as merely a memorial or remembrance of the Lord's work on the cross, and not a 'repeated sacrifice' that is implied in this belief.

The Vital Ingredient of Faith

Like anything else in our walk with the Lord, The Lord's Supper ought to be celebrated in faith that His presence is right here with us no matter whatever form of service or liturgy we follow. He has promised to never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), so at the time of partaking we can expect His presence to be with us by faith. Faith allows us to draw near to God, even 'sense' His presence, so it is desirable to expect Him to honor your obedience to this ordinance or requirement. Worship is the appropriate way to honor His presence at this time.

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The Lord's Supper ought never to be some clinical mental exercise, but rather a meaningful moment and expression of a thankful heart where the Living Christ is actively recognized as gracing His people with His presence.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

In the next chapter, we discover the freedom we have in Christ to celebrate The Lord's Supper at church **and** at home.

Chapter 3

At Home And At Church

Celebrating 'At Home' And 'At Church'

Thankfully we can all enjoy God's benefits whenever and wherever we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Jesus has promised to bless any group of believers that gathers together in His name with His presence whether they be at home, in a small or large group or 'in church'.

Matthew 18:19-20

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

A 'sanctuary' is any place that believers have set aside to commune with God. Your home (and also your own body) is just as much a sanctuary (or at least it should be) as the 'Church' sanctuary. The Holy Spirit within you is the sanctifying agent wherever you go and in whatever you do in Jesus name, not the physical building you happen to be in.

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A cornerstone of the New Testament priesthood of all believers is that everyone who trusts in Christ are included. There is today no special class of priests as was the case with the priesthood of Aaron under the Law of Moses.

I was taught this truth from scripture when I first received the Lord as my savior. Since that time our family has enjoyed celebrating the Lord's Supper many times in the privacy of our home.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...

Revelation 1:5-6

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

We all have the God - given privilege to 'draw near' (as priests) to our heavenly Father through our High Priest Jesus (Hebrews 8:1). This opens the door for every believer to celebrate God's goodness through the Lord's Supper. There will more on this in later chapters.

Old Testament Practice

When Moses instructed the Israelites to prepare for leaving Egypt on the night of Passover, he made sure they understood that this covenant meal was to be celebrated **at home** with each family or household (Exodus 12:1-20). They did not gather at some local meeting place, but each household celebrated Passover at home with the head of the

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home officiating over the meal. They did not need a special officiate like a priest or minister to participate in this covenant meal.

New Testament Practice

It was the common practice in New Testament times to celebrate the Lord's Supper together in a 'communal' setting. Generally, the setting was the home, not the local synagogue or 'church building'.

The early disciples met and celebrated The Lord's Supper from 'house to house' (Acts 2:46). Yes, they were under apostolic authority and teaching, but they were also free to practice this blessing in their homes.

The Bible does not promote isolated individualism in the practice of our faith, but neither does it promote centralized control by some elitist professional priest craft. Today there seems to be a resurgence of 'communal' sharing at the household level of the blessing intended by the Lord through communion. This may be a reaction against the isolation and anonymity that is often felt in the large 'mega' church experience in some communities.

We are 'wired' for mutually beneficial relationship, so be encouraged in the non negotiable truth of your access to God through Jesus' blood alone, to which The Lord's Supper testifies. Be bold and use this book to begin celebrating The Lord's Supper wherever and whenever you are led by the Holy Spirit.

How To Use This Book

This book is intended to be a handy reference for not only you as an individual believer at home, but certainly for couples, families, small group and church leaders / ministers officiating at church meetings as well.

Be open to celebrating The Lord's Supper at weddings, during hospital visitations and even when visiting folk unable to get out from old age and retirement communities. If you are involved in prison ministry you can celebrate the Lord's Supper with those inmates that know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Use the following twelve chapters as a daily, weekly or monthly devotional. Church leaders may wish to use this resource to provide a focus during a monthly communion church service. Remember to use the material to characterize The Lord's Supper as a celebration of His goodness for yourself and or your friends, small group or family.

Practically, it will be helpful to prepare the bread and wine (grape juice) elements beforehand so that you can flow from the devotional into the celebration itself. Be open and prepared in faith for God to honor your times of intimacy with His manifest presence and intended blessings. Your faith expectancy is God's invitation to 'surprise' you with His abundant favor.

Use the suggested prayer at the end of each chapter to pray over your life, friends and family or church as you partake. Maybe read through the chapter ahead of time and make notes, summarizing what the Lord is highlighting to you through the material.

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Section A

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Chapter 1

Understanding The Blood Covenant

When we set aside our modern sensibilities and read the Bible through 'covenant eyes' we see the greatest story ever told dripping in blood! Of course we want to know why there is this emphasis in the Bible.

Blood represents life, and the giving of one's lifeblood for the benefit of another is the essence of covenant as the Bible reveals it.

Leviticus 17:11-12

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.'

In this chapter we explore ancient covenant beginnings in order to lay a foundation of Jesus' blood sacrifice on the cross and what it means to us today as we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

What is A Covenant?

Briefly, a covenant is a binding pact between two parties involving the 'cutting of flesh where blood flows'. This Old Testament practice is carried into the New Testament where the definition includes a binding contract or league made with another party. Covenant is mentioned over three hundred times in the Bible, and involves agreements in three different categories: between God and man; man and man; and man with God.

As this and later chapters unfold these definitions will be expanded on and better understood in relation to what happened in all the historic covenants leading up to our own covenant in Christ.

The very first recorded covenant event in the Bible was when God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins after the glory of God that previously clothed them was lost when they fell into sin (Genesis 3:21). Blood was shed as the animals were killed to procure the skins that were used to cover them. This was symbolic of God's provision for Adam and Eve in contrast to their own earlier efforts to cover themselves with fig leaves.

The Need For Covenant

God created the earth for man to enjoy and have dominion over. Regrettably Adam, who is called the 'son of God' (Luke 3:38) and made in God's likeness and image, sinned. His sin effectively 'sold out' or transferred his God given and delegated authority on earth to the 'illegal' ruler or 'god' of this world system: satan, the fallen angel. The following scriptures make the connection between God's

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delegated authority, Adam (representative of mankind), and satan usurping authority on earth from man through sin.

Genesis 1:26

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Psalms 115:16

6 The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's;
But the earth He has given to the children of men.

Psalms 8:6

6 You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet, ...

Luke 4:5-7

5 Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.

For the temptation described in Luke 4:5-7 to be genuine, satan must have had authority on earth given to him by the one who was already in authority, that is: the man Adam. If satan had been lying to Jesus about this authority (Vs 6) Jesus would have pointed this out, making the temptation not real. Adam had come under satan's authority when he sinned at the fall. Since that time all

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mankind has needed to be brought out from under evil authority by means of God's covenants.

The Bible teaches that God is ultimately sovereign, and will work all things to His glory, so we see man's history characterized by God coming to him in covenant to offer a way out of the dilemma of sin and its terrible consequences. The power of choice we have to come out from satan's authority falls within the larger orbit of God's ultimate authority or sovereignty, and make us beings created in God's image and not mere robots. True love and worship of God is based on conscious choice, not coercion.

Authority on earth given to man could only be reestablished through man, (God could not 'legally' go against His own choice of delegation), yet because spiritual death and corruption had been introduced to man's natural and spiritual genes through Adam's sin, there was a problem. This meant that mankind was inherently unable to save himself. Only a perfect man: a 'second or last Adam' could save man. Consider these powerful scriptures that point to Jesus Christ functioning in His humanity as the perfect man, reversing what Adam did.

Romans 5:12, 18-19

12 Therefore, just as through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense (Adam's) judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's (Jesus') righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

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1 Corinthians 15:20-23

21 For since by man (Adam) came death, by Man (Jesus) also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

From scripture we know that Jesus was uniquely the 'God-Man' (fully God and fully man). He was born of a virgin, and thus qualified by his sinless birth and life to stand as the perfect covenant mediator between God and man. This is the genius of God manifest in the seemingly vulnerability of a 'man' giving His life for His brothers and sisters in covenant.

God the Father began setting things up for Jesus the Son to come as the Messiah (anointed by the Holy Spirit) way back in the beginning of man's history by means of a series of ancient covenant practices. The first time the word 'covenant' is used is when God made a covenant of protection from disaster with Noah when the whole earth was flooded.

Genesis 6:18

18 But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark--you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

Since that time God has unfolded His plan for the salvation and restoration of man through three main covenants. (There were other sub-covenants like the Noahaic, Davidic and Palestinian covenants that also reflect God's plan to redeem and restore mankind to full sonship, but for our purposes we focus on the following three main covenants outlined below:

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- The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15:18) – established with Abraham the ‘father’ or originator of our faith to create the chosen people or Jews who would bring forth the Messiah, the Savior of the world.
- The Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19:5) – added as an addendum to the Abrahamic Covenant because of Israel’s sin for a season till the Jewish Messiah Jesus came and fulfilled the Abrahamic Covenant as the promised ‘Seed’.
- The New Covenant in Jesus blood (Luke 22:20) – the consummation of all previous covenants that had been entered into before, and the covenant under which all believers live today.

These covenants are all connected in some way because of God’s unchanging nature, purposes and dealings with man. They all point to and ultimately focus on the centrality of Christ and His completed work at the cross.

Hebrews 1:1-4

1:1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ...

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Right now we live our lives based on what God has already achieved in Christ. What went before must now be seen in this glorious light. He is the one we look to, not Moses, Abraham or anyone else for that matter. He is the one seated at God's right hand, upholding us in all that we do or hope to do. Not Moses, Elijah, Abraham, but Jesus alone sits at God's right hand...and we are in Him (Ephesians 2:4)!

Jesus is the brightness of God's glory and no one must supplant His preeminence. Everything we see and experience must be 'filtered' through a revelation of the risen Christ. It would be folly to settle for anything or anyone else now that God has spoken to us through His Son!

Jesus is the 'heir of all things' (Hebrews 1:2) and there is nothing worthwhile outside of a life in Christ. He is the hinge on which all history turns. Be sure to go through this door.

Covenant Basics

Any covenant involves a 'principle of exchange': what's mine becomes yours and what's yours is mine. This win / win situation exchanges one party's weaknesses for the other party's strengths. The stronger party gets legal opportunity to extend His dominion over the weaker, and the weaker party receives strength and protection from the stronger. Of course with a covenant between God and man, God has no weakness to exchange, only His strength. What a gift this turns out to be in our human frailties and needs. We receive God's strengths in exchange for our weaknesses.

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A covenant is initiated at a meeting where the **motives** or reason for **entering into** the covenant are established between the parties. A **mediator** would represent the parties to each other and there would be **bloodletting**, usually of an animal, that took place on an **altar** in what is known as a covenant sacrifice.

Immediately we can see that Jesus fits perfectly into this scenario as the mediator between God and man on the one hand, and man and God on the other. He is also the sacrifice whose lifeblood is shed on the altar (the cross) so that the necessary price is paid.

The **terms of the covenant** are spoken and consist of **blessings** for adhering to the covenant and **curses** for breaking it. An **oath** is also sworn, and the covenant is **sealed with a sign**, (in our case the indwelling Holy Spirit is the sign and seal of the New Covenant).

Names and gifts are then **exchanged**, and the covenant celebrated with a **meal** or feast. Garment exchanges also take place and a covenant handshake where the blood from both parties comes together as the hands and wrists are clasped. Today's modern handshake is a 'watered down' version of the ancient blood covenant custom.

In short, a binding covenant pact is established between two parties when the one party formally **calls** the other party into covenant, who then responds to the call. You may remember Moses and the burning bush, or Jesus calling the disciples by the sea. These were both covenant calls. The parties then formally **enter into covenant** and promise to keep the covenant.

In short, the order that is followed is summarized as follows:

- Call to engage in covenant
- Response to enter into covenant

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- Commitment to keep the covenant.

At this point you may be able to start connecting the dots with some of what you may have read about Abraham, Moses and Jesus and His disciples. God calls a man to enter into covenant with Him. Man responds to the call of God, enters into covenant with Him and then begins to keep or follow through with God's plan after that.

Of course we know that apart from Jesus' perfect obedience, all other men have their faults, hence the intriguing stories of forgiveness and restoration that pepper the historical record in the Bible of God's dealings with man through the ages both on an individual level as well as on a national scale as with the nation of Israel.

In our time, our covenant with Jesus is based on His perfection, not ours. He perfectly represents God to us, and also perfectly represents us (mankind) to God. He is able to do this because he has tasted the human experience with all its challenges and temptations yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:16

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus knows what you and I go through, and has come to help us by means of the covenant in His blood.

We are the weaker party and receive His grace to help us in our need. The Lord's Supper we celebrate is our reminder of the forgiveness that Jesus purchased with His blood when we fall short of keeping the terms of the New Covenant. It also points to the grace or divine favor and ability we need to live uprightly in a world that attempts to pull us away from God's purposes in our lives.

Psalm 105, 78 and Acts 7

These passages of scripture provide a summary of God's covenant dealings with His people over the course of almost two thousand years before Christ. Take a moment to read them to get a big picture perspective of at least the two significant covenants God made with Abraham and Moses.

First, Psalm 105 highlights God's covenant commitment to His people and how He kept His covenant promises.

Psalm 105:8

8 He remembers His covenant forever,
The word which He commanded, for a thousand
generations,

Sadly, Psalm 78 describes how Israel failed so many times, yet on a positive note it also dramatically shows God's unending mercy towards them despite their failings.

Psalm 78:38-39

38 But He, being full of compassion, forgave their
iniquity,
And did not destroy them.
Yes, many a time He turned His anger away,
And did not stir up all His wrath;
39 For He remembered that they were but flesh,
A breath that passes away and does not come again.

The Israelites broke covenant many times, yet God pursued them time and again according to His promises. His pursuit after their hearts is the forerunner of the divine

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romance that awaits every believer in the Lord who surrenders to His passionate advances.

Acts 7 gives us an historical perspective right up to the time of Christ. Stephen's martyrdom, cruelly perpetrated by proud religious bigots is a classic example of God's love and forgiveness extended through His covenant people. In this case Stephen who was full of the Holy Spirit dramatically extends forgiveness to his killers.

Acts 7:60

60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Like the Lord before Him who forgave His killers right at the moment of His agony on the cross, Stephen also was so possessed by love that he was able to forgive his killers from his knees as he was being stoned to death.

As in all things with God and His Word, we need to study it with a view to giving Him opportunities to connect the dots in our understanding. Keep in mind that the focus of God's plan is always Jesus and what He has purchased for us through His blood.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you read these and the other scriptures referenced in this book so that you may comprehend what God wants to say to you. Personalize this reference as the basis for your prayer for spiritual enlightenment:

Ephesians 1:17-20

17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the

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riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His
power toward us who believe, according to the
working of His mighty power 20 which He worked
in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and
seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly
places,...

In the next chapter we continue to see how God beautifully lays a covenant foundation for Christ's coming through Abraham who lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (modern day Iraq) almost two thousand years before Christ. Abraham was from a family of moon worshippers in the region of modern day Iraq before he met the God who made the moon!

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate This Lord’s Supper, we are taken with the grand plan of redemption and restoration you have set in motion through the covenant.

We are thankful that you called us when we were in desperate need of your help, and helped us enter into covenant with you.

We pray today that you continue to unveil Your marvelous provision, protection and purposes for our lives.

Amen.”

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Chapter 2

God Cuts Covenant With Abram

The covenant God cut with Abram almost four hundred and thirty years before Moses and the Law Covenant opened the way for Jesus the Messiah to come though the Jewish people. Jesus came to save us as a fulfillment of God's promise and grace and not by man's own efforts or obedience or holiness. Everything to do with this covenant began with God and would be consummated by Him. Abram was completely unable to fulfill the covenant and had to totally rely on God's ability to bring things to pass.

God Initiates The Covenant With Abram

Genesis 12:1-5

12:1 Now the LORD had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father's house,

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To a land that I will show you.
2 I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you and make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be
blessed."

Notice that "I will's" in the passage. All five of the things God promised to do depended on Him and not on Abram. God gave, Abram simply believed and received.

Abram was seventy five years old when the promise of a land and nationhood was made. Abram's descendents were to be a nation set apart for God's purposes: His chosen people, the Jews. They certainly did not qualify because of any inherent positive qualities suited to God's plan, or that they were a great and mighty nation. No, they were to be a people that God would raise up to His glory. He would be the source and sustainer of their blessing. It is always good to keep God as your source in everything. He delights in making 'something' out of 'nothing'.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, ...

Abram Believes God

Genesis 15:1-6

15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." 2 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" 4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." 5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

In Verse 6 Abram **believed** God's promise and it was accounted to him for righteousness. At this point he had done not a single good work. He simply responded to God with faith in his heart. That was his part. He thus ruled out any notion that his son Isaac and any descendants that followed were a product of anything other than the grace of God. He was made righteous or justified by his faith, and not anything else he did then or even later.

Romans 4:1-5

4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was

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accounted to him for righteousness." 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. 5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

Abraham is the 'father' of our faith and our righteousness today comes when we simply believe God's promises in Christ. No amount of doing, obedience, religious ritual, prayer, fasting, Bible reading etc will make us righteous; only Christ (who is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of a 'Seed') make us righteous before God. Of course all the things mentioned above are valid spiritual disciplines, but they must find their root and place in an already established righteousness that comes by faith and faith alone.

Abram Meets With Melchizedek The 'King-Priest'

Later Abram meets up with Melchizedek the mysterious King / Priest of God. This man stands as a type of the Lord Jesus as our High priest and king. Before considering more about this man and how his meeting with Abram connects with The Lord's Supper, we look at the animal sacrifices that were made to establish the covenant between God and Abraham.

Genesis 15:7-11

7 Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." 8 And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" 9 So He said

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to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

When God slew the animals, He was showing Abram (whose name means 'lofty father') that He was most definitely a covenant making and keeping God. Abram was asleep when God did this highlighting the importance of 'believing and receiving' over trying to earn God's favor by self effort. The only part Abram played was to drive away the vultures from the covenant sacrifice. In our context, this speaks of the enemy trying to steal the Word from us before it starts to produce results in our lives. We are to 'run him off' with our words of faith in Jesus name, just as Abram drove away the vultures.

God then shows Abram things to come in the future, outlining a history in advance (prophecy) of the Jewish nation's captivity and later deliverance from Egyptian slavery. God shows him things which were to take place over four hundred years later. They were to come out of slavery with great possessions and inherit a land as an everlasting covenant benefit, something which is still being contested today before our eyes in the news in modern day Israel with the Palestinian problem.

God made this promise of the land as part of an everlasting covenant, and there is no sound evidence that He has changed His mind in our time.

‘Abram’ Becomes ‘Abraham’

Genesis 17:1-6

17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

In time God reveals His name as “Almighty God” to Abram and inserts Himself into the middle of Abram’s name to make it **Abraham**, thus eternally identifying Himself with His covenant man. In our context, this is what happens when Jesus comes to live on the inside of us in the New Covenant. When we enter into covenant with Him at our conversion and the new birth: He comes to live in us, and we become totally identified by and in Him.

God spoke into Abraham’s life his future destiny again in more detail. He called ‘those things that were not as if they were already so’ (Romans 4:17). This is God’s *modus operandi* – the way He does things. In this sense He operates by faith and wants us to do the same. He wants us as His sons and daughters to define our future as we learn to live under His authority and speak destiny in line with his will.

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At this point Abraham and Sarah had no child, and they were old, well past child bearing age. So their child had to be a miracle, and when Isaac was eventually conceived and born, he was most certainly a child of promise and not a product of the natural order of things.

The sign of the Abrahamic covenant was **circumcision** (where blood from the most sensitive private part flowed).

Genesis 17:10-11

10 This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; 11 and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Once again, this came many years before God made and the covenant of Law with Moses. So Abraham's covenant came well before and even outlasted Moses covenant when Christ came in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. Whereas the Law was based on demanded obedience, the Abrahamic Covenant was based on God's promise and a supply of God's grace, favor and enablement. The Abrahamic Covenant is thus superior in 'quality' and in duration to Moses' covenant. Many people in church circles have little idea of this and its significance. They continue to focus on the Law and virtually ignore the overarching grace based covenant which was established years before the Law was ever given.

Isaac And Ishmael

Here God makes an important point about succession through the generations. In Abraham's family the promise was to come through Isaac, his child of promise and faith and not through Ishmael, the child of Abraham and Sarah's human efforts (works) to 'help' make the promise come to pass. Impatience had set in and Sarai suggested to Abraham that they take matters into their own hands and produce a child through Hagar her servant girl (an acceptable custom at the time). Obviously Abraham and Sarai, as her name was at this stage, did not fully comprehend God's grace nor believe or trust His ability to fulfill His promise at this point in their journey.

Genesis 17:15-20

15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her." 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" 19 Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly.

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God made it clear to Abraham that He would fulfill the covenant through His chosen successors: Isaac and his descendants, and not Ishmael and his descendants. Nevertheless God also comforted Abraham about Ishmael's future, promising to take care of him as well.

Like Abram's name was changed to become Abraham, Sarai's name is also changed to become Sarah. Once again God inserts Himself into the center of someone's life by means of changing their name. She becomes Abraham's 'princess or queen', a noble woman before Isaac is even conceived. He looked past her current unbelief and saw her potential and eventual victory over unbelief and renamed her accordingly. She was ninety years old and well past child bearing age. Both Abraham and Sarah laughed about this. The key here is that Sarai now had a constant reminder that God was now in the picture. Her new name had God at the center of it, and every time Abraham called her name, God's presence was invoked. (The name given to a child that is born is very important, so choose Godly names that speak to the child's Godly heritage and destiny, and not some odd name).

You may be facing some tough situations, and if you don't laugh, you might just cry. Insert God's promises in the midst of your troubles, laugh if you have to, but believe and see God turn things around just like He did with Abraham and Sarah. They are the 'father and mother' of our faith.

Your deliverance is really not a matter of trying harder to be better, or even working to solve your problems by being more determined; rather it comes when settle back into the restful arms of your heavenly Father who has promised to make all things work out for your good (Romans 8:28). We

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live, move and have our being based not on our heroic efforts to be spiritual but on Jesus' heroic work at the cross.

From the above passage about Isaac and Ishmael it is clear God loves and desires to bless all people, Jews and Arabs (descendents of Ishmael) alike, but He has a plan that must find its fulfillment in Christ who came through the line of Isaac. Once again, the point is not that Isaac and his descendents (the Jews) have anything inherently pure or noble about them. No, God chooses the least to bless the rest. The point is to see His grace in all His dealings with mankind. Nor is it that the Arabs (the descendents of Ishmael) have anything inherently impure about them. All mankind (Jew and Gentile alike) have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and thus stand in need of Jesus' redeeming blood (Romans 3:23). This ought to be the central focus right now in our dispensation, and not some sort of improper comparative nationalistic fervor based on ignorance of the scripture and God's heart for all mankind, no matter their background. We all stand in need of God's mercy regardless of our heritage.

Abraham And Isaac's Sacrifice

Genesis 22:1-2

22:1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 And He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

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Abraham and Sarah eventually did give birth to their supernatural son Isaac, who incidentally is a type of Jesus Christ, God's own Son supernaturally conceived and born to Mary. Then, the time came for the covenant between God and Abraham to be tested By God for its fidelity.

In the above account we see the seeds of God's plan for saving mankind at large. Isaac was Abraham's supernaturally conceived son of promise, whom he loved. He was to be offered as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah, considered to be one of the seven hills (mounts) around Jerusalem.

Abraham and Isaac understood sacrifice as a covenant requirement, and so they set off for Mount Moriah, a three day journey. On the third day they make their way up the mount and Isaac asks 'where is the sacrifice'? Abraham's answer shows his faith in God's provision and ability. If needs be, God will raise Isaac from the dead!

When you read on in the account, at the very moment of slaughter God stops Abraham. He sees his integrity and willingness to go through with the act of sacrifice, and in place of Isaac God shows Abraham a substitute ram caught in a nearby thicket. Abraham then sacrifices the ram and calls the place: 'The Lord will provide' – or Jehovah Jireh. At this point he saw forward to the sacrifice God would provide in His own son – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Abraham was showing great faith. God had promised him an heir and Isaac was produced. Nations would flow from this lineage. So he concluded that if Isaac had to be sacrificed, God would raise him from the dead. The book of Hebrews records this inspired commentary of that day's events.

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Hebrews 11:17-19

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

In this incident we must remember the covenant principle of exchange: 'what is yours is mine, and what is mine is yours'. Isaac was Abraham's son and God required him to be sacrificed in this test. When He saw Abraham's commitment to the covenant, He stepped in and in effect said that Jesus – His own son was now Abraham's! The exchange was made. So, Abraham's faithful obedience to the covenant in effect paved the way for God to legitimately send His 'only begotten' supernaturally conceived son Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 3:16).

God never does anything in a 'vacuum' but always in terms of covenant. Today God gains access to our lives in the same way. When we respond in faithful obedience to the terms of the covenant, and in effect open up a way for God to perform what He has promised in the New Covenant.

The focus will always be on Jesus: He is our covenant 'head' and we are in Him. Everything we need is accessed through Him by faith. Any blessing we enjoy is not based on our own righteous deeds but rather on His righteousness – what He did for us on the cross! We simply believe in Him and receive. The Christian life is not one of self effort or godliness, but rest in Christ and His sacrifice.

The Covenant With Abraham Marked by Blessing

Genesis 24:1, 34-35

24:1 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things...

35 The LORD has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys.

Abraham was mightily blessed in all things: spiritually and materially. Yet Abraham was not perfect. You could say that in many ways he fell short of God's glorious perfection. To start with he was in all likelihood a moon worshipper like his family. He doubted God at one stage when he resorted to his own efforts with Hagar to produce an heir, and then after Isaac had been conceived he felt that he had to lie about his wife's identity for fear of his life when he took a side journey at one time.

A situation arose where he was pressed by unbelief to hide his wife's true identity from King Abimelech of Gerar (Genesis 20:1-18). God nevertheless protected them both from harm, blessing both Abraham and Abimelech in an act of undeserved favor. Abraham was blessed with sheep, oxen and servants, had his wife restored to him, while Abimelech's household, including his wife was restored to child bearing fruitfulness. They had been barren during the time Sarah was in their household as Abraham's supposed sister.

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It is clear that the blessing on Abraham's life was due to God's grace and not because of Abraham's perfect track record. This blessing even spilled over onto those around Him. He was blessed in order to be a blessing!

Now this pattern of blessing also applied to Isaac his immediate heir and in turn much later even to Jacob his grandson. They were all blessed in the covenant because of their faith in God's grace and not because of their perfect performance. God's favor was on their lineage simply because He chose them as His covenant partners to establish the Jewish nation. It was this nation that came from the loins of Abraham that would ultimately bring forth the savior of the world, God's own son destined to be the one who would be the way of life and blessing for all mankind.

Today, the blessing we enjoy as children of God is because we have accepted the covenant offered to us by God through Jesus, and not because we deserve anything by our good deeds or even our faithful service. Faithful service is good, but every blessing we enjoy originates in God's heart of love for us and not our love for Him. He sets things in motion, we believe and receive and then enjoy.

We love Him because He first loved us and not the other way round!

1 John 4:19

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

God is the initiator, we are the responders.

Melchizedek And Abraham - The Connection With The Lord's Supper

To back track a little in the Abraham's life, we look at the connection between the meeting that Abraham had with Melchizedek and the Lord's Supper that we celebrate today.

Genesis 14:18-19

18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High.

Psalms 110:4

4 The LORD has sworn
And will not relent,
"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."

Hebrews 7:1-2

7:1 For this Melchizedek , king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace,"

Melchizedek is important because when he administered 'bread and wine' to Abraham, it was the first recorded account of 'Communion' in the Bible. He was also a king and priest at the same time foreshadowing Jesus and even ourselves in turn as a 'kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9).

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Melchizedek, whose name means 'King of Righteousness' and 'Peace' (Salem), blessed Abraham who is the 'father of all who believe' (Romans 4:16). The greater always blesses the lesser in covenant matters. Abraham was a man of faith and enjoyed the blessing simply because of his belief and not by keeping any set of laws. Interestingly, when the two met, there were no covenant terms of cursing pronounced. Abraham was operating under pure grace here. He even gave a tithe to Melchizedek, showing that tithing is not under the Law (which was added over four hundred years later) but under grace.

When Abraham received the bread and wine from Melchizedek, who was the one greater than himself, his act of humility symbolized the time when we as New Testament believers would receive the blessing from Jesus our 'King of righteousness' (Jehovah Tsidkenu) and 'peace' (Jehovah Shalom)". Like Melchizedek, Jesus is our greater one and deserves our tithes too. In Christ, righteousness and peace 'have kissed' (Psalm 85:10), and joy is thrown in for good measure too (Romans 14:17).

Righteousness, peace and joy are key kingdom attributes that follow each other in divine order. When we receive God's righteousness in Christ, we enjoy a peace that produces a deep seated sense of well being or joy.

Jesus is our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Faith and grace covenant) and not after the order of Aaron under Moses (the Law covenant). Faith precedes and supersedes the Law as it engages us with God on the basis of what He has done and not on the basis of what we have tried to do. Like Abraham we believe and it is credited to us for righteousness (right standing) with God.

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Romans 4:1-5

4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. 5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness ...

God is an expert at justifying the ungodly. Unfortunately many people feel they must first become godly in order to be justified or made right. This is not God's order. He makes us godly in Himself, **and then** we produce godly deeds (fruits of holiness) thereafter as we abide in his love and justification.

The Lord's Supper is about the completed work of Christ and is firmly rooted in the tradition of faith that Abraham exemplified when Melchizedek met him after his battle and victory over the kings of the surrounding nations (Genesis 12-13). It is important to see that our faith is rooted in Abraham – the father of our faith and not in some set of Law keeping religious rules and regulations.

What About Sodom And Gomorrah?

Was God really intent on destroying the two wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, or was He looking for His covenant 'friend' or partner Abraham to intervene as an intercessor / covenant partner? It appears that He let Abraham in on what He was about to do, so that He could

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find a reason **not** to destroy the people there. When Abraham went from fifty righteous down to ten, the implication is that God would have spared the cities if there were but one righteous person (Genesis 18:22-33).

Abraham's question was first: "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" The answer is no. God **is not** bent on destroying people, as some claim when disaster strikes. These people claim that famine, tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes and the like, are all supposed 'acts' of God's judgment on sinful men and women. Rather, as it was in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, God is still intent on seeking to save mankind, not destroy us. This fact is especially true when you remember that God's holy wrath and judgment has already fallen on Jesus at the cross for man's sin: past, present and future.

Our sin has already been punished, and God is **not** using sickness, disasters, and accidents to vent His anger against sin. He is not unjust, and does not exact punishment for our sins twice: first by laying them on Jesus at the cross and now in our time through some adversity. Rather the enemy, who comes to steal, kill and destroy, is the author of evil. He (satan) is the one who takes advantage of continued sin and ignorance. (The Earth today 'groans' as it waits for the full manifestation of the sons of God – Romans 8:18-22).

Jesus the grand 'game changer' has now come to give us life as He lives it. He is the good shepherd, and is not out to get you like some 'trigger happy judge bent on destruction the moment you step out of line! He is still at the father's right hand standing in the gap making up for any shortcomings we may have.

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John 10:10-11

10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Faith is weakened when you do not 'rightly divide the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15) and properly apportion to God what He done, and to the devil what he is doing. God is altogether good, and there is no evil in Him.

Some Perspective Needed

In looking at the big picture, it helps our faith to know that...

- The Abrahamic Covenant focuses on God's promises: 'seed' and a 'land', and is based on grace or God's unmerited favor and empowerment.
- The Mosaic Covenant is a picture of Christ pointing us to Him as savior and Lord (where the Law serves primarily to bring us to Christ).
- The New Covenant presents Jesus in person as the fulfillment of all that went before. He is the 'substance' that casts the 'shadow'!

Jesus is now our 'all in all', and our attention is to be firmly fixed on what He has already done at the cross to redeem us from sin and its consequences both in this life and for eternity to come. When we partake of The Lord's Supper we ought to see it as covenant meal where God's grace and

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mercy is freely extended to us in Christ. Abraham's life and testimony is the Old Testament foundation of our faith.

Whenever you are in need, remember that Jesus sits on a throne of grace and mercy. Do not be fearful of judgment, your sin has already been judged – at the cross.

Hebrews 4:16

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate Communion as our covenant meal, we rejoice that You always initiate our deliverance. You did it in Abraham’s day, by inserting Yourself in the midst of His life.

You called Abraham to possess your promises, just as You call us today to receive new life in Christ and receive the promises.

We are children of promise, Your covenant partners, made righteous through faith in the completed work of Christ at the cross.

Thank You for the peace and joy we also enjoy in Christ as we partake of the communion elements of bread and wine.

Amen.”

Chapter 3

Moses And The First Passover

God called Moses to lead His people (now living under the Abrahamic covenant) out of Egyptian bondage after over four hundred years of slavery. He appeared to Moses in the burning bush at Horeb in the wilderness (Exodus 3:1), calling him to be their leader / deliverer. (Horeb is the region of mountains that contains the summit of Mt Sinai where Moses was later to receive the Ten Commandments).

Approximately forty years earlier Moses had tried to do something about his people's plight while living in Egypt under Pharaoh. Unfortunately, he operated in his own strength and killed a man, causing him to flee for his life into the wilderness where he later met and married Zipporah the daughter of Jethro the 'priest of Midian'. Midian was a region that reached east of the Dead Sea into the Sinai Peninsula. Moses then tended sheep there for forty years before God appeared to him at the bush and declared that He, God, would deliver Israel from the Egyptians through his (Moses') hands.

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God thus established Himself in Moses' eyes as the covenant making and covenant keeping God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who had seen His people's oppression. He had heard their cry, and knew their sorrows and was responsive to their need. He was about to deliver them according to the terms of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Exodus 3:6-10

6 Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. 7 And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. 8 So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. 9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Under God's authority, Moses is then released to go to Pharaoh with his 'rod of authority' along with his spokesman Aaron. After challenging and defeating the Egyptian deities described in the dramatic account of the ten plagues, he gives instruction to the Israelites to prepare to leave Egypt after eating the covenant meal called Passover.

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This picture of deliverance at this first ever celebrated Passover foreshadows our deliverance in Christ and the remembrance feast of the Lord's Supper. God's will was to bring the Israelites up to a 'good and large land' (Vs 8). They had become restricted or 'squeezed' by an oppressive Pharaoh as time went by to the point that life had become unbearable. They had cried out to God and now He had answered their prayers.

In our time the application here is this: there is no need for anyone who is a believer in Christ to be oppressed or put down (John 8:36). God wants us to enjoy our very own 'broad place of rich fulfillment' in Christ, and wants to establish us in righteousness so that we can be far from oppression.

Isaiah 54:14

14 In righteousness you shall be established;
You shall be far from oppression

Only when we are walking in His righteousness will we be established. In fact we reign in the realm of life when we receive the abundance of His grace and the gift of righteousness that is found in Christ alone.

Romans 5:17

...those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Victory in life is all about receiving the free gifts of God by faith. Deliverance from oppression and victory in life do not depend on our own efforts, but on Christ's efforts. When it looks like the enemy has you all wrapped up, realize that God has set you free in Christ. Believe it,

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declare it, and see the reality of your freedom come to pass as you stand your ground in faith.

The First Passover

The following somewhat lengthy passage (but well worth reading) summarizes God's commandment to Moses and the Israelites to keep the Passover ('Pesach' in Hebrew) as a memorial to their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The Passover memorial is fulfilled in the death of Christ many years later and commemorated in The Lord's Supper.

Exodus 12:1-15

12:1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2 "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3 Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. 4 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. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 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. 7 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. 8 Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with

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water, but roasted in fire--its head with its legs and its entrails. 10 You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 11 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. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. 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. 14 So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. 15 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

The Key Elements Of The Passover

The Israelites were delivered from Egypt after four hundred and thirty years there since Joseph's time. The Israelites first thirty years under Joseph's influence had been good, but for four hundred years thereafter they had become slaves in the land. Now under Moses, they were about to enjoy a new beginning (Vs 2). It was to be the defining moment of their calendar year. In our context our defining moment is when we are born again and become new creatures in Christ. We begin our lives again completely new. We are born again.

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2 Corinthians 5:17-18

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The Israelites long bondage in slavery had seemed interminable, but the time had come to be miraculously set free. The intensity of spiritual warfare had greatly increased as Moses was empowered by God to challenge the very core idolatries of the Egyptians in the ten plagues. One by one God's power overcame all their false expressions of religion, and now it was time for God's people to be led out in triumph! This great deliverance was based on God's grace and certainly not on the people's ability to set themselves free.

As Christians we ought to see the new birth as no less miraculous and dramatic where true freedom is found in Christ alone. This freedom is appropriated by faith and lived out in the face of any enemy's lies to negate our liberty.

The whole congregation was to take for themselves a lamb for each household, and kill it at twilight, sprinkle its blood on the doorpost and lintel, and eat it all right there and then. It was to be roasted in fire and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

In this we conclude that God sees the family unit as one, and desires to impart His blessing to whole households, not just individuals in any household. Moreover, He does not want us to merely 'look at' or mentally consider the lamb (Jesus), but to 'eat' or enjoy the immediate and present benefit of our relationship with it (Jesus). His plan is for us first to enjoy what Christ has done for us in the here and

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now. Then, as a consequence of our faith on earth we have a future to look forward to in heaven.

Right now there is a clear revelation that He wants us to daily enjoy the 'load' of covenant benefits He has for us each and every day.

Psalm 68:19

19 Blessed be the Lord,
Who daily loads us with benefits,
The God of our salvation!

Today when a family or household member believes in the Lord and partakes of the Lord's Supper, they also become a 'sanctifying' agent in that family. That family is marked for salvation and Jesus' love begins to spread in the family as intercession is made and a gospel witness in word and deed takes root in the family relationships.

Make it your business in prayer and obedience to release your faith for the other family members in your household that are not saved or may be in need of healing or some other form of deliverance. True religion and love begins at home, for the home is the crucible of relationships. If we can make the gospel 'work' at home, we can make it work everywhere.

Let us look more closely at the three key elements to the Passover meal the Israelites were to eat as they prepared to leave Egypt: the lamb, the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs.

The Passover Lamb, was to be without blemish, which speaks of Christ's perfection as the spotless sacrificial Lamb of God. It was to be killed at twilight, which

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according to Jewish time was considered to be 3 pm. This was exactly the time of Christ's death on the cross.

Then the blood of the slain lamb was to be sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel. This served to protect the Israelites from death as the angel passed over the people that night. Jesus' sacrificial blood not only protects us from the destroyer, but it also gives us access into the 'household' and thus the provision of God. To enter into God's 'household' we have to go through the door, otherwise we will be rejected as a thief illegally seeking entry. The Bible teaches that Jesus Himself is the 'door' as recorded in John 10:7-9. There is no other way into God's salvation.

The application of the blood at the entryway to each household 'defines' or consecrates everything from that point on. Jesus' blood marks or defines us in the spirit. Here both God and our adversary take note of the blood.

Also, the lamb was to be 'roasted' in fire. This is symbolic of the intense suffering Jesus underwent on our behalf at the cross as the fiery judgment of God for our sins fell on Him as our substitute.

(In the next chapter we look at the Passover lamb in more detail).

The Unleavened Bread, or matzos as it is called in the modern Jewish Passover celebration, was flat bread. It did not contain the rising agent or yeast, which in Bible times spoke of sin. The unleavened bread therefore points to the sinless life of Christ.

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I Corinthians 5: 7, 8

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The unleavened bread may also represent the haste in which the Israelites were delivered (unleavened bread is quicker to bake than leaven which requires more time for the leaven to work its way through the dough). It took only one night after over four hundred years of slavery for the Israelites to be broken free. Thank God we can expect God to deliver us quickly even if we have been enduring some sort of bondage and oppression for a long time.

Interestingly, for centuries the Passover Seder in Jewish homes has used three pieces of unleavened bread or matzos broken in half and kept till the end of the meal before being eaten as the 'afikomen' (or 'that which comes last'). The custom seems to come from when Abraham served three cakes of fine meal to the three angelic visitors who announced the birth of Isaac his supernaturally conceived son as recorded in Genesis 18:6. The three pieces symbolize the three persons of the Godhead, and the three days and nights of Calvary. When the middle piece (in the Jewish Seder) is broken and hidden from sight, to be later brought out and eaten, it speaks of Jesus, the central person, of the Godhead being broken for us at the cross and now 'hidden' from human view as He waits to return from heaven.

The simplicity of the bread (flour and water only) points to Christ as the bread from heaven (our true food) that only

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God supplies according to John 6:31-32. Only Christ can truly sustain man's spiritual craving: hunger and thirst – flour and water.

The stripes and pierced holes in the modern matzos bread have come to symbolize the piercings and stripes Jesus suffered in His passion under the Roman soldiers as they flogged and then pinned Him to the cross with huge nails in His hands and feet.

The Bitter Herbs were to remind the Israelites of the bitterness of their enslavement in Egypt. We are called to freedom from sin and its terrible consequences, and Jesus truly sets us free to become His devoted followers.

Romans 6:18-19

18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms

John 8:36

36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed

We need to remember this in contrast to the degradation and hopelessness of enslavement to sin, as well as the bitter suffering that Jesus endured on our behalf.

Take It All

Moses received the instruction to not let any part of the roasted lamb be left over till the morning (Vs 10). This signifies that God wants us to receive and enjoy **all** that he has for us in Christ. We are to discover **all** the riches that are ours in Christ: He has forgiven us of **all** our sins, and healed us of **all** our diseases, not just some! It is a form of

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false humility to settle for only part of God's provision. He wants us to enjoy the abundance of His grace, not just a little bit.

Psalm 103:2-3

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not **all** His benefits:
3 Who forgives **all** your iniquities,
Who heals **all** your diseases, (Emphasis added).

They were to eat the Passover meal while being prepared and ready for their journey or Exodus out of Egypt. Their belts on were to be on their waists, sandals on their feet, and their staff in hand (Vs 11). God always has a purpose for what He does, and He was focused on delivering His people that very day. He was delivering them from bondage to freedom. They in turn were to be ready to move. God is very deliberate in the way He operates. So should we.

In our day, God has girded us with the belt of truth, and put the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace on our feet, and even given us the sharp rod or sword of His Word to speak from our mouths. (Ephesians 6:14-17). His part is to deliver us, our part is to be ready, cooperate and follow Him in faith. We are saved for the purpose of the good works God has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10), and not just to get to heaven some day.

Summary

The Passover event is described as a 'memorial'; 'feast', and 'ordinance' (Exodus 12:14, 47). In turn, 'Passover' points to a memorial of the work of protection that Jesus blood affords; whereas the word 'feast' speaks of our

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necessary joyful participation. Then 'ordinance' underscores the imperative or 'must do' celebration God requires of His people. Our participation in The Lord's Supper today ought to reflect all three of these characteristics. We must remember the Lord work, joyfully celebrate in communion and all participate in this celebration of grace.

Notice that the Passover meal was instituted **before** the giving of the Law at Mt Sinai. The Israelites were thus delivered from bondage under the Abrahamic covenant, and certainly not because of their adherence to the Law covenant of Moses. They received their deliverance by faith, as well as the wealth and health of God's covenant provision according to Exodus 11:2.

Psalm 105:37

37 He also brought them out with silver and gold,
And there was none feeble among His tribes.

There was also a huge wealth transfer to God's people as they gathered up the gold and silver that was owed to them by the Egyptians from their years of slavery. Some argue today that God is setting us up for another huge wealth transfer to finance the great end time ingathering of souls for His kingdom. Could this be why the world economic systems are shaking so much as the enemy reacts to what God is doing among His people as he prepares them to properly steward vast resources for the spreading of the gospel?

Finally, there is a tendency among many well meaning Christians to 'fall from grace' (Galatians 5:4) and bring themselves under Law again, trying in some way to merit God's unmerited favor. They start their walk with God in

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faith but end up in some sort of 'works program' soon thereafter. We need to take a lesson from the history of the Israelites who enjoyed God's abundant provision and health **before** the Law was even added because of their sin (Galatians 3:19). Keeping the Law therefore had nothing to do with them enjoying God's favor and blessing.

Today, we live, move and have our being in Christ by faith in what He has already done for us, and not by our own diligent efforts to keep some set of laws or even by living a good moral life. (This is not to say that living right is wrong, but it is not the source of our favor with God). Our relationship with God is never based on rule keeping and God's covenant blessing is freely given on the basis of His merit, not ours. Celebrate the Lord's Supper with an assurance that you have already been delivered from sin and its consequences both now and in eternity. Be thankful and rejoice in God's abundant grace and favor.

In the next chapter we focus in some detail on Jesus as the Passover Lamb of God.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate together The Lord's Supper we rejoice in our deliverance from the bondage of sin, sickness and lack. You are our savior, deliverer, healer and provider.

Thank you for paying the price as the Passover Lamb and leading us out into the freedom and liberty we find in You.

We purpose to love and serve you with hearts that are sincere and truthful. Thank You for cleansing us from malice and wickedness.

We are truly free in You, and we take hold of all that you have graciously provided for us in the covenant.

Amen.”

Bonus: Comparing Moses And Jesus

Moses was a prophet of God who told the Children of Israel that God would later raise up a prophet like him, and that we are to listen to Him. He was of course referring to Jesus.

Acts 7:37-38

37 "This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.'

Here is an interesting summary of the similarities between Moses the Israelite deliverer from Egyptian slavery, and The Lord Jesus Christ the deliverer of all mankind from the bondage of sin.

- Moses: Pharaoh orders Jewish male babies killed, fearful that the Hebrew slaves will revolt and throw off His authority (Exodus 1:8-16).

Jesus: Herod orders Jewish male babies killed, fearful that the Messiah will eventually lead a revolt that will threaten his authority (Matthew 2:1-16).

- Moses: the son of oppressed people grows up under Egyptian rule (Exodus 21-10).

Jesus: grows up as the son of oppressed people, even spending part of his youth in Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15).

- Moses: works as a shepherd before leading the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3:1).

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Jesus: lives and works in similar humble circumstances in a carpenter's household and then calls Himself the 'good shepherd' (John 10: 11, 14).

- Moses: is called upon by God to challenge Pharaoh's authority, who refuses to recognize God's power despite many miracles (Exodus 5:-11).

Jesus: God calls Him to challenge the authority of the religious leaders of His day, most of whom refuse to recognize God's power despite His many attesting miracles (John 10:32).

- Moses: the death of Egypt's sons causes Pharaoh to release his hold on God's chosen people (Exodus 12:29-31).

Jesus: Jesus' death as God's Son, causes sin to lose its grip on those who receive His sacrifice as the unique atonement for sin (Romans 8:2).

- Moses: God commands the children of Israel to celebrate Passover in order to remember how He delivered them from slavery (Exodus 12:14-21).

Jesus: At the Last Supper (Passover Feast) He instructed His disciples to remember with the bread and wine the deliverance He was about to accomplish at the cross (Luke 22:19).

Chapter 4

Jesus - The Passover Lamb Of God

Exodus 12:3-4

'On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.

John 1:29

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

1 Corinthians 5:7

For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

1 Peter 1:18-20

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

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When God does something, He always does it well. This is magnificently illustrated in the glorious fulfillment in Christ of the Passover Lamb.

Moses had been given clear instructions about the sacrificial lamb to be slain at that historical first Passover meal. This memorial Feast was powerfully instituted at the time of the Israelites miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage after four hundred and thirty years of slavery.

Animal sacrifice may not be your 'cup of tea'. In fact it was never God's either (Isaiah 1:11)! Yet, because of His consuming love for us, He sent His only Son to be the fulfillment of Passover sacrificial lamb offered up for our sakes as a fulfillment of the covenant requirements. He went to these lengths to ensure that we got the message.

Consider the following comparisons between the lamb of sacrifice in Moses time as recorded in Exodus 12:1-51 and the dramatic fulfillment of this covenant meal in Jesus Christ the 'lamb of God'.

Vs 3 - It was to be a lamb, and Christ is the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

Vs 5 - The lamb was to be a male of the first year, mature and in its prime. Christ was mature at age thirty (Numbers 4:3) and was offered up as the supreme sacrifice in His prime (Luke 3:23).

Vs 5 - The lamb was to be without blemish which speaks of Jesus' purity – a lamb without spot (1 Peter 1:19).

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Vs 3, 6 - The lamb was 'set apart' for four days. Jesus entered Jerusalem four days before The Passover Feast (Matthew 21:1-10) and was set apart or examined by both the people and the authorities.

Vs 6-9 - The lamb was to be slain at twilight. Jesus died at three in the afternoon or twilight according to Jewish time (Matthew 27:46).

Vs 21 - The elders picked out the lambs for themselves. Jesus was put up for trial by the elders of the day – the Sanhedrin (John 18:3).

Vs 46 - No bones of the lamb were to be broken. Jesus did not have His bones broken when He was crucified (John 19:33-36).

There is no doubt that Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of God slain for us at the cross for the salvation or wholeness of our whole spirit, soul and body (3 John 2).

God's choice of a lamb as the animal for sacrifice speaks of Christ's meekness and innocence. This was something that the farmers and animal herders of the day would understand. Jesus laid down His life for us on purpose. He was dependent on and fully submitted to His Heavenly Father's leadership and chose to drink of the cup of suffering without trying to defend His position.

Isaiah 53:7

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

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He was victimized so that we might become victors. God has eternally confounded the wisdom of man with the seeming 'foolishness' of a lamb (Jesus dying on the cross) being slain. Through this situation of apparent helplessness and defeat, great victory has come for all who will humble themselves to receive Him (John 1:12). Through death, Jesus conquered him who had the power of death.

Hebrews 2:14-15

14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

The Spotless Lamb

For the Passover sacrifice to satisfy God's demands it had to be perfect. That is why Jesus was intensively inspected by all in His life and ministry.

First, he was inspected (tempted) by satan at the start of His three and half year ministry. Then time and again the religious people of His day tried to find fault with Him and His mission. Then third, Jesus was subjected to six or seven distinct inspections depending on whether you count Pilate's dealings with Jesus as one or two events.

Consider the following inspections that Jesus 'passed' in His last hours before the crucifixion in more detail.

1. King Herod admitted that Jesus was without blame (Luke 23:13-15).

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2. Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest (Caiaphas) obviously found no fault with Jesus as he passed Him on to son-in-law (John 18:12-14, 24).
3. Caiaphas, the high priest, then inspected Jesus and no fault was found in the spotless lamb (John 18).
4. Pilate, a gentile, examined Jesus also and on two occasions declared that he could find "no fault" in Jesus (John 18:28-38 and John 19:4).
5. The centurion assigned to Jesus' crucifixion scrutinized Jesus and concluded that He was truly the "Son of God" (Matthew 27:54).
6. Even the thief on the cross had the sense in the end to conclude that Jesus had done nothing wrong (Luke 23:40-42).

Every single inspection resulted in a confession of Jesus' innocence as the spotless Lamb of God. God made Jesus who knew no sin to be made sin for us in a great spiritual exchange.

We were guilty of sin and deserving of judgment, whereas Jesus was perfectly righteous and undeserving of any judgment. Yet it was God's plan to satisfy the claims of justice in the eternal courts of heaven by sending Him to the cross on our behalf. We (the guilty) are now saved by Jesus (the innocent) in the greatest act of love ever. It is this amazing grace which we celebrate at The Lord's Supper.

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2 Corinthians 5:21

21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

On the cross, Jesus supreme act of sacrifice accomplished both the removal of our sins **and** the impartation of His righteousness to us. It was dramatic two way transfer.

With this one act Jesus also fulfilled all the five offerings required under the Levitical law, which historically were 'shadows' pointing to His perfect offering made 'once and for all' (Hebrews 9:12). Here we focus on only two of the sacrifices: the 'sin' and 'burnt' offering (Leviticus 1-4).

First, the sinner was to bring his 'sin offering' to the priest to be inspected for any blemish. Then, the sinner was to lay his hands on the animal (a bull if the whole nation sinned, a male kid / lamb if a ruler sinned, and a female kid / lamb or two turtle doves if a commoner sinned) and the animal was sacrificed and the sinner's sin was transferred 'away' from the sinner into the animal.

Identification And Access

This act of identification meant that the sin of the offerer was transferred to the lamb **and** the innocence (or righteousness) of the lamb was transferred to the offerer. At the conclusion of the sacrifice, the focus was to be on the fact that sin had now been atoned for, and that all that remained was the imputed or transferred righteousness. The 'price for sin' had been paid and God's justice fully satisfied.

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Second, the other main offering called the 'burnt offering' (Leviticus 1:9) also involved a sacrifice of an unblemished animal that resulted in the transfer of God's favor by means of the sacrifice on the altar. Here the emphasis was on the righteousness being transferred towards the person in question. This offering was like a 'sweet aroma' to the Lord, and signified acceptance into His presence. The sin offering, you might say, took away the negative or minus, while the burnt offering brought the plus to the recipient.

A lot of people struggle to accept how large God's heart is towards us. They focus on the shortcomings they still see in their own lives instead of looking at the one who has paid the price to set us free from the things that hold us back from walking with God in the abundant life Jesus so freely offers all who repent.

It is important to see both sides to what Jesus has done. Not only do we have forgiveness of sin, but also righteousness or right standing with God at His right hand in Christ. We have access to the Lord's presence through Jesus' perfect sacrifice alone, and not through our efforts or 'self righteousness'. We are encouraged to freely receive all that has blessed us with in Christ, and not hold back. 'Oh ye of little faith' is not a compliment. God wants us to enjoy all that He has paid such a high price for.

As you celebrate the Lord's Supper now, remember that whatever God does, He does well. The good work He has started in you, He will bring to completion as you open up to the greatness of His grace and favor in Christ.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate together the covenant meal, we are in awe that You chose Jesus to be our spotless lamb of sacrifice.

Your meekness and obedience is our inspiration as we remember that although you knew no sin, you became sin so that we could become the righteousness of God.

Holy Spirit, help us to see the value of being laid down lovers of the lamb king.

As we partake of the bread and the wine, we remember with thanksgiving the great sacrifice You made for us.

Amen.”

Chapter 5

'Kings and Priests'

The Call To All

Exodus 19:5-6

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

1 Peter 2:9-10

9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

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A 'Kingdom of Priests' and a 'holy nation': this was the invitation to significance and greatness that God made to all the people of Israel who had been delivered from Egyptian bondage under Moses leadership. Under Egyptian rule they had multiplied and become a nation, yet in time had largely forsaken the Lord and His covenantal relationship and begun worshipping the idols of Egypt. They had developed a slave mentality, yet in His mercy He heard their cry and honored the terms of the everlasting Covenant He had with them under Abraham. Another step in God's eternal plan was about to unfold.

A Nation On Probation

The Israelite nation was called out and placed on probation when they were taken from Egypt into the Wilderness to 'prove' them and to know what was in their heart. (God already knew their hearts, but they needed to know as well).

Deuteronomy 8:1-2

2 And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart,...

Besides this, they also needed to be united from a rag tag group of escapees into a united fighting force able to take possession of the 'Promised Land'. That is why they at first did not follow the most direct route towards the Promised Land. This northern coastal route through the land of the Philistines is the modern day Gaza area inhabited by 'Palestinians' today.

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Exodus 13:17-19

17 Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." 18 So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

As they travelled out by the more southern route they unfortunately failed four tests of faith and obedience: at the 'Red Sea' (Exodus 14:10-12, 31), at the bitter 'Waters of Marah' (Exodus 15:23-26), the 'Wilderness of Sin' (Exodus 16:1-12) and at 'Rephidim' (Exodus 17:1-7).

These passages chronicle the sobering fact that they were quick to murmur and complain. Also, that their heart focus was still in Egypt as they craved after the food and drink of their previous life back. It was not that God was not committed to meeting their basic daily needs. He was, but He wanted them to trust Him and establish a healthy perspective. He had them on a journey to their Promised Land and wanted them to learn to walk by faith, and to keep their eyes or focus on Him.

Today as the Body of Christ, the Church is faced with no less of a challenge. God is committed to bring you and me into a place of rich fulfillment in Christ: our Promised Land. He has promised to supply all our needs (Philippians 4:19), give us our hearts desires (Psalm 37:4) and empower us (Acts 1:8) to fulfill our destiny as a witness to a world crying out for meaning and deliverance from sin's bondages. Yet we too must always walk by faith and not by

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sight or the adverse circumstances that may face us. We are to keep our eyes on Him and not be distracted by lesser pursuits.

After only a short few weeks, the Israelites murmuring and ungrateful complaints exposed the poverty of their evil hearts of unbelief despite God's miraculous covenant deliverance, protection and provision.

Notably, when they took the 'plundered' riches of the Egyptians as they left on the morning after Passover, they were actually under the grace provisions of the Abrahamic covenant and not the Law Covenant of Moses! According to Psalm 105:37, there was also not one person feeble or sick as they travelled out. You could say they left Egypt healthy and wealthy! All this before they were given the Law at Mt Sinai. However, the moment they came under the Mosaic Law Covenant, the curses of lack and sickness for disobedience to the terms of that Covenant came into play. Interestingly, the Abrahamic Covenant had no direct curse attached, only blessings! Selah.

Sadly, the Israelites were a people which Psalm 78:1-54 and Psalm 105:1-15 records as a 'stubborn and rebellious generation'. Once again this goes to show that they were not chosen because of some inherent goodness of their own, but rather because of God's great mercy on their suffering. Despite God's great grace upon them they still murmured and complained about the temporary circumstances they were facing on their journey to The Promised Land. Later commentary in the Psalms points to their unfaithful hearts.

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Psalm 78:7-8

7 That they may set their hope in God,
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments;
8 And may not be like their fathers,
A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not set its heart aright,
And whose spirit was not faithful to God.

This is tough commentary indeed, but nevertheless a true and sober reminder for our times.

In fact, the events that followed their failing the four tests mentioned above, show them actually provoking God a total of ten times (Numbers 14:22). They had come to the Wilderness of Paran within reach of the Promised Land and balked at going in. At Kadesh Barnea (check out your Bible maps) twelve spies had been chosen to spy out the Promised Land, one from every tribe. When they returned from their spying mission, the people opted by majority vote to go with the negative 'evil' report of the ten spies and not with Joshua and Caleb's minority good report. Kadesh Barnea was supposed to be a 'place of sanctuary' before stepping out into the fulfillment of their destiny. However, due to their rebellion and unbelief, it became a 'fountain of judgment' as they were sentenced to wander in the Wilderness for forty years, one year for each day in the spying operation.

They had chosen to place more weight on what the negative spies saw with the natural eye (the giants of opposition) than to the promise of God that the Land was already theirs.

As Christians today, we ought to learn a lesson: God's promises are true, and will come to pass. Our privilege is to

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respond to His invitations (commands) in faith. If we cooperate with God we enjoy His promised benefits. If we don't, we fall short of His glory, and do not enjoy the weighty substance of a victorious life in Christ. It's that simple. The choice is ours.

But first, back to Moses and The Israelites when they had come to Mt Sinai in Horeb in the third month of their Exodus out of Egypt. God had called Moses into His presence, and instructed him to tell the people that if they would obey His voice and keep His covenant they would be a 'special treasure' to Him, as well enjoy the honor of being a 'kingdom of priests' and a 'holy nation' (Exodus 19:1-6). He reminded Moses how He had delivered them, carried them on eagle's wings (symbolic of strength and protective provision) and had brought them to Himself.

Israel's Presumption

Exodus 19:7-8

7 So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. 8 Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do."

At first sight this may appear to be simple enthusiasm. Yet later history shows that their response was in fact arrogant and presumptuous, proceeding not from a heart of faith and dependence on God's grace to bring them through, but from their own pride. Their good intentions and hasty declarations were doomed to failure without God's help.

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They even went so far as to reject God's invitation for the whole nation to become a 'kingdom of priests', (see text scripture at the beginning of this chapter: Exodus 19:6). They became fearful and wanted Moses to stand before God on their behalf.

As a consequence of their refusal to accept the call to be a nation of king-priests they wandered in the Wilderness for forty years thereafter until the unbelief of that generation had been rooted out (Numbers 13-14 and Hebrews 3-4).

They had fallen from the 'high ground' of grace and faith to the 'low ground' of law and works. God was obliged to give them a covenant of law and works to expose their helplessness and inability to keep the covenant. This covenant introduced a special 'class of priests' under the High Priest Aaron and his sons to officiate the sacrifices in the tabernacle of Moses. They thus missed the privilege of becoming a whole nation of priests who by faith could draw near to God themselves without having to 'go through' Moses and the Aaronic priesthood.

Now this whole system of feasts, rituals and sacrifices associated with The Law Covenant mercifully were to point to the coming Messiah Jesus Christ who would fulfill the grace covenant (Abrahamic) through His own life and substitutionary death.

So, the Mosaic Covenant and the Law was 'added' or placed alongside the Abrahamic Covenant (still in effect in God's eyes - it was an 'everlasting' covenant) because of Israel's transgressions (Galatians 3:19). This sub-covenant was given to the nation of Israel to prefigure the person and work of Jesus Christ the Messiah who would come as the

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perfect High Priest with His pure blood to cleanse our consciences once and for all.

Hebrews 9:9-10

9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-- 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

Sadly, without God's revelation, religious leaders even today have tended to reduce a relationship with God into a set of rituals and regulations. For example, the Jews have even codified over six hundred laws to live by under Mosaic Law. God never intended us to live by rules and regulations but by faith (Galatians 3:11)

Even in the church, there often seems to be 'covenantal confusion' where many preachers perhaps unwittingly reduce a vital relationship with God through Jesus into a large set of do's and don'ts. Think of it, how many sermon points have you heard that when you add them up in a year of fifty two Sundays amount to over six hundred steps! Chances are you can't even remember last week's three points let alone the points from three or four months ago!

In short, there are only **two keys to pleasing God** and walking in His blessing: trust absolutely in Jesus for everything, and be led by the indwelling Holy Spirit! It really is that simple. Everything grows out of that simple faith as **fruit** of your secure relationship in Christ. All the details of how to love God and your neighbor are the product of abiding in Him and His completed work.

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When you celebrate the Lord's Supper, you focus on His grace or empowerment to fulfill all His requirements or commandments. Nothing depends on our self effort: it is only Christ in us that makes anything we do acceptable to God. Whereas the Law (and preaching that emphasizes this) makes you 'sin' conscious, grace makes you 'son' conscious and gives you the favor / ability to walk in His freedom.

Galatians 2:20-21

20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

The Lord's Supper is a reminder of what Jesus has done for us and a clear call not to trust in our own abilities but to rest secure in His abilities in us to bring out the fruit of a relationship with Him. Just as the priests in Moses time were not to wear clothes that made them 'sweat', we too must not draw near to God on the basis of our own efforts or 'sweat'. The 'linen' (non sweat producing) robe of righteousness we wear is given as a gift from God, and all that we do must be the fruit of His abundant grace.

Ezekiel 44:18

18 They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.

Isaiah 61:10

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,

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My soul shall be joyful in my God;
For He has clothed me with the garments of
salvation,
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments,
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Romans 5:16-17

17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

Practically we reign over sin and its consequences through Jesus alone, and not because of our diligence, discipline, willpower, pathways or systems etc. We live in victory as a kingdom of priests because of Christ alone. If our doctrine requires Christ **plus** something, then it is not scriptural. God's grace in Christ is sufficient. Anything more detracts from His preeminence.

Jesus Christ As Our High Priest

At this point we look at the superiority of Christ's High priestly office.

Hebrews 3:1-2

3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, 2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him,

Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. He possesses distinctive features as our High Priest who

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entered the Holy of Holies with His own pure blood to make a once and for all atonement for us.

Jesus' High Priesthood supersedes all previous covenantal priesthoods in the following ways:

- He was absolutely sinless (Hebrews 5:1-5) and perfectly qualified to be the sacrificial Lamb of God.
- He enjoyed the nature of God and man and thus perfectly represented (or mediated between) both God and man: John 1:1-3 / Hebrews 2:17.
- He was King-Priest after the order of Melchizedek who was unique in this combination role: Hebrews 5:1-10 / Matthew 2:2 and shows us how to live before God and man.

We must pay much more than lip service to the fact that Jesus is our High Priest. When we consider His unique work on our behalf, this puts us in a unique position of favor with God. Reflect on the following five powerful truths about our new standing in Christ.

We are accepted in the beloved (Jesus) as His very own children (John 1:12). We can call God our 'Father' (Romans 8:15), are blessed with all manner of spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3) and enjoy a divine advantage in that the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in our hearts (John 16:7). Not only this, but our very consciences are cleansed (Hebrews 9:14 / 10:22) so that we can stand before God without a sense of shame, regret, guilt and condemnation!

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In fact, we enjoy such favor with God that we are even seated in a position of honor at His right hand in Christ (Ephesians 2:6). Jesus blood has given us new life, regenerated us and 'injected' royalty into us. This may be a far cry from what you may have been taught, but it is nevertheless true.

God gets no glory when His children are 'held down' to a level way below that which He paid the ultimate price for. He went to the greatest depths of a shameful death on the cross to raise us up to the greatest heights in Himself. Who are we to limit the Holy One to some sort of mediocre savior only able to set things half way straight!?

He is the lifter of your heads, so do not walk with your head down considering the dust and beggarly elements of this world. Consider Him, look up and realize that ...

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Priesthood Of All Believers

Jesus is head of the church which is the visible manifestation and extension of His ministry on earth today. Today the church fulfills the ministry of king-priests offered to Israel but sadly rejected at Sinai (Exodus 19:3-6).

Historically up until the Law of Moses was given, the head of each family was the family priest. God accepted their sacrifices upon altars they built. For example, the book of

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Genesis records the priestly acts of at least the following five men before the introduction of the law and priesthood under Moses and Aaron.

- Genesis 8:20 - Noah
- Genesis 12:7, 8; 13:18 – Abraham
- Genesis 14:18 - Melchizedek (King-priest of Salem)
- Genesis 26:25 - Isaac
- Genesis 31:54; 35:7 - Jacob

It is consistent with God's plan for man (and certainly the restoration we enjoy under Jesus' ministry), that in our time each household can and should enjoy celebrating the Lord's Supper as a memorial of His abundant grace. The family is the basic unit of society and God, and He as its great benefactor, desires to be at the center of it through communion.

Our Two-Fold Privilege

In the new Covenant we enjoy a double privilege. Every believer is now called and equipped to function as a 'King-Priest'.

First, under the validating work of our High Priest Jesus, as 'priests' (those that draw near) we offer:

- Our bodies as a living sacrifice: Romans 12:1-3
- Our praise: Hebrews 13:15
- Divinely appointed good deeds: Hebrews 13:16
- Intercession (prayer for others): 1 Timothy 2:1

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Second, we function as 'kings' (those with a domain or jurisdiction) when we in Jesus name (with his delegated authority):

- Cast out devils: Luke 10:17-19; Mark 16:17
- Heal the sick: Mark 16:18
- Rule in the home: 1 Timothy 3:5
- Exercise government in the church: Titus 1:5
- Administer His provision in the church: Acts 6:1-3

Jesus showed us the way in life. In His ministry as the King and Priest, Jesus cast out devils, exercised authority over nature (walked on water, calmed the storm), healed the sick, raised the dead, established order and rule amongst His followers (His household), and now functions as the Head of the Church, interceding continually on its behalf. He showed us how to relate to God as Our Father in worship, one another in love and service, and the lost through powerful witness. He also showed us how to deal with the enemy of our souls, and live in victory over temptation.

As His followers and ambassadors, we get to enjoy the privilege of modeling our king – priest ministry after Him!

In Bible times the fragrance the people smelled coming from the temple precincts was from incense. Today as New Testament priests we are the incense. Our prayer, worship and victorious life in Christ diffuses the pleasing fragrance of God's goodness in every place we live move and have our being.

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2 Corinthians 2:13-14

14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

As you partake of the Lord's Supper rejoice in the knowledge you have of your loving heavenly Father through Christ. He paid the price for you and me to draw near to Him in adoration and worship.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate together The Lord's Supper, we are reminded of the depths Jesus went to raise us up to great heights in Him.

Jesus, as Our High Priest we are grateful for your cleansing blood. We stand before You with clear consciences, our sins forgiven and forgotten, forever.

You have made us to be a kingdom of priests, reigning in this life in victory over sin and its consequences.

You are our God, and we are Your people set apart and graced to glorify You in all that we think, say and do in Your name.

Amen.”

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Chapter 6

Jesus And His Disciples Celebrate Passover

In observance of the annual Passover Feast, Jesus and His disciples made preparation to eat it together in what is called the 'upper room' of a house in Jerusalem the city of peace.

This was the setting of the Passover Feast Jesus fervently desired to spend with them. He had set His face intensely towards Jerusalem, and now was the time for the fulfillment of His earthly ministry.

The past few days after His triumphal entry into the city on what we call 'Palm Sunday' (Matthew 21:6-10) had been spent teaching both His disciples and the people. He had shared great truths about the coming Holy Spirit as our 'Helper' and even divine 'advantage' (John 16). He spoke of how spiritual fruit could be consistently produced as we 'abide in Him, and as His words abide in us' (John 15).

He prayed for His disciples (and us) that they would be 'one' in unity with themselves and the Father just as He

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and the Father were in unity with one another (John 17). He showed them things to come outlining a prophetic timetable of what would shortly happen in the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans, and also the end time or latter days which are now unfolding before our eyes in current world events (Matthew 24:1 – 25:46).

The religious leaders had in the meantime become increasingly indignant at His influence over the people. They were upset that Jesus had overturned the tables of the money changers they endorsed, who in Jesus eyes had defiled the Temple courts. The system that they were comfortable with was being shaken, and they were envious of Him (Matthew 27:18)!

Now it was time for Jesus to spend the last few hours with His beloved disciples in quietness before the storm that was about to break. At this Passover covenant meal, He would formally introduce the New Covenant with its game changing benefit of the total remission of sins.

Matthew 26:26-28

26 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." 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Took – Blessed – Broke – Gave

Notice that Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and then gave it to His disciples. He was symbolically showing

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them God's pattern. God had **taken** Jesus (the bread of life), **blessed** Him, and was now about to '**break**' Him on the cross with the weight of our sin as the suffering Messiah. Then when the punishment for all our sin was satisfied, He **gave** Him back to the world as the glorious Lord and conquering savior of the world.

When we give our lives to Jesus, we are **taken** from darkness to light. We are **blessed** with every spiritual blessing, '**broken**' in the sense that a wild untrained horse is 'broken in' for service to its master, and then **given** back to the world as agents or ambassadors of God's kingdom.

God has prepared mighty things for each of us, and requires that we receive His grace through faith in order to fulfill these good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). Our submission **to** His purposes is based on His love for us, knowing that He wants to take us to a better place than where we can ever take ourselves through our own efforts.

Betrayal

Matthew 26:20-24

20 When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. 21 Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." 22 And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?" 23 He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me."

It is amazing that Jesus so calmly continued to eat with His disciples knowing that He was shortly to be betrayed by Judas who dipped his hand with Him in the dish. It is one

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thing to be betrayed by someone who is 'far' from you, but completely another by someone as close as Judas was. Judas was His disciple, a covenant 'friend' (Matthew 26:50). Yet Jesus relentlessly pursued God's plan despite the pain of betrayal.

Later that night Peter (and the rest of the disciples too) would deny Jesus after bragging that he would never do such a thing. This was after he bravely defended Jesus in the garden a few hours later as he took off the ear of the servant with his sword. He did so in the face of great danger from a huge contingent of soldiers sent to arrest Jesus at the behest of the Jewish leaders. Then shortly thereafter Peter would quickly deny Jesus three times when the servant girl (and some others) challenged him in that dark night. I think the caution here is not to boast of what we will do for the Lord, but rather focus on boasting on what He has already done for us. Our responsibility is not to try to impress the Lord with our declared fidelity, but to cling to Him in faith for the strength not to fail Him in times of testing.

In fact Jesus had prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail and even prophesied that Peter would return to Him to fulfill his ministry of strengthening the brethren.

Luke 22:31-33

31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

Thankfully, after His resurrection the Lord pursued Peter who had 'gone back to fishing' (John 21:3). He restored

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him to his calling through the three confessions of his love which negated his earlier three denials around the fire at the High Priest house. He did not let Peter drift off into a life of regret and condemnation, but pursued this, 'smoking flax' or 'bruised reed'. Peter was restored back to His path of destiny.

Be encouraged that God is not easily put off by your impetuous and presumptuous outbursts one way or the other. He is both patient and longsuffering towards our foolishness and will never stop pursuing us with His love. He chases us down with His love!

Take Up The Towel

John 13:1-5

13:1 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 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.

Jesus knew who He was, what He was doing and where He was going, so He was quite confident and secure in His identity. So much so, that although He was the Son of God,

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He could choose to serve his disciples by taking a towel of the lowest household servant and wash His disciples feet. He laid aside His rabbinical garments and took up the towel to set an eternal example of humility for all believers to follow.

Today, in a world whose values differ so much from God's, even some church folk are so caught up in the heights of their new position in Christ (seated at His right hand) that they are blinded to His example here. We may be 'royal' sons of God accepted into His family, no longer slaves to sin and religiosity, but we are not exempt from loving our fellow man in practical acts of service as we walk in the Master's footsteps. It is tiresome to see insecure leaders 'lording' it over their followers as if they are some sort of superior class of Christ follower with special privileges. They often avoid and ignore menial obligations because they are God's anointed, and thus perpetuate a limited brand of 'leadership'.

Let us gird ourselves with the towel of humility and point people to Jesus, rather than attract followers who cannot see Jesus for seeing us. There is no greater love than for a covenant 'friend' to lay down his life for his 'friends'.

John 15:12-16

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Covenant Friends

The Last Supper was the covenant meal that Jesus shared with His disciples to memorialize the institution of the 'New Covenant in His blood' (Matthew 26:28). This meant the way things had been done under the Law of Moses were to change radically. This was a completely 'New' covenant, not an old one with some additional twists. The 'New Covenant' was, and is fundamentally different from the 'Old'. Whereas the 'Old' was characterized by death and condemnation, the 'New' is characterized by life and love.

Hebrews 10:19-20

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us...

2 Corinthians 3:7-9

7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.

This new Covenant opened the way for all covenant partners to become 'friends'. Jesus issued and graphically demonstrated His new commandment of love as He washed their feet. He then described their New Covenant identity as 'friends', no longer to be called 'servants'. This statement has erroneously been interpreted by some to mean that as God's children we no longer need to serve in certain ways.

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Rather the verse explains the difference. They, unlike servants of the day, were now to know firsthand what the 'master' is doing. They were established in a new relationship as covenant partners, privy to the plans and purposes and processes of their covenant master. As 'sons of light' (1 Thessalonians 5:5), they were not to be kept in the dark about what their master does. Jesus had even revealed to them that the Holy Spirit would show them things to come (John 16:13). This was their covenant privilege as sons and daughters of the Father in heaven.

Not that Jesus was now their 'buddy' or 'pal', but rather that He was their 'blood brother', to the death if needs be. He would stand by the covenant, and He expected them to do so as well. They were honor bound to uphold the terms of the covenant. It was sealed in His blood.

Our modern culture and some religious teachings have eroded the true meaning and deep extent of covenant, especially the truths about covenant 'friendship'. If we are to understand and apply Jesus' words to our lives, we must bridge the 'gap' between our sometimes shallow and self serving interpretations and His original intent.

Abraham, God's Covenant Friend And The Judgment Of Sodom And Gomorrah

Take Abraham and God's judgment of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as an example. Abraham had become God's covenant 'friend' (James 2:23-24) by simply believing God's promises. Through His faith he had access to God's heart and covenant obligations, as the following accounts testify.

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Genesis 18:16-17

16 Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. 17 And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,...

Genesis 18:22-25

Abraham still stood before the LORD. 23 And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

This shows two covenant 'friends' or partners speaking to one another. God was not teasing Abraham about what He was about to do to the cities, nor was Abraham disrespectful or foolhardy in questioning God. This conversation was a legitimate interaction between covenant partners. It appears as if God was looking for a reason **not** to judge Sodom and Gomorrah! He was looking for a righteous man to serve as an intercessor on behalf of the others. Seemingly Abraham stopped asking God too soon! Righteous Lot and his family were still in the town (2 Peter 2:7).

This and other Bible accounts demonstrate that God is indeed longsuffering and patient towards sinners. He is not quick to judge and desires that the world might be saved. This is at the center of His heart towards us.

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John 3:17

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

In fact it is 'alien' or unnatural (contrary to His essential nature of love) for God to quickly judge without giving man time and opportunity to repent.

2 Peter 3:8-9

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

However, God will not tolerate mankind's continued rebellion that is bent on destroying His kingdom, so He will not neglect to rise up as judge, but He will always do so with perfect justice and timing.

His heart's desire is that all men avoid judgment. Hell itself was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41) and not for man! On the other hand, if anyone refuses to repent and accept God's mercy and salvation in Christ, he then brings judgment on himself and is confined in his continued rebellion in hell.

It bears repeating, that God has already judged sin on the cross already, and now expects a) unbelievers to accept this, and b) believers to walk in the liberating light of this assurance by judging their own thoughts and actions when they don't line up with God's revealed truth.

Old Testament 'judgment' scriptures must now be passed through the 'cross filter'. Jesus is the perfect

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representation' of God to us, because the 'fullness of the godhead dwelt in Him bodily' (Colossians 2:9). He was God incarnate, and since sin has been judged in Jesus' body, natural disasters like Tsunamis, earthquakes and hurricanes are **not** the means God uses to judge people today. They are rather consequences of an earth 'groaning' as it waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. Things are the way they are not because God is mean, but because we as sons and daughters of God have not risen up to the fullness of our sanctifying stature in Christ.

Romans 8:19-23

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

In Christ, we are the 'salt' and 'light' of the world, and in my opinion can only play a greater preserving and enlightening role in life on our planet as we rise up to all that we are in Christ. As we increasingly discover what God has already bound and loosed in heaven, we become the instruments (covenant partners) of God's blessing on earth. We have had immense authority delegated to us.

Matthew 16:19

19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

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As covenant 'friends' with God, like Abraham we can and should have conversations with God about what is happening and even about what God is planning to do. This is not so strange when you consider this great scripture about the Holy Spirit giving us a 'heads up' on what's coming down the road.

John 16:13

13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

I believe God wants us to play a key intercessory role so that we can stand in the gap for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Good things don't just happen on earth. They are the product of God's will being prayed into our realm.

Mercifully, mankind still stands this side of God's ultimate judgment, so He commands men everywhere to repent or turn from the folly of trying to save themselves by their own efforts and put their trust in the One who has already been judged on our behalf.

Acts 17:30-31

(God) ...now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.

As you partake of The Lord's Supper remember that your sin is no longer imputed to you. You are forgiven, and completely cleansed because Jesus has satisfied God's justice on your behalf. Celebrate His goodness now with a

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clear conscience. His blood is entirely sufficient to make you enjoy God's comforting and empowering presence.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate communion today, we remember the New Covenant you established with us in your blood.

We are thankful that You were prepared to ‘take up the towel’ and serve us as Your covenant’ friends’, and that You did this in the midst of betrayal.

We honor You for taking upon Yourself our sin and the judgment we so deserved, and worship You with our lives for the great mercy we enjoy.

Bless You Lord; we are looking forward to Your return.

Amen.”

Chapter 7

Jesus On The Cross

The cross defines history. What has already done on the cross is the issue in all of life. The Lord's Supper is a vital memorial of all that Jesus achieved for us on the cross. God laid the iniquity of us all on Him so that we could live free as sons in His family forever. In this chapter we explore several key truths about what actually happened at the time of cross and their application to our lives.

It seems as if much preaching today in an effort to be 'real and relevant' has come to look more and more like motivational seminar pep talks about vision, diligence, endurance, goal setting etc. Of course Jesus displayed all these and more in perfect fashion, yet it seems as if the core centrality of the cross and what it means to us is often obscured or even assumed. In what some call a 'post modern' world, the liberating truth about Jesus' blood sacrifice is often neglected. Our present reality is defined not by itself, but by the past: what Jesus has already done (and not our mistakes or sin).

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I have learned is that God is more modern than I am: He is the ever present and great 'I am'. (He knew about the internet before it ever existed in someone's mind). He is neither old fashioned, nor is He out of date. In fact, He is always 'ahead of the curve'; with the devil trying to play 'catch up' with his futile counterfeits and corruptions. There's nothing original or creative in what the devil does, he only infects, pollutes or corrupts what God has already blessed mankind with.

Our central message is still 'Christ and Him crucified'. The cross remains central in God's mind and we would serve ourselves well to keep it that way too. The great apostle Paul wanted to be remembered by keeping his focus on what was of eternal significance and not by anything else.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2

2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

He certainly did not want to be remembered by some faddish focus, only the centrality of Christ's sacrifice.

The cross was a bloody affair, offensive to some, but nevertheless a painful event that was absolutely necessary and completely within God's covenant plan. We now examine the seven times in which Jesus' blood was shed for us.

Jesus Sheds His blood Seven Times

We look at the time period from when He was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane till He was actually crucified on the cross. This is often called the time of 'His passion'

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where His pure or untainted blood (1 Peter 1:18-19) was shed seven times, providing complete and full redemption for every need in our lives (seven is the Biblical number for perfection and completeness). In the Old Testament, the priest was required to sprinkle the blood from the animal sacrifices seven times on the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:14). This was the place that overshadowed the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments of judgment. This shows that mercy triumphs over judgment, and Jesus' blood sprinkled on the heavenly mercy seat seven times serves to set us free from all the consequences of Adam's sin in the first garden in Eden.

1. Jesus Sweats Blood In The Garden

Luke 22:41-44

He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." 43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Jesus made His choice to follow God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane knowing the potentially overwhelming suffering He was about to endure. That is why He needed the help of an angel while He sweated blood under the intense agony. (He was, you may remember, functioning in His humanity as the anointed son of man).

He was conscious that He was to drink the cup of suffering on our behalf. He was to receive in Himself all the punishment that was due to us because of our sin. His love

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for us caused Him to embrace the pain and suffering of the cross so that we might be free from it.

With this conscious choice, Jesus redeems the power of the human will with His blood. Whereas Adam willfully disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, Jesus willfully obeyed God in The Garden of Gethsemane. Today we can look to His power in us to make choices that please God. Our wills have been restored, and we do not need to submit to satan's control any longer. We can submit to God's plan because of Jesus' blood that flowed from the broken blood vessels together with His sweat in His brow as He fought the intense battle of spiritual testing. He won the victory in prayer before the eventful moments to follow played out. In our lives as we get before the Lord in prayer and settle things in truth there, we can be assured that what follows God will back us up.

Later, as Jesus hung on the cross, suspended between earth and heaven, symbolic of His mediatory role between man and God, He refused to drink of the vinegar mixed with gall. This drink which was prepared by sympathetic women of the day, served as an anesthetic. Yet Jesus wanted to identify fully with the moment, and not be dulled by the anesthetic preparation. His will was thus fully engaged as He chose to embrace His destiny.

Let us be fully conscious of the choices we make to honor Him and not be anesthetized by the attractions and ways of the world to the price Jesus paid to purchase our freedom.

2. Jesus Is Bruised For Us (Internal Bleeding)

Isaiah 53:5

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,

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He was bruised for our iniquities;

When Jesus was subjected to the sham trials before Annas and Caiaphas, He was brutally manhandled, spat on, beaten and slapped. So harsh was the beating that He was bruised and bled internally.

Matthew 26:67-68

67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands,...

The slapping was insulting enough, but the brutal beating went further as the next scripture points out. In Isaiah's prophetic reference the internal bleeding or bruising would have caused His face to mar more than any man.

Isaiah 52:14

4 Just as many were astonished at you,
So His visage was marred more than any man,
And His form more than the sons of men; ...

Most religious art portrays Jesus with Western facial features and most often does not show the horrible disfigurement and intense 'marring' He suffered on His face. Jesus was altogether lovely as He stood in our place as the perfect 'son of man', yet when He was subjected to the degrading treatment of religious hypocrites, He became an 'astonishment' to many, so great was the contrast with what he had looked like before the crucifixion

This internal bleeding speaks of our deliverance from the 'internal patterns' of iniquity that beset so many individuals and families. These generational iniquities are broken by the blood that Jesus shed as He was bruised for us. No longer do we have to put on a good outer 'face' yet suffer

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despair within. His internal bruising cleanses us within so that we can enjoy freedom without.

This makes sense when you understand that God does not artificially divide the internal from the external: our inner man (the spirit and soul) is vitally connected to our outer man (the body). That is why the apostle John prayed that we would prosper and be in health (in our bodies) 'just as our souls prosper'! He showed that for the Christian to enjoy a lifestyle of health there was close connection with a healthy soul or way of thinking (the soul involves the mind emotions and will). You cannot be suffering from an internal civil war where your mind and emotions are out of alignment with God's promises and live in health and well being. Your body eventually shows this inner turmoil and confusion.

3 John 2

2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

When we discover that generational curses have **already been** broken by Jesus, we begin to enjoy the benefits of our new bloodline. There is no need for a Christian to suffer genetic ailments and conditions (heart problems and the like) any longer. Rise up, draw a line in the sand and stand your ground against internal 'inherited disease patterns' and partake of God's provision for your total well being through what Jesus did. He has broken all iniquitous patterns in your life and that of your family. This freedom is your covenant benefit. Learn to partake of God's grace freely.

3. Jesus Sheds His Blood At The Roman Whipping Post

John 19:1-4

19:1 So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. 2 And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. 3 Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands.

A Roman scourging or whipping at the time of Christ was extremely violent. Usually it took place at a short whipping post over which the victim was slumped. Two soldiers would take turns at lashing the victim across his back with a whip that usually had glass, metal and bone embedded in it. It would rip across the person's flesh and tear multiple gaping stripes across their back with every stroke. The beating was relentless as the one soldier readied himself for the next lash as the first soldier landed his lash across the unfortunate victims back.

At this point Jesus was already exhausted from a night of extreme abuse, drama and gross injustice. Now the soldiers brutally inflicted thirty nine stripes on His back. Blood flowed from His back as this flogging continued. Yet as in all things, God was able to turn even this cruel punishment to our advantage. The stripes on Jesus back form part of God's wonderful plan for our physical healing.

Stripes On His Back

Isaiah 53:5

... the chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.

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The Bible teaches that not only did Jesus bring healing to us when He ministered during His earthly ministry, but now in His passion at the cross, He paid the price for our physical well being too. Jesus lived and died as our covenant head, taking our place in all things. God sees our need of redemption in the totality of our beings: spirit, soul and body (3 John 2). He made provision for our physical healing through the precious blood that Jesus shed when He received the stripes. Healing is therefore part of the 'shalom' peace or wholeness that is ours in the atonement. The Word of God clearly teaches that **both** the forgiveness of sin **and** the healing of our bodies has been paid for in the atonement. We access and enjoy this twofold grace when we accept by faith the great depth, height, length and breadth of God's love and goodness in Christ's substitutionary death. God will not withhold any good thing from you. Healing for your body is a **good** thing.

Acts 10:38-39

38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

4. Crown Of Thorns

Mark 15:16-20

16 Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. 17 And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, 18 and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. 20 And when they had

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mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.

Jesus identity as the King of Kings was being mocked by foolish men, ignorant of the eternal majesty in their midst. Later an accusation written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek was nailed to the cross above His head. Ironically, this intended mockery actually testified to His true identity. The words read:

Matthew 27:37

THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Interestingly, the religious rulers reacted vehemently to this sign because in the Hebrew the first letter of each word spelt out the very name of God, a name they supposedly revered so much!

Notice the statement was ironically written as a summary of the accusation against Jesus, and not a positive comment on His accepted identity. Today, you and I may have been accused of a variety of things as we stand in faith before unbelievers, mockers and scorners. Be sure that God will vindicate who you are in Christ as you stand firm in what He has declared you to be...His child: son or daughter.

John 1:12-13

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

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The crown of thorns that Jesus wore on His brow points to the time when God was obliged to curse the ground because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:17-18). Adam was to work under a curse and produce a living by the sweat of his brow! Jesus came as the second Adam to buy us back to a place of fruitfulness and prosperity in the power of grace through faith and not our own efforts.

Once again God sees our physical well being even in this practical area of finances as not being divorced from His 'shalom' peace or wholeness. Jesus is now our peace, and He lives within us to show the world that God takes care of His own in the practical matters of life.

The following powerful scripture attests to the work Jesus did at the cross to purchase us back from poverty into prosperity. It must be properly interpreted in the context of material things and not 'spiritualized' away.

2 Corinthians 8:8-10

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Only at the cross when Jesus took our poverty on Himself did He become 'poor'. At no time during His earthly ministry along with many disciples in tow, did He lack from a full supply to fulfill the work God called Him to do.

To be 'rich' in Bible terms is to have a 'full supply' in order to complete God's will in one's life. Jesus was only 'poor' in His passion when He took on our poverty at the cross as our substitute. At all other times His covenant

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Father in heaven ensured that He was never forsaken or begging for anything: He had a full supply to meet the needs of all his disciples and many more too (remember the feeding of the five thousand, the boat sinking load of fish, the water turned into wine etc).

Work and the money it generates are tools to glorify God. Jesus came to put everything in true perspective including the sanctified use of our time, efforts and material resources. Everything we are and do ought to bring Him glory and build His kingdom. This includes material resources and money.

Deuteronomy 8:18-19

18 "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Receive His grace (or power) in this area, and do not let the enemy rob you through religious tradition. Glorify God with the material resources entrusted to you.

2 Corinthians 9:7-9

8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Simply put, God has blessed us in order to be a blessing to others. We are to be like a flowing river that passes on its water from the source to the area of need. There is a flow of blessing in a river that you do not get in a reservoir that dams up the flow. Jesus' blood flowed out on our behalf, bringing blessing wherever it flowed.

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5. Jesus Sheds His Blood Through His Hands

When Jesus was taken up to Golgotha, or the 'place of the skull', He shed His blood there in three distinct places: first in His hands and feet as He was pinned to cross and later from His side as He was pierced with a spear.

The soldiers drove huge nails through Jesus hands or wrists pinning Him securely to the cross. Hands signify things we touch and hands and are designed by God to bring blessing and prosperity.

Psalm 90:17

17 And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;

Mark 10:16

16 And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them. (Note: these were the children that were brought to Him).

God's beauty is ours because the son of man (Jesus) was betrayed into the hands of men (Matthew 17:22). Now we can raise our hands to Him in praise and offer up a sacrifice of praise for His goodness. We can bless others as we literally touch them with our hands and pray for their healing.

Mark 16:18

... they (the believers) will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

With redeemed hands we must not be afraid to 'touch' that which is unclean, because in the New Covenant the unclean

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becomes clean. Jesus showed us the way when He touched the leper (something not practiced under the Old Covenant Law). Because we now go out into a needy world in His name, we represent His holiness and power and can touch that which is unclean and see it become clean through God's power.

Mark 1:40-42

40 Then a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." 41 And Jesus, moved with compassion, put out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.

The power of Jesus blood shed through His hands on the cross today sanctifies our hands to become instruments of blessing.

6. Through His Feet

Feet represent authority. Adam lost authority on earth when he rebelled. He came under satan's authority (foot). When Jesus' feet were brutally pinned to the cross, the blood that flowed from them bought back our authority.

God put all things under Jesus' feet!

Ephesians 1:22-23

22 And He put all things under His feet , and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

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Jesus is qualified to be in authority over all things. Yet in a fascinating passage in the book of Hebrews God speaks of putting all things in subjection under **man's** feet. By extension Jesus suffered and died for us as our covenant head functioning in His role as the 'son of Man' (Matthew 26:2). He died as a man, perfectly representing us before God.

Hebrews 2:6-8

"What is man that You are mindful of him,
Or the son of man that You take care of him?
7 You have made him a little lower than the angels;
You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And set him over the works of Your hands.
8 You have put all things in subjection under his
feet."

Much earlier Moses was promised that every place on which his feet trod would be his. He was to boldly step out and take the place that God had prepared for His people.

Deuteronomy 11:24

24 Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours:

Later Joshua, who was Moses' understudy, had the promise repeated to him as he was preparing to enter the Promised Land.

Joshua 1:3

3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.

In our time, God sends us as ambassadors of peace into a world full of turmoil with a powerful promise to crush

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satan under **our** feet. He has a place of influence and impact that He has ordained for each one of us to exercise dominion in. The price for this has already been paid for by Jesus blood which he shed on the cross through His feet.

Romans 16:19-20

20 And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

As we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit (hold fast to His steps) we will be kept safe and not turn aside into any wrong path.

Job 23:11

11 My foot has held fast to His steps;
I have kept His way and not turned aside.

Even if we slip, God is there to extend His mercy to us. He will hold us up, and bring us back to that place of authority where we can stand our ground against the enemy's assault.

Psalms 94:17-18

17 Unless the LORD had been my help,
My soul would soon have settled in silence.
18 If I say, "My foot slips,"
Your mercy, O LORD, will hold me up.

Ephesians 6:11

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

7. Through His Side Or Heart

John 19:32-34

32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him.

33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. 34

But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

Jesus gave up His spirit and died at approximately three in the afternoon. He died at the same time the sacrificial lambs were being sacrificed a short distance away within the temple precincts inside the city walls by the priests on duty.

Usually victims of crucifixion took longer than a few hours to die, but in Jesus case, it was the crushing weight of the sin of the world that some say broke His heart before the soldiers could pierce His side. As the spear was thrust into His (side) or heart sac, blood and water flowed out. This proved medically that Jesus was dead already and that His legs did not need to be broken.

Jesus suffering had thus opened up the way for all mankind back to the heart of God.

Dramatically darkness had covered the whole world (Luke 23:44) as the 'light of the world' (John 8:12) took upon Himself the sin and resultant darkness of all mankind on that fateful yet glorious day.

The crucifixion was the supreme act of love that opened up a pathway into the heart of God. His broken heart healed ours. A central aspect of His ministry included mending

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broken hearts (Luke 4:18). Through the cross when His blood flowed from His side, the deep seated joy of an unbroken heart relationship with our heavenly Father was restored.

Little did the soldier know at that time as he pierced Jesus' side with his spear that prophecy was being fulfilled (Zechariah 12:10).

John 19:36-37

36 For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."

Jesus Conquers Death

In the utter humiliation of the moment as He hung on the cross on Golgotha, Jesus turned the tables on satan, the great 'Goliath'. Just as King David many years before had cut off the head of Goliath with his own sword and brought it to Jerusalem (and reportedly buried it on Golgotha) so Jesus cut off the 'head' (his authority) of satan. Through his own death Jesus conquered death!

Hebrews 2:14-15

He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

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In God's economy, Jesus' humiliation and death led to our exaltation. We were once alienated from God in our minds, even His enemy, yet now we stand before Him in His presence holy, blameless, and above reproach, His covenant friends.

Colossians 1:19-22

19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

Our defeat or victory does not depend on what happens **to** us but rather on what happens **in** us. As we believe on what Jesus has already done for us on the cross, we are reconciled to God our Father and declared to be blameless. From this point on we are encouraged to consider ourselves in this way, our consciences cleansed from a sense of shame and guilt for past sin. So to say that as New Testament believers we are still 'sinners' at heart is to dishonor Jesus work on the cross, and is a form of ignorant false humility that belittles the power of the Holy Spirit in regenerating us at the new birth.

Titus 3:5

5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,..

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1 Corinthians 6:11

11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Ezekiel 36:25-26

25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

The above three scriptures all speak to the radical work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating us. Right now, we are completely new creatures, recreated in God's image, restored to full sonship and all its covenant privileges. This is what Jesus blood that flowed from His side did for us. His blood flows deep into our innermost beings, and we cannot make His work into some sort of superficial 'behavior modification scheme'. We are truly 'born again' as new creatures in Christ.

What Jesus Said On The Cross

The four Gospels give us a composite account of what happened on the cross from differing viewpoints. God did this to emphasis certain truths to different peoples with different backgrounds and inclinations. In Matthew's Gospel the focus was largely on the Jews who looked for key prophetic fulfillments. Mark's Gospel zeroes in the Roman (gentile) mindset which valued action, response and

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authority. Luke's Gospel targets the Greek mindset which valued the 'perfect man' and John's Gospel sought to develop the soaring heavenly meanings behind Jesus life and death for the believer.

The four Gospels together paint a full picture of the complete savior and His work, and are symbolized by the four animals in Ezekiel's vision.

Ezekiel 1:10

10 As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man, each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle.

Each animal had commonality in their 'faces', as do each of the four Gospels. This commonality serves to bear witness to the truth.

The following seven statements Jesus made on the cross are taken from the four Gospels to give a complete picture of His grace.

1. Jesus Forgives Those That Crucified Him

Luke 23:34

34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

Much evil is perpetrated in ignorance, so here Jesus opened the door for forgiveness to be released towards those that acted against Him in ignorance. Later, on the Day of Pentecost (and even after that day) 'a great company' of the priests came to the Lord (Acts 6:7). I believe this was

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directly related to the magnanimous release of forgiveness at the very moment of Jesus' abandonment and human injustice. Forgiveness was such a part of Jesus' life that it literally 'oozed' out from Him under stress. The forgiveness He released literally changed the spiritual atmosphere paving the way for the Gospel to penetrate the hearts of those that would later witness the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem.

Remarkably, the martyr Stephen also was so full of God that when he was stoned to death by religious bigots he echoed Jesus' cry for forgiveness. Heaven was opened to him as he called out to God in his last moments. The river of God's love and forgiveness in his heart flowed out strongly here in this great act of mercy.

Acts 7:58-60

58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

The staunch yet bigoted religionist Saul, who was to become the great Apostle Paul, was in the evil company that stoned Stephen that fateful day. It initially appeared as if Stephen's words of forgiveness fell on deaf ears as Saul later journeyed to Damascus on a mission to brutally persecute Christians there. But on the road he had a life changing encounter with the Lord Himself who literally knocked Saul off his 'high horse'. I believe the seed of forgiveness sown by Stephen as he died came to fruition at

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that moment in Saul's life. Stephen's intercession at the moment of His death set the stage for Paul's salvation.

Intercession is a powerful release of God's purposes in the spirit realm, and should never be neglected. Pray for those that despitefully use you (Matthew 5: 44). Stand in faith and watch and see God bring your persecutors around. God's love in you will never fail...if you give him enough time to bring your persecutors around.

2. Jesus Speaks To His Mother And The Disciple John

John 19:25-27

26 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!"

27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

In the midst of His agony, Jesus had the heart and presence of mind to make arrangements for the welfare of His mother. Most people find it difficult to truly take care of other people when things are going well, let alone when they themselves are under great pressure. Yet Jesus, even when He was under extreme duress, committed His mother to the beloved disciple John's care. It seems as if there could have been no better choice. He settled the relationship by addressing John as well. I see in this act, a compassionate identification with all people who have lost a child or with those who have been adopted for whatever reason.

God cares about you and your family.

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Psalm 68:6

6 God sets the solitary in families;...

If you are lonely or solitary, He will set you in a 'family' perfectly suited for you. Trust Him for this. He starts by putting you in a local church family. Keep open to complete fulfillment in these matters.

3. Jesus Reassures The Penitent Thief

Luke 23:43

43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Jesus was crucified between two criminals who both berated Him as they suffered. Yet as their agony dragged on, one of them came to his senses and called upon the Lord at the last moment, asking to be remembered when Jesus came into His kingdom. Jesus immediately recognized the penitent thief's repentance (change of mind) and assured Him that He would do just that. This notable act of mercy saved the man from eternal condemnation, and he immediately enjoyed saving forgiveness.

God is willing to forgive at the last minute, and we must be open to serving communion to people on their death beds who turn from their past rebellion, doubt, confusion and sin to call upon the Lord. If Jesus accepted this thief's repentance as genuine, who are we to judge and discourage someone from calling upon the Lord at the last minute as being insincere? God sent Jesus into our world to save sinners, not judge or condemn them, even if they leave it to the last minute. Only a religious person, unrenewed to

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God's amazing grace, will want someone on their deathbed to try to 'deserve' forgiveness through some set of actions.

4. Jesus Thirsts

John 19:28-29

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"

Jesus knew that His suffering had satisfied God's just judgment of our sin laid on Him as the sacrificial Lamb. He was totally focused on fulfilling God's plan in God's way, and now could ask for something to drink to meet His own need. As a true servant / son, He always sought to serve the needs of others first before looking to His own.

Interestingly, Jesus the 'Lamb of God' thirsted because He had become 'dry' with the sins of the world, for whose benefit He was crucified. Earlier in His ministry He had exhorted the people to come to Him whoever thirsted – that is He was fully supplied with the 'water' of God's presence and provision through the Holy Spirit. He became thirsty so that you and I need never to thirst (spiritually) ever again. He was the 'rock' that was struck in the wilderness by Moses so that water flowed out in abundance to meet the needs of the Israelites (Exodus 17:6). Later, when the people called for water again Moses was instructed to 'speak to the rock' (Numbers 20:7-11) and not strike it this time. Moses got angry and struck the rock twice, yet the water flowed out in merciful provision. As a consequence Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because as a leader he knew better and suffered the greater judgment.

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What this means to us today is this: Jesus has already been 'struck' by our sin on the cross, leaving only the confession of our faith (speaking) that is required by God to enjoy His supply. We do not, and indeed cannot, 'twist' God's arm (convince) Him to meet our by our own efforts like fasting and prayer. Only the completed work of Christ impresses (pleases) Him. Our only approach is through the blood of Christ already shed for us. We are to agree with God (through our mouth) and enjoy His provision this way only.

In another type that connects to Jesus thirsting on the cross we find Gideon placing two fleeces of lamb's wool – a type of Christ on the ground before the Lord (Judges 6:36-40). On the first occasion Gideon asked God to make the fleece wet and the surrounding ground dry. This happened and speaks of Christ in His earthly ministry supplying the water of life to the thirsty around Him (John 4:35 –the woman at the well received spiritual water as she encountered the Lord's grace and mercy). Then Gideon asked for the opposite to happen: the fleece was to be dry and the ground around it to be wet! This speaks of when Jesus was 'dry' on the cross and thirsted, and the world became blessed or wet with God's grace.

Jesus' life and death has paved the way for us to fulfill all that God will ever require of us. He has shown us the way, and we can with confidence know that even in our deepest need, we can continue to serve Him and know that He will meet our greatest need at any time. He is the water of everlasting life springing up in us (John 4:14).

5. Jesus Despairs

Matthew 27:46-47

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

All through the four Gospels Jesus describes God as His 'Father'. Only here when the sin of the world was laid on Him did He despair and address His Father as 'My God'.

Jesus goes so far as to express His feelings of being forsaken in fulfillment of the prophetic psalm of suffering.

Psalm 22:1

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My groaning?

At no time before He suffered on the cross was He ever forsaken, left alone to fend for Himself or abandoned. Yet as the sins of the world were laid on Him, He became alienated from God as His Father. God's judgment of mankind's sin was just or righteous yet at the same time because of Jesus sinlessness, the cross provided the way for mercy to meet with the truth of righteousness in a dramatic moment of intimacy in full view.

Psalm 85:10

10 Mercy and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed.

In this supreme act of love God removed the antagonism of sin and established eternal peace with His man. Jesus revealed God as our 'Father' in His earthly ministry before

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the cross. 'Father' speaks of belonging and closeness, whereas the term 'God' is somewhat more distant. Sin distances us from God, and when Jesus took upon Himself our sin as our substitute, He was 'distanced' from God. God was obliged to turn his face way from Jesus at this point.

Jesus suffered this form of 'abandonment' so that we might never be abandoned. This is the ultimate love of the cross. Now that this substitution has been made, rest assured that God will never leave you or forsake you.

Hebrews 13:5-6

For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we may boldly say:

"The LORD is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?"

Even in the midst of circumstances where it seems that someone has forsaken you, you can boldly declare that your Father in heaven has not and never will, no matter what you may be feeling in your emotions.

6. Jesus Dismisses His Spirit

John 19:30

30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

Luke 23:45-46

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46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.

Jesus tasted the sour wine and boldly declared that His work was 'finished'. There was nothing more that He could do for you and me. Today this is still true. All we have need of in the 21st Century was paid and provided for in Christ almost two thousand years ago. Our faith must therefore be focused on receiving what He has already promised, and not on begging Him to do something outside His will. We must align ourselves in faith with His stated, known and believed promises.

At the very end Jesus bowed His head on His own chest, thus finally finding a place to rest His head. Up till this time He had not found any place to rest His head. The fallen world had no rest; it was and still is turbulent and disturbed. However now that the Prince of Peace has come, we can enjoy true peace through His sacrifice.

Matthew 8:20

And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

As He gave up His spirit (it was not taken from Him), He showed dignity and control. At the very moment He breathed His last, He now addresses God once again as His 'Father' (because the sin sacrifice was complete) and commits His spirit into His Father's hands. He is now totally dependent on God and has found His place of rest in Him. He can now lay his head down in the place of eternal rest. Three days later God vindicates Jesus' righteousness by raising Him from the dead.

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Acts 17:31

He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

Romans 1:4

4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

Thank God we serve a savior who met all the standards of righteousness, paid the ultimate price and opened the way for every believer to call God their 'Father' - the one who sees us in Christ and who will never forsake us.

7. Jesus Final Cry As The Veil Is Torn In The Temple

Matthew 27:50-53

50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. 51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, 52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

Jesus cried out with loud voice and not a whimper. In the intensity of this world changing moment, He wanted the world to know in no uncertain terms that His work was finished! The price for the sin of all mankind had been paid once and for all. In the face of seeming defeat, the sound of Jesus' victory cry rang out and today stills resounds around the world. Do you hear the cry?

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The thick veil in the temple that separated the Holy place from the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom. It was reported to be at least four inches thick and the fact that it was torn from top to bottom signified this was a supernatural act of God for the benefit of man. (Grace from top to bottom: from God in heaven to man and earth). Man now had direct access to the presence of God through Jesus' blood, and we now stand under an open heaven where we can access all that heaven has to provide to meet whatever need we have: spirit, soul and body.

Such was the power in this sacrifice that the very earth quaked, the rocks were split, and even many bodies of dead Old Testament saints were raised to later go into the city after Jesus Himself rose from the dead on the third day. These were strange happenings indeed. Can you imagine the consternation when family members showed up at the house after having been buried weeks, months, maybe even years before!

God events change the environment.

I believe this passage supports the teaching that Old Testament believers were 'in waiting' in a place called 'Paradise' below the earth till Jesus came. Paradise or 'Abraham's bosom' was the place of the **believing** Old Testament dead (Luke 16:19-31). It was separated by a fixed impassable gulf from 'Hades', the place set aside for departed **un**believers. This challenging and sobering passage underlines the importance of making the right choice to trust God's salvation this side of eternity. Once we pass, there is no second chance.

This chapter has explored the seven places in which Jesus pure blood was shed for our salvation, as well as the seven

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utterances He made on the cross itself. If God did not spare or withhold His ultimate: Jesus His Son, but delivered Him up for our salvation, we can be sure that He will then freely give us all things that we need from day to day. His heart has always been and always will be to freely supply us with anything we have need of according to the riches found in His Son!

Romans 8:32

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

As you celebrate the Lord's Supper with the bread and wine ask the Lord to fill you with His wisdom and understanding into the pointers covered in this chapter.

The next chapter will focus on the amazing grace of God as He sacrificed His only begotten son for us; 'once and for all'.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate Your supper, we remember the great price You paid at the cross for our freedom. Thank You that Your blood redeems us from all manner of affliction and oppression: spirit, soul and body.

We rejoice that You chose to drink the cup of suffering on the cross so that we could drink the cup of blessing.

You went to the greatest depths of pain and rejection so that we could be restored to the greatest heights of wholeness and acceptance in the Father's family.

We worship and adore You for the great grace, peace and mercy You give us through Your blood.

Amen.”

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Chapter 8

'Once and For All'

Amazing Grace

Romans 6:10-12

10 For the death that He died, He died to sin **once for all**; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.
11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Emphasis added).

Hebrews 7:26-27

26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did **once for all** when He offered up Himself. (Emphasis added).

The phrase 'once and for all' should settle things about the grace of God as it is contrasted with our efforts to earn favor and acceptance with God. What

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Jesus did at the cross, He did **once and for all**. In God's eyes there is nothing more to do but believe and receive. Anything that comes after this in our Christian lives is fruit of an already established relationship. If we reckon that there is more to do in making us acceptable in our approach to God, then we negate the 'once and for all' sacrifice at the cross. When Jesus died for us, we died to sin and came alive to God at the same time. All that we need to do now is to 'see' this truth, and apply it to our lives. For some this is 'too good to be true' (where is that in the Bible) and they slip into some sort of blend between Law and Grace, not fully enjoying the benefits of either.

Right believing leads to right behavior. If your heart is in tune with God's heart as revealed in his Word, then your actions will line up. Your behavior - what you do - will be the fruit of an ongoing relationship with Jesus (John 15) and not the product of a set of religious rules you follow or even some set of vain attempts to reach up to God with your own efforts or works.

Jesus, as our High Priest of the New Covenant of grace, offered Himself once and for all, unlike the priests (and High Priest) of the Old Testament who year after year repeatedly slaughtered the sacrificial animals. It was a continual and unending process that served a type of the great 'once and for all' sacrifice of God's own Son's blood as The Lamb of God.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul comments that we are now reconciled to God through Jesus blood on the cross. We are now holy, blameless and above reproach, not by what we have done are doing or ever will do in the future (our sacrifices), but by what He has already done! The focus ought to shift off our efforts to His effort.

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Colossians 1:19-23

19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight-- 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,

Our 'response to His ability' (responsibility) is to continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast in the glorious good news that the price for our redemption has already been paid. There is nothing more to do! If we add anything to what He has done, we negate what He has done. In effect we take matters back into our hands and exclude His grace, putting us back into the realm of 'works' and the law which condemns us.

Holiness is something God imputes to us as His gift. He attaches no blame to us at all, and steers way from all reproach (disgrace, defamation or disparagement for sin). When we are grounded in this liberating truth, and not moved from this hope of the Gospel, no devil can lie to us about our walk with the Lord, accusing us that we are not good enough or not living up to God's standards. We are secure in Christ, and He has met God's righteous standards on our behalf. We now serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear 'because we have grace'.

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Hebrews 12:28

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

God's kingdom in us is unshakeable, and when we keep our eyes on Jesus and His finished work, we have all that we need to live a life of holiness. We serve God by His enabling grace, and by grace alone.

Grace

Grace may be defined as the 'unmerited or undeserved favor of God' in our lives through what Christ has done. His 'kind and friendly disposition towards us' comes from His heart of love and compassion for us in our helplessness. He expects no other contribution to the relationship but to trust and receive from Him all that He promises in the covenant.

The power to fulfill the call to live right before Him on a daily basis springs out of this position of rest. There is security in grace, it does not depend on how well or not we perform. Our performance (or lack thereof) ought never to be the issue in our relationship with the Lord. The focus must always be on Him and what He has done.

The early disciples had to come to the end of themselves as they prayed and waited for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on Pentecost. Up till this time they had lived under the Mosaic Law, obliged to keep it all, something they were evidently not able to do. That is why they, like all other Jews, needed yearly cleansing from sin on the Day of

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Atonement. The Law declared that were 'cursed' if they did not continue doing all the requirements (Galatians 3:10). This impossible situation was designed by God to drive them to faith in the Messiah. The whole system of types and shadows with the sacrificial animals, feasts and practices pointed to Christ as the fulfillment. Besides, the Law was added to the Abrahamic covenant for a season till Jesus the Messiah and promised 'Seed' came.

Galatians 3:19

It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made.

Now in a dramatic covenantal shift, Christ had died as their Lamb of Sacrifice on the cross and declared with bold finality: 'It is finished'.

So what could there possibly be to 'do' but wait and believe. This may seem too good to be true, and an excuse for doing nothing, but when you are set free from a performance mindset in your walk with the Lord, then His burden truly is light and His yoke easy. Yes, He actually wants us to be 'light and easy'! Only when man's religious traditions are added does the Christian walk become burdensome. This is not God's plan.

Really, our walk with the Lord is about bearing fruit naturally from a position of security. Striving has no place here. In fact we are **seated** in heavenly places together with Him as joint heirs. You can't do much when you are seated.

The good deeds we do after this are already prepared beforehand by God. We merely 'walk in or into' them. What freedom there is when we are under God's grace and set free from the bondage ministry of death (2 Corinthians

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3:7) of the 'Law' where we are constantly trying to measure up to God's standards in our own strength.

Consider the following powerful passage from Ephesians (the Christian 'Magna Carta') that speaks to the revelation we need from God through prayer of our 'exalted' position of rest in Christ.

Ephesians 1:18-20

...that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,...

All that is made available to us in Christ is because we 'believe' (Vs 19). Look at the words: hope, riches, glory, inheritance, exceeding greatness...all these belong to Christ... and to us when we realize that we are raised up with Him! Consider a later verse where our identification with Christ is highlighted. We are seated with Him at God's right hand of favor.

Ephesians 2:3-7

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ...

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God has raised us up with Christ to sit in a position of rulership. God is in His element making something out of nothing, raising the dead to life, so it is His great love and pleasure that seats us in Christ at His right hand... the place of His favor and blessing.

The good works we then do in His name must originate in His heart, be according to His plan and process and end up bringing Him glory. That is why we need His grace at all times. Even good ideas performed with good intentions do not bring Him glory. Only 'God ideas' do any lasting good. All things must therefore be 'of' 'through' and 'to' Him.

Romans 11:36

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

This should drive us to pray and seek Him for his specific plans and pursuits.

What freedom there is in knowing that God has gone ahead and made preparations for us. All we need to do is take the time to slow down enough to hear what He would have us do, how to do it, when to do it and with whom. Then simply step into it.

Ephesians 2:10

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

If our lives and ministries are law driven (have to) rather than grace driven (get to) they will be characterized by 'sweat' or human effort. Old Testament priests were required to wear nothing that caused sweat (Ezekiel 44:18).

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In our dispensation, Jesus has already sweated on our behalf when He suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane. He broke the curse of human self effort, setting us free to pursue God's plan in the strength of the grace that is imparted to us through the Holy Spirit.

In a culture where 'self made' men and women are lauded by so many, God gets no glory. Our focus must always be on Him and His ability in us.

When we partake of The Lord's Supper we emphasize His grace and thus glorify Him as we make a clear statement of our rest in the complete work of the cross.

The Amazing Part Of Grace

John 19:30

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

When Jesus uttered these dramatic and defining words on the cross at the hinge point of history, little did His onlookers appreciate the impact they would have on your life and mine. He had just put a seal on God's plan to set mankind free from sin and its consequences. He had lived a sinless life, and had been the perfect sacrifice to satisfy God's demands. His work was finished! All that remained at this point was for God to raise Him from the dead thus vindicating His mission.

Romans 1:3-4

...3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the

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flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

Today, as far as pleasing God is concerned, there is nothing left to do except to trust Him in faith. So your Christian life begins with a big “done”, not a long “to do” list of religious observances. Jesus has done it all, and when we trust in Him we are completely acceptable to God.

Put it this way: does your behavior qualify you to believe, or does your belief impact your behavior? God positions you in Christ, and then your Christian practice flows out of this new place of favor and blessing. Your heart has to be changed, and then your hand will do what God wants. Your conduct depends on your calling, not the other way round.

In learning to walk free, don't get the cart before the horse! The Bible way is to work things from the inside out, not from the outside in. Receive in your heart all that Jesus has already done, and then act out what is on the inside. This is the heart of what is described in the Bible as the ‘new creation’. This is truly amazing.

New Creation Realities

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has **reconciled** us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their

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trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the **righteousness** of God in Him.

God's Word says you are right **now** a new creation, not will be one if only you could 'get your act together' somehow. Victorious Christian living is therefore not a matter of our works, but of faith in what has already taken place in the spirit. God has moved on your behalf, forgiven you of all your sins, and sent His Spirit to live on the inside of you. His Spirit now empowers you to live the life He has planned for you. God does not focus on sin, but rather our response to His gift of rightstanding (righteousness) in Christ. Our sin has been judged in Christ on the cross, and the way is open to relate to God on the basis of His righteousness in Christ.

We now examine the life of freedom that is founded on the following 'new creation realities'.

Regenerated, Not Just Renovated

Titus 3:4-5

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,...

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When you accept Christ and are born again, you are saved by what He has done for you. He has 're-gened' you spiritually or regenerated and renewed your spirit, making you **really** brand new. Your heart is like nothing before (as the Greek word 'new' underscores). He did not just renovate your old spirit with a coat of 'spiritual paint' to cover up the old and bad. No, He totally made everything brand new, and old things have passed away. We have a new set of 'spiritual genes' and are no longer sinners by nature, but rather accepted sons and daughters of God recreated in His image. Of course we often fall short of this new glory in our actions, but this does not negate our new status in Christ. It is just like when a child breaks some household rule; he does not suddenly lose his identity as a son or daughter in that family. Correction may be needed, but the child never loses his or her status as a child.

God wants us to be assured of our salvation, not nervous. If our focus is on Christ in us, then we will shut the door to much trouble and condemnation.

When Jesus introduced the New Covenant in His blood (Matthew 26:28), He did so in fulfillment of Ezekiel 36:26 where He promised He would put in us a new heart, and take out the old.

Ezekiel 36:26-28

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

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God is the one who causes you to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments. This happens because He lives in you and your spirit is totally **recreated** and not merely **reconditioned!** The spirit you now have as a born again Christian is not the same as you had before. Even though your outward behavior may not always have 'caught up', it will when you present yourself to the Lord to renew your way of thinking according to Romans 12:1-2. Recognizable transformation comes when you consistently respond to His love and make choices to yield to God's ways.

Romans 12:1-2

12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Only by the 'mercies of God' can we even begin the process of transformation. We present our bodies to God, knowing that we are already acceptable to him in Christ. He then takes what we give Him and transforms us as our mind 'catches up with our spirit'. Very often, it is unrenewed thinking (a mixture of lies from the enemy, religious traditions and or plain and simple ignorance) that short circuits the process of proving what is that 'good acceptable and perfect will of God'(Vs 2).

Some Christians tend to dig up their past sins much like a grave robber digs up old bones long void of any life. They forget that God has forgiven and forgotten their sins, and that they are 'buried with Christ' in the grave. They replay past hurts over and over again like a continuous loop of a

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nasty old tape, thus exalting the power of the past over the promise of the future as a believer.

Choose to arise into new life in Him, and step out of the darkness into the light of this new creation reality: you are brand new in God's sight!

Romans 6:2-4

How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Reconciled To God

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ...

God reconciled you to Himself, restoring you to a relationship where the hostility and alienation that once existed because of sin is no longer there. Sin is destructive and God hates sin, but always loves the sinner. In Christ He dealt with the sin problem that separated you from Him. God's righteous wrath fell on Jesus at the cross, so now it certainly does not fall on you. Jesus was your substitute, and God no longer holds your sin to your account. He nailed it to the cross, took it out of the way, and set you absolutely free from that debt.

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Colossians 2:13-15

13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

This is such good news, that the enemy fights it with all manner of confusion in the body of Christ.

Righteousness: God's Gift

Romans 5:17, 19

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ...

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

To be made righteous means that in Christ you now stand at His right hand of favor, forgiveness, blessing and authority. This position is not achieved in any way, only received. When you receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness, you are catapulted into a realm of authority: you begin to reign in the realm of life as a king. Whereas Adam's disobedience caused many to be 'made sinners' (by nature), Jesus' obedience made many to be righteous, thus completely overturning Adam's sin.

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Fully appreciate that righteousness is God's gift. God gives you this gift because He loves you and wants to bless you, not because you have earned it through good deeds. The good deeds come later as an expression of your love, thankfulness and identification with His desire to bless others through you. They are in no way an attempt to prove to God that you were good enough to deserve His blessing. Your own righteousness amounts to nothing but 'filthy rags' compared to God's righteousness. No matter how good you may get in your own strength, you will always fall short of God's best. For those who are trying to climb the wrong spiritual ladder, receive His gift and rejoice that God saw fit to restore you to His right hand of favor. Revel in the abundance of His grace that is freely available to all who receive Christ as Lord and savior.

Receivers Of His Divine Nature

2 Peter 1:2-4

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

You may have cried out to God for His grace and peace to be yours. The Bible fact is you already have them in Christ. But to enjoy their benefit you have to receive revelation knowledge of what He has already done in your heart. God's people perish for a lack of knowledge, and not for a

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lack of God's power, or even prayers. You have to know, believe and act on what you already have in Christ to enjoy continued victory.

Hosea 4:6

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Notice that the above passage in 2 Peter says that God has already given you 'all things that pertain to life and godliness' (Vs 3). You simply have to know about and enjoy it! It's like someone depositing a million in a special bank account with your name as beneficiary, but you simply don't know about it. Or, if you do, you don't believe that it true. In both cases you are not going to make any withdrawals and will never enjoy the benefits already accrued to your account.

When God comes to live on the inside of you when you are born again, He brings all that He is and has with Him. His nature and power becomes available to you through believing in the promises. If you truly believe that God has made Himself available to you, you will enjoy His fullness. However, if you don't, you will not enjoy the abundant benefits of your new relationship with God.

God does not want us just to 'get by' in life. He wants us to enjoy abundant life in Christ (John 10:10). In fact, when we know or have a revelation of the love God has for us, we are filled with 'all His fullness'!

Ephesians 3:17-19

17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height--

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19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be **filled with all the fullness of God.** (Emphasis added).

God takes away all emptiness and the false pursuits it produces.

Like Reproduces Like

In the book of Genesis, God set in motion the divine principle of 'like reproduces like'. Of course God submits to His own principles. He made Adam after His own kind. That was why Adam is called the 'son of God' (Luke 3:38). Today when a person accepts Jesus as Lord he is given the power or authority to be called a 'child (or son / daughter) of God'.

John 1:12-13

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Notice that you are 'born' of the will of God. He implants His new nature in you. Of course this may 'blow the minds' of folk steeped in tradition and religion, but it is true anyway! God changes your nature. Where your old nature caused you to habitually sin before you were born again, your new nature is programmed for righteousness. The key issue here is, do you really understand this truth, receive it in faith and renew your thinking to think in line with God's word, or not?

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God's nature in you is to love, give, and forgive. He is full of faith, hope and love. In fact, He is love! His essential nature is love. He is all-powerful, full of mercy and patience, and much, much more.

The all powerful supreme God of the universe now lives in you! It is up to us to accept the powerful truth that we can and should partake of His divine nature. It's yours for the taking. God said it, and that should settle it.

A sinner sins because his nature is predisposed to sin. A born again Christian in Christ has new nature predisposed to righteousness.

This is what is amazing about grace: God's riches at Christ's expense for us, absolutely free. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we remind ourselves of who we truly are in Christ and who He truly is in us. There is much glory or substance in understanding and walking in this grace and truth.

Colossians 1:27

27 ... God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate Communion, we are truly amazed by Your grace and favor towards us.

You paid the ultimate price for our ultimate freedom, once and for all. There is nothing more to be done.

We rejoice that in You we are made brand new creatures, reconciled to Your heart, receptors of Your righteousness and even partakers of Your divine nature.

Help us to see and celebrate the heights to which you have already taken us in the spirit.

Amen.”

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Chapter 9

The Early Church Breaks Bread

Acts 2:40-47

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

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The early church provides us with a blueprint for the substance and structure of corporate church life. Of course we have cultural, logistic and technological differences today, but God's wisdom still applies in a 'post modern' world without any compromise. The practices outlined in this chapter will hopefully give you firm and fruitful principles to apply in your own context. You will learn how to live and celebrate life in the light of what God has ordained for the local church.

A Dramatic Outpouring Of The Holy Spirit

On the Day of Pentecost fifty days after Jesus resurrection, the early church experienced a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit that dramatically introduced the church to the city of Jerusalem and later by extension in the years that followed, the whole world.

It was a surge of the supernatural through the hands of the apostles and believers that had never been seen before. It caught the devil and the religious authorities under his control completely by surprise, and they have been trying to play catch up ever since. The fires of revival have been burning through the centuries in places where hearts are open to the truth and where the true uncompromised gospel of grace is preached.

On this great day of the Feast of Pentecost about three thousand people were saved, miracles happened and people spoke in tongues. You could not be a disinterested bystander. It was so intense that you had to take a position: either for or against. There was no room for indifference. This is the context for the early church 'breaking bread'

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where they enjoyed the benefits of sharing this covenant meal on a regular basis.

When Peter preached on that day, he called the listeners to be 'saved from this perverse generation'. He was not focusing on the typical works of the flesh, like sexual perversion, but rather on a religious system corrupt at its core. This corruption of God's original intended purposes produced all sorts of evil and perversion in the society. The misuse of the Law had led to rampant sin, albeit hidden in many religious leaders whom Jesus described as 'whited sepulchres' – outwardly clean, but inwardly dead.

This was a generation that up till this point had not recognized the 'time of its visitation' (Luke 19:44). The prophesied Messiah had been right in their midst, attested by mighty miracles, yet they had given in to their callous and envious leadership, and called for His crucifixion a few short days earlier. Yet God's mercy and grace was now being poured out in such a measure that they could not ignore.

The merciful ways of God had been perverted by a man made system of 'doing church' (or temple worship in their context). This life draining set of rules and regulations (some six hundred and thirteen of them) had been substituted as a false and fruitless religion of Judaism instead of pointing them to faith in the coming Messiah. The true purposes of The Law had been hijacked and the people were mostly in bondage except for a faithful remnant.

Today, as in their day, our traditions often invalidate the power of God's Word. Cold, distant and empty religious observances, or the 'form and structure' we sometimes hold

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so dearly to in church circles, actually negates the liberating substance or glory God is releasing on His people.

Religious tradition devoid of grace and truth always has a negative effect.

Mark 7:13

13 making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down.

Think of it, even Jesus, God's own Son, mighty in power, was limited in His ministry by ungodly traditions of men (see Mark 7:1-12 for the whole incident). Wherever a dynamic expectant relationship with the living, caring and involved Father is substituted with technique, form and mannerisms (the 'way' we do things), cold formalism creeps in to quench spiritual fire or passion. God has already passionately pursued us, and wants us in turn to respond to His advances in a holy and passionate pursuit of His presence.

Transformation comes when we seek His face. When we behold or encounter the glory revealed in His face, we are changed. Worship is the environment for such a transformation. Breaking bread at the Lord's Supper provides such an environment of worship where we encounter God's goodness.

2 Corinthians 3:18

18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

'Gladly Received His Word'

God has chosen His Word to be the conveyer of faith (Romans 10:17). Only when we receive His Word with childlike acceptance does the power of the Holy Spirit come into play and the blessings of God flow in and through our lives.

God is not in the business of forcing His will on anyone. Faith is what pleases Him, (Hebrews 11:6) not unwilling obedience. When we 'gladly' receive His word faith arises and we please God and begin to walk in his abundance of grace.

However, if we hear God's power filled Word but 'filter' it through a mindset of ignorance, doubt, unbelief, hurt or religious tradition, we cut ourselves off from the life it carries. Trust is part of faith. God's goodness is the motivator of our trust. His manifest goodness causes us to change our way of thinking. This is the repentance that opens us up to His salvation.

Romans 2:4

4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

'Three Thousand Souls Were Added'

When the Law was given on Mt Sinai and written on tablets of stone about three thousand people were killed as they quickly forsook God's ways and caused Aaron to fashion a golden calf as they waited for Moses to come down the mountain (Exodus 32:19-29). They had quickly

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broken the first commandment and brought judgment on themselves.

In a remarkable mirror event at the public launch of Jesus' New Covenant Church on the Day of Pentecost where the resurrection power of God was initially poured out on all manner of flesh in the holy city of Jerusalem, three thousand souls are saved and added to the church. What a contrast and statement God was making here: life versus death! The Law, even though it was glorious nevertheless ministered death, whereas the more glorious ministry of the Spirit brought life.

2 Corinthians 3:7-9

7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.

The Law that was written on stones was and still is incapable of imparting any life, and is actually the ministration of death. On the other hand, grace and truth came through the living person of Jesus and carries a far more exceeding weight of glory or substance.

John 1:17-18

17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The early church walked in God's grace (unmerited favor and divine enablement through the Holy Spirit) and miracles happened. In contrast, miracles are not a feature of

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ministries characterized by Law. When was the last time you saw a miracle in an atmosphere of legalism, judgmentalism and dead religion?

Grace and truth does not come through keeping the Law, only through faith in Jesus name. The New Covenant Church walks in the miraculous because of Jesus' completed work at the cross and not because of rule keeping and any 'manmade' holiness. We are required to believe in Him. When we layer additional requirements we negate His grace.

The Church is vibrant and fruitful when it focuses on the life of Christ. God adds to this church daily those who are being saved.

'Continued Steadfastly'

The early church's steadfastness was not the product of some seminar that focused on the values of steadfastness. They had been touched by the flame of God's Holy Spirit. Grace had been poured out on them, and they had an experience with God which was tangible and personal. On the basis of a fresh revelation of the resurrected Christ they established a dynamic daily discipline that included the regular sharing of 'The Lord's Supper' or communion. Their discipline flowed from their relationship with Christ and not the other way round.

First, they steadfastly sat under apostolic doctrine (doctrine or teaching still counts in God's eyes); they participated in the common cause or 'fellowship' of their leadership who had received an impartation for reaching the world; and

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they were constantly praying. No wonder godly fear came upon every soul and miracles were the norm.

Our daily Christian practice is only powerful and sustained when we keep Jesus at the center of it all. If we reduce our church experience to a set of 'country club' endeavors focused on self gratification and advancement, we rob it of the life necessary to continue steadfastly advancing the kingdom.

'Now All Who Believed Were Together, And Had All Things In Common'

Generosity and a sense of community was another product of God's grace upon them. It was rooted in a realization of the value of communal sharing and support, and not on private or independent growth. Our faith is a shared one. Jesus taught that we are to pray the more community oriented '**Our** Father' (Matthew 6:9) and not the more individualistic '**My** Father'!

Modern Western individualism has no place in the church where members or rather 'attendees' largely spectate while the 'paid professionals' do their thing from the platform. Of course this is not the church's stated intent, but over time many churches default into various degrees and forms of this practice.

'Church' is much more than attracting people to come to church on Sundays. As much effort, people resources and finances ought to be spent on effectively getting people fruitful in the community, as is spent getting them to attend corporate church meetings on Sundays.

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In the book of Acts the people were equipped to function 'out there' in their sphere of influence. They carried the presence of God wherever they went, meeting the needs of the people they touched from day to day.

The early church met in the temple and 'broke bread' from house to house. Intimacy, fruitfulness and sharing was natural to them as they ate together keeping their practice of community ('koinonia') simple and sincere. They survived, thrived and grew dramatically because of God's power and not because of some slick program that attracted onlookers at some central location.

They had a reason to praise God and the Lord honored this shared devotion with His favor producing growth as a natural byproduct of this balance. The believers saw themselves as channels of God's blessing, called to help their fellow man in practical ways. They certainly did not see their faith as a means to getting ahead for themselves individually. Rather they saw the value of sticking together as a mutually supportive group of people with a shared destiny under the leadership of the apostles.

Today we need to explore what it means to be 'together'. I don't think that it means to simply show up at a public church meeting and sit for an hour or so and then leave without engaging with fellow believers in any meaningful way. The way we do things ought to facilitate true community and not hinder it. Whether community and sharing is fostered through 'life' or 'connect' small groups and other relationship oriented gatherings, the point is to strategically encourage this God ordained way to grow and impact the community in which we live in a real and meaningful way.

The Grace Continues As The Early Church Is Threatened

In the somewhat lengthy passage below (don't skip it – it's worth reading through) Peter and John had been threatened by the religious authorities not to preach and perform miracles in Jesus name. A lame man had been miraculously raised up at the temple Gate Beautiful and the enemy was stirred up. Peter and John were let go without being punished because of the crowd's favor. Yet the great intimidator (the devil) had reared his ugly head and it was time for the church to rally around its leaders.

Acts 4:23-35

23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:

'Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?
26 The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the LORD and against His Christ.'

27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your

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servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

Notice they found comfort in scripture that prophetically applied to their situation, and when they prayed together the very place they were assembled was shaken. They were (re) filled with the Holy Spirit and promptly continued speaking the Word with renewed boldness. This broke the back of intimidation, fear or compromise, and the church continued to prosper with renewed generosity towards their own and anyone else in need.

They faced this threat together, and later the Apostle Paul taught that we enjoy strength through what every 'joint supplies'. He was speaking of mutually beneficial relationships through which the body or church 'edifies

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itself'. The power of edification (the Holy Spirit as strengthener or edifier) is already resident in us!

Ephesians 4:16

16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The enemy was not able to cause division and thus conquer them. In our time we would do well if we would 'consider' or know and care about one another in such a way that we stir one another up to love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:24-25

4 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

In our time the return of the Lord is that much closer, and we must encourage each other by means of the Lord's Supper not to forsake assembling together for the purpose of strengthening each other and glorifying the Lord.

These first Pentecostals were also concerned with 'Social Justice' issues, and their charity began at home! I can remember when such a season existed with such force in our local church in South Africa. People were so full of the Holy Spirit that they would strip off their costly jewelry and place it in the offering to help spur on the revival. This happened without being cajoled by slick communicators interested largely in their own welfare. We experienced a liberty in the Spirit that was quite remarkable. It

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manifested in generosity and ministry to the poor and needy.

‘The Lord Added To The Church Daily’

The net result of the early church's steadfastness to walk in the dynamics of the Spirit was that the Lord added to the church daily those that were being saved. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we help establish an environment where people are 'easily' saved.

This happens because Jesus is glorified in the communion elements: His body broken for our healing, and His blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins. His grace attracts.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate Communion, we are thankful that You created Your church as a body of believers called to honor You on a daily basis.

Thank You for the example of the early church who steadfastly partook of Your broken body and shed blood through The Lord's Supper. Help us to play our part in encouraging our brethren in Christ through caring Church life.

Strengthen us to keep you at the center of all that we are and do in Your Name. We now that you will add to the Church daily those who are being saved.

Amen.”

Chapter 10

Discern The Lord's Body

1 Corinthians 11:27-30

27 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. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

The Lord's Supper is intended to be a special time of blessing for God's people. Yet many Christians simply show up at church and often partake of The Lord's supper in an unworthy manner. In this passage we are warned that not discerning the Lord's body can lead to problems (Vs 29-30). The Lord's Supper is such a powerful means of appropriating God's provision for strength and

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health, that we are strongly encouraged to avoid missing the moment.

In this chapter we examine what it means to properly discern the Lord's body.

Discernment

To 'discern' is to have spiritual insight into something that on the surface is not immediately obvious. Spiritual insight is given by God to those who ask for it. It is not automatically given because someone shows up 'at church' as a regular attendee. Paul knew this truth and prayed for the Ephesian Church in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) to have their 'understanding enlightened' (Ephesians 1:15-20). In this way they would know the 'hope of their calling', even the 'exceeding greatness of His power'.

Even Jesus grew (in His humanity) in grace favor and wisdom learning to 'discern' the good from the evil according to Isaiah's prophecy.

Isaiah 7:14-16

14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. 15 Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.

The 'curds and honey' refer to the Word of God that He was being schooled in as He grew up in Nazareth and on His trips to Jerusalem for the annual feasts (Luke 2:41-50).

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Now the Corinthian Church obviously did not discern the Lord's body properly, and in his first letter to them the apostle Paul was obliged to write some strong words of correction. They had become very unruly in their public gatherings and in the partaking of The Lord's Supper. It is important to understand this context, so as to avoid wrongly applying this passage to our modern day experience where it is not necessary.

Earlier Paul had described the 'carnal' or flesh ruled Corinthian believers as 'saints' and 'brethren' (1 Corinthians 1:2, 10). He saw them as 'enriched in all everything by Him' (1 Corinthians 1:4). Although they often operated in the gifts in an unruly manner they were nevertheless still God's children. Think of some kids you may know in a family. They are often unruly around the house, but at no time do they lose their identity as children of that home.

The point here is that the Corinthians were immature believers needing of some fatherly correction. They did not need to 'get saved again'. They belonged to God as His children, and were definitely members of His family. Yet they had problems, some of which were severe enough to open them up to sickness and even early death.

Their carnality ought not to be our standard today. Nor should the correction Paul brought to them by way of his letter be our standard either. It is wise to put the shoe where it fits, and only if and when it fits.

To be specific, the carnal Corinthians had not discerned the Lord's body properly. They had made this covenant memorial meal into some sort of common eating and drinking event with little or no respect for the Lord or one

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another (1 Corinthians 11:20-22). They had thus drifted away from the early church's spiritual practice of eating with one another with the central focus being on remembering the Lord broken body and shed blood.

They simply gathered together (as believers) and had a feast, where some of them were even getting drunk. They had made something that was holy, a common occurrence. As a consequence, they did not enjoy the benefits of properly partaking of the Lord's Supper. Their faith was not being released, so many were weak and sick, even to the point of premature death. The enemy was having a field day without them knowing it. Through their lack of discernment they had in fact opened the door to the thief, satan.

What It Means To 'Discern' The Lord's Body

To discern or spiritually appreciate and appropriate the benefits of the Lord's body involves the following two key aspects.

First, Jesus physical body was broken for us as He suffered greatly in His flesh at the cross. When we say 'at the cross' we include all His suffering or passion from the time He sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane to when He was brutally pinned to the wooden beams on Golgotha. This includes the beatings He received, the scourging on His back, and the crown of thorns. As we have seen, Jesus shed His blood and suffered in His body seven times.

His body was specially prepared by God to be a 'spotless' or unblemished sacrifice. Like the lambs that were inspected for days before The Passover Feast of

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Unleavened Bread, Jesus was put on trial, (inspected) and unjustly sent to the cross. His accusers could find no fault in Him in all the six sham trial sessions He illegally underwent. He was the unblemished 'lamb of sacrifice' according to the teachings of Leviticus. All legal protocol was broken as the leaders of the day desperately engineered His punishment.

We are also told in the New Testament that Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree.

1 Peter 2:24-25

24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed.

Remarkably these verses point to healing as part of the overall redemption Jesus purchased by hanging on the tree (cross). Forgiveness for sin **and** healing went together as part of the whole 'package' of salvation. Jesus Himself had earlier confounded the unbelieving Pharisees with this connection when He healed the paralytic.

Matthew 9:2-8

2 Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." 3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!" 4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? 6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--then He said to the paralytic, "Arise,

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take up your bed, and go to your house." 7 And he arose and departed to his house. 8 Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

Forgiveness of sin and healing are bound together by the law of association. God has provided for both through Jesus' costly sacrifice at the cross. As we have seen in an earlier chapter the Bible makes no artificial separation between the inner and outer needs of man: God meets us in the totality of our need.

Healing for our body is thus a gracious work of the atonement, just as much as forgiveness of sin for the soul. This magnificent truth is supported by Isaiah's prophecy recorded in Isaiah 53:3-5 where 'griefs and 'sorrows' are better rendered from the original Hebrew as 'disease' or 'sickness' and 'pain' respectively.

Isaiah 53:3-5

3 He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.

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He bore both our sins and sicknesses on His body and carried them away as He hung on the cross. Yet many today do not discern this to be God's plan to provide for our physical and spiritual well being or 'shalom' peace where nothing need be broken, missing or lacking!

Interestingly the 'wounding Jesus suffered for our transgressions' (external lacerations from the thorns, whips, nails and spear) speak of sins we stumble into, whereas the bruising 'for our iniquities' (internal bleeding brought on by the beatings and brutal handling) speaks of the internal tendencies, or patterns of sin that are so often evident in our lives and our family lines. God has marvelously taken care of both categories of sin.

Jesus ministry reflected God's will at all times. The Gospels show that He ministered healing to all who came to Him. Matthew's Gospel shows the connection between what He did in His healing ministry and Isaiah's prophecy.

Matthew 8:16-17

16 When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

"He Himself took our infirmities
And bore our sicknesses."

Jesus healing ministry was thus in fulfillment of God's will. God was with Him and anointed Him for the purpose of doing good and healing **all** who were oppressed by the devil.

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Acts 10:38-39

38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Never once did Jesus refuse to heal someone, nor did He ever make someone sick to supposedly teach them a lesson (as some perverse modern teaching suggests). He always did good works, and healing is a good thing to be joyfully received.

When we partake of the Lord's Supper we have a divine opportunity to reach out in faith and receive healing for any and all ailments, sicknesses, pains, and afflictions. Jesus was 'chastised' on our behalf. He didn't deserve it; we did because of our sin. Yet because He loved us, He suffered so that by His stripes we would be healed.

He held nothing back then, and He is not holding anything from us today either. There was no limit to the suffering Jesus bore in His body, so today there is no limit to what the Lord has already done for your healing. Everything is covered. Take, eat and receive!

Discerning The Lord's Spiritual Body

Second, to discern the Lord's Body also means to appreciate His Spiritual body or the Church.

1 Corinthians 12:27

7 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

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We function best in the Body of Christ when we are properly connected to one another in a mutually supportive way. God made us for loving relationships: first with Himself and then with one another.

The Corinthian church evidently did not function in this too well.

The following passage from Ephesians demonstrates the powerful ability of the Body of Christ to be an agent of growth and edification.

Ephesians 4:14-16

...we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

When each part (individual) of the body speaks the truth in love and contributes their part through relationship, then we all benefit. However, where there is criticism, backbiting, jealousy, schisms, a partisan spirit, strife, envies and immorality that goes unchecked in the church, this carnality opens the door to many problems.

The fivefold gifts set in the Church by the Lord Jesus have the responsibility to equip the body to function properly in the way God intended. The body of Christ in turn is to

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receive and adhere to their ministry and in this way enjoy God's protection and blessing (Acts 2:42).

The Corinthian Church was noted for the operation of the powerful gifts of the Holy Spirit, but had not understood the equally important need for the fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The whole passage from 1 Corinthians chapter 11 through 14 deals with church relationships, the exercise of the gifts, how to partake of The Lord's Supper, love and the proper value we are to have for each other in the Body of Christ.

Paul corrected them with a heart of a loving fatherly apostolic figure bringing order to a disorderly church. His intent (and God's too), was to graciously bring them to a realization of God's higher ways. In our situation we need to be sure that we are properly applying this correction to our context.

If we are walking in love towards our brothers in the church we can eat the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper with faith and without a sense of guilt and condemnation. There is no need to 'hammer' the people if they are walking in love.

Doctrinal correctness in the church is obviously important, for proper belief leads to proper behavior. Any correction in the church must be tempered with love, mercy and grace; otherwise there is tendency towards judgmental Pharisaism.

With the advent of the internet and such avenues like YouTube, many self styled 'Pharisees' take long shots at people they don't even know. They criticize (blog) about this or that in the Body of Christ, literally slandering many

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good men and women of God. In this way they bite and devour, and cause a lot of harm, all in the name of their version of supposed doctrinal correctness. Their tone is harsh and critical, not loving and restoring. They also do not have any real jurisdiction over local church bodies or members, neither are they held accountable for their blog posts that often twist or misrepresent things. All they have is a computer and access to the internet, and very often little discernment.

To discern the Body of Christ is to keep in mind that it is **His** body that you are relating to. Jesus is the Head of the Church and He is protectively watchful over His children. He is not pleased when one member of the body injects poison into the other with an unruly mouth. We are to pray for unity and a love in the body of Christ that is centered on His Word and enlightened by His Spirit. Avoid people who are self appointed 'sheriffs' of the church.

Let A Man Examine Himself

The injunction to 'examine oneself' (1 Corinthians 11:28) when partaking of the Lord's Supper once again must be seen in the light of the troubles in the Corinthian Church.

When we make it our practice at communion time to look into our hearts to see if there is any fault in us, we are sure to find something that does not quite measure up! Communion can easily become a time of improper focus, a sad time indeed instead of the joyful celebration God intended it to be.

I believe this approach is not the point of the passage in Corinthians.

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As believers we all fall short of God's glory (sin) from time to time. God's way to move forward in such times is for us to be reminded of His sufferings on our behalf, and to keep our focus on Him and stay under His grace. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of His victory over sin, death and the grave, and not a time of heavy self introspection. It is a time where we celebrate the abundance of His grace and the gift of righteousness that is imputed to those who trust in Him for their salvation. (Romans 5:17-18).

It is through His abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness that we receive the power to live in victory in the realm of life. The power to live in victory over sin does not come through how sorry we feel at communion time, or even how hard we try to live holy or even how many sins we confess. Faith in what Jesus has already done is what pleases God. We can never do enough to impress God. We are cleansed and kept clean only through His blood.

To 'examine oneself' is first to see whether we are partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy 'manner'. The Corinthian church was guilty of selfishly eating and drinking 'ahead' of their fellow believers, turning the sacred feast somewhat into a 'free for all', with little regard for its spiritual significance. They even got drunk at these times, so evident was their carnality (1 Corinthians 11:20).

They neglected to bring into focus the grace and mercy of the Lord's suffering. So Paul encouraged them to 'judge' themselves focusing on their conduct at communion. If they were hungry, they were to eat before they gathered together, so that communion would not turn into scramble for food and drink.

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The Body of Christ needs more than ever to be filled with the 'spirit of wisdom and understanding' (Ephesians 1:17-18) regarding this vital area of celebrating The Lord's Supper and enjoying His intended blessing for all who do.

When you partake of the Lord's Supper, do so with thankfulness that the Lord has bought you out from slavery to sin, setting you free to walk in the freedom and liberty He provides through His sacrifice. It is about what He has done for us that is of vital importance, **not** what we can straighten up and do for Him. See your life as safely hidden in Christ as you partake of the Lord's Supper.

Summary

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-33, Paul summarizes his encouragement to the Corinthian church (and us today where needed):

- **Remember and refocus** on the centrality of Christ when we partake of The Lord's Supper. This speaks of our spiritual heritage, how He served us with His life and in His death. (Vs 23-25).
- **Reaffirm** His death and that He is coming again, where Jesus as the Alpha and Omega first and Second Comings act as defining bookends to our lives. This speaks of the hope we have in Him and the responsibility to live purposefully and productively. (Vs 26).
- **Reexamine** the manner in which we live. (Vs 27-31). Are we walking in proper relationship to the

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Lord and our fellow man according to 1 John 4:20-21?

We now love God (and our fellow man) because He first loved us, allowing God's love to run its full course in and through us by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:19

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Romans 5:5

5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

When we celebrate The Lord's Supper we acknowledge God's love for us and our love one for another. This is the celebration's proper focus.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate Communion, we rest in the knowledge that you have already paid the ultimate price for our freedom.

Your body was broken that we might be made whole, by Your stripes we are healed right now. We receive this gift with gratefulness in our hearts.

We also thank You for our fellow members in the Body of Christ both in our local church and the Church worldwide. Help us to love and serve them with a sincere heart, and in no way take advantage of them, not being critical or judgmental.

We look now to the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness we have received, and celebrate your goodness as we properly discern or appreciate your Body.

Amen.”

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Chapter 11

'Forget Not His Benefits'

Psalm 103:1-5

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
3 Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
4 Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender
mercies,
5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

23 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; 24 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." 25 In the same

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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."

We All Need Reminders

We all need reminders. Like sticky notes on the fridge door that remind us of our shopping or household chores, we need reminders of God's goodness towards us. Things get in the way, and God does not want us to forget what He has done for us in the covenant.

If we are forgetful of what He has done we will not actively trust Him for their fulfillment. In effect we will 'settle' for some sort of experience which falls far short of the best He originally intended for us to enjoy. There is a lot to 'live up' to! That is why God wants to remind us of the exceeding greatness of His mercy and grace towards us. Even Jesus often had to remind His disciples of things He had taught them: "Again I say to you" (Matthew 18:19 / 19:24).

Take marriage vows for example. In their purest form, they are covenant promises that partners make to each other. In time, the couple can settle into less than desirable relationship habits that are harmful to the covenant, and sometimes have to be reminded of their first love they had for one another.

Here are two Bible examples to illustrate this need for being reminded of God's blessings.

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2 Peter 1:12-13

I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. 13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you,...

In the context, the apostle Peter was careful to 'stir up' the believers by 'reminding' them of some key truths that they actually were established in. He did not take it for granted that they were actually walking in the benefits of the truth. He made it his business to stir them up by reminding them of their changed nature and the response they were to make to this new position they had by trusting in Christ.

In a second example, the apostle Paul did the same with the Corinthian Church, who in their fickleness, had soon forgotten how he conducted himself in their midst. He sent Timothy to 'remind' them of His ways.

1 Corinthians 4:17-18

17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

To focus on our opening text scripture from Psalm 103:1-5 we see the Psalmist instructing us to 'forget not' God's covenant benefits (Vs 2). Hard as it may seem, we are prone in our flesh to forget what the Lord has done for us through His suffering at the cross. Technically, we may mentally 'remember' His benefits, paying lip service to His promises, but we often do not continue to actively trust Him with a vital faith to enjoy those benefits. Faith is a spiritual dynamic that can be 'smothered' as things get in

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the way. That is why we are responsible to bless the Lord as we 'remember' the benefits of our covenant. Expectancy is a key element of faith.

Every time we partake of the Lord's Supper, we remember the excruciating pain and suffering He endured to purchase our forgiveness and healing. This was no intellectual act, nor some mere doctrinal point of discussion. He experienced great pain and rejection on our behalf as He was judged as the substitute for our sin.

This prophetic Psalm, written way before the time of Christ's sacrifice, vividly outlines the covenant benefits of the Old Testament. How much more ought we as New Testament believers under a new and better covenant (Hebrews 8:6) enjoy these promised benefits?

- Forgiven of all our iniquities
- Healed all our diseases
- Redeemed from destruction
- Crowned with loving-kindness and tender mercies
- Satisfied by our mouths with good things so that our youth is renewed like an eagle.

The eagle withdraws to a high safe place to bask in the sun while new feathers grow. This symbolizes a life of healthy longevity for God's people.

The Holy Spirit Is Our Helper

The Bible definition of 'remember' is to bring the power of a past reality into the present. The precious Holy Spirit has been given to do just this. Remembrance is thus not the mere product of human mental effort, but a profoundly spiritual moment. When we partake of The Lord's Supper, we actively engage with God, the Holy Spirit to bring to our remembrance all that Christ has already done for us.

John 14:26-28

26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

He is our helper – the one called alongside to help us in our need. He points the way back to Jesus: what He has said and done. We enter into the peace Jesus left us. This peace is not the mere absence of conflict, but a peace that speaks of wholeness: spirit soul and body! It is the 'shalom' peace that only the 'Great Shepherd' of our souls can give His followers. His peace leaves nothing missing, nothing lacking, even when we are faced with adverse circumstances that threaten us.

As the confusion and pain of life's circumstances threaten to overwhelm you, let the Holy Spirit cause you to 'remember' your savior and the benefits of His covenant with you.

With the Holy Spirit's help we also have a 'divine advantage'. As Jesus was preparing His disciples for His

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departure back to heaven, He said that it was to their 'advantage' that He goes away because the Holy Spirit would come to them.

John 16:6-7

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

Earlier, He had made it clear that the Holy Spirit would be **in** them (John 14:17). They would become the very 'habitation' or dwelling place of God! In our day this is no less true of every believer. The Holy Spirit comes to take up residence in our hearts, and as we learn to appreciate His ministry we enjoy the sweet fellowship and comfort He affords. Becoming 'God inside minded' is a huge step in walking in the reality of our covenant benefits. As we realize that he lives in us, we begin to enjoy the divine advantage or favor He brings to our lives.

God Chooses To Forget Our Sins

Isaiah 43:25

25 "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake;
And I will not remember your sins.

God is committed to a relationship with us that is unhindered by sin and even a consciousness of it. That is why He has chosen to blot out, cleanse and remove our sins as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12). He is purposefully forgetful of our sin and transgression because the price has been fully paid by Jesus' blood on the cross.

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He does not want to remember our sin: past or present, so who are we to constantly remind God of what He has chosen to forget? He wants us to be 'son conscious' not 'sin conscious'!

We are now reconciled to God through Christ and all things are made brand new. He does not even impute (take an inventory or count) our sins to us at all. Sin is no longer the issue with God. He has dealt with it at the cross.

God even found 'fault' with the first covenant under Moses (Hebrews 8:7). So in Christ He established a better covenant where He would internalize His law on our minds and hearts by His Spirit. Up to this point, the Law was a 'dead letter' engraved on stones that only brought condemnation and guilt as men found it impossible to keep its standards. The Law was not capable of imparting sin conquering life. All it could do was to expose and highlight sin and its deathly consequences. In contrast, the indwelling Holy Spirit now imparts the life of Christ to and in us. This life now empowers us to rule over sin.

Romans 3:20

...for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

2 Corinthians 3:5-6

...our sufficiency is from God, 6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Our sufficiency is from God. We do not need to supplement what God has done for us in Christ with any of our own efforts at spirituality. You could say we start our new lives in Christ at the finish line! No amount of self

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imposed religious contrition, sorrow, penance and self abasement, whether it be mental or physical, is going to make us any more sufficient. In Christ, we have all we need to please Him and be fruitful. In Christ we have fulfilled the Law, and He has redeemed us from the curse of trying to keep it all.

Galatians 3:10-14

10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

If keeping the law in its entirety is an impossibility that carries with it a curse that we are redeemed from in Christ, why shift away from a total reliance on Christ alone for justification? The promise of the Holy Spirit within comes by faith in Christ and not by any effort of our own. No amount of Law keeping is going to earn us God's favor. He gives it to us as His gift in Christ. We are made 'just' or right by faith, and live 'justly' by the power of the Holy Spirit who has come to dwell within us.

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God Himself becomes our teacher (Hebrews 8:10-11), and we have an anointing from the Holy One (1 John 2:20) to know all things that pertain to our relationship with Him.

Then, as New Testament believers, we no longer have to go through a fallible class of priests who have themselves fallen short of God's glory and have to offer sacrifices for their own sins!

Christ is now our sinless High Priest, and we can approach the very throne room of God ourselves as priests with a conscience cleansed from dead works (Hebrews 9:14). God has been merciful to our unrighteousness and does not remember our sins and lawless deeds any more.

Hebrews 8:10-12

10 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. 11 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. 12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

This marvelous and liberating truth must be remembered as partake of the Lord's Supper. The 'air' around the throne is clear of any polluting shame, guilt, condemnation and reproach. His throne is established on righteousness, justice and mercy – all to be found in Jesus... and we are right there!

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, as we celebrate ‘communion’ today we remember the great price you paid at the cross for us. We rejoice in You that our sins and iniquities are forgiven, our diseases are healed and that You have redeemed us from all forms of destruction.

We thank you for the freedom from guilt and condemnation that we enjoy because You have chosen to forgive and forget our sins.

We bless you with all that we are and gladly receive all that you freely give us in Christ, and praise and thank you for crowning us with your loving-kindness.

Amen.”

Chapter 12

**'Till He Comes'
Looking Forward**

1 Corinthians 11:26

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

When we partake of The Lord's Supper we not only look back in faith to what the Lord has already purchased for us, but we are to also look forward to His Second Coming. This future part of His plan is rapidly approaching in the accelerated times in which we live. In these end times of uncertainty God wants us to be assured that He is still the great 'I am'. In fact, He is already there in our future and has our every need covered. There is no need to fear the future.

Whereas the Old Testament believers looked forward to Jesus' First Coming, we as New Testament believers look forward to His Second Coming. This anticipation is not merely 'theoretical' but carries with it the powerful force of

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hope and an encouragement to holiness. In fact we live each day in the light of eternity! The certainty of His Second Coming is highlighted every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, as well as the fragile nature of our earthly existence. We desperately need the abundance of grace that comes when we accept what Jesus has done for us.

The world economic and political systems are shaking and the Bible teaches that in the end, despite man's attempts to restructure a new world order, the kingdoms of this world will eventually come under God's authority. Jesus is building His Church and the gates of hell will not hold out against God's love. There is a definite prophetic time frame to this age in which we live, and it is rapidly coming to an end. The consummation of the seven 'day' framework of human history is at hand. An age of practical peace on earth will shortly unfold when Jesus comes back to rule and reign on earth for a thousand years. He is the true 'prince of peace' (Isaiah 9:6). Without His leadership and truly benevolent rule, man cannot engineer lasting harmony and peace. That is why the Second Coming is no side issue.

The Second Coming – No Side Issue

The Second Coming is mentioned more than 318 times in the New Testament and is therefore no side issue. Jesus testified of the personal nature of His Second Coming in John 14:2-3; and the two men in Acts 19:9-11 also testify of this certainty. Later the apostle Paul says we are to comfort one another with the truth that He is coming again (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Then Peter warns believers that His coming will be sudden and unexpected (2 Peter 3:1-13). God wants us to be ready and prepared for the future.

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If something takes us by surprise and we are caught flat footed and become confused, it is because we have not been paying attention to what is proceeding out of God's mouth – His current Word to the Church.

Matthew 4:4

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "

God speaks to us today through His Word and His ministers and prophets. He will never contradict what He has already said in His Word so any utterance or direction given to His Church will fall within the sphere of His already revealed will. He provides wisdom and perspective into current affairs and trends. Several years ago I remember a number of preachers were preaching and prophesying about getting out of debt. Yet many in the Body of Christ carried on in an unsustainable lifestyle of credit purchasing and landed in a lot of trouble since the downturn that took hold in 2008.

God knows the end from the beginning and has promised to watch over His children in good and bad times...if we listen to His freshly uttered 'rhema' (or inspired spoken) words of prophecy.

Social Justice Issues

So how does this relate to tackling the problems we face in the here and now? Some argue the Church should focus more on correcting social justice issues that face humanity all around the world. That's what makes Christians and the preaching of the Gospel relevant and real to society. This is

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and always has been on the heart of God. He is the God of justice and hates evil in all its forms. There is no doubt the gospel truth should play out in practical love for our fellow man.

Yet eternity is an inescapable reality in which we all live, and the responsibility of introducing Jesus as the author of eternal life to all men is something that can only be done by the Church. No matter how well we succeed in righting wrongs in the socio-economic realm, we are still called to point men to repentance so that they can accept eternal life in Jesus. Without eternal salvation and security this life really has not much meaning. There is a wonderful future to look forward to in eternity that transcends anything this earth has to offer.

Any Gospel presentation is therefore not a matter of 'either-or', but 'both-and'. We need a clear and effective ministry in both realms: that of the spirit and in the natural. I believe that in order to be of some 'earthly good' in meeting the practical needs of hurting people, you first have to be truly 'heavenly minded'. Jesus was just this, and His ministry was effective in all realms. Yes, He fed the poor, ministered to the sick and destitute, but He always presented His listeners with eternal truths That transcend the here and now.

Jesus prayer teaching should clarify this: He taught us to pray 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:9). We therefore need a clear vision of how things are in heaven if we are to model effective and lasting change on the earth. Heaven is full of grace and order. God's love defines and determines everything there, and He wants us to see everything from His eternal perspective.

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Leaders are responsible to encourage their people to encounter the eternal God in such a way that they are creatively relevant to this world's immediate problems. We are to be leaders in discovering ways to meet the needs of people. Biblical history has shown many times in history when the wisdom of God has been applied with dramatic effect to serious human problems. Joseph and His economic plan in Pharaoh's time is a classic example of how God's people can influence society in immensely practical ways. William Wilberforce in more recent times fought long and hard to bring an end to slavery in the British Empire. As a believer he saw his role as bringing justice to the grossly ungodly socio-economic system of his day. The battle continues even in our day where economic slavery is more sophisticated, yet no less hurtful. It seems as if each generation is faced with great challenges, yet in the midst of this turmoil as we keep our eyes of Jesus we are comforted and motivated to continue playing our part as 'salt' and 'light' in society. We can rest assured that He will complete the good work He has started. That is why we can celebrate His goodness as we partake of the Lord's Supper... 'till He comes'. Our vision of the future impacts our present experience.

The Believer's Reward

As believers in Christ, we can expect to be rewarded for what we have done for the benefit of our fellow beings. God rewards those who diligently seek and serve Him (Hebrews 11:6), and our future eternal rewards depend on our present motivations and deeds.

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2 Corinthians 5:9-11

9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Our aim must always be to please Him, knowing that we as believers will be judged for what we have done with His calling on our lives. (This is not the same judgment that unbelievers will undergo at the great 'White Throne Judgment' described in Revelations 20:11-15). Fortunately, our future is secure in Christ with our names already written in the 'Book of Life'. We have a good future to look forward to.

Be Forward Looking

2 Peter 3:10-14

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

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14 Therefore, beloved, **looking forward** to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; ... (Emphasis added).

The Day of the Lord's return will settle many issues. Things on the Earth that are not of God will thankfully be burned up, thus cleansing the earth of millennia of all manner of defilement. For example, think of toxic waste in the air, sea and land that pollutes our natural realm. All these manmade things that have caused so much disease and suffering to so many will be totally cleansed. Man's sin and greed always has always had negative and destructive consequences on the environment and society, yet no amount of caring for the planet by man today will compare to the care God Himself will bring as He establishes a new heaven and earth.

Peter forewarns us of such a fearsome time and this serves to sober us to live our lives in such a way that we actually play our part in preparing the way for the Lord's Second Coming. Peter's passage teaches that holy living actually 'hastens' the day of His return! Remarkably, we are called of God to play a part in bringing on the Messiah's return (Vs 11-12).

Our faith and obedience actually counts for the future. The end will only come when we have preached the gospel of the kingdom to all the earth.

Matthew 24:13-14

14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

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When you see yourself as a vital covenant partner with God, then this scripture makes sense. God does not work independently from those he has delegated authority on earth to. His instruction still stands: 'Go ye'.

We are encouraged to have hope as we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth. To hope is to 'confidently expect' that which God has promised. Hope is not a case of 'maybe so, maybe not', rather it is an assurance that God will watch over and perform what He has promised. Our faith is attached to our hope. Put another way, how we live today is impacted by what we believe about tomorrow.

Hebrews 11:1

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Faith in what Jesus has already done is the foundation for diligence in our lives. We can live in today's turmoil cocooned in a state of assurance about the future and be 'found by Him to be in peace, without spot and blameless' (2 Peter 3:14) when He returns.

The apostle Paul in his letter to Titus also highlights the connection between looking forward and how we are live out our lives right now. The 'blessed hope' he talks about in the following passage is not some abstract 'pie in the sky', but a driving force for righteous living that produces good works that serve as a witness to all men. Our lives right now count for eternity: people are watching how we live. We are living epistles, 'known and read by all men' (2 Corinthians 3:2). Our lifestyle ought not give them any occasion to stumble. Besides, the Lord is also watching and looking to find faith in the earth, a faith that produces the intended fruit of the gifts He has so freely bestowed on us.

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Titus 2:11-15

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 **looking for** the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (Emphasis added).

‘Proclaim The Lord’s Death’

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we proclaim His 'death till He comes' (1 Corinthians 11:26). It would seem more edifying to focus on His life than on His death. Death is naturally abhorrent to anyone who is alive. Our very beings shy away from it. As noble and unique as Jesus' life was, it was through His death that everything changed.

While He was alive, He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, fed the hungry, and performed many other miracles. He taught the people as no one else had before, yet it was only through His death and resurrection that the world was irreversibly changed. He was born to die for the whole of mankind (John 3:16), and was destined to destroy the power of him who had the keys to death, hell and the grave (Revelations 1:18). That is why Paul could say that he wanted to be remembered for preaching "Christ and Him crucified".

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1 Corinthians 2:1-2

2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

In order to be resurrected Jesus had to die first, that much is obvious. The resurrection vindicated His sinless life and opened the way for the 'spiritual resurrection' we enjoy as believers today. Yet, Jesus resurrection also guaranteed the future resurrection of our bodies too (1 Peter 1:3 / 1 Corinthians 15:42-43). It may be argued therefore, that Paul's focus on proclaiming the Lord's death is not somehow negative, but rather quite positive as Jesus' death is the 'gateway' to life, both now and in the future resurrection.

Ephesians 2:3-5

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),..

Thank God, we were dead in our trespasses and sins but now are alive because Jesus paid the price for us through His death.

The Gospels have more chapters devoted to the events of the cross, Jesus' death and resurrection than any other of the events in His life. Sure He healed the sick, fed the hungry, delivered the demon possessed - all these are very important, yet it was His game changing death and resurrection that the Gospel writers focus on.

Many noble people have given their lives for good causes, but only Jesus could give His life for the cause of redeeming all mankind with His pure blood. His obedience

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stretched as far as the cross. He remained faithful to His calling, despite the temptation to take another path as He agonized in The Garden of Gethsemane just before Judas betrayed Him. Jesus kept His eye on the goal of redeeming mankind with His blood, and God rewarded His humility by exalting Him with a name that is above every name.

Philippians 2:8-10

He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,...

Only by going to the lowest place of humility can we expect to rise up to the highest place of exaltation. Fortunately we do this when we identify with Christ through faith and **not** by some set of heroic efforts to 'prove' to God that we are humble. We sit at His right hand of honor by accepting what He has done, not by what we have done. You could say that the most humble thing to do is to accept what Jesus has done for you and thus avoid the temptation to embark on an unrewarded path of doing religious things to prove to God you are worthy of His grace.

Humility is the **fruit** of our relationship with Christ, not the **root** of it. We must never think that our righteous deeds are enough. In fact in God's sight, our **righteous** deeds (and not our rebellion or sin) are described as 'filthy rags' (Isaiah 64:6). It is exactly the opposite of what some religious folk would have you believe. We are not accepted by God nor receive His blessing on the basis of what we do

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or have done (good or bad), but on the basis of what He has already done through Christ's death and resurrection.

Jesus died voluntarily – He laid down His life in willing obedience so that He could redeem unwilling and disobedient men to Himself for eternity. It was His death that destroyed satan and the power he held over us through fear or intimidation. We need our spiritual eyes opened to the fact that satan is already 'destroyed' and that Jesus has made a public spectacle of him.

Hebrews 2:14-15

14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that **through death** He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Emphasis added).

Jesus came to give His life as a ransom (or redemption price) to loose us from satan's grip. We are now free and need no longer fear him.

Mark 10:45

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

2 Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

The age old problem of headship that Adam had introduced by his sin was dealt with by Jesus. Death had reigned over all mankind because of Adam's sin. However, Jesus died

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and rose again in fulfillment of the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), and God honored His promise to buy back mankind from under satan's control. We were put under Jesus' (the second Adam) headship and made alive in Him. Jesus became our life giving source.

Romans 5:14-15

14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

1 Corinthians 15:22-23

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

This speaks of the future resurrection that we hope (confidently expect) for. We already enjoy the first fruit: our spiritual resurrection in Christ, then we will enjoy the benefit of a physical resurrection.

In keeping with God's 'modus operandi', Jesus will come back again **according to the scriptures**. When we partake of The Lord's Supper, we proclaim that He will surely come again! We stake our very lives on this momentous and history defining truth.

Suggested Prayer

“Lord, we rejoice in the blessed hope that You are coming back for us. In You our future is secure, and our lives today count for eternity.

You died for us while we were yet trapped in our sin. As we celebrate Communion today we proclaim to all that You are coming back.

We receive Your gift of righteousness and the abundance of grace in our lives as we partake of your body and blood.

Amen.”

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Section C

Practicalities & Resources

Chapter 1

Useful Definitions

Words can mean different things to different people depending on what they have been exposed to or taught. It will help to be familiar with the Bible definitions listed below. When we start in the right place then we can then begin to cross the divides of culture and history.

For example, to 'curse' in modern western culture most often means to swear some sort of profanity in a moment of frustration and or anger. However in Bible times to 'curse' meant much more and was vitally important to the covenant that two parties were entering into. Of course the positive blessings attached to the covenant are what we prefer, but nevertheless the point remains: we need to know what God meant when certain words are used in the Bible.

Altar: *Place of sacrifice where blood flows*

Bless: *To pronounce happiness, temporal success, favor, benediction upon the party entering a*

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covenant with you as they promise to obey the terms of that covenant

Covenant: *'Berith' (OT Hebrew) - to 'cut' / establish a binding pact or 'Diatheke' (NT Greek) – a binding contract or league*

Curse: *To pronounce or warn malediction, misery and failure on someone as a consequence of their breaking the covenant*

Grace: *The unearned and unmerited favor or delightful goodwill God gives those who trust in Him*

Mediator: *A 'go between', reconciler, intercessor*

Ministers: *Those that officiate / serve as priests*

Passover: *The Feast to commemorate Israel's 'passing over' from Egyptian bondage (Hebrew: 'Pesach' / Greek: 'Pascha')*

Priest: *One who draws near to God by means of prescribed sacrifice*

Redeem: *To buy back or deliver from slavery or bondage*

Sacrifice: *To slaughter where blood flows*

Tabernacle: *Temporary place of dwelling / residence of God (E.g. Moses' tent tabernacle)*

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Temple: *Permanent place or house of dwelling for God (E.g. Solomon's Temple... and today, under the New Covenant, the believer's body!)*

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Chapter 2

Some Practicalities

Unleavened Bread Versus Ordinary Bread

'Unleavened' bread is bread that is baked without a rising agent in it like 'yeast'. Very often it is sold today in grocery stores as 'Matzos'. Biblically, yeast represents sin, so you want to use 'flat' or unleavened bread rather than regular baked bread that has risen. This is not New Testament Law, but simply a way in which we are reminded of Jesus' sinless sacrifice. If you wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper and there is no unleavened bread to hand, go ahead anyway, sanctifying whatever bread you use by your prayer when you partake.

The pierced, striped and slightly burnt unleavened bread still speaks of the suffering and punishment Jesus underwent for us on the cross as our substitute.

Alcoholic Wine Or Non Alcoholic

Some leaders avoid using alcoholic wine as they believe the Bible teaches this (Ephesians 5:18), while others maintain that the alcohol content is not the issue, only drunkenness.

Some pastors use non alcoholic wine (grape juice) so that anyone in their congregation who has a drinking problem, or is recovering from one is not unduly influenced. The principle truth here is that you do not want to cause anyone to stumble through your liberty (Romans 14:21). Keep your practice simple and safe for your people (and your family), and always focused on celebrating what Jesus has done. He shed His blood to free us from the need of any substitute (alcohol for example) for the joy we have in Him (Romans 14:17).

Common Or Separate Cup & Loaf

In today's world of heightened awareness of hygiene, (at least in some places) it has become common to use small separate prepackaged cups and wafers to serve communion instead of a common loaf of bread and a large chalice that people share. I know of people who do not want to 'share germs with the stranger next to them (especially in large churches), and will not partake if a large cup is passed around. They are also concerned about a large loaf of bread that everyone touches with their hands as it passed around.

Besides the hygiene aspect, it may be more convenient to use the prepackaged containers as far as estimating

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numbers of people partaking and having unnecessary leftovers, or too few packages.

There is also no real spiritual 'loss' of fellowship if individual containers and wafers are used (or gain of spirituality if a common loaf is used for that matter).

Settle the matter in your family and church ensuring that whatever you do is practiced in faith.

Practicalities During A Service

Whether people should come forward (or to the side in some cases) or remain seated in the 'pew' – is a matter that may depend on the size of the congregation, the seating arrangements and suitability of the aisles in a public setting. Once again, there is no real spiritual significance attached to any place (or altar) in the building. It is the faith of the participants and the value placed on Jesus' sacrifice at the cross which sanctifies the communion celebration and how it is practiced.

I have seen a church use a table off to the side of the room, which is available each week for participants who wish to celebrate as couples or as families. They are invited to step out and partake while the rest of the congregation worships and prays during a specially consecrated time of the service.

Whatever you do simply have things well organized to avoid time wastage and which facilitate a proper focus on the meaning of communion rather than on the mechanics.

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If you use disposable plastic cups have people (ushers) collect the empties quickly and / or have packets at each row for this.

Of course if you celebrate the Lord's Supper in a small setting like the home, there is no need to be so concerned about any of the above logistics. Simply go ahead and enjoy the intimacy.

How Often To Serve The Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:26

26 For **as often as** you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (Emphasis added).

There is no absolute Biblical guideline for how often communion should be served, only that it be served as a beneficial remembrance of what Jesus has already done.

Luke 22:19-20

19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

Then, no matter how often it is practiced, the point is to partake in faith and avoid empty ritual and routine.

You may wish to celebrate communion every day, weekly, or at least 'regularly' as is suggested by Acts 2:42-46 and Acts 20:7, or maybe only once a year at Passover.

The Lord's promises are fresh and new every morning, so it is my conviction that the choice is yours according to your

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faith and the leading of the Holy Spirit (Lamentations 3:23 / Matthew 9:29).

If you are sick, or there is distress in your life or in your family, or you simply want to honor the Lord in a special way, take the 'bread and wine' and celebrate God's goodness through the Lord's Supper. Be open to administering communion to people who are sick in hospital or who are otherwise not able to get to church.

The key here in the New Testament is to be led by the Holy Spirit who knows all things and wants you to know what to do for yourself.

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Chapter 3

Powerful Blood Covenant Scriptures

The scripture is God's gift to us so that we can believe and practice the truth. Right believing produces right living. Consider using the following scriptures in your daily devotions over the next few weeks. Meditate on them (mull over them in your mind), and take the time to read them out loud as you regularly partake of the Lord's Supper in your own devotions. Remember that the Old Testament foreshadows the work of Christ at the cross whereas we now live in the reality or substance of New Testament fulfillment where God has spoken to us most clearly through His Son.

Hebrews 1:1-4

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things,...

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In short, we interpret the Old Testament through the eyes of the completed work of Christ that is revealed in the New Testament. In this way we avoid minimizing Christ's work by putting it on the same level as the Old Testament types and shadows. What Jesus did totally eclipsed everything that went before, magnificent though they all were. Jesus Christ is preeminent in all things today! Keep it that way as you 'rightly divide' God's Word into what is applicable to us today in Christ and what is not.

Old Testament Foundations

Genesis 3:20-21

And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. 21 Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.

- When God clothed Adam and Eve with tunics of skin, He performed a covenant act of killing animals and shedding their blood as a covering and cleansing for their sin. This first mention sets a divine order in that God is the initiator of any redeeming covenant and not man. Man's attempt to cover his sin with his own efforts was and still is totally unacceptable to God. Life blood had to be shed for the forgiveness of sin.

Genesis 4:1-5

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." 2 Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought

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an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering.

- It is evident that God gave instructions to Adam and his sons as to how to approach Him through blood sacrifice: animal sacrifice (with the obvious shedding of blood) is acceptable, whereas fruit and vegetables (the fruit of one's own labor from a cursed earth) is not.

Genesis 8:20-21

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

- Noah knew to build an altar and make offerings of animal sacrifices on it. This was pleasing to the Lord, not that He delights in the killing of animals (Isaiah 1:11), but rather that Noah had obeyed the terms of blood covenant that God had set in motion to be later consummated in the blood sacrifice of Jesus His own Son on the cross.

Genesis 12:7-9

Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 And he

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moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

- When Abram built an altar to the Lord this implies an animal sacrifice where blood is shed. He thus continued the blood covenant practice passed down from the time of Adam and Eve. He also called upon the name of the Lord as part of his covenant practice.

Genesis 14:18-20

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him and said:

"Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
20 And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."
And he gave him a tithe of all.

- This event also speaks of the practice of blood covenant signified in this case by the 'bread and wine' (communion). It also speaks of the blessing and victory over our enemies that God achieves when we align ourselves with the covenant. Tithing was practiced way **before** the law was instituted in Moses' time, four hundred and thirty years later. So was communion: the bread and wine.

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Genesis 15:7-11

Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." 8 And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" 9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

- God promised Abram descendants and a land. He then 'cut covenant' ('berith' – Hebrew) with Abram by means of the animals. Abram's part was to believe God (Genesis 15:6) and make sure the enemy (vultures) did not rob him at this vital time.

Exodus 12:1-14

Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2 "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3 Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. 4 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. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 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. 7 And they shall take some of the blood

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and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. 8 Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire--its head with its legs and its entrails. 10 You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 11 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. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. 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. 14 So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.

- In this detailed passage clear instruction is given to Moses and the Israelites as they prepared to leave Egyptian bondage. The Passover meal involved the shedding and application of the blood for protection. This principle is still applicable in the new Covenant under Jesus. His shed blood must be 'applied' by faith as we remember what He has done by means of the Lord's Supper as our memorial covenant meal.

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Exodus 24:5-8

And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7 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." 8 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."

- Blood must be applied: today we apply its benefits by believing and speaking the words of the covenant in faith.

Leviticus 16:14

He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

- The blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat which covered the Ark of the Covenant containing the Law tablets which condemned all men under sin. Mercy always triumphs over judgment, (James 2:13) and is complete in its seven fold application. Jesus shed His blood on seven occasions during His passion, covering all human need: spirit, soul and body.

Leviticus 17:11

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.'

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- This passage underscores the essential need for the shedding of blood. Later, the pure blood of Christ was shed to cleanse us completely from all sin.

Psalm 103:1-5

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
3 Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
4 Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

- God's has a whole plan to redeem the whole man from destruction. The covenant carries benefits which must be known and appropriated by faith with thanksgiving: forgiveness, healing, redemption from destruction, satisfaction and fulfillment and longevity.

Isaiah 53:4-6

Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;

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We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

- The full scope of redemption is prophesied in this passage and purchased at the great price of Jesus sacrifice on the cross. He was the Lamb of God who had the 'iniquity of us all' laid on Him. The 'griefs' and 'sorrows' spoken of in the original Hebrew speak of 'disease' and 'pain' respectively.

Zechariah 9:11-12

"As for you also,
Because of the blood of your covenant,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
12 Return to the stronghold,
You prisoners of hope.
Even today I declare
That I will restore double to you.

- The blood sets us free from the prison of sin, sickness and poverty to become captured by hope (prisoners). Here hope is defined as a confident expectation that what God has promised, He will certainly deliver on.

New Testament: The Better Covenant

Matthew 26:28-29

For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

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- Jesus is our Covenant Head and shed his own blood and not that of an animal substitute. This shedding of His blood set in motion the New Covenant which involves the 'remission' (or removal and complete washing) of sins, and not the mere temporary 'covering' of sins as was the case in the Old Covenant blood sacrifices.

John 6:53-56

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. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

- When we partake of the Lord's Supper we establish a connection with Him. We abide in Him, and He in us. A powerful connection or unity is effected as we play our part in the sealing of the covenant through the covenant meal.

Acts 20:28-29

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

- Jesus has purchased (paid the redemption price) His church with His own valuable blood. Salvation may be free to us, but it cost God (Jesus) His very life. Nothing less would have sufficed.

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Romans 5:8-9

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

- We are already justified (made just or righteous) through Jesus' blood. We are thus saved from the future wrath against those that refuse to repent and continue in their willful rebellion towards Him.

Ephesians 1:7

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

- Because we trust in Jesus, we are redeemed or bought back from sin and its consequences. Our sins are also forgiven not according to our efforts or piety, but 'according to the riches of His grace'.

Ephesians 2:13

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

- Intimacy or closeness with God is available to us through the blood of Jesus. His blood gives us access to God's presence.

Colossians 1:19-20

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

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- God was pleased to give His all to us in Christ (hold nothing back) and to reconcile (or make enemies into friends) all things to Himself. He did this through the shed blood of Christ on the cross.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

- God has intended that The Lord's Supper be a blessing to us as we partake. In addition we celebrate our unity with our fellow believers as we partake.

Hebrews 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. 12 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. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 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? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

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- Jesus' blood goes where no animal blood sacrifice could go: to the cleansing of the inner conscience! This New Covenant provision is greater than the Old. Today, the law of God (His royal law of love) is written on our hearts and no longer on tablets of stone (the condemning Ten Commandments) like it was in Moses time.

Hebrews 10:1-10

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come--In the volume of the book it is written of Me--To do Your will, O God.' " 8 Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. 10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, ...

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- The Lord Jesus Christ broke a long a line of animal sacrifices which served as a mere shadow of His perfect sacrifice. His sacrifice was **once** and for **all**. Whereas the continual repetition of animal sacrifices reminds us of our own inadequacy and insufficiency, Christ's sacrifice of obedience was complete, and opened door to a new and living way. It reminds us rather of His adequacy and sufficiency. Now we have received the capacity to love, obey and do God's will. We are empowered by His grace.

Hebrews 10:19-23

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

- Jesus is our High Priest and His blood provides entrance into Holy of Holies: or the very presence of God. We can now draw near to our Father with a cleansed conscience (no sense of shame, guilt and condemnation). Spiritual intimacy with God is based on the security we enjoy because of what Jesus has done. We are the sons (the offspring) of God, and belong to His family. Mercifully, He focuses on Jesus' perfection and not our daily imperfections.

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Hebrews 13:11-13

For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

- Jesus suffered outside the city's gates (on Golgotha's hill) so that we can be brought back into the 'city of God'. We identify with His 'going forth' – that is with His suffering or rejection, so that we can in Him return into the camp and enjoy God's acceptance.

Hebrews 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, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

- The blood of the everlasting covenant (God is not going to change His mind) makes us complete (or whole) to do His will. Because of Jesus, we need never feel inadequate as He works in us what pleases Him.

1 Peter 1:18-19

... knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the

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precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

- As the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus precious blood was, and is not in any way corruptible. It still speaks on our behalf today, after two thousand years! We have purpose and are set free from lifeless tradition and religious practice.

1 Peter 2:21-24

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

22 "Who committed no sin,

Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed.

- Because Christ bore our sins and took the stripes on His back we can identify in faith with God's two fold provision for the inner and outer man: righteousness and healing. This new creation reality is ours by what He has already done. We are now dead to sin and healed. Believe and receive.

1 John 1:8

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

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- Jesus blood is the most powerful cleanser of all. It works in the past, present and future. It is timeless and never runs out!

Revelation 1:5-6

... and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- Not only were we washed from our sins, but we have been made kings and priests to our God and Father. Every believer now has access to God's presence as a priest (one who draws near), and also dominion over sin, sickness and lack as a king in our domain or sphere of influence and responsibility.

Revelation 5:9-10

9 And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll,

And to open its seals;

For You were slain,

And have redeemed us to God by Your blood

Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

10 And have made us kings and priests to our God;

And we shall reign on the earth."

- God intends for everyone that He has bought back (redeemed) from bondage amongst the tribes, tongues, peoples and nations to reign on the earth as

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king-priests. Through Jesus blood He has restored those that accept Him (enter into covenant) back to their God given position of privilege and honor as kings in His presence.

Revelation 12:11-12

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. 12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them!

- Jesus blood is the foundation for our victory. Our testimony and commitment to live and if needs be die for Jesus is based on the power of His blood in our lives.

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If You Have Never Accepted Jesus As Your Lord

God has made it possible for you to get into right relationship with Him. He sent His Son Jesus into the world to live, die and rise again from the dead so that you could be forgiven of your sins, live a life that pleases Him, and joined to Him forever in heaven when you die.

God expects you to **acknowledge** your need for His forgiveness, **believe** that He raised Jesus from the dead, and be prepared to **confess** Jesus as Lord before witnesses in the world you live in.

Accept His free gift of eternal life today. Turn away from your sinful past; wholeheartedly put your trust in Him today. Pray this prayer out loud from your heart, you will be giving your life back to him, and He will love, protect and provide for you all the days of your life.

Dear God in Heaven,

I accept that I need your forgiveness for my sin.

I repent and acknowledge that I cannot save myself.

I believe that you raised your only begotten son Jesus from the dead.

I ask you to come into my heart right now and be my Lord.

I confess you Jesus as the Lord (master) of my life.

I promise to serve you all my days.

Thank you for saving me. I am now your child, accepted into your family.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Friend,

Now that you have prayed this prayer, get into a good Bible believing church that focuses on Jesus and His word, read your Bible starting with the gospel of John in the New Testament, and tell someone that you have accepted Jesus as Your Lord. Pray to your new heavenly Father every day, and look to God to help you in every area of your life.

God bless you.

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