

The Lord's Supper - Part III

The Substance Behind the Fruit of the Vine

The blood of Jesus and the power of God have often been mentioned together in sermons, songs and poems and for good reason. As we study God's word we will learn that there is such great power in the blood of the Lamb that it goes beyond human comprehension. Many people have wondered why Jesus had to come and die a horrific death in order to save mankind. It seemed so barbaric, so shocking. Why did it have to be this way? Couldn't God have provided some other way? For some, the Cross of Christ is a stumbling block and offensive. As we study in this series about the body and blood of Christ, we will find that God has given us the reasons as to why atonement for men's souls had to be paid for at such great price and through the death of his very own Son.

The Bible speaks of blood atonement from Genesis to Revelation. To begin with, we must know this: *If God said it, it is truth.* God always speaks truth and it is always absolute. It is also complete and perfect, pure and unadulterated. It is not related to or dependent on any arbitrary standard. When God says that it takes blood to atone for the sins and souls of man, it is so. Please bear this in mind as you continue reading this teaching about the blood. Whatever God speaks, it is law. When God said under the Old Covenant, **"The soul that sins shall die"** it was so. Since God's word is so true then the penalties for breaking it are for certain to come. Because of this, only God could provide the remedy for man's sin that has brought about eternal death. The only way he could provide a remedy was through the cross of Christ.

This is My Blood Poured out for You

To begin learning about the substance behind the symbolism of the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper, we will continue reading in Luke 22. Jesus had just broken the bread, which as we learned was symbolic of the sacrifice of his body that he gave for us. Then we read that:

"After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you that I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." (Luke 20:17-18)

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20)

Jesus poured out his blood for us. Again, the Lord could speak volumes in one statement. His words are like unlimited layers of revelation knowledge. It's so fantastic; no matter how many times we read the same passage of scripture, we can receive a fresh, new understanding of a particular spiritual truth that we have not previously known before. In this teaching, we will try to cover the most elementary truths concerning the blood of Christ and gradually move into more specific meanings of what the blood means to us as believers. Although we seek to learn progressive revelation knowledge concerning the benefits of the body and blood of Christ through the Lord's Supper or Communion, the complete depths of his entire sacrifice may only be fully

realized until we come face to face with him. (1 Corinthians 13:12) Let's continue on to learn of the meaning of the Lord's words, **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."** (Luke 22:20)

Did this Cup Hold Wine or Grape Juice?

Just briefly I want to interject a question that some have wondered about concerning the cup of the Lord. Did it contain wine or grape juice? I know that I am touching on a taboo subject here in some Christian circles but it is a question that deserves an answer. Since many translations of the Bible interpret what was in the Lord's cup as the fruit of the vine, it has been left open to one's own interpretation or preference. Being that the nation of Israel had to give an offering of a quarter hin of wine during the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, I truly believe that Jesus and his disciples were drinking wine at the Last Supper.

Not only is it recorded in scripture that Jesus did in fact drink wine because the Pharisees accused him of being a winebibber, but we also find that according to the Apostle Paul's writings, the Corinthians obviously used wine in the observance of the Lord's Supper as well. This pretty well teaches us that wine was commonly a part of this spring festival of the Jews, but was also used by the Church in the first century during the Lord's Supper. Supporting scriptures for this are Exodus 23:13, Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:24, 1 Corinthians 11:21

Due to the legalism that exists in many denominations within the Church, a lot of believers think it is a sin to drink a drop of alcohol. Many have even gone so far to say that if one touches a drop of alcohol that they will go straight to hell! This however is not taught in the Word of God. The Bible identifies drunkenness as sin but not drinking in moderation. The fact that Jesus turned water into wine teaches us that drinking alcohol is not a sin in itself; otherwise Jesus would have been promoting sin! The fact that the Pharisees accused Jesus of being a winebibber teaches us that they did indeed see Jesus drinking wine. Of course their accusations went too far! Jesus knew no sin. Since this is true, he would not have sinned by drinking too much.

The fact that Paul rebuked some of the Corinthians for getting drunk during the Lord's Supper teaches us that they were drinking wine from the cup of the Lord. Obviously, people cannot get drunk on grape juice! He does not rebuke them for using wine however, but for the sin of *drunkenness*. (1 Corinthians 11:17-22) Paul also suggested that Timothy use a little wine as a medicinal purpose for his stomach problem. (5:23) Also, one of the guidelines for leadership in the Church to follow was that a bishop, elder or deacon should not be given to "much wine". Please notice it does not say "no wine". (1 Timothy 3:1-8) I said all that to say this. Is it wrong to drink wine at the Lord's Supper? No. Would it be okay to use grape juice? I suppose. Should brethren who drink grape juice at Communion condemn those who drink the wine instead? No.

The Blood That Ratified the New Covenant

The first thing that Jesus associated the cup with that held the wine (blood) was the New Covenant. We learn in God's word that it was the blood that Jesus shed on the cross that ratified the New Covenant. (Hebrews 9:11-28) The blood of Christ instituted and established the New Covenant and the ordinances contained therein for the people of God. Through his perfect sacrificial atonement, Jesus qualified to be our High Priest under this New and Everlasting Covenant. (Hebrews 7:21-28) God bestowed on him this title and honor for he declared:

"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (Hebrews 7:17)

The Lord took a binding oath before God to officiate as High Priest and be the Mediator of the New Covenant to minister to those that are called so that they can receive the promised eternal inheritance. This promised eternal inheritance that we have received *through* and *in him* is salvation and all of those marvelous things that accompany salvation. (Hebrews 6:9) Now that Christ has made us sons of God through the atonement, we are now heirs of God and inherit all things with Christ. (John 1:12-13, Romans 8: 15-17)

Time does not permit me to go into greater depth of the Priesthood of Jesus in this teaching but the most important thing to grasp at this moment is that Jesus ministers to us the things of the New Covenant. He ministers to us the substance behind the symbolism of the bread and wine. He does not do this alone however. The Holy Spirit has been sent to also minister to us those things that Jesus has obtained for us through his life, death and resurrection. He has a ministry to the believer under the New Covenant. (II Cor. 3:7-8) If we would approach our study and prayer time with this in mind, we will begin to be excited and take joy in all that God wants to minister to us and receive from this *new* and *better* Covenant.

The death of Christ also brought an end to the Old Covenant Law.

“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:4)

Believes what? Believes that Jesus died and that God raised him from the dead; believes that Jesus is Lord and salvation is in him alone. No longer would man try to obtain their own righteousness in vain by trying to keep works of the law, but by receiving the righteousness that is freely given through Christ. Christ puts an end to the works of the law for those who believe that his sacrificial atonement is all-sufficient for their lives.

The Blood Makes Atonement for the Soul

The New Testament has much to say about the shed blood of Christ. We learn in the word that Jesus not only shed his blood on the cross but also he shed his blood before he was nailed to the cross. There is great substance behind the symbolism of the Lord's cup and God's word tells us what they are. Remember that Jesus suffered in his spirit, soul and body so that he could provide *complete* redemption for us as well. If we come to know of what Jesus has already provided for us then it will increase our faith and help us to more easily receive the reality of these truths into our lives. Nothing is impossible with God. In him we will find everything we need.

The most notable reason that the Lord shed his blood was for the atonement of men's souls. This means every human ever born has been provided for and has the opportunity to receive the wonderful gift of eternal salvation. God declared in his word that only blood can make atonement for the souls of all mankind for it is written:

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood...for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.” (Leviticus 17:11)

The word atonement literally means “at one with”. The atonement that Christ provided for us brought each of us back into a right relationship with God. Before we came to Christ and received him as Lord and Savior, we were separated or cut off from God because of our sins. We were not able to come into his presence or relate to him personally. Through the body and blood of the Lord however, we have now been redeemed, forgiven of all our sins, given right standing with God (the righteousness of Christ) and are now able to come into his presence and have a personal relationship with him. Jesus paid the price of death for our sins. Since the Father accepted his

sacrifice in our stead, we are now “at one” with God, now and forever. We have been united with God and one another through the Cross of Christ.

Why did Jesus have to die for our sins? God told the first man and woman that if they sinned by eating of the knowledge of good and evil they would surely die. (Genesis 2:15-17, Romans 6:23) The day that Adam and Eve sinned, they unknowingly opened the door for the devil to come in and hold all of humanity captive, to bind them with an evil, sinful nature and blind them to the glorious light of God. All born after that came under the dominion of the evil one. As a result of sin, all men have died since.

We must understand that the sin of Adam and Eve did not just incur a *physical* death penalty but a *spiritual* one as well. This is made evident by the fact that Jesus had to come to save us from eternal death and give us eternal life through him. Eternal death is different from physical death in that it is a permanent state, i.e. for eternity. It is obvious that the Lord does not rescue us from physical death (not unless it's premature) because the scripture says, **“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”** Clearly, all men are destined to die a physical death but we certainly do not want to die an eternal death. The first death simply helps us to step into eternity, whether to life everlasting or eternal death and punishment. Every person then is in need of being rescued by Christ from eternal death.

There may be some unbelievers that feel that they have no need for the blood atonement of our Savior because they may not see their fallen state or condition of being a sinner. God however, has declared in his word that all men have sinned and the only way that sin can be atoned for is through the blood of Christ. It is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless, there is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3, Ecclesiastes 7:20 & Romans 3:10-12)

God's Promise of Redemption Foretold

Although the first couple sinned and fell from that glory and position that God had created them to live in, this did not mean that mankind was without hope however. God, in his love, grace and mercy revealed a plan of redemption immediately after their fall from sin. A way was made for Adam and Eve to be redeemed. God prophesied of the coming of the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (Satan) and perform a *divine reversal* of all the damage that he had done to God's creation as a result of his evil deed. God told the devil in the Garden:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

God kept his promise and this prophetic word came to pass when God's Son, Jesus Christ came to die for the sins of the world and restore eternal life to mankind. Satan did indeed strike the heel of Jesus Christ through the crucifixion. Because of what the serpent had done, Jesus had to come to earth to suffer and die for the very people he created. The good news however is Christ won the complete victory for all men through the cross and crushed the head of the devil by totally defeating him. If we keep in mind that Jesus performed a divine reversal, we will be able to better receive those good things that he died to give us.

Through the Shedding of Blood there is Redemption of Sin

There are many parallels between the physical and spiritual worlds. Since God said that the life of the flesh is in the blood, then it would take the shedding of blood to redeem (or buy back) eternal life for men. God made it perfectly clear that not just any blood will do however. The redemption of all men's souls would require the blood of a perfect, sinless, spotless Lamb of God. Before this Lamb could actually come to give his life however, God would temporarily accept a substitution to keep men in the way of salvation until he could arrive.

When God gave the nation of Israel the Law of Moses with all of its rules and regulations, he specifically commanded them to offer animals or lambs as a sacrificial atonement for sins of the people. These lambs had to be without spot, blemish and disease free in order to be acceptable to him. These lambs were completely innocent, yet had to pay the price for the sins of others by being slaughtered on an altar. These sacrificial lambs were merely symbolic of the real Lamb of God that would come and take away the sins of the whole world. Jesus was sinless and innocent but had to pay the price for our sins. Our Lord was also slaughtered on an altar as a living sacrifice in order to redeem us.

When the real Lamb came to give himself for us, God accepted him as a one-time sacrifice that would put an end to all other sacrifices forever. (Hebrews 10:3.10) His shed blood was the perfect and all-sufficient atonement for the sins of the souls of all men for all time. For both the Old and New Covenants, God required blood to be poured out as a sacrifice in order for men to be forgiven of their sins.

“In him we have redemption through his blood...(Ephesians 1:7)

“...Without shedding of blood there is no remission (of sins) (Leviticus 17:11, Hebrews 9:22 KJV)

It is only by receiving the shed blood of Jesus that we can be forgiven of our sins and receive the free gift of eternal life. As we learned in the last teaching, Jesus came to take our sins in his body on the cross. Through his blood we not only receive complete forgiveness of them but are also completely washed clean of them. Because of this we may now enter into the presence of God. (There will be more about this later.)

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his GRACE.” (Ephesians 1:7)

God concluded that all men were sinners and knew that we would never be able to save ourselves from eternal death. If we would have had to pay the price of death ourselves, there would have been no hope of eternal life with God; there would have been no escape from hell, eternal death (separation from God) and no victorious abundant life in the here and now. Through the sacrifice of his Son, and the pouring out of his grace (undeserved, unmerited pardon) we are able to receive this gift freely without having to earn it. Thank God that Jesus already paid the price for us to receive this precious gift through the atonement!

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