

# The Awesome Cost Of Love

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*Forerunner*, "Personal," January-February 2010

During a recent trip to Trinidad, I read a newspaper account of a meeting regarding government-provided school education. During the meeting Labor Minister Rennie Dumas, the main speaker, said, "There is no such thing as free education." This is a truth, but people tend to overlook this fact because at the time they receive their education, they do not make a formal payment each time they go to the school to be educated in some manner.

In such a system, it is easy to overlook the undeniable fact that somebody is paying for the buildings, equipment, books, teachers, janitors, and administrators. Those costs are being covered by the society through the taxation of its citizenry. Such a system tends to hide the costs, and so many forget the costs involved. In like manner, there is no such thing as free government-provided healthcare, military, libraries, or refuse collection.

Brethren, there ain't no free lunch. Welfare systems cost "tons" of money. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment compensation, and transportation systems that include buses, trains, and highways are very costly. To be sure, there are benefits, and these perceived benefits motivate us to pay the taxes and buy the bonds to ensure these programs will be available for our use.

In these modern times, this is a fact of life. Nonetheless, we must keep the costs in mind, or because of human nature, there is a high risk that we will overlook the costs and fail to appreciate the benefits. We will gradually take the benefits for granted and use them without gratitude because they are accepted as due to us. As this reality influences us, irresponsibility in their care will also rear its ugly head.

Closer to home, rare indeed is the child who appreciates the gifts his parents give. Observe how a child treats a gift after his initial pleasure wears off. Appreciation is a quality that must be learned. Unfortunately, it is most often learned through deprivation unless the child has unusually wise parents who, when he is young, teach him appreciation and responsible, thoughtful care for gifts given to him.

## Freedom Is Not Free

We hear the undeniable truth that "freedom is not free" more often these days as people awaken to the fact that many of our unappreciated but long-held freedoms are disappearing as the government widens its powers over the public. Are Americans going to retain their freedom, or will the ever-encroaching government continue to chip away at them?

In an anti-slavery speech given in 1852, abolitionist Wendell Phillips said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," a truth confirmed by history. Nation after nation throughout history has found that liberty is largely a privilege that must be defended by those who receive it, or others who desire what they have will take it away. Whether liberties are political or religious, there is no doubt that they must be vigorously defended, or they will be lost. It is also true that the liberties that have been bestowed were costly to those who secured them and passed them on to us. If they are to be retained, their defense will also be costly.

A major part of conversion involves a moral and spiritual education by God and about God and His way that the convert believes and faithfully uses. However, what happens if that education is unappreciated and allowed to decay through ingratitude and irresponsibility into disuse?

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are largely about both political and religious freedom. To the Israelites in Egypt, the freedom God gave was largely political, as He broke their bondage to the Egyptians. Yet, in the larger purpose of God, the breaking of bondage is spiritual in nature. God intends the record of that event in His Word to be an object lesson to those being converted and prepared for the Kingdom of God.

The Egyptians paid an awesome cost for the Israelites' freedom. Were the Israelites willing to pay the costs that accrued to them so that, once free, they would remain free? Notice what Jesus says regarding a cost of freedom in John 8:31-32: "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.'"

For the purposes of this article, the key word is "abide," which can also be translated as "continue," "dwell," "remain," "be present" and "endure." It gives the sense of staying in a given place, state, relation, or expectancy. It does not indicate one merely inactively standing still but suggests consistently moving within a pattern. Jesus clearly states that truth makes a disciple free. However, He also emphasizes that the truth and the freedom it produces do not come in a moment of time.

The truth of which He speaks indicates a broad and deep reality, a package containing many individual truths not merely one. Thus, the package takes time to build, to accumulate, which is why a person must abide, pressing on, maintaining the freedom once it is given. The use of time is a costly investment that is not always easily made. Experience in Christian living proves that urgent needs arise in the defense of one's standing before God, and they cannot be dealt with leisurely. In addition, there is the everyday maintenance of discipline in one's life in securing our absolute need of study, prayer, and service to God and fellow man.

Truth and freedom go hand in hand, but truth will produce freedom only if it is used. This is why there must be a disciplined investment of time and energy by those who have truth and desire to protect and build their freedom. We might know something is true, but if we fail to use it, of what value is it? It would be like having money but never using it to buy or invest in anything. What good is it merely to possess it?

Truth and the freedom it produces accrue to those who press on, maintaining what they already have while simultaneously expanding and deepening it. The kind of freedom God is bringing us into comes progressively. We are to overcome, as Jesus admonishes us seven times in Revelation 2-3, and we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18).

Israel's experience in Egypt and in the wilderness is an object lesson that God desires us to reflect on frequently. These lessons are most forcefully brought to the fore during the spring as we begin rehearsing God's plan of salvation in the annual holy days. Once freed from their slavery to Egypt, it took the Israelites but seven days to cross the Red Sea, breaking completely clear of Egyptian control. In dramatic contrast, it took them forty *years* to walk the remaining few hundred miles! During this trek, every man of war numbered in the first census after leaving Egypt—with the exception of Joshua and Caleb—died without reaching the Promised Land. Will we allow ourselves to match this miserable record by failing to maintain our liberty?

I Corinthians 10:6-11 gives us a brief overview of what they did to fail:

Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

What a costly expedition! Hebrews 3:16-19 clarifies the cause of their failure more specifically:

For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not *all* who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. [emphasis ours]

Clearly, they did not make the right efforts to defend their God-given liberties. Instead, they exacerbated their circumstances by failing to discipline themselves to submit to God's rule over their lives, even though He freely rescued them from their slavery. They were unwilling to pay the costs of directing their lives as He commanded, despite knowing, through the many manifestations of His power, that He acted exactly as Moses had said He would.

### **Did Jesus Warn of Costs?**

Jesus admonishes us in Luke 14:25-30 that responding to His calling will trigger some difficult circumstances in the new convert's life. Thus, He warns us to count the cost before committing ourselves as followers:

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sister, yes, and his own life also he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

This is not the first time in Luke that Jesus warns that following Him would be costly:

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." 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." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62)

In these two warnings of possible costs, He says we must expect the loss of the respect and association with those we feel the most affection for, family members. They are not going to appreciate the changes we have made in our lives. They are yet blinded because God has not removed the veil covering their spiritual perceptions. This happens to many of us. It occurred in my relationship with my parents.

Jesus warns that our lives may become seriously unstable, as outsiders might judge it. He suggests that the convert may become somewhat itinerant, seeming to have an unsettled existence. He also suggests that following Him would put demands on our lives and time that might cut close family members to the quick, perhaps even turning them into enemies. Christ makes plain that, despite God's well-known mercy, He wants our wholehearted, unreserved loyalty with no yearning ever to turn back to our former lives. It is in meeting challenges like these that the potential costs become realities.

Though not mentioned directly here, Hebrews 11 reminds us of those who were tortured by mocking and scourging, by imprisonment, by stoning, and even by being sawn in two. Others were forced to flee for their lives, wandering destitute and tormented, barely able to clothe themselves. This may not happen to many of us now, but as matters intensify, Jesus warns that people will eventually kill Christians, thinking that they are glorifying God.

Romans 12:1-2 charges us:

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. 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.

Paul makes a strong, urgent appeal to Christians to devote their lives to sacrifice. Sacrifice suggests the giving up or forfeiture of something or oneself for something or someone considered to be of greater value. In this context, the "Someone" is Jesus Christ and the "something" is God's way of life. The apostle is urging those of us who have had the revelation of God given to us to devote ourselves entirely to living it.

He urges us to sacrifice our bodies. He does not mean to imply giving up merely our skin and bones but the totality of what we are—our entire beings including our minds with all of their character, energy, knowledge, experiences, skills, perspectives, and attitudes—with nothing held back, since we are likely to hold a portion of our life in reserve just for ourselves. In other words, he is asking us to consecrate our entire lives to God. Note that Paul does not call this "extreme," but "reasonable."

Why would one even consider taking on the potential for such costly pain? No one really grasps the fullness of what God asks of those who make the New Covenant with Him at baptism. This witness in Romans 12:1-2 is nonetheless part of His Word to testify against us. There is a good reason, succinctly given in Romans 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." We do it because God's love for His Son has been given to us and is growing. His investment in us, His grace, is beginning to be returned.

The love of God, the biblical love, is not a mere affection but an outgoing concern equal to or greater than self-concern. This love, which we do not have by nature but is given by God as a gift, will sacrifice itself for the well-being of others. It will pay the costs of forfeiture of self-interest for the

well-being even of enemies. It will choose to lay down its life following the pattern shown in Jesus' life.

The love of God is an unearned, dynamic gift from God that influences one who has it toward oneness with God and fellow man. It must be deliberately chosen, though, in order to be put to use.

At this juncture, its costs come to the fore because, despite conversion, human nature remains. Though considerably weakened, it still exerts its influences toward the self (Romans 7:14-23; Galatians 5:16-17). We must overcome human nature's influences, but in virtually every case, we must make a sacrifice to fulfill the influences of the love of God. Sacrificing almost always involves the potential for loss, at times a considerable loss.

A number of verses reveal that, in one sense, choosing whether to sacrifice oneself in obedience to Jesus Christ is not a realistic option to anyone who claims to love Him. In John 14:15, Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." He adds in John 14:21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me." Verse 15 is a direct command and challenge to anyone claiming to love Him, and verse 21 says that one's following through in submissive obedience is the proof that the claimant loves Him. I John 5:3 adds a resounding confirmation to verse 21 by providing the Bible's definition of love: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."

Love comes at a high price, but it is also rewarding because, as we make the sometimes costly choices to please God by following Jesus Christ, we transform more fully into His image due to following the pathway our Savior blazed before us. Becoming a living sacrifice is one of the costs that observing Passover should recall to our memories, giving us substance for sober reflection aimed toward revitalizing our understanding of the significance of this important day.

### **A Frequently Overlooked Cost**

Earlier, we considered I Corinthians 10:6-11 regarding the examples of the Israelites' destructive conduct in the wilderness. A parallel scripture, Romans 15:4, has broader significance and perhaps even more vivid application to us: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

The difference between the two is that I Corinthians 10 concentrates only on Israel's wilderness experiences, while Romans 15:4 broadens its horizons. Within its scope, it includes God's work with Israel and with other nations and peoples over the entire Old Testament. This should teach us that the scope of God's salvation activities is far vaster than it appears on the surface.

II Peter 3:9 confirms this: "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." In I Timothy 2:3-4, the apostle Paul echoes Peter's statement: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

God is preparing us for what is to come. He has caused these examples and principles to be recorded and preserved so that we would be equipped with the guidance to conduct our life in the right way. The scope of what God is working out in our lives is awesome! If we are to discern Passover and its costs rightly, this has to be considered deeply. When properly understood, every bit of what God is

doing is out of love. We will not be able to observe Passover properly unless we can see its importance in its broadest sense.

What a moment in time it was on that Passover in AD 31! God must have been filled with excitement about what was taking place. It was an awesome step toward what He is working out with us.

We must consider Romans 15:4 in light of the historical witness that God is making in our lives. Meditate on this: How many people have lived and died in the vast sweep of the history of each nation to prove a very important point—that there is *no way* but God's way that will produce the environment that man greatly desires but has never achieved? We need to consider this before taking the next Passover because it is important to our thinking that we look at things from God's point of view.

It is not necessary to recount everything, but from Abraham on, how many Israelites have lived and died without ever being offered spiritual salvation? The numbers become staggering as we expand our meditation further back in time. How many people were obliterated from existence at Sodom and Gomorrah? How many people lost their lives in the Flood?

How many people died in Egypt over and above the firstborn? That land was so devastated that it took generations to recover—and may never have truly regained its former glory! In the days of Ezekiel, God prophesied that Egypt would "be the lowliest of kingdoms" until the Millennium (Ezekiel 29:15), when He will raise it up to be one of three major nations with Israel and Assyria (Isaiah 19:23-25). Egypt must have been an awesome nation, a wonderful people, with plenty of ability, as their remaining architectural monuments testify. Yet, God decimated them to provide an object lesson for us! He can do that—He is God, and it is His purpose being worked out. He perhaps did not *have* to do it, but He did it to help us to understand and appreciate Passover more fully. God thinks so big that it is beyond our comprehension.

We can look at the Orient and see 1.3 billion people in China, 1.1 billion in India, 228 million in Indonesia, 128 million in Japan, 90 million in the Philippines, and millions more in Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, the Koreas, etc. Are they living their lives in vain? No, they are not because God is still on His throne, but neither is He offering most of them salvation at this time.

Who knows what God is recording for these people? When they wake in the judgment that Jesus speaks of in John 5, and they learn the history of their people from God's perspective, who knows the depths of their minds' meditations on the Passover in AD 31? They may appreciate it to a depth we cannot understand on account of the deprivations that we have not experienced but they have.

Contrary to what many believe, salvation has never been completely closed to the Gentiles. As early as Exodus 12:48, God reveals that Gentiles are permitted to make the covenant with Him. Following the formation of the church, the book of Acts records the expansion of the invitation to Gentiles in that the church was urged to take the gospel to them. Even so, the most thorough preaching was still pursued in Israelitish lands.

God's Old Testament record of His dealings with them continued to be written right on through Malachi. Even among the Israelites, few seemed to have been called to conversion. From the days of Abraham to Jesus, how many lived and died just as the wilderness generation did so that this record could exist for our edification? What a costly operation!

When we take the Passover, we need to weigh these things so that they make a deeper impression on our minds than they did before. Even so, the cost of the Father and Son's love, as shown by Passover, does not end here. It goes on.

### **Many Lives Deliberately Taken**

Hebrews 10:1-4 states:

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. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

This reveals another part of the cost. Perhaps we think of this as a rather minor affair, but God shows that He has, and we must have, respect for the life of an animal. In His instructions on the subject of the regular sacrifices, God commands us not to eat the blood! The blood must be drained on the ground and not imbibed by a human being. He does this out of respect for the animal, for its life is in the blood even as ours is.

Animals have at least a low level of feeling. They experience fear; situations can frighten them. And who will say that one's pet, a dog or a cat, does not have a special relationship or feeling for him or her? Certainly, it does.

Can we extend that to include a bullock, goat, sheep, kid of the goats, or a lamb as having feelings too? To be sure, they do not have human feelings. Nevertheless, they have life, and in the sacrifices, they symbolize—every single one of them—the life of Jesus Christ. How many animals had to give their lives to make a witness and an example of His sinlessness, His approach to life, or His payment for our sins? We will never know; but just to give an approximate idea, Josephus records that, when he lived in the middle of the first century, the Romans took a census of all of the lambs that were killed in Jerusalem for Passover one year. They tallied 256,000 lambs killed for just one Passover observance—more than a quarter million lambs died to illustrate a lesson!

Perhaps it would help us to understand why God tells the Israelites in Exodus 12 that keeping Passover should be a family affair. It was not to be done at the Temple or Tabernacle. In His instructions, God specifies that nearly every family should kill its own lamb (Exodus 12:3-4). He desires to make the point to every individual that he is responsible for the death of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ!

However, consider this: The overwhelming majority of those Israelite families were not rich. Most of them had only small flocks and herds, so they had just a few sheep and very few lambs. In most cases, they lived with their animals, and whenever they put a lamb to death on Passover, it was quite likely the family pet! They killed something very close to them, a living thing to which they had emotional attachments. Millions of beloved pets died over centuries! Perhaps this can provide us more insight to see that nothing is too great a price for God to pay for us.

### **The Greatest Cost of Loving of All**

I Corinthians 11:25-29 says:

In the same 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." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. 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. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Verse 25 reads, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." It employs a figure of speech in which the word "cup" is a metonymy, meaning that the cup represents what it contains: literally wine. The wine symbolized His blood, thus, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood."

A covenant is an agreement, a contract, between two parties. It is a device to bring people into a binding relationship to accomplish some undertaking. This particular covenant is unusual in that it is in His blood.

In his commentary on I Corinthians 11:23-34 (p. 104), William Barclay makes a very interesting comment on this. He changes a few words and provides proof that the change is grammatically legitimate. He paraphrases it in this manner: "This covenant cost Me My life." This agreement, the New Covenant, is made at the cost of the most precious, the most valuable and dearest Life that has ever lived on the face of the earth, that of our sinless Creator. It did not come cheaply.

Barclay's paraphrase is justifiable because the life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:14). The giving of that specific Life by His shed blood made possible the establishment of a covenantal relationship with God. This relationship is the fruit of Christ's sinless life and subsequent death. Passover portrays what makes salvation a reality for us because justification before God is its fruit. We can consider Christ's making this relationship possible the most important accomplishment of all that He has done through His death.

Our relationship with God *is* our salvation. We could have no salvation unless the relationship existed because we would still be cut off from God. Once established, this relationship *must* be developed and to be developed, it *must* be continued! "If you continue, you will become free," says Jesus. This begins the process of truly coming to know God, and to know God is eternal life (John 17: 3).

Within the context of I Corinthians 11, a major point deals with people not properly discerning the sacred gravity of what the symbols represent. Some in Corinth were making a mockery of the Passover. The church members gathered for a meal, and some were getting drunk, others ate in a gluttonous manner, while a few received little food because others were hogging it all. What they did edified the body not at all! They experienced very little of the right kind of spiritual fellowship.

The apostle writes his epistle to correct a corrupt situation. His point is that, in doing what they did, they were not discerning the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus Christ. If they had truly understood their significance, they would not have acted in this manner. They were not properly interpreting and applying the meaning to their own lives. In treating Christ's sacrifice in a frivolous manner, their application especially went awry. They went through the motions of taking the Passover but without appreciating the reality that the symbols represented.

The word "unworthy" in I Corinthians 11:27 means "lacking in merit or worth." The Corinthians had no appreciation of the precious value of what the symbols represented to their personal salvation. They were missing the eternal character of what they were observing, caring little about who had died and grasping almost nothing of the love that went into His act. They were truly profaning the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ and putting Him to an open shame.

A major point of understanding about observing Passover is that our attitude toward Christ's sacrifice affects our approach to life in general. Above all, it will affect our relationship with the Father, as well as with one another, because the strength of our obligation to submit to Jesus Christ will be diminished. We will not feel it all that important to submit in obedience.

If God wants us to understand anything by our observing the Passover, it is 1) the tremendous costs it took to free us and to maintain that freedom, and 2) how far Jesus Christ, our Example, was willing to be "pushed" without giving in to sin in even the smallest of matters. Let us take Passover soberly, with the serious significance of what it represents at the forefront of our minds.