



"We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God."
—A.W. Tozer

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Without Bitterness

In the annual contemplation of the [Passover](#) and Exodus stories, the question occasionally arises of whether or not the Christian Passover must be observed according to the original instructions in Exodus 12—specifically, with a lamb, bitter herbs, etc. Jews, including some Messianic Jews, typically partake of a Seder meal. *Seder* is the Hebrew word meaning "order," describing the punctilious and exacting procedures that are followed in this Jewish ritual. Is all this still required for Christians?

The *institution* of Passover certainly is eternal ([Exodus 12:14](#)), but that is not to say that all the symbols and details have remained unchanged. For example, the original command involved putting lambs' blood on the doorpost ([Exodus 12:7](#), 12-13). We recognize the significance of that act, but for a Christian, animal sacrifices are no longer necessary, and [God](#) does not send the Death Angel every year. That part of the institution has played its role, and does not contain a literal application for us.

Rather than lambs' blood, we partake of wine to symbolize the blood of [Christ](#) ([I Corinthians 11:25](#)), which is infinitely superior to the blood of sheep and goats ([Hebrews 9:12-14](#)). His blood does not just save us from the Death Angel, as it were, but it actually allows for the forgiveness of [sin](#). The

blood on the doorpost indicated those who were marked out for protection, pointing forward to the supreme sacrifice of the Messiah, but it could in no way forgive sin.

Similarly, the original institution called for the Passover to be eaten with a belt on the waist, sandals on the feet, and staff in hand ([Exodus 12:11](#)). God had the Israelites do this so they would understand that they would soon be traveling and needed to be prepared. As Christians, we recognize the implication that we are likewise "pilgrims" (see [I Peter 2:11-12](#)), and should always be ready to follow God rather than being complacent. However, this detail in Exodus 12 should not be regarded as a mandatory dress code for observing the Passover.

A third example: The original institution held that the Passover lamb had to be set aside on the tenth day of the month and observed until the fourteenth day (roughly three and a half days later), when it was killed. [The gospel](#) accounts of the Passover, though, show the preparations being made more or less on the day before (see [Mark 14:12](#); [Luke 22:7-8](#)). It does not show Christ and the disciples picking out a lamb days before. Yet, interestingly, at the beginning of Christ's ministry, *He* was identified as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of [the world](#)" ([John 1:29](#)). He was "observed" for three and a half *years*, and seen to be without blemish by an untold number of people. Again, the symbolism and principle are still there, but the literal application of God's command is unnecessary.

As far as the bitter herbs are concerned, it is interesting that "herbs" is actually not in the original Hebrew, but only implied. [Exodus 12:8](#) literally says, ". . . and with bitter they shall eat it." In the Bible, bitterness is symbolic of sin. It is a sin itself ([Deuteronomy 29:18](#); [Acts 8:23](#); [Ephesians 4:31](#)), as well as a sign of [mourning](#) or lament as a *result* of other sins ([Proverbs 17:25](#); [Lamentations 1:4](#); [Ezekiel 21:6](#); [27:31](#)). The ancient Israelites had no way of having their sins removed. Offerings were prescribed to be given when sin occurred, but the [book of Hebrews](#) makes it plain that the blood of bulls and goats cannot actually take away sin ([Hebrews 10:4](#)). The life of an animal is not worth anything near the life of a man—and sin causes the life of man to be forfeit ([Romans 6:23](#)). Thus, when Israel kept the Passover, the ritual reminded them that their sins could not be forgiven under the Old Covenant.

In the New Testament examples and instructions regarding Passover ([John 13:1-30](#); [Matthew 26:26-30](#); [Mark 14:12-26](#); [Luke 22:7-23](#); [I Corinthians 11:17-34](#)), the emphasis is on Christ Himself—His example and His sacrifice—rather than on the bitterness of our sins. Certainly, we should remember that it was because of our sins that Christ had to die, but our sins are not something to be memorialized! Our "bitterness" has been taken away if we have accepted Christ's blood. His sacrifice is what we remember each year.

The symbols change from a lamb, something bitter, and unleavened bread in the [Old Testament](#), to unleavened bread (still representing a sinless life), wine, and footwashing in the New. The requirement of a lamb has been fulfilled because Christ became the Passover lamb for us. Our Savior took our sins (bitterness) on Himself, so when we memorialize His death, it is not with bitterness, but with solemnity and [joy](#) because we have been redeemed. This makes possible the wonderful opportunity to enter into a rare relationship with God the Father and His Son.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Passover and I Corinthians 10](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Like our forebears, we can lose our salvation if we live a life of divided loyalty even though we have mechanically and physically gone through the ordinances. Like the Old Testament examples, the Corinthians also developed a careless presumption (having its roots in pride), allowing themselves to be drawn to lust, fornication, tempting God, and murmuring. We need to soberly reflect on these examples, finding parallels in our own lives.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[An Unpayable Debt and Obligation](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

When God calls us and redeems us through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ, we suddenly come under obligation, an immense debt we cannot pay. Were we to somehow pay it ourselves - which we could do only by dying - we would have no hope of eternal life, just the finality of death. John Ritenbaugh illustrates the magnanimity of God's gracious redemption and the response it compels the redeemed to give Him in turn.

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