



# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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Dear Brethren in Christ,

This Lord's Day we begin a new chapter in Exodus. I don't simply mean that we start Chapter 12 (which we do), but we take our first look at the Passover Feast in Exodus. The instructions for the Passover are given a few times in Exodus; this is in part because there are instructions particular to the first observance that are not codified into the regular, annual observance of the Feast.

The Passover was one of the most important holidays for the Old Covenant Church. It was, in so many ways, the holiday that reminded them of their identity. For many of us, July 4<sup>th</sup> is a day of special significance to remember when this Republic declared itself unique and separate from the British Crown. On that day - or perhaps longer - our communities are adorned in patriotic bunting, music is played and sung that reminds us of our unique American heritage and identity, television channels feature movies that celebrate America's special past and the obstacles the national heroes overcame to bring the Republic into existence and preserve it from her enemies.

On the Fourth of July, Americans are traditionally encouraged to look backward to the Republic's past to remember who we are as we look to the future. Americans' national identity has traditionally been formed by reflecting on the nation's history.

## I. Passover and National Identity

Similarly, Passover was designed to be an annual reminder for the Church of who they are and where they came from. At Passover, Israel is confronted with the greatness of God's salvation to them. The components of the meal reinforce the poverty of the Church: slaves trapped in bitter servitude.

As they ate the Passover meal, they are reminded afresh they had nothing to commend themselves to God. God made them His people not because of what they had to offer Him, not because they wisely chose Him, and not because they were more righteous than the other nations or even Egypt.

God made Israel His people because of His grace and God saved Israel because of His faithfulness. Passover shows Israel not that they are sinless, but that God *passed over* their sins. On the first Passover night, God struck down every firstborn Egyptian because of the sinfulness of that people, but not one in the Old Covenant Church perished on that night. It was not because of their righteousness, but because God provided a means of escape from His Judgment. All those who trusted in the means of salvation God provided were spared on that Passover night.

Passover was to remind the Old Covenant Church generation after generation that they are God's people because of His grace to them. God's grace toward them was to be at the core of their national identity.

## II. A Substitute for Sinners

The Passover was designed by God to magnify His grace and justice. The first Passover was an especially bloody affair: not only would an animal have to be slaughtered, but then the animal's blood would not be discarded until it had been smeared, sprinkled, and splattered all over the entryway of the house.

The Passover lambs had lived in the household for several days, they had become members of the families; this is not a random component of the ritual, but a vital part of the lesson of the Passover. By living in the midst of the family, the lamb is identified with that family and is a qualified substitute for them.

The death of the lamb reminds each family what sin deserves, what always follows sin, and what God demands of sinners: death, death, death. But instead of the firstborn sinner of the family dying, the lamb substituted for him or her and the lamb's blood is placed on the entryway. Placing the blood on the doorway testifies to the people's faith in God to save them from His justice and judgment on sinners. In fact as the people eat the lamb, they are - in a sense - receiving life, strength, and nourishment from the lamb that was slaughtered instead of them, which surely points forward to a greater sacrifice, doesn't it?

### III. Saved Through Faith

It's important for us to understand the Israelites were not saved by their obedience. Israel's salvation is on the same terms as our salvation: God's grace received through faith. All the ritual connected with the Passover feast contributed not one iota, not one drop to their salvation. So what was the point of that ritual? It was an expression of the people's faith in God's word.

God had provided a way to escape His judgment, a refuge from His wrath. The people by faith took refuge in what God had provided. They did not look to the act of their splattering blood on their door as the reason God saved them. Their obedience was evidence of their faith in His word of promise to save them.

In fact, if it were the act of splattering blood on the doors to their houses that saved them, they would need far more precise specifications, wouldn't they? After all, if it is works that save, then how do we ever know when those works are completed? What if a person used too little blood? What if a person splattered the blood in the wrong direction? What if the blood was splattered too widely? We see no such details of minutiae in Moses' instructions. The blood was merely pointing forward to a spiritual reality.

Putting the blood on the door was simply an act of faith. God gave the people the opportunity to make an expression of their desperate trust in Him to save them. In fact, the next morning God's salvation through the blood was made even more clear as the people left their homes through the doorways stained with blood and began their journey - in freedom - to God's Promised Land.

Every subsequent annual observance of the Passover reminded the Church of God's saving mercy to bring them out of Egypt, free them from the penalty of their sins, and lead them into the Promised Land.

### IV. Christ Our Passover Lamb

The Church under the New Covenant no longer celebrates the Passover annually for a number of reasons. One of which is that the Passover has been completely fulfilled in Christ and is now obsolete; Paul offhandedly makes this point:

**Y**our boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. **For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.** Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor 5:6-8)

Paul is correcting some of the sexual misconduct in the Corinthian Church and commands them to remove the corruption of rancid sin in their lives. The reason for this is the True Passover Lamb has been sacrificed: the Lord Jesus Christ, so they live free from bondage to sin.

In as much as the Old Covenant Church looked back to the Passover as their defining moment of national identity and redemption, so too the New Covenant Church looks back to the Lord's Supper and crucifixion as the defining moment of our identity and redemption. In the Supper, the broken body and the shed blood of Christ are set before our faith to assure us God's salvation extends even to the likes of sinners such as us!

But Christians do not simply look backward to the finished work of Christ on the cross. In the Lord's Supper, we also look forward because we "proclaim His death *until He comes*," awaiting Christ's triumphant return when He brings His people into the Promised rest of of the New Creation.

Christians also do not celebrate the Passover because we have a better substitute. The blood of bulls, goats, and sheep cannot really take away sin. But Christ, as the True Firstborn, offered His own blood to cover all the sins of His people and provide them full assurance of faith that God is indeed their loving Father

Your friend,



Ryan Biese,  
Pastor