

BREAD AND WINE

Let us view sacrifice in its true and attractive light—a continually-repeated process of giving up one thing for the sake of a better one—a gradual advancement toward the most glorious of all blessings and most intense of all pleasures, a full living sacrifice to the perfect will of God.

When a man, according to the law, took the best of his possessions and laid it on God's altar, what did it signify? It was an intelligent, worshipful recognition that what God had yet to give was vastly greater and more glorious than that He had already given, that everything a man had, including his own life, he would gladly and eagerly lay upon the altar of his faith in God's plans for his future eternal blessing.

Sacrifice is the joyful recognition that the future is full of promise and that the best is yet to come. Sacrifice frees a man from the petty limitation of the poor little present, and relates him to the boundless scope of eternity.

All this shines through the letter of the Law as we read the many divine ordinances which Moses penned so long ago. All this is still but a small fraction of what the Mosaic sacrifices signify to the discerning heart. Sacrifice, with all its little details deep with meaning, taught in picture-story the whole glorious message of the prophets and apostles—the whole history of the divine purpose.

And overshadowing the whole picture is the one great sacrifice for sin, the crowning sacrifice, not a separate feature, but a gathering together of all others in one perfect representation of everything that was embodied in all the rest.

To what extent could the faithful Israelite discern significance in the flour and wine and oil, which in certain prescribed amounts were associated with the sacrifice? We cannot tell; but for us they set in motion many trains of thought. Nor is each item restricted to a single meaning. An interplay of many meanings gives depth to the picture. These common objects which the Spirit uses to construct its symbol-pictures gradually increase in interest as we study their varied significances.

We can neither strive after, nor be satisfied with, a flat, mathematical interpretation—this means this, and that means that. The spirit is always fuller than the letter by which it is expressed. A certain amount of inexpressible feeling must be communicated by, though not actually contained in, the letter. A mathematical interpretation is final and complete, so it ceases to hold the interest.

"Then shall he that offereth his offering unto the Lord bring a meat offering of a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of oil. And the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering shalt thou prepare with the burnt offering or sacrifice, for one lamb." (Num 15:4-5).

Bread is the symbol of strength, both natural and spiritual. Bread is also the symbol of the body of Christ—many individual grains of seed in the act of baptism—springing up to newness of life—gathered in the Lord's harvest—threshed to remove the chaff—ground in the mill to a smooth, fine consistency in which each seed merges with countless others to form one body.

Bread again is that one individual body, which is offered for us—the bread which came down from heaven—the Purpose manifested in flesh. Flour is a certain step in the process of making bread. So we discover that the sacrificial ordinances include a chronological presentation of the Truth—an unfolding of the purpose: the seed; the sheaf; the flour; the baked bread.

Bread again is the fruit of labor; in the joint partaking of it, it is fellowship and covenant relation; it is protection and security; it is the final basic necessities of life; it is the ministration of charity.

Then the oil with which the flour must be mingled. Even the idea that something must be mingled with the flour is a lesson in itself. It shows that exactly the same thing might be acceptable or not acceptable—according to that which accompanies it. Oil is a symbol of spirit. Things must be done in the right spirit. Just the bare doing is not enough. The purpose and motive must be right.

In the act of anointing we see the spirit-oil poured out upon a believer, sanctifying and consecrating him—setting him apart—devoting him to a purpose. In the lamp the spirit-oil is guidance and enlightenment and comfort and encouragement.

Mingled with the flour, the spirit-oil transforms a loose, powdery mixture, which a slight wind would scatter, into one homogenous mass that can be shaped to a desired form. When passed through the fire it will hold that

shape and its natural heavy doughiness will be transformed into palatableness and flavor. Oil again is gladness and joy.

Wine, in the figures of Isaiah, is the gospel message, offered freely without price. Christ uses it in the same way, and he also employs the contrast between new and old wine to illustrate the relation of his teaching to the Law. It was a new vintage of the same thing. The time had come for the new. Wine can also be a mocker and deceiver, false as well as true. As such, it is the cup of false doctrine in the hand of the Apostacy.

Again, wine is the blood shed for sin, the life obediently poured out unto death—the life is in the blood. And wine is well-being, prosperity, celebration of good. Wine is grapes trodden in wrath; bitter judgment poured out that the condemned must drink.

Bread and wine are body and soul; they are the necessities and pleasures of life; they are the physical and mental aspects of life. Wine and oil are a soothing and healing ointment. David says (Psa. 104:15), that God gives—

"Wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart."

—the gladdening gospel wine, the enlightening spirit oil and the strengthening bread of life.

And behind the wine is the multitudinous imagery that surrounds the vine and its branches—

"I am the true vine and ye are the branches . . . without me ye can do nothing."

Without him, what are we? What incentive would there be to carry on day after day in meaningless plodding toward oblivion? One long struggle with its inevitable bitter twilight and final extinction. But the bread and the wine are here before us. Here is a point of contact with the eternal. The bread and the wine, each with the wide meaning and association which it has acquired through the long period of the Spirit's teaching and revelation.

There is a strange sense of familiarity when the mysterious figure of Melchizedek brings forth bread and wine in the presence of Abraham. In this gift of long ago by the King of Righteousness to the Father of the Faithful, all the history of God's loving purpose is condensed. The Jew today, as his fathers have done for ages, still brings forth his bread and wine at the solemn passover feast. But the veil is still over their face.

"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."

"Take, eat, this is my body."

"This is the new covenant in my blood."

Each thread we pick up in Scripture leads us to this point. Each thread is intended to lead us to this point and fails in its purpose if we do not follow it through. Let us not read these things with a veil of blindness or habit or preoccupation upon our minds, so that we, like the Israelites, "cannot look to the end of what is signified." Let us not permit the Law to fail in its purpose through the weakness of the flesh. The Law must lead us to Christ. He is the priest, the altar, the sacrifice, the bread, the wine, the oil. All things point to the redeeming love of him whom we have assembled to remember.

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