

Bread and Wine

Douglas Wilson, *Mother Kirk*, (Canon Press, Moscow, ID, 2001), pp. 103-106

As if the theology of the Supper were not difficult enough in its own right, our modern traditions have created additional questions. And we do have some complicating traditions. What does the Bible teach about the elements of the Supper? What are we required to understand and do?

The elements of the Lord's Supper are bread and wine. Our purpose always is to remember that He has invited us to His Supper, and we are to study to determine how *He* has set the table. And at the same time, we are also to study what manners are appropriate whenever we sit down at His table. How does He want us to treat His other guests?

We must remember the context of Passover. Christ instituted the observance of the Lord's Supper on the 14th of Nisan, at the annual Passover festival of the Jews. In the course of that meal, Christ set apart some of its elements for the establishment of a new meal, the meal of the New Covenant. Christians were to take these elements and remember Him, proclaiming His death, until the Second Coming. At the same time, it is a memorial in the Old Testament sense, in which we are asking God to remember us, for Jesus' sake.

The bread used was the middle loaf of three, and was called the *aphiqomon*.¹ This bread, because it was at the Passover, happened to be unleavened. Christ took it, and broke it, and gave to it a new significance. "This is my body."

During the course of the Passover, there were four cups of wine. The third cup was called the "cup of blessing." This is the cup Paul refers to as being the cup from which Christians would drink until the end of the world. Now this cup was a cup of *wine*—fermented grape juice. The practice of the Jews was to mix water with their wine, usually at a ratio of two to one, so the cup was one of diluted wine. The common evangelical practice of substituting grape juice for wine, simply for the sake of keeping our own pietistic traditions, is scripturally unwarranted, and more than a little impudent.

The questions concerning leavened and unleavened bread are not so simple. Contrary to popular opinion, leaven does not always represent sin in scriptural imagery. The basic idea behind leaven is neither a representation of sin or righteousness, but rather that of *growth*. That growth may be for good or ill, depending on what kind of leaven it is. The imagery of leaven shows that basic religious commitments have consequences over time. Leaven shows us the dominion of a faith. The only question is *whose* faith.

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 822.

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. Another parable He spoke to them: The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened. (Mt. 13:31-33)

The unleavened bread of the Passover meal was a representation of the break with the *leaven of Egypt*.² Consequently, the unleavened bread was called *the bread of affliction*. “You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, that is, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt *in haste*), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life” (Deut. 16:3). The meal was also eaten with bitter herbs to remind the people of the horrible time they had had in Egypt, and to help them look forward to the times of the Messiah. They were not to take any of the leaven of Egypt with them as a “starter.” That would simply have built them another Egypt. We may say, on the basis of this passage in Deuteronomy, that the missing leaven from the Passover was to show the *affliction* of Egypt, and the haste in which Israel left.

Consequently, many have an assumption that leaven in the Bible always represents sin. Certainly it *sometimes* represents sin: “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, *nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness*, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:6-8). Here leaven represents, as it did in the Old Testament, the principle of sin working through the entire loaf. But as we saw above, leaven is also symbolic of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 13:33), working its way through the world. Thus leaven can represent sin, the leaven of Egypt, as it works at corrupting something good, or it can represent God’s leaven as it works at establishing righteousness throughout the world. This is found in the Old Testament as well.

When Israel came into the promised land, they were to begin serving the true God. One of their offerings was the peace offering, a picture of the coming reconciliation which the Messiah would accomplish. “Besides the cakes, as his offering he shall offer *leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving* of his peace offering” (Lev. 7:11-13). This leaven is a picture of thanksgiving, just as a lack of leaven is a picture of affliction under sin and hastening away from sin. Of course, it is better to be in haste while fleeing sin than at rest and leisure in sin. But the point of bringing the people of Israel into the promised land was to liberate them from sin and *give them rest*. This meant they were to offer back up to God

² Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Press, 1994), pp. 118-122.

offerings which had the leaven of *Israel* in it, a thanksgiving leaven, and not the leaven of Egypt.

We see the same truth at the offering of the first-fruits at Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks — also gloriously fulfilled in the coming of Messiah. “Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord.” (Lev. 23:16-17).

Interestingly, the first recorded instance of Christians celebrating the Lord’s Supper after its institution was at this festival, at the time of Pentecost (Acts 2:46). At Passover, no leaven could be present. But at Pentecost, the presence of leaven was required. In other words, the first celebration of the Lord’s Supper was not held in the strictness of Passover, but in the liberty and joy of Pentecost.

Our celebration of the Supper must therefore be *unleavened* in the sense that we reject all worldliness and sin. Our celebration of the Supper must be *leavened* in the sense that we proclaim a gospel which will transform the entire world. Both are true, and both are necessary and legitimate statements to make at the Supper. But which kind of physical bread should we use? The question should be answered based upon which of these two truths we want to have *preeminence* in our observation of the Supper. First, the Christian Church should stay away from worldliness. Second, Jesus Christ died to save the world.

The tenor of the New Testament is conducive to the latter statement; leavened bread represents a *potent* gospel.