

Fencing the Table
Exodus 12:43-51, 13:3-10
Lebanon PCA, Rev. Lane Keister

7/22/2012

The old Scottish church invented a phrase that describes how elders are to seek to insure that only members in good standing of an evangelical church are to partake of the Lord's Supper. They called it "fencing the table." There is a metaphorical fence around the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper is not for everyone. Those who are not Christians, those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, are not to partake of the Lord's Supper. Also, those living in unrepentant sin are not to partake of the table. Anyone who has something against someone else that has not been resolved and needs to be resolved should also refrain from partaking. A large part of instruction as to how the table is fenced comes from this passage in Exodus, which gives us the regulations concerning the Passover meal. As we know, the Lord's Supper, in the New Testament, takes the place of the Passover in the Old Testament. If we wish to summarize the teaching concerning the Lord's Supper by referring to the Passover, then we can say that the Passover was a meal to share, a meal to eat, and a meal to explain. And this is how the Passover table was "fenced." We learn about salvation, and we learn about the Lord's Supper in particular, as we look at this passage.

First of all, we see that the Passover was a meal to share. Verse 47 of chapter 12 says that the entire community of Israel must celebrate the Passover. It is a meal that shows the unity of the Old Testament church. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul makes a point there about how the one loaf points to the one body. The Lord's Supper is a place where we celebrate the oneness of the body of Christ, just as the Israelites showed that the people of God were one people, indeed, that they were the Old Testament church, and that we are the New Testament Israel.

In an age where individualism says that we don't need other people at all, the idea of sharing a meal with an entire community seems foreign. Of course, we do have our potluck meals. But that is a different kind of unity. In the Lord's Supper, and for Israel in the Passover, it is a oneness that celebrates Exodus. We are the body of Christ, whom Christ has led out of spiritual darkness. So, as we look at the body of Christ, we have to remember that we need the body of Christ. This is much more true than that the church needs us. For the fact is that the church really only needs Jesus. It is we who are needy, not the church. And the Lord's Supper is one way of saying that we need the church, the body of Christ, and that we also need Jesus.

Now, the Passover could not be shared with everyone in the whole world. Unity cannot be pressed so hard that purity and truth are left behind. For a unity that is contaminated is not a true unity. In this sinful world, of course, there will always be hypocrites in the church of God. That is unavoidable. However, church discipline is given to the church to be one of the marks of the church. For the Passover, the Lord told the people of God that no foreigner could eat of it. Now, a foreigner here was defined by uncircumcision. No uncircumcised person was to eat of the Passover. Now, non-Israelites could still participate in the Passover meal. But they

had to be circumcised first. In those days, this was equivalent to a profession of faith. They were acknowledging that they needed to be set apart from the rest of the world. These instructions were important precisely because many non-Israelites went up out of Egypt with the Israelites. In fact, that is why these instructions concerning Passover come after the Exodus has already begun. The question of who could participate in the Passover would be a very natural question that would arise, given these circumstances. The Lord says that there is one law for the foreigner and one law for the Israelite. There is actually no favoritism here. If someone wants to participate in the Passover meal, he has to be circumcised.

Now, one might ask the question about how women could participate when they could not be circumcised. Here the principle of covenant continuity comes into play. For all women belonged to a covenant family. And each family had a covenant head, who was male. As long as the woman was connected to a family where there was a strong profession of faith in circumcision, then the women could participate. Women were not excluded from the Passover meal.

In the church today, we believe that baptism has taken the place of circumcision. This is why we say that baptism initiates a person into the people of God. So, in fencing the table, we always say that a person has to be a baptized member of a church that preaches the true Gospel. So, if baptism marks the initiation of a person into the covenant people of God, the Lord's Supper confirms a person in that same covenantal people of God. Now, there is some discontinuity between the Passover and the Lord's Supper, as well. For instance, it seems most likely that everyone partook of the Passover, young and old, infants and adults. However, that is not true of the Lord's Supper, where only those who make a profession of faith can partake of the Lord's Supper. The reason for that is that Paul gives us instructions about the Lord's Supper, where we are to examine ourselves before we partake of the Lord's Supper. Infants are not capable of that kind of self-examination, and so that's why we wait until the children are able to examine themselves.

Not only was that generation supposed to share the Passover, but also all future generations were to share it. The wording here is quite remarkable. For each generation that partook of the Passover was to speak of the Exodus as if it had happened to them. Each generation was supposed to speak as if *they* were the Exodus generation. Verse 8 proves this, because the people are envisioned as being in the Promised Land, and yet each person is supposed to be talking about how the Lord had done this *for him*. And each future generation is supposed to behave the same way. So also for us, each one of us can talk about what Jesus did for us, for Jesus did not die merely for the sins of people in His generation, but for all the sins of the people of God. Jesus' blood is that effective to take away sins. We have seen, then, that the Passover was a meal to share, although not to everyone.

Secondly, we see that the Passover was a meal to eat. This seems self-evident. A meal is something one eats. However, it wasn't just any kind of eating. The Passover was to be eaten in a certain way. And these instructions are helpful for us such that we can understand salvation. Firstly, it had to be eaten inside the house, not outside. The Israelites, of course, had to be inside while the destroying angel came all over the land. For they had to be covered by the

blood of the Passover lamb. We have to be inside the house, as well. In effect, for us, it means that we have to be inside the church. For outside the church, there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. So, also, we eat the Lord's Supper in the presence of the people of God.

The second way the Passover had to be eaten was whole, entire. They were to eat everything that they could, and whatever was left over had to be burned. None of it was to be left until morning. The lamb was a complete sacrifice for them. The lamb was given whole and entire. So also the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, was given whole and entire. The text also says that not one bone of the lamb could be broken. There is no convincing reason in the Old Testament context for why this had to be. The only really logical explanation was that this provision looked forward to Jesus Christ. In John's Gospel, we learn that not one bone of Christ's body was broken. The soldiers were going to come and break the legs of Jesus, but they found that He was already dead. John tells us that this fulfilled Scripture, which said that not one of His bones would be broken.

Thirdly, there could not be any yeast at all in the houses of Israel. This was symbolic of getting rid of sin. All the yeast had to be gone from the entire people of God, not only in each person's house, but also in the entire land of Israel. No yeast at all could exist within the boundaries of the land of Israel. So also for us, all our sin has to be forgiven in order for us to partake of the Lord's Supper. There can be no yeast of sin remaining unforgiven in our hearts. That is why we prepare for the Lord's Supper. We have to be mindful of what Jesus has done, and we have to make sure that His blood has covered over our sin, each one of us. Yes, the Lord's Supper is a meal to share, but it is also a meal for each one of us to eat. And we must eat it in a certain way.

Lastly, the Passover was a meal to explain. We have seen that it was a meal to share, a meal to eat in certain ways, and now we see that it is a meal to explain. There was a kind of catechism that went along with the Passover meal. The child was to ask the parents, "What does this mean?" And the parents were to explain about the Exodus. If we don't explain what the ritual means, then it becomes a meaningless ritual. For the Israelites, then, they were to explain how the blood of the lamb on the doorposts meant that the destroying angel passed over their house so that they were not destroyed along with all the Egyptians. The same thing must happen in the Lord's Supper. The blood of the Great Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, has been spilled on our account so that the wrath of God has passed over us. We are no longer under God's wrath, but have passed from wrath to grace. And the blood of Christ our Passover Lamb, has been spilled. And so this is what the meaning of the Lord's Supper is. This is what it means to discern the Lord's Body. It is to see that the body of Christ was broken for us. So, when the Lord's Supper is served, all of these things should be remembered by us. For the Lord's Supper is inexhaustible in its riches for showing us the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even if we were to celebrate the Lord's Supper every week, we could not come to the end of the rich meaning of the Supper. There would always be something new to explore, something fresh to see. For the Lord's Supper is as deep in significance as the Word of God itself.

We have seen that the Passover is a meal to share, a meal to eat, and a meal to explain.

We can say the same about the Lord's Supper. We have also seen how this means that the table of the Lord's Supper must be fenced. It is not a table for absolutely everyone. It is a table for those who have repented of sin, been baptized into a church, and have no unrepentant sin in their lives. May this be true of us as we come before the table every time.

Sermon Outline:

I. Introduction

II. A meal to share

III. A meal to eat

IV. A meal to explain