

The Cup of the New Covenant, in His Blood

Part 1 of 2

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In Luke 22, we read of Jesus' appointment of the Lord's Supper as a memorial of His death. When He came to the cup of wine, He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20; see also 1 Corinthians 11:25). Have you ever wondered why Jesus used this wording? Why did He say that the cup of wine is the New Covenant in His blood? There is something very important for us to learn here.

Why Wine and Not Blood?

Why don't we actually drink blood in the Lord's Supper? Yes, for most of us, that would be gross. But there's another reason. It's because all we could really do is drink the blood of some animal. But the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were only shadowy pictures of what was to come. They pointed ahead to the real sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Now that Christ has actually come and made that sacrifice of Himself, we're not to return to those shadows.

But even under the Old Covenant, although they sacrificed the animal and shed its blood, the people were strictly forbidden from drinking the blood. Why? Genesis 9:4 tells us that the life of the flesh is in its blood, and notice Leviticus 17:10-11: "Any man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who live as foreigners amongst them, who eats any kind of blood, I will set my face against that soul who eats blood, and will cut him off from amongst his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life."

The blood on the altar pictured the atonement of Christ. But that's as far as it went. God explained that the life of the flesh is in the blood. Killing the animal pictured the death of Christ. The blood shed in the killing pictured Christ's life poured out for His people. Because the blood "makes atonement by reason of the life" that is in it, if a person were to drink the blood, it would picture taking into oneself—internalizing—Christ's life. But internalizing Christ was not a benefit of the Old Covenant, and it is why condemnation was never truly removed in the Old Covenant (Hebrews 10:3-4).

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The Old Covenant was entered through physical birth into the nation of Israel and/or through circumcision. The New Covenant is entered through belief, and only believers can take Christ—and, thus, the life He gave to make atonement for them—into themselves. Only under the New Covenant is condemnation taken away (Romans 8:1). Under the Old Covenant, the people could only picture the sacrifice that was to come by performing the ritual sacrifices over and over again. By shedding the blood of an animal, they pictured (although most of them did not realize it) the coming death of the Messiah to pay the penalty for the sins of His people. But it stopped there. They were forbidden from drinking the blood because salvation through internalizing the blood atonement of Christ was not for national Israel under the Old Covenant.

As an aside, I'll mention that the Old Testament saints were not saved by the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant could not save. They were saved by having faith in the promise of the coming Messiah, whose atonement was pictured even in the sacrifices that predated the Old Covenant (it's why the Lord respected Abel's offering—Genesis 4:4). But the majority of the Israelites under the Old Covenant, although they offered the sacrifices, didn't have faith in what they pictured. They probably didn't even understand what they pictured. Instead, they thought that keeping the law—including the law of the sacrifices—was what would make them righteous (Romans 9:31-33). Only those Israelites who were elect had the faith to trust the Messiah, and only they were saved. Their salvation did not come through the Old Covenant, but in spite of it.

Today, we have the reality of the shadows pictured in the Old Covenant. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, has been sacrificed. If we believe in Him as our Savior, we have taken His Word into us (James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:23; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). In fact, we have taken *Him* into us (Romans 8:8-10; Ephesians 3:17). The elect have internalized the blood atonement of Christ.

The Supper

Before He died, Jesus established a supper that we are to regularly eat to remember and proclaim His death until He comes (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:26). This supper is not like the sacrifices the people of the Old Covenant performed that looked ahead to the sacrifice of the coming Messiah. Under the New Covenant, we, the people of the Messiah, look back in a memorial supper to the death of Jesus Christ (the Messiah). In this Supper, we don't shed the blood. That already happened on the Cross. We remember that shedding of blood, without repeating it, because it was once for all time (Hebrews 10:10).

So, while we don't sacrifice anymore, we do drink the "blood." We don't drink animal blood because the time for the shadow of animal sacrifices is past; the reality of Christ's sacrifice came about two thousand years ago. We can't drink Christ's literal blood. So, we drink the symbol He instituted. That symbol is red wine. (Further reading: "The Elements of the Lord's Supper: What Kind of Bread and Fruit of the Vine Are We to Use?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/lords-supper-elements/>) The wine shows Christ's death. When we drink it, we show that we remember His death, and we show our participation in His death (Romans 6:5-9). By giving His life, Jesus gave us eternal life. But there's more!

As I've pointed out, the Bible tells us the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11). When we drink the wine, we are drinking the symbol of Christ's blood, which in turn, stands for His life. Thus, it is correct to say that we are drinking the symbol of Christ's life that He died to give us. We are showing that His death applies to us in taking away our sins, and we symbolically show that we take Christ's life—eternal life—into us. Jesus said He was to be in us and we in Him (John 17:21-23).

Red wine is the symbol Jesus chose for His blood. Red wine is red like blood. Wine contains alcohol and so gladdens the heart of those who consume it (Psalm 104:14-15). Most importantly, it is the fruit of the vine. Read John 15:1-17. Jesus symbolically refers to Himself as the Vine, and to us as the branches: "I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (verse 5). We are to remain in Him and He in us. We are to bear fruit. How does a branch of a grapevine bear bunches of grapes? It must remain in the vine so that it continues to receive the life-giving sap from the vine and use that to produce the grapes. Similarly, we are to remain in Christ by remaining in His love (John 15:10-12). We are to continually be taking His life into us if we are to produce fruit. How do we do this? Jesus plainly equates our remaining in Him with His words remaining in us (John 15:7). Our part in this, then, is to be taking in His words from the Bible.

Jesus' Words Are Life

Echoing postmodernism's rejection of rationality and dogma, many teachers now espouse elevating Jesus Christ as the living Word of God while denigrating the written Word of God. They accuse those who revere the Bible as practicing bibliolatry. These postmodernists apparently have no idea that the Bible is the revealed mind of Christ and its words are the words of eternal life (John 6:68). Jesus could hardly be plainer when He said, "It is the spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life" (John 6:63). "The words...are life."

Again, those who speak against the words, casting aspersion on their divine origin, reveal that they are not of God: "He who is of God hears the words of God. For this cause you don't hear, because you are not of God" (John 8:47). But to those who receive His Word, Jesus says, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him" (John 14:23).

The Bible makes direct connections between the blood and the life, between the life and the words, and between taking the words into us and taking the life into us. Drinking the wine that symbolizes Christ's blood pictures taking His life into us. His life gives us eternal life. His words are His life and our eternal life. Forsaking the words of Christ is a huge mistake that further leads postmodern Christianity down the road of apostasy. Hebrews 13:12 tells us that Jesus sanctified the people through his own blood, while in John 17:17, He prayed, "Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth." So, in the Lord's Supper, the wine pictures Jesus' blood that pictures His life that He gave for us. In drinking the wine, we show His death and its application to us, but we also picture taking His life into us, which is what we really do when we take His words into us. But there is still more.

In the last half (Part 2) of this article, I'll specifically talk of the symbol of the *cup* of the New Covenant in Jesus' blood, and I'll explain why all of this is so important in a world where Christians are being inundated by subjective, Bible-devaluing, postmodern Christianity.