

Who Sleeps in Gethsemane?

by Ray Straub

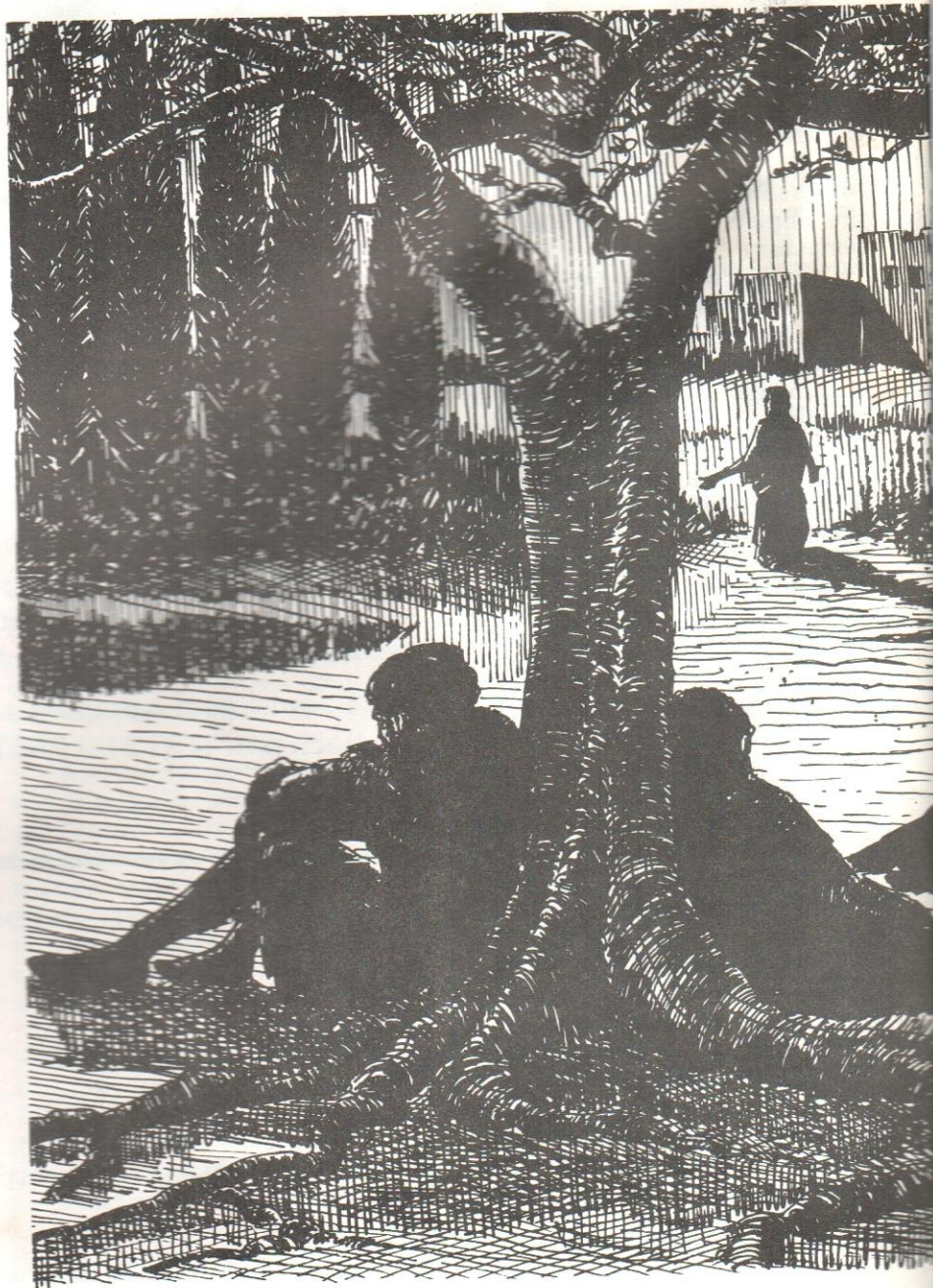
*Many of us have them and don't want them. Peter, James, and John could have used one!
A sleepless night.*

What keeps us awake when we would rather sleep? Physical discomfort does. So does worry about the whereabouts and welfare of loved ones, as does our inability to pay bills and complete our work. Guilt can cause restlessness. So does disturbing news. Anger also provokes hours of composing speeches, plotting, and resolving while we reshape our pillows and rearrange our bedding.

Sleeplessness, however, is not all bad. When we are kept awake we concentrate on responsibilities, plans, and relationships. The thoughts may not all be ideal, but at least important matters have our attention.

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus arrived at a critical time in His life. His well being and His Father's will were in tension. He needed to pray.

Arriving at Gethsemane, Jesus asked His disciples to stay behind, except for Peter, James, and John. The four went farther into the garden. Jesus told the trio to be on



guard while he prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

Returning, He found the two brothers and Peter sleeping. Jesus wondered why they couldn't stay awake for one hour. Again, He asked them to watch, warning them that their tired bodies may not want to cooperate. He prayed and returned only to find His friends asleep again. It happened a third time. After that Jesus



knew He was going to be betrayed whether the three were on guard or not.

Readers of this incident may wonder why this small inner circle of disciples didn't stay awake with Jesus during His ordeal. Were they so unsympathetic? He was severely troubled and surely seemed to deserve the small amount of support that staying awake required.

The body will go to sleep when it wants, unless there is enough reason for it to remain alert. Cars often are driven by those who know that falling asleep may cost several lives, but the body still insists on losing its consciousness to sleep. No matter what urgency faces us, a tired body is unsympathetic. We sleep in front of interesting telecasts, during concerts, conversations, in classrooms, and in church. If we sleep everywhere else, why not in Gethsemane?

The church has her Gethsemanes, her times when she urgently seeks God's will. The alert are awake and participate, while the masses sleep.

The church needs constant prayer because she is constantly having to evaluate and choose. There is no stopping change. Either we change, or we are changed. Nothing remains the same for long. Some changes are progressive, maturing, enhancing. Others are mistakes which prove to be costly. We need wisdom from God to know the difference.

Jesus faced quick, profound, meaningful changes. He talked about them with His Father in Gethsemane. The church also will face changes, big and small. The need for good decisions will take her to lonely Gethsemane, and while she seeks the will of God, there will be those who slumber unconcerned about the need and nature of change.

Knowing why changes come and how we can deal with them will find us watching instead of sleeping. We can move ahead and mature.

Change comes about because tradition is in the constant process of decay. This is an unchangeable characteristic of tradition.

Some have wondered, "What would President Abraham Lincoln think if he should come back to life?" They are curious about how he might react to the many incredible changes that have taken place in the last 125 years. Questions like this remind us that changes are always in progress.

When born, each human begins an evolutionary process of development. The environment presents to the newborn a network of traditions. A culture disciplines its young to patterns of behavior. Within these, values are established which deserve investment of affection and energy. Our customs govern our lifestyle. We are raised by traditions, held together by traditions, and are committed to passing them on.

For all of their value, customs are evolutionary, constantly moving from innovation to decay. This is why surprise and awe would greet a resurrected President Lincoln. He presided over a land strong in good traditions, but regardless of their value, they could not hold back changes which have been staggering!

No institution or endeavor is more guided by traditions than is the church. They direct our personal religious activities, as well as our worship together in church services. They are unquestionably useful.

Yet the God we worship is both

Truth is to be understood, not personally owned. The pursuit of it is a lifelong endeavor which never ceases to reward those who love it.

immanent and transcendent, known and unknowable. His immanence allows Him to be identifiable in creation and knowable in our human experience. A classic statement of the Creator's immanence is the Psalmist's, "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth. . . . When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalm 8:1a, 3, 4).

Our traditions enable us to honor God. Sabbathkeeping, for example, is mandated to honor God's creative power, evidence of His movement in our lives. Other customs enable us to encourage each other, to find ways to sense the Presence of our Heavenly Father. The immanent God is a Person whom we worship, know, and love.

Yet, for all of their value, even religious traditions are part of the passing world. As they move from being stirring to becoming routine, habitual, and eventually tiresome, traditions are soon like the sleep-inducing hum of an automobile carrying a weary driver. Sleep threatens. (To remain alert we must find new ways to observe and know God.) Good changes produce healthier fellowship and worship.

Those acquainted with the Creator know that He is not only identifiable and experienced, but He is also transcendent. God can be seen in creation, but He is totally other than creation. While

He may be experienced, He can never be grasped.

O that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. . . . For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him (Isaiah 64:1, 4).

Augustine, the fifth century churchman, in his essay, "God Is Incomprehensible," wrote:

If thou hast been able to comprehend Him as thou thinkest, by so thinking thou hast deceived thyself. This then is not God, if thou hast comprehended it; but if this be God, thou hast not comprehended it. How therefore wouldest thou speak of that which thou canst not comprehend?

We are speaking of God; is it any wonder if thou doest not understand? For if thou doest comprehend, He is not God.

The church goes to Gethsemane to seek the will of a transcendent heavenly Father. Our quest is to know better a God who is what He is, not what we imagine Him to be. To be satisfied with our present idea of God is to sleep in Gethsemane. The alert recognize that change is growth which will enable them to continue reaching for the transcendent One who always has more to reveal to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Mary and Martha were both religious. A visit by Jesus found Mary athirst for what the Master

taught. Martha felt abandoned. She was concerned about Mary's irresponsible attitude toward her household duties. Martha appealed to tradition in asking their Guest to remind Mary of her duties. Jesus identified the eternal values; they were not the traditions.

At the Last Supper, Jesus warned Peter that Satan desired to sift him as wheat, meaning that the devil wanted him. Christ prayed that Peter's faith would not fall.

"And when thou art converted," continued Jesus, "strengthen thy brethren." Interesting words!

Jesus' reference to Peter's conversion carried a twofold prediction. It indicated that Peter would be tested and waiver in his loyalty. It also predicted that he would return to the Lord. This coming back would make him a source of new strength. He would learn and get something new. Victory after testing extends us. We have been changed because some experience moved us beyond the limits of existing tradition.

Those who have changed the course of history recognized the confinement and temporary nature of traditions and thus charted new trails. They were restless and daring. They accepted vulnerability and took risks. They sought beneficial change and proved its value. They knew that the discovery of transcendence lies beyond what is done habitually, and they dared to venture. Who can sleep in Gethsemane when the prayers of some seek

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that part of God's will which lies beyond what is comfortable and routine?

Change also will come not only because traditions are decaying, but because language is too. Expressions gain new life and excitement through the metaphor, and from there they drift steadily toward the meaningless, unmoving, non-communicative cliché. There is no way to prevent an oft-used phrase from becoming tiresome. To be worth hearing, we must find fresh ways to express ourselves.

We may hope that our once brilliant answers will always be so, but, alas, they will not. Repetition gets boring, and so will the explanation of our religious beliefs if they are not enlivened by new study and fresh expressions. What was once an exciting interpretation of Scripture all too quickly becomes commonplace, attracting little attention.

A passage of Scripture may strike the interest of the Bible student. He researches it, compares it to other portions of the Bible, adds historical information, analyzes the words and syntax, and discovers a truth he is anxious to share.

The process of developing a doctrine based on Bible study has been called *domestication*. It is the experience of having a newly conceived biblical precept acceptably taught and explained until it becomes the belief of the membership as a whole.

From domestication traditions come. Beliefs are widely accepted, embraced, and included with a church creed. At the mention of a denomination, certain distinguishing doctrines come to mind. This is because traditions give continuing signals to the world what a church has come to believe and practice.

Again, the nature of tradition is such that it eventually loses its impact. Old standing beliefs are accepted without personal research, and ceremonies are observed because they seem fitting

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and are not questioned. One need not be alert to observe tradition. Such comes naturally.

In time, traditions lose their freshness and become cliché. None can retain the excitement of yesterday's innovations. This is evidenced when only scattered members can explain why they believe what they do. Not only are they unable to offer a defense of their beliefs, but they feel no need to do so. They have become intellectually stagnant and do not want the doctrines preached because they are no longer challenged by them. Others appreciate hearing doctrinal clichés because it assures them that nothing has changed.

The earnest prayer, seeking fresh and stimulating ways to express the will of God, is sent up from Gethsemane, but many prefer to sleep through the humdrum of threadbare religious jargon. To find new biblical insights and to explain old ones in new ways are changes which assure that the Presence of a life sustaining, transcendent God is with us. It keeps a search for His will alive among us.

It has been suggested that man has difficulty taking an honest look at his own honesty. It is easy to become possessive about our beliefs, considering that anyone who questions them attacks our personal integrity.

Truth is to be understood, not personally owned. The pursuit of it is a lifelong endeavor which never ceases to reward those who

love it.

We are not saved by knowing truth, but we are blessed by it. We are neither saved nor blessed by traditionalizing interpretations and insisting on their survival. This dooms our faith to become as tiresome as the cliché.

As we look ahead into 1984, we will look for changes. Some will be substantial, because traditions always change. We will be saying things differently — more clearly and inspirationally. We must, because the truths we love are too dear to die with the language.

Hebrews 10:25 calls for a change which speaks as directly to us as it did to the wavering Hebrews to whom this letter was written: *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

Change is noted in the words, "so much the more." The trend was toward forsaking, slacking off, weakening. The author of Hebrews rallied the efforts of the church toward greater intensity and a resolve to do more, not less.

May the new year introduce similar changes in us, as we see the day of the Lord approaching. Let there be more meetings, more personal encouragement, greater insights into means by which new frontiers in our work for God may be opened. These changes assure us that God is present and will lead in our church and in our individual lives.

Ed

The Meaning of the LORD'S SUPPER

by Ray Straub

Taking part in the Lord's Supper is considered by many to be the highest act in Christian worship. Do you agree? Of all of the ceremonies which are part of Christianity, is participation in Communion services the most lofty? Many Christians are conscientious about getting to Lord's Supper services. It is one occasion they don't want to miss!

Let's spend some time discussing the Lord's Supper. Several names are given to this sacrament. It is called the Eucharist, meaning "thanksgiving"; the Communion, referring to what we do together; the Holy Communion; the Lord's Supper; the Lord's Table — and perhaps other suitable terms. It would be difficult to choose the best among those named. Each seems appropriate.

Let's review the setting in which the Lord's Supper originated. It is referred to in all four Gospels.

During the week in which Jesus died, the annual, week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread took place. This celebration began with the Passover supper. According to Luke, Jesus asked Peter and John to make the necessary preparations so that He with His disciples could observe this sacred festival.

The celebration of the first Passover meal occurred in con-

junction with Israel's departure from Egypt. Thereafter, it became a memorial to the events of the Exodus.

By Jesus' time, procedures for observing the Passover were firmly established. This ceremonial meal was called the *seder*. It opened with a prayer of invocation by the head of the household. The first course included green herbs, bitter herbs, and a sauce of mixed fruit eaten without bread.

During the second part of the meal, the head of the household explained how the various dishes eaten symbolized historic events which brought the nation, Israel, into being. The foods here included the lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. Also included in this ceremony were drinks, recitations, and singing.

There is no indication Jesus followed tradition in giving the usual explanations for the food at the *seder* during which He introduced the Lord's Supper. Instead, He gave new meaning to some of the food which had long been part of the Passover menu.

Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples. In 1 Corinthians 11:24, Paul quotes Jesus saying, "This is My body which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

Later Jesus took a cup. Again He offered thanks and gave it to

His disciples and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:25).

This gives a brief description of the beginning of the Lord's Supper. Let's consider its meaning. The better we understand the reason for the Communion, the more meaningful will be our celebration of it.

First, it proclaims the substitutionary, self-offering of Jesus as



adequate atonement for our sins. Second, it reminds us of God's invitation to participate in His order of salvation set up by Jesus' death as a *covenant sacrifice*. Third, it permits us to share our appreciation for having become part of the body of Christ, the church. Fourth, it holds forth the hope of a positive experience at the second coming and presence of Jesus. A discussion of these four reasons in some detail will cause us to see why observance of the Lord's Supper is such a high Christian act.

A Proclamation

The first reason given was that the Lord's Supper proclaims the substitutionary, self-offering of Jesus as adequate atonement for our sins. Let's consider the substitutionary nature of His

death. Question: Whose place did Jesus take when He died? Answer: Mine, and yours, and everyone else's. We were all doomed. Loaded with guilt for our sins, there was no chance to escape, no possibility of avoiding eternal death.

Yet, God's mercy provided a substitute for us. He gave His own Son, whom He loved. Our observance of the Lord's Supper gives us opportunity to grasp and reflect upon the truth that Jesus was willing to be our stand-in on death row. Because He died for our sins, we have access to eternal life.

People forget too easily. Memories quickly fade into unreachable distances. We would like to know about many events of the past, but forgetting has lost them to us forever. Unless there is some means by which experiences can be kept alive through retelling, recording, or reenactment, they become hopelessly lost.

The celebration of the Eucharist enables us to experience anew the most meaningful of human events. The past is pulled into the present again. We are reminded impressively that we were sentenced to die. Jesus stepped in and

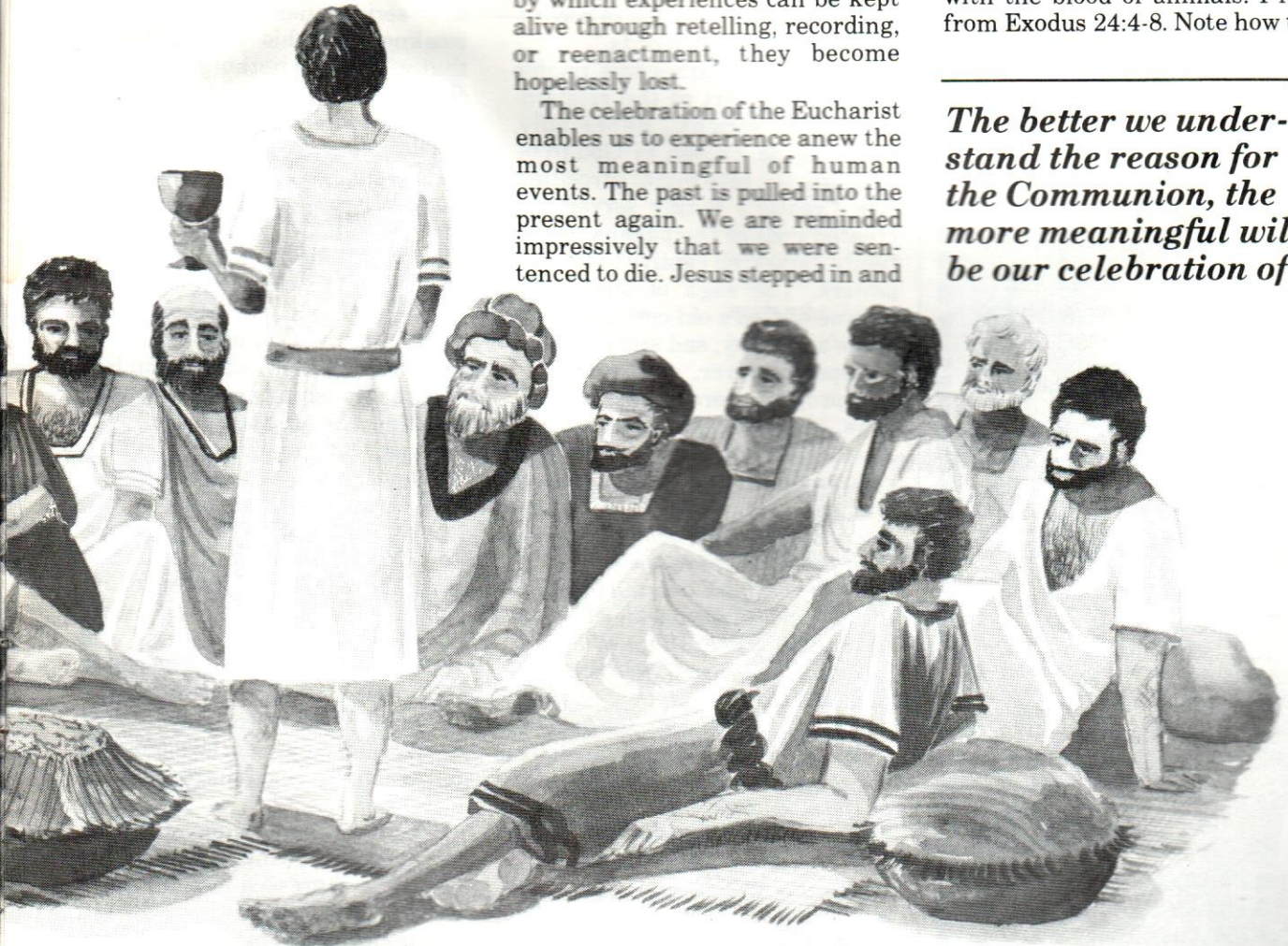
was physically tortured and executed because of what we did. I'm not flattered in remembering, but I'm warmed with gratitude as I contemplate repeatedly the generous substitution.

A Participation

Not only do we proclaim the Lord's substitutionary death in observing the Lord's Supper, but we also demonstrate our ongoing participation in God's order of salvation. It was set up by Jesus' death as a *covenant sacrifice*. The word "covenant" refers to a sacred or divine relationship. Note how this word appears in 1 Corinthians 11:25, "In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the *new covenant* in My blood.'"

The Old Covenant was ratified with the blood of animals. I read from Exodus 24:4-8. Note how this

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Remember when going to church was something special?

Baths were taken, shoes were shined, your best outfit was pressed and mom fixed that special dinner everybody liked. Going to church can still be something special. God made a special day just for you. He called it the Sabbath. You can learn more about God's Sabbath and how you can benefit from it. Write for our pamphlets, free for the asking from the Bible Advocate Press.

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passage shows the people of Israel's desire to obey God in their effort to keep the covenant:

And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

As a nation, Israel was unable to keep her part of the relationship God sought. Repeatedly, these people, chosen by God to be His own, fell into moral atrocities. The Creator's family served the created gods of the pagans. Eventually, Israel fell captive to foreign powers. The saga of the moral decline of God's old-covenant people is a lengthy, sad story.

Hope, however, was voiced by the prophet Jeremiah: "*Behold, days are coming,*" declares the Lord, "*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,*" declares the Lord. "*But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,*" declares the Lord, "*I will put My laws within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me, from the*

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least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

To review, the Old Covenant was based upon obedience. God rewarded good deeds and punished those who sinned. This placed emphasis upon sin as a deed. The spilling of the blood of animals reminded Israel about how serious her sins were. The weakness of this covenant was that it could do nothing about the sinful state of man brought upon him by Adam's disobedience.

The New Covenant was different. Because the perfect life of God's Son was offered in sacrifice, an adequate atonement was made. It made forgiveness of sin and complete cleansing possible. A reconciliation has taken place. We can know God personally. He becomes ours, and we become His. The relationship brought about by the New Covenant is maintained because God has written His laws inside us.

I will not take time to do so, but I encourage you to read Hebrews 10:1-25. It gives further understanding on how the spilling of our Savior's blood exposed the inadequacy of the Old Covenant and ratified the New. From the least to the greatest, all of us may know the Lord. By partaking of the Lord's Supper, we declare our participation in this improved New Covenant.

The joy of being under the New Covenant, of living a new life in Christ, is expressed in submission to the will of God. His laws written on minds and hearts motivate God's children to live righteously.

The Old has passed. The new has come. This glorious, new covenant relationship is celebrated ceremonially at the Lord's Table.

A Sharing

Third, the communion demonstrates our membership in the corporate body of Christ. God invites more than one person to the communion table. He welcomes the whole Christian family.

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17).

This new ministry is one of reconciliation. Through Christ we become reconciled to God and

members of the reconciled family. "I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18).

God is love. It's His most outstanding feature. Members of God's family reflect the Father's character. One cannot relate to God if he cannot love. The Lord's Supper is a corporate meal in which God's love is repeatedly confirmed and demonstrated. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." At the Communion Table we commemorate that gift of love. We celebrate by loving each other.

Let's examine a severe problem in the church at Corinth in regard to its observance of the Lord's Supper. Reading select verses from 1 Corinthians 11:20-34 will

provide some valuable insights.

Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? . . . Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. . . . For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. . . . So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you

(Continued on page 26)

BOOK REVIEWS

Why Christians Burn Out by Charles E. Perry, Jr., Nelson Publishers, \$4.95, paperback.

Does your work drain you emotionally? Do you blame others for your problems and failures? Have you stopped making plans to do great things? Do you consider your career a treadmill? Do you want to be "left alone"?

If you answered yes to these questions, you could be on the brink of burning out—or already experiencing its emotional and professional devastation.

Why Christians Burn Out is a personal account of Charles Perry's "unthinkable" experience when he burned out in his pastoral ministry. It is also a thoughtful look at the myriad of causes and effects of burnout.

Directed toward professionals in people-helping careers, subjects covered include the "professional mystique" and career disillusionment, stress-related problems, feelings of failure, physical and mental effects on the individual, work and home relationships, and preventive decision-making.

Charles Perry is a graduate of Grace Theological Seminary, and has served churches in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana. After experiencing job burnout, he learned how to cope with the causes, effects, and recovery and is now living and ministering in northern California.

Common Sense Christian Living by Edith Schaeffer, Nelson Publishers, \$13.95, hardback.

How does common sense apply when your good friend commits suicide? How does common sense apply when you have a handicapped child? How does common sense apply when you and your husband or wife are having problems getting along with each other? How does common sense apply when you're suddenly widowed and having difficulty continuing your life?

Edith Schaeffer supplies direct answers to perplexing questions in these intimate talks about day-to-day problem-solving. Is common sense old-fashioned? No, says Schaeffer as she outlines practical applications of this basic wisdom.

"What is common sense Christian living? It encompasses the whole of life, from childhood to old age. . . it includes the whole person giving freedom for creativity and commanding us to rejoice and be glad."

Because Christianity affects all of life, not just those areas we call "religious," Schaeffer's *Common Sense Christian Living* can make sense of what often is a senseless world. Schaeffer deals specifically with those seemingly insurmountable problems frequently glossed over or ignored in most books on Christian living.

Edith Schaeffer is the author of nine other books, including her most recent, *Lifelines*.

THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

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may not come together for judgment.

Apparently, it was the practice of the Corinthian saints to have a meal in connection with the Lord's Supper. It may have been an *agape* meal, such as the "love feasts" referred to in Jude, verse 12. These occasions, originally designed to encourage brotherhood, became offensive because they set apart social classes within the church. Instead of advancing togetherness, they displayed snobbery. The balm of unity was set aside, permitting stinging, infectious division, and resentment.

Paul warned that those who partook of the Communion in such an unworthy manner brought condemnation on themselves. Taking the Communion is something we do together. We are all members of God's family, saved alike, remaining in Christ alike, loved alike, and we will be given immortality alike. With love, we declare our equality and togetherness at the Lord's Table.

A Future Hope

The fourth and final reason the Lord's Supper is such a high and meaningful observance is that it not only keeps the past alive, but it also focuses our faith and hope on the future. As mentioned earlier, our taking the Communion brings renewal to the historical Last Supper. It further gives a preview of a time when the saints join together to meet the returning, descending Jesus.

Note the warm and reassuring words of Jesus as He ate the Last Supper with His disciples. The words are found in Matthew 26:29, "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

These words must have lingered in the memories of the disciples. They would carry on the observance of this sacrament, knowing it would continue until they rejoined Jesus at His return to earth.

This expression of hope is seen in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, written years after the Lord's departure. Paul wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the

Lord's death until He comes.
The Communion, then, is a ceremony which links the past suffering and death of Jesus to His future victorious return. It enables us to be part of the eventful past, as well as the blissful future. The Eucharist stirs and enlivens our sense of appreciation for what has been done for us, and it increases our longing to be part of the joys which lie ahead.

Summary

Yes, the Lord's Supper deserves its place among the highest acts of Christian worship. It proclaims the substitutionary, self-offering of Jesus as the adequate atonement for our sins. He paid the price necessary for our release from the binding, destructive forces controlling us.

It reminds us of God's invitation to be part of the new-covenant relationship. We can be forgiven and given the gift of eternal life because Jesus died for us. We receive two-fold deliverance — from the guilt of sins and from the compulsion to keep on sinning.

The Communion permits us to express our joy for being part of the corporate body of Christ, the family of the living God. All members of the church are equally loved, and they demonstrate the same attitude toward each other.

Our meeting at the Lord's Table is an expression of hope. We will continue celebrating until He comes again.

What a good occasion is the celebration of the Lord's Supper! It is indeed a most meaningful, powerful Christian observance. **BA**

This article is an excerpt from "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper," a segment of the Doctrinal Cassette Series, Part 3, produced by Media Outreach. Ray Straub is pastor of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Marion, Oregon, and also serves as speaker for the Doctrinal Cassette Series.

Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

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