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DO OR DO NOT

“Do or do not. There is no try.” (Yoda)

The theology of Star Wars is not necessarily compatible with the theology of the Bible, but there are some similarities. There is, for instance, a sense in which Yoda’s maxim hold true. God doesn’t give points for trying. “Therefore shall ye keep my commandments, and do them: I am the LORD.” (Lev 22:31)

Keep and do. There is no try. If a couple was caught in adultery they were stoned under the Law of Moses. All that was required were two witnesses. They couldn’t argue, “But we went for weeks wanting to, but tried to overcome our desires.” Stone them both, no matter how hard one of them tried. A sacrifice was to be without blemish. “I tried to find one, but this is the best I could find, even if he has a bad hoof and rotten teeth.” Malachi had an answer for that.

And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts. (Mal 1:8)

But what does God mean when he demands that His people “keep my commandments, and do them?” What is the difference between keeping and doing?

The doing part is easy. Do or do not. When God says to do something, you take a specific action to do it. When He says not to do something, you specifically refrain from doing it. In computerese it is as simple as 1 and 0, yes and no. Did you do it (1) or did you not do it (0)? No other choices. The only question is whether you were supposed to do it or to refrain.

Keeping God’s commands is apparently a different matter. It should be pointed out that this is not the same word used about keeping (sanctifying) Sabbath. Rather, the word used here literally means to plant a hedge of thorns around it. By extension, then, it carries the idea of guarding or preserving. The Pharisees in Jesus’ day built up traditions to “build a hedge around the Law.” Paul mentions having received from the Jews “forty stripes save one.” (2 Cor 11:24) This was to prevent accidentally exceeding the law limiting the number of lashes to forty. In that sense, they were following what God said. (The

problem came when the hedge became more important than the law it surrounded.) The most effective way, though, to “keep” (preserve) God’s word is to teach it. Read the Bible to know what it says, and read it to our children and others so that they know what it says. Keeping the word means knowing it, and avoiding traditions that would water it down. To that end, keeping the commands includes quoting “book, chapter, and verse” so that people can find it themselves. A preacher who says “the Bible says” or “God says” without telling you where is probably not keeping the commands.

With God there is no try. Trying and failing is the same as failing. Fortunately, though, He has always provided forgiveness for failure to do. Under the Law of Moses there was the sin offering. The writer of Hebrews acknowledged God’s forgiveness under the Law, saying, “the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh.” (Heb 9:13) They were efficacious, but with a limited efficacy. So the writer goes on to explain God’s eternal forgiveness.

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:14)

There may be some advantage to trying to follow God’s commands. Any weightlifter knows that attempts at the next weight goal eventually lead to lifting that weight. Ultimately, though, none of us can keep or do God’s commands perfectly. That is why we all need the blood of Jesus. Do or not do, we need to know that Jesus has us covered.

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THE LORD'S SUPPER

It goes by several names. There are various practices associated with it. It even becomes, in a slightly different form, an essential part of Robert Heinlein's science fiction classic, *Stranger In a Strange Land*. It is the ceremony of remembrance instituted by Jesus the night he was betrayed.

Names

The ceremony is most commonly known by three names: the Eucharist, the Communion or Holy Communion, and the Lord's Supper. It is also called breaking bread and the Sacrament (even among those who recognize more than one sacrament).

Eucharist means thanksgiving. This ceremony (hereafter in this article referred to as the Lord's Supper for convenience) is never called that in scripture. This name comes from the passages that say Jesus "gave thanks" for the bread and the fruit of the vine. It is a term not commonly used except by High Church groups. Since it is primarily a remembrance of the death and burial of Jesus, it seems strange to refer to it as a thanksgiving;

Some have chosen to change those elements, with no scriptural authority.

however, in a real sense we should be giving thanks for that which brought our salvation.

Paul used the word communion in association with the Lord's Supper. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16) It is unclear whether he was using the word as a name for the rite or, as is more likely, a description of the purpose. It is in the partaking of the Lord's Supper that we come into fellowship with the blood and body of Christ. If one were to claim Christianity but refuse to participate in the Lord's Supper, it could be said that person (or group, such as the Quakers) was refusing fellowship with Jesus. The communion aspect of the ceremony is of great significance. Those partaking share a fellowship with the Savior and with each other.

The phrase "Lord's Supper" only appears in one verse in the Bible: 1 Corinthians 11:20. It is used in the introduction to Paul's most comprehensive discussion of the ceremony. Apparently the Corinthian church was incorporating the celebration into a much larger meal, and

Paul wanted to make a distinction between the Lord's supper and a common supper. The discussion that follows in 1 Corinthians 11 demands a distinction between taking the bread and fruit of the vine for a memorial purpose and merely eating and drinking. It is the Lord's, and therefore is not to be profaned.

The use of the term breaking bread gets a little more confusing. At times the scriptures use that phrase to mean a common meal, as is probably that case in Acts 2:46. "And breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Yet just four verses earlier it appears to refer to a specific religious act. "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." This compound use of the phrase gets even more confusing in Acts 20:7.

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

It is clear this was not a daily meal because the previous verse implies they waited seven days for this breaking of bread. It could refer to a community meal, such as was practiced by the Corinthians, that was held when the church gathered on the first day of the week. There is some support for this in the fact that they didn't actually break bread until the following day. It could refer to the Lord's Supper and a practice of partaking of it on Sunday when they commonly gathered together, and it was only Paul's long-windedness that caused them to partake the following day. In any case, the phrase describes at least a part of the act of the Lord's Supper.

Practices

Perhaps as many practices are associated with the Lord's Supper as there are names. These have to do with the timing and the elements, primarily.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he used unleavened bread and "the fruit of the vine." It was, after all, Passover. Those are essential elements of the *seder*. Some have chosen to change those elements, with no scriptural authority. The Greek Orthodox use leavened bread, saying this symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit in what is taken. Paul, however, followed Jesus in equating leaven with sin rather than the Spirit.

Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor 5:8)

There is a greater debate over the other element. The Latter-Day Saints use water instead of any form of the

fruit of the vine. Many use wine of varying strengths. Some groups that generally associated themselves with the temperance movement only use unfermented grape juice. Some others use either wine or grape juice, whichever is convenient. It may be significant to note that none of the biblical writers used the Greek word for wine when writing about the Lord's Supper. It was used in other contexts, such as when Jesus turned water to wine. In accounts of the institution of the rite, it is said he took "the cup." Then Jesus spoke of "this fruit of the vine." Perhaps he was looking forward to a time when churches would be split over the alcohol/non-alcohol issue that he chose a neutral term that could be applied either way.

In some traditions participants only take the bread and the officiant takes the fruit of the vine. In others, everyone partakes of both. In some, the bread is dipped in the fruit of the vine (intinction) before it is given to the participant. Of the cup, Mark clearly states, "they all drank of it." (Mk 14:23) That is why many object to the practice of limiting who drinks. Intinction is generally frowned upon because Jesus clearly prayed over each element and distributed it separately.

The other variation in practice has to do with timing. May the Lord's Supper be taken once a year, once a quarter, once a month, once a week, or even daily? The Jehovah's Witnesses limit it to once a year on Passover, based on Jesus' statement, "this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Cor 11:25) The argument is that since the Passover comes once a year, "as oft as ye drink" must be once a year. At the other extreme are those who participate once a week, based on Acts 20:7. If breaking of bread in that passage was the Lord's Supper, and since it was being done on the first day of the week, and since every week has a first day, then it should be taken weekly. This would take the phrase "as oft as ye drink" to be general, rather than speaking just of Passover. Those who participate monthly or quarterly argue that more frequent observance would tend to cause it to become routine. While that may be true, that would depend on the individual rather than the frequency. One could just as easily lose the significance with quarterly observance as with weekly.

There are a few people who see nothing wrong with daily participation in the Lord's Supper. Or in doing so any time it is offered (even twice on a Sunday if the congregation offers it). Since the Bible does not clearly give a specific time or frequency to do it, then the frequency is probably not that significant.

Significance

While the elements and timing of the Lord's Supper may be important, its significance goes much deeper than a mere rite. Those who fear that it may become rote to some have a valid concern. Paul addressed this, complaining that some were "not discerning the Lord's body." (1 Cor 11:29) (Some would claim he was

saying they did not discern the church, rather than the body represented by the Lord's Supper.)

In all accounts of what happened on the night of the betrayal, Jesus says, "this is my body...this is my blood," or some variation of that. (Matt 26; Mk 14; Lk 22; 1 Cor 11) Earlier, Jesus had an encounter with a crowd of people.

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the

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last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. (Jn 6:51-57)

This is the significance of the Lord's Supper. This is the communion with the flesh and blood of Jesus. In *Stranger In a Strange Land*, Heinlein had people gaining special status by eating the flesh of his main character. Whether you believe the elements of the eucharist become the literal flesh and blood of Jesus or you think it is purely symbolic, there is something to this idea.

Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (1 Cor 11:27-30)

To a Christian, the Lord's Supper is sustenance. Without it there is spiritual sickness and death. This is one reason that online or broadcast church services are insufficient. The Lord's Supper requires that people "come together." (1 Cor 11:20) It requires self-examination while part of a group. Most importantly, it allows one to participate in the saving sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It is an acknowledgement not only of that sacrifice, but also of our acceptance of his salvation.

WE DON'T TALK ABOUT THAT

Cancer. Sixty years ago you almost never heard the word. And if you did, it was often in hushed tones. Church prayer lists rarely had cancer patients listed. Today cancer is a common word. Prayer lists now have whole sections for cancer patients. Cancer drugs are regularly advertised on American television. Currently 54% of Americans say that someone in their immediate family has been diagnosed with a cancer. It is said that almost every person in America knows or knows of someone who has been diagnosed. It may be that cancers are more prevalent today. Or it may just be that people didn't talk about it back then.

Sin. Sixty years ago you frequently heard the word, in or out of church. What is now called cohabitation was generally called living in sin. In 1955 Somethin' Smith and the Redheads hit number seven on the Billboard charts with the 1939 song, "It's a Sin To Tell a Lie." Today you rarely hear the word, and when you do it is often in hushed tones. Church prayer lists rarely refer to sin openly. Even many preachers never say the word. Yet 100% of people in the world today can be diagnosed with sin. It is not that sin was more prevalent back then. People just don't talk about it today.

Sin is a problem. "All have sinned." (Rom 5:12) It is endemic in the human population. Just as great an issue is that people are afraid to identify sin. It is now a "lifestyle" or a "problem." It is politically incorrect to call sin "sin." (People who use the term "politically incorrect" usually forget that it was popularized by one of the worst mass-murderers in history, Josef Stalin, to justify his own crimes.) The problem is that people who sin don't want to admit that they are on the wrong side of God's laws, or don't want to admit that there is a God. As it used to be

with cancer, if you don't use the word, maybe the problem doesn't exist. It wasn't true of cancer sixty years ago, and it isn't true of sin today.

Most cancers are treatable. The effectiveness of that treatment often depends on how early in the progress of the disease it is diagnosed. One of the biggest causes of late diagnosis is that people don't want to see the doctor because they are afraid of what might be found; then when it is found it is too late to treat it effectively. All sin is treatable. The effectiveness of the treatment increases with the patient's willingness to face the possibility of a diagnosis. Those who are afraid to admit to sin will most often die in sin.

The treatment for sin is 100% effective. It is a simple blood transfusion; contact with the blood of Jesus.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (Rom 5:8-10)

Paul goes on to describe the method by which we are justified by his blood.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom 6: 4)

Just as talk of cancer is now in the open, in part because of better treatments, so we should also bring talk of sin back into the open. People are dying. And the cure is waiting for them.

Timothy J. O'Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123