

ARE YOU PARTY TO THIS CONTRACT?

⇒THE NEW COVENANT - 2⇐

For Christmas we left our study of the covenants of the Bible half way through the New Covenant. We saw that the covenant of Jesus was a covenant between God on one side and any individual on the other. We saw that the only term in the covenant was God's promise to forgive sins. We left a discussion of the way in which the covenant was sealed and the sign of the covenant to this chapter.

We have seen in earlier studies that the covenants with Noah, Abraham and the tribe of Israel at the time of Moses were all sealed by animal sacrifices. When Jesus at the Passover talks, in his statement of the covenant, about the cup of wine being his blood, we can reasonably interpret this as meaning that his death the next day was to be the sacrificial death which instituted the covenant. Peter and John were both present and though they do not specifically use the word "covenant", they are both quite clear about the importance of Christ's death. Peter says "The price (of freedom) was paid in precious blood, the blood of Christ". (1 Peter 1:18-19). John says "we are being cleansed from every sin by the blood of Jesus". (1 John 1:7). The letter to the Hebrews is quite explicit, addressing Jews: "He (Jesus) is the mediator of a new covenant, under which, now that there has been a death to bring deliverance from sins committed under the former covenant, those whom God has called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance.". (See the whole of chapter 9 of Hebrews, especially verse 15 quoted here).

As Jesus instituted the covenant through his death, it means that he himself lived under the Old Covenant. This is a theme that I shall return to at a later stage.

Finally, for the sign of the New Covenant, we return to the words of Jesus Himself. "During supper Jesus took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples with the words: 'Take this and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them with the words: 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Matthew 26:26-28). Paul tells of the same event in his second letter to the church at Corinth and adds the command of Christ to repeat the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine in his memory (2 Corinthians 11:23-25). So the sign of the covenant is the bread and wine, or perhaps particularly the wine.

Christ's choice of a sign for the covenant is simple and easy to implement. In the case of the covenant with Noah, the appearance of a rainbow was the sign. In the case of the covenant with Abraham, male circumcision was the sign to remind everyone of their covenant. In the case of the tribe of Israel, they were required to keep the sabbath week by week in memory of their covenant; though as we have seen they were also under the covenant of Abraham. Christ's sign can be implemented every time we eat and drink. We can make use of any meal to remember our Christian covenant. It can be done in solitary confinement in prison, alone at home, with one's family, with one's friends. As long as there is food and drink to keep a person alive the covenant can be remembered with that food and drink. Naturally, when Christians gather together they will remember Jesus in the way he told them. This the early Christians in Jerusalem did when they met to eat together in their homes. (Acts 2:46).

This continued, as we have already seen, in Corinth, far away from Jerusalem. Then as the centuries passed by, the communion became more formalised. Tradition restricted it largely to churches. (Churches buildings were rare before the fourth century). Within the churches it was naturally led by the leaders of those churches, and with the development of the system of clergy as we see it today, it is now led by the clergy. However with the great shortage of cash to pay the clergy, perhaps there is now a financial reason to return to the original idea given by Christ, which is to remember his covenant at any time, in

any place, with or without a clergyman. But it would be better if this was done solely because it is right, not as a result of financial problems.

The importance of communion is that it reminds us more eloquently than any sermon of the central idea of the covenant, the forgiveness of our sins. It is a wonderful visual aid. And, perhaps, in view of our weakness in the face of temptation, arising largely from within ourselves, Jesus really meant when he said, “whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me”, that we should remember his covenant whenever we eat and drink.

We have now quickly and very briefly surveyed the covenants that God has made with men. In future chapters We shall look in more detail at some of the issues that result from this understanding of the framework of Christianity based on the covenants.