

CHAPTER TWO

A COVENANT PEOPLE

The Agape Feast

Jesus took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My Body, broken for you. Take and eat!’ (1 Corinthians 11: 23,24). They all did and, in so doing, identified themselves with the Body of Christ.

“In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new *covenant* in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me’.” (emphasis mine). I am struck that not one of those present asked Him what He meant by this statement. I can only assume that they all understood.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. “You do this for me and I’ll do that for you!” Today, when men make covenants it is essential that proof be available in the form of signatures attached to the written agreement. Sadly, the word of a gentleman is no longer acceptable. In the time of Jesus, covenants were sealed over a common drink. It would not have been blood, as more recently among the Native Indians of North America and the tribesmen of Africa, though all the covenants of the Old Testament days would have been signified by the shedding of blood in the slaying of a sacrificial animal. Indeed, one was said to *cut the covenant* rather than *make* one.

An interesting story is told concerning Dr. Livingstone, the great pioneer missionary to Africa. He, with his guides and bearers, was often taken captive by warrior tribesmen as they journeyed through the dark continent. On one occasion, the captives were brought before a hostile chief who began to berate them

for trespassing on his territory. As he was getting more angry at Livingstone's silence, a guide leaned over to the missionary and urged him to *cut the covenant*. Livingstone did not understand what was being requested, but he soon recoiled in dismay as he watched his Christian servant and a chosen young man from the hostile tribe, perform what was to him, a pagan act. They made a small cut in their forearms, gathered the blood into a bowl and drank it together! The chief then stepped forward and took hold of the string by which Livingstone was leading a goat, the source of the milk he so enjoyed. Livingstone was dismayed and then surprised as the chief pressed a gift into his hands - the copper-tipped staff with which he had met the trespassing party. They were then led to a hut where they would spend the night after receiving a meal from their captors. Some time later, while journeying through another region of Africa, Livingstone was captured again and brought before another hostile chief. This time, however, the chief fell on his knees before the missionary. It was only then that understanding came. When the young guide had 'cut the covenant' on behalf of Livingstone, and had sealed it by the drinking of blood, an agreement was made between them and the tribe, especially between Livingstone and the chief. As a token of that covenant agreement, the chief had given his staff, a symbol of his commitment and support. The second hostile chief had recognised the staff, understood that Livingstone had *a blood brother* and had yielded to that superior power and authority.

Jesus has made such a covenant with us! We can now walk tall in this crippled world, by His authority! We have a blood brother Who shed His blood, drank it to the bitter dregs on our behalf, and gave us the authority of His name!¹ Our enemy, Satan, and his henchmen, sin and death, should have no dominion over us!²

When Jesus invited His disciples to drink the *covenant cup*, they knew they were indicating their agreement to the terms of a new covenant. So it is, every time we take the emblems at the Lord's table.

¹ Acts 3:16

² Romans 6:14

As we eat the bread, we are declaring ourselves to be *the BODY of CHRIST*. As we drink the cup, we are covenanting again to be *servants to one another, lovers of one another, and obedient to His Word*.

An unworthy manner

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul exhorts us to be very careful in taking these emblems. If we drink the Lord's cup "in an unworthy manner" we may well drink judgement to ourselves, not recognising the Lord's **BODY**. "For this reason many among you (believers) are weak and sick." (1 Corinthians 11:30).

If I bear animosity in my heart to another, or am not living as a servant, lover or in obedience, my taking the bread and cup is hypocrisy. I am failing to recognise the other as one with me in the Body of Christ. This may well result in weakness and sickness coming upon me. This is not from the Lord - He is not the author of sickness - but I have given the devil a foothold³ and he certainly knows how to manipulate such footholds for his advantage!

Praying for the sick

Now I have an understanding of what James meant when he wrote,

"Is any among you, sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him."
(James 5: 14,15).

I often wondered why the elders had to be involved. Couldn't anyone pray? Do elders have more prayer power than loving friends and family? I do not now believe that calling the elders has anything to do

³ 2 Corinthians 2:11

with their prayer power but, rather, with their *authority*. This verse must be linked with Paul's warning above, as they are the only verses that give any reference to reasons why believers may be sick or weak. Of course, we also are subject to germs, diseases, and sickness just as anyone in the world, but Paul's warning must be strongly expressed to believers.

Should the elders discern that the believer's sickness may be associated with a wrong attitude to others in the Body of Christ, they must exercise their authority as elders in the church, to charge that one to be reconciled. Only then can they pray, anointing him with oil (a symbol of the Holy Spirit's blessing and protection) in the name of the Lord. The sick one - the guilty one - will be restored and forgiven.

The Lord's prayer

Having taught His disciples the **PRIORITIES** on His heart, our Lord lifted His eyes toward heaven and spoke to His Father. One should take time to read the entire seventeenth chapter of John's gospel to hear the heartcry of Jesus, the night before He died. Let me walk with you through these wonderful words, emphasising a major theme.

"Father, I have finished the work You gave Me to do . . . I have manifested Your name (attributes) to these men . . . and they have kept Your word. . . . I ask on their behalf . . . for they are Yours. . . . They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. . . . As You have sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world. . . . I do not only ask for these but also for all who will believe on Me through their word. . . . (*including YOU and ME*).

THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE . . . that the world may believe.

I have given them Your glory . . . **THAT THEY MAY BE ONE** . . . as We are One. . .

That they may be perfected in **UNITY**, that the world may know that You sent Me and that You love them even as You love Me . . . I have made Your name (attributes) known to them . . . that the LOVE with which You love Me may be in them, and I in them.”

The **NAME** of the Lord was revealed to Moses when they met on Mount Sinai. He is “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” (Ex. 34: 6,7)

Truly, Jesus manifested these same attributes to all He met.

God’s gospel tract

I cannot take even ONE PAGE out of the Bible and use it as an evangelical tract to give to an unbelieving friend. I can quote from John 3 or follow *The Romans road* in explaining to him the way of salvation. I can give him the “Four Steps” or “God’s Wonderful Plan of Salvation” but I cannot tear one page out of the Bible and give it away as a gospel tract. However, I can take whole chapters and even books, to point out to the believer, God’s priorities - **HIS WAY** of salvation. He has declared that when His people are walking in **UNITY** as servants, as lovers and in obedience, the world will **KNOW** and **BELIEVE!**

We are His Gospel tract! It’s time we got our priorities right and in line with His priorities! We are quick to speak when we detect heresy of doctrine in one another; - isn’t it time we were just as quick to act against heresy of practise, seeing the many divisions among believers, so evident to the world?

“For the anxious longing of all creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the Sons of God.”
(Romans 8:19).

