

THE ETHICS OF COVENANT

Webster defines a covenant as "a binding agreement made by two or more persons or parties." Such was the case when God made a covenant with the people of Israel.

After Moses had led Israel out of Egypt, God invited them to make a covenant with Him, which they did (Exodus 19:3-9). Sadly, they broke covenant and suffered greatly as a result.

When Christ came into the world, he came to make a new covenant, one without the flaws of the old covenant (Heb. 9:11-13). In this new one we receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life by the blood of Jesus. However, we too must keep our part of the agreement we have made with God. Paul tells us Israel's records were written for our instruction (1 Cor. 10:1-12). If we can learn how Israel broke faith with the covenant they had made with God, that will help us avoid their mistakes.

First of all Israel disobeyed God's command to completely destroy the Canaanites out of the promised land (Deut. 9:1-3). As a result, they took up the ways of this evil race they had failed to destroy. In fact, God's people eventually became more sinful than their sinful neighbors (2 Chron. 33:9).

Second, as their lives became more materialistic they began to resent the time they were asked to dedicate to God and longed for the moment when the special religious festivals and the Sabbath would be over so they could continue their evil ways (Amos 8:4-6). This moved God to say he wished someone would shut the gates and deny entry to such worshipers (Malachi 1:10).

Third, they no longer gave the best of their animals and goods to be offered to God. Instead they brought the sick, the lame, and the blind (Malachi 1:11-14). As a result God accused them of robbing Him by withholding their proper offerings to the Lord (Malachi 3:8-10).

Finally, they turned away from the one true God to other gods (Jer. 2:26-28), which would allow them to do the evil things they desired to do. This they did even to the point of offering their own children as sacrifices to pagan gods (Jer. 32:33-35), In their darkened minds they also incorporated into their religion the use of prostitutes as a mean of worship (Hosea 4:13-14).

Is there a lesson here for us? Do we not see all these things taking place today? Is it that easy to tell the difference between many Christians and our pagan neighbors? We are not told to destroy our unbelieving neighbors, but we are warned against following their life style (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Do we really take the time to examine our contemporary ideas of fun and pleasure by the word of God? When I have talked with students about modern dancing forms, or about going to movies where there is nudity and a lot of sex going on (most of it outside of marriage), I see them roll their eyes, or I hear them claim that they do not pay attention to such things...that it doesn't bother them. My response to that is that "you are kidding your self!" It is not possible to put a lot of filth and junk into your mind, and then have a holy symphony come out of your heart. For that reason, the writer of Proverbs tells us, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." Jesus said, "the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34). I grew up during WWII and as an adolescent I worked in the fields with older men and heard them talk about things that to this day I regret having heard.

Do we look forward to the time when we do not have to attend all the services of the church.? Some think it is cool to sleep in on Sunday morning, or not to have to attend on Wednesday evenings, or even to stop attendance altogether! I remember hearing of a man who moved to an area where he was not well known rejoicing because he did not have to go to church on Wednesday nights. There is an old joke about a line of people waiting to find out if they were going to make it into heaven. Suddenly they heard a great cheer from those farther up toward the head of the line. Then they heard why people were cheering. They had just been told that Wednesday nights did not count.

How many of us ever feel guilty about spending all our money on ourselves, never giving anything, or very little to the Lord? Could that be robbing God (Malachi 3:8-10)? How many brought up in the "one faith" are today wondering if there is only one! On a world wide scale probably the majority thinks any god, or any savior, or any good life can get you through O.K.

I'm reminded of Isaiah's statement, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter (5: 20). It looks a little like "Deja Vu" all over again doesn't it!" Jesus warned the church at Ephesus, "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first, or else I am coming to you,

and will remove your lamp stand out of its place, unless you repent" (Rev. 2:4-5). If we do not walk according to the way of Jesus, there will be a divorce on the grounds that we have broken covenant with Him. This is the way the Lord looks at those who break covenant with Him: "I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with wrong, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously. You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied Him?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He "delights in them" (Malachi 2:16-17). We cannot afford to fall down on our part of the covenant!

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