

Sermon – 13/08/2006 am

Covenant Renewal – Hypocrisy

Study Text: Deuteronomy 29:16-28

The Lord God heard the cry of the children of Israel when they were in Egypt. They were in bondage and the Lord came to their rescue. With great wonders and mighty power he delivered them from the cruel hand of Pharaoh. At Mt Sinai he made a covenant with these people. He promised to bring them into a land of milk and honey, a land where they and their children could live in peace and prosperity. For their part, the people agreed not to worship any other gods. They entered in this agreement to walk in obedience to the commands of Yahweh.

On the plains of Moab, Moses reminded the people how the Lord had delivered them from Egypt, and more recently from the two Amorite kings. He protected them and provided for them during forty long years in the wilderness. Moses called the people to renewed commitment to the Lord under the terms of his covenant.

This was a covenant of grace. The Lord had chosen Israel even though they were the least of all people. Through no merit of their own he delivered them and promised them an inheritance in Canaan. But he warned them against turning away from him to serve other gods. He warned them against presumption, against deceiving themselves that all was okay when it was not. He warned them against mere outward observance of the law, when in their hearts they were secretly serving other gods.

A root bearing bitterness or wormwood/poison (29:18). Moses likened apostasy to a poisonous or bitter plant that grows undetected in a crop. The plant may seem harmless, but in the end will ruin the whole crop. A few poisonous seeds ground up with the wheat means the whole batch has to be rejected. Hosea (10:4) spoke of judgment *like hemlock in the furrows of the fields* he prophesied against Israel in its apostasy. Amos (6:12) similarly spoke of this bitter root – *you have turned justice into gall and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood* .

The New Testament the church is also told to beware of this bitter root of apostasy. *Look carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by this many become defiled* (Hebrews 12:15). This attitude was exemplified by Esau. Taking God's grace for granted, or presuming upon his love and mercy, is dangerous. It is like a bitter root growing in the heart, a root that affect one's personal life, affects the whole fellowship of believers, and arouses the jealous anger of God.

Adulterates Self

Turning away from the Lord is spiritual adultery. Moses warned the people against secret sin and self-deception. Some might bless their own heart saying *I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart* (29:19). In other words 'I can do what I like and God will still bless me'.

Some people fear the wrath of man, but pay no regard to the wrath of God. As long as no one finds out about their sin they feel secure. But God sees the secret things. He knows what goes

on behind closed doors – contrary to the once popular song. God knows even the thoughts of your heart. One day all the secrets of our hearts will be revealed. *God will judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus* (Romans 2:16).

Some Roman Catholics take the attitude ‘I can do what I like as long as I go to confession each week’. They believe in the power of the priest to make things right with God. They presume upon the grace of God. But God not only hears the words of a confession; he sees the heart. *Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound. Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it* (Romans 6:1, 2)?

Some Reformed Christians also presume upon the grace of God. The doctrine of election is true and is a great comfort to believers. But some say to themselves ‘I am a chosen one, I can never be lost, so I can do what I like’. ‘I am one of the elect so it does not matter if I do not attend worship’. They say ‘those people in church are not doing the right thing so I will not attend’. Beware of pride and self righteousness. *Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall* (I Corinthians 10:12).

Moses warned Israel against deceiving themselves in this manner. They did not listen but followed the dictates of their own hearts again and again (Jeremiah 18:12). Jesus found them still walking according the dictates of their proud hearts when he came into this world. The Pharisees were scrupulous about outward observance of the law, especially that of others. But their hearts were hard towards God; so hard that they rejected God’s Son and crucified him! Let us be warned, for many walk in their footsteps even today.

The apostle Paul continued to confront the Jews in their self deception regarding the law and outward observance. Many blessed themselves in their heart because they were circumcised, and because they were God’s chosen people. But circumcision is of the heart, not of the flesh (Romans 2:25f). John the Baptist bluntly told those claiming Abraham as their father that *God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones* (Luke 3:8).

The gospel of grace is often misrepresented and misunderstood today. Even when Paul preached there were those who said ‘shall we do evil that good may come’ and ‘shall we continue in sin that grace may abound’ (Romans 3:8, 6:1). The horrible term ‘cheap grace’ is rightly applied to some preaching today. We hear nothing of sin and of repentance. We are told to believe in Jesus, but nothing about turning away from sin. Rather it is ‘come as you are, keep all you have, keep doing all the things you like doing, just try adding Jesus’.

What must we do to be saved? *Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out* (Acts 3:19). *If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation* (II Corinthians 5:17). One who believes in Jesus comes under the terms of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. They will not continue to follow the dictates of their own hearts. *Submit to God. Resist the devil. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up* (James 4:7, 10).

‘One of the most frightening things about human sin is that it dulls our perception and warps our judgment. It corrupts our thinking and distorts our values. Sin parades itself in a subtly attractive guise; we do not see it for the horror it truly is. It liberalises our outlook, professing to release us from outdated traditions and mere social conventions. Instead of listening to what God says to us in his word, we listen to the changing, vacillating dictates of our own minds and the equally corrupt judgment of others. Vainly we imagine it is enough to be

guided by our consciences, forgetting, or choosing to ignore, the Biblical truth that even the most sensitive human conscience has not escaped the ravages of sin’.

Affects Others

As though the drunkard could be included with the sober (29:19). A whole party can be ruined by a single person getting drunk. ‘Oh, I did not mean to spoil it for everyone’ they will later say. ‘I was just enjoying myself’. Your sin affects others – if not directly, then indirectly. ‘Sin is not insular, isolated and self-contained, but a highly destructive and contagious force... It has the appalling potential and power to reproduce itself in the lives of other people’.

Sin is like an aggressive cancer. It does not confine itself to one part of the body but spreads through the whole body, destroying cells wherever it goes. What does the doctor do when faced with such a cancer? He gets the person into his surgery as fast as possible and cuts that cancer out. We must do the same with sin. Sin must be nipped in the bud and not allowed to grow and become a root of bitterness destroying our own life and the lives of others.

Shortly after Israel entered Canaan they destroyed Jericho. But moved on to attack Ai they were forced to retreat (Joshua 7). It was a terrible blow, for God had promised to give them victory. What went wrong? It was a root of bitterness springing up in their midst. Achan had disobeyed the command of God by taking some of the devoted things to his tent. His sin affected the whole nation. He was dealt with immediately.

A root of bitterness sprang up in the New Testament church. Ananias and Sapphira deceptively kept back some money from the sale of their property. Indirectly the whole church was affected. They had lied to the Holy Spirit. Peter confronted them and as they continued to lie they were judged by God. *So great fear came upon all in the church and upon all who heard these things...and multitudes entered the church (Acts 5:11).* Do we see such fear of God today?

Angers God

The secret idolater who blesses himself saying ‘I will be safe even though I persist in going my own way’ is not only deceiving himself, and affecting those around him, but also arouses the jealous anger of the Lord The curses of the covenant as written in the book of the law would fall upon such a person *and the Lord would blot out his name from under heaven (29:20).* He would be cut off from the people of God without pity or memory.

Achan was stoned along with all his family at the Lord’s command. Ananias and Sapphira were buried with fear rather than mourning, after the Lord struck them down. Do not arouse the anger of God by turning away from him in disobedience and sin. You must serve the Lord to the exclusion of all other gods. You must serve him to the exclusion of material things (Matthew 6:24). You must serve him to exclusion of self (Luke 14:26). The rule of Jesus in your life must be total. It is all or nothing.

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