

next band trip and made rash promises that many of them have since broken. My friend followed the biblical advice here and said nothing.

Look how this speaks to the two points. We agree that we shouldn't make rash promises. But this says nothing at all about a reasoned, prayed-up, determined covenant of soldiership for life with God through The Salvation Army. And it doesn't make my friend a hero (although he is a good guy). It just makes some of his friends 'fools' (according to the Ecclesiastes text above).

While it is better to say nothing than to rashly promise, it is even better to make a godly promise and fulfill it.

4. What is the attraction of covenant?

It takes courage and conviction to promise. That's part of the attraction. We're not called to some lame membership in a DVD store or the public library, to which we can belong if we're breathing. We're called to something romantically heroic, something that may cost us our lives (as it has cost some of our valiant, fallen comrades).

The difference in cost leads to a difference in benefit. Our public library or DVD membership card will help us accomplish very little in life. But our covenant with God as a soldier can help us accomplish world conquest.

5. What, then, are the benefits of covenant?

Covenanted people are widely admired and generally outstanding in their effect. We can depend on covenanted people to act in certain ways. It is also the nature of an army. You can't be in it unless you commit. And if you don't commit, you can't be counted on in battle. All the more does this apply in the spiritual warfare in which The Salvation Army engages.

6. Why don't we hear much about covenant these days?

Covenant has a tough time in millennium three, during which apologetic soldiers, burdened by spiritual inferiority complex, figure that we cannot challenge anyone to sign his or her life away in covenant with God through the Army. This attitude completely misses the mystery and power of covenant.

Maybe the implied death is the reason it lacks in popularity. Who wants to die? Who wants to die to self, to comfort, to habits, to ease? Who wants to suffer?

7. What is the premise behind our covenant?

As Canadian Salvationist Sergeant Rob Dolby says, 'You can't earn God's love, but you can earn his trust.'

You see, our Father 'delights' to give us the Kingdom (Luke 12:32). As well as peace, righteousness and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17), the Kingdom involves all sort of supernatural interventions. Our Father would love to delight in us by releasing the fullness of his Kingdom, if he could trust us with it. Like Elisha, after picking up the mantle, our covenant provides a holy trustworthiness that allows God to release Kingdom fullness and, in so doing,

take delight in us. Do we want the wonder-working, world-winning power of the Kingdom that God delights to give us? One of the keys is the trust generated only by covenant holiness.

8. Of what other value is covenant to the Salvationist?

William Booth argues that covenant is essential, 'not only for those who do wrong, but to prevent people from going wrong'.

We've watered down our end of the covenant so much that soldiership has meant, in some cases, signing a piece of paper and going to a Saturday seminar so you can join the band. But the articles of war covenant is intended to provide a means to holiness. The junior soldier's covenant and the officer's covenant have the same purpose. And this puts reins on good intentions to accomplish great ends.

9. What are the stakes?

Listen to the Army Mother, Catherine Booth: 'Let me remind you – and it makes my own soul almost reel to think of it – that God holds us responsible. He holds you responsible for all the good you might do if you had [the power of the Holy Spirit]. Do not deceive yourself. He will have the five talents and their increase ... Where are the souls you might have saved? Where are the children I would have given you? Where is the fruit?'

10. Where do we go from here?

The potency of restored covenant is powerful beyond our comprehension. When we are living a sacrificed, committed lifestyle we have access to the promises of God. And the gospel paradox, that only in slavery is there true freedom, liberates us to incite holy revolution around the world.

Exhortation

As we reposition ourselves downstream in the river of God's grace, we eagerly pray for the day when God unleashes the wonder-working, world-winning goodness and miracles that he has promised as part of his 'greater things' end-time package (John 14:12). William Booth felt the same way, when he exhorted us, 'By all means let us aspire after higher gifts.' But even more, let us aspire after a Father who is free to delight in us because he can trust us.

It may be that we are akin to the people of Israel on the verge of entering the Promised Land. We've enjoyed the blessings of our heritage. But we've not proved trustworthy to receive the promised blessings ourselves. Those people had to enter into their own covenant with God, being circumcised after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 5:3). Maybe we, too, need to take seriously holy covenant to establish a trust relationship with God that allows him to delight in us and unleash through us the fullness of his Kingdom with wonder-working, world-winning power.

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