

"GIVE THEE FOR A COVENANT"

THUS saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers: Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee. Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee, and I will preserve thee and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places." – Isa. 49:7-9.

Full often have we made application of this Scripture to our Lord, the Head, and the Church, his Body. We now call attention particularly to the feature which declares, "I will preserve thee and give thee for *a Covenant* unto the people, to establish the earth," etc. Notice the fact that the people and their earthly inheritance are here differentiated from the great Mediator of the Covenant, through whom the people are to be blessed. Our Lord has not yet received the heathen for an inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. He has not yet regathered and blessed natural Israel and made them the special channels of his blessings to mankind. For more than eighteen centuries he has been waiting at the right hand of majesty for his foe to be turned over to him – for the time to come when he shall take to himself his great power and reign. The beginning of that reign will be the binding of Satan. Then the blessing and uplifting of the groaning creation will follow. Gradually the world will be prepared to resume covenant relations with God at the close of the Millennium.

Why the delay? Why did he not begin the work at once, immediately after he ascended up on high? The Scripture answer is that, in harmony with the Divine Plan, he has been waiting for the "members" of his Body to join with him in sacrifice in the sufferings of this present time, that they may share with him as his "members" in the glorious work to which he has been appointed as the spiritual Seed of Abraham. (Gal. 3:29.) From this standpoint all the work of God's people during this Gospel Age is so much of the ministry of the world's New Covenant – serving that New Covenant by getting themselves and each other ready for the future work of glory at the expense of self-denials as respects earthly things and the present life.

Note St. Paul's application of our text to the Church. He quotes the passage as applicable to the Body of Christ, saying, "We, then, workers together, beseech also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted [the antitypical Atonement Day], and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time [when we, like our Lord, may sacrifice earthly rights and restitution privileges and thereby attain the spiritual blessing of our 'high calling of God in Christ Jesus']; behold, now is the day of salvation" – the great salvation to the Divine nature. – 2 Cor. 6:1,2.

Reading again the prophecy from which this quotation is made – our text – we perceive that there is no room to question that the entire Christ Head and Body was given as a Covenant for the people, the world, to institute general times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began. – Acts 3:19-21.

We see, in this connection, also the appropriateness of our Lord's speaking of his "Cup" of suffering and death which he invited his faithful to share with him as being not only his own blood shed for us, but also "the blood of the New Covenant shed

for many," in which we are privileged to *participate*. Those who see and who appreciate the privilege rejoice to be accounted worthy to have *fellowship* or participation with Christ in his sufferings and sacrifices, that they may have share with him also in his glories and work. The blood of the New Covenant signifies the "better sacrifices" by which God has been pleased to arrange to bring the whole world *anew* into Covenant relations with himself.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

"If any man be in Christ, he is a New Creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. [Such are already back into harmony or covenant relationship with God.] And all [these] things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ [brought us back to covenant relationship], and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation: to wit, that God was in Christ, *reconciling the world* unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech men by us; we pray men in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God. For he [God] hath made him [Jesus] to be sin [offering] for us [him], who knew no sin; that we might become God's righteousness in him." – 2 Cor. 5:17-21.

The careful student will note in the words quoted four [R4542 : page 7] parts distinctly separate: God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church, and the world. God and the world are in opposition. Divine sentence of condemnation passed upon all the human family, determining that they were out of covenant relations with God – imperfect, unable to keep the Divine requirements, and therefore under death condemnation. In due time God sent forth his Son, with the avowed object of reconciling the world. Jesus did not even attempt to do so. He confined his efforts entirely to the Jewish nation and amongst them to the seeking for the "lost sheep," as many as the Father would draw to him.

Having finished his ransom-sacrifice, he ascended on high and *applied it*, not for the world, but for those who should believe on him and become his followers by consecration. The Apostle was one of these, as he explained to others, and incidentally to us of the same class to-day. The results of our Lord's appropriation of his merit on our behalf, was our consequent harmony with God and share in the reconciliation, not done by our Lord, but in a measure committed to us, his "members." He says, as above quoted, "God hath reconciled us to himself through Jesus and hath given to us the ministry [service] of reconciliation"; not the service of our own reconciliation, which is already passed, but the service of making known to the world the great fact that through the merit of Christ's death, whosoever wills may return to harmony with God, be reconciled to him. Our message is that this reconciliation is eventually to reach the whole world, but that, at the present time, it is intended only for "him that hath an ear to hear."

As ambassadors for God, as "members" of The Christ, it is our ministry or service in the world to carry the message to all who can hear it – to persuade men, to encourage them by word and example, to be reconciled to God – to accept his terms and conditions and to submit themselves fully to his will. This ministry or service in the present time affects merely the gathering of "the household of faith," including the "elect," but this is not the end of the service. Those faithful in the present work of the ministry of reconciliation will be counted worthy by the Lord of a share in the glorious work of the future. The reconciliation of that time will differ from the message of the present time. Now we persuade, we urge, we entreat, we lay down our lives for the brethren. We seek by word and example to encourage, to entice them to the Lord – to have fellowship in his sufferings and in our ministry.

The ministry of the future will be entirely different – it will be glorious. Instead of suffering and sacrificing and being rejected of men, the future reconciliation work will be accomplished on a

plane of glory. Our Lord and Head, glorified, will be the King of kings and Lord of lords. We, his humble followers, will be "changed" by the power of the First Resurrection and, as "members" of his "glorious Body," we will sit upon his throne. We will exercise under him the office of Prophet, Priest, King, Mediator between God and men, the world. No longer will men be entreated, but, on the contrary, the Law shall go forth from Mt. Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:3.) And "the soul that will not obey that Prophet shall be destroyed from among his people," after full, fair warning and helpful advice. – Acts 3:23.

This ministry of reconciliation committed to the Church, now and hereafter, is sometimes referred to as the ministry of the New Covenant – the service of bringing Israel in covenant relationship with God *anew*. These royal priests serve the New Covenant by way of making ready, under the guidance of their Head, the sacrificing of their restitution rights as underpriests. The duties and privileges of this "royal priesthood" are now a sacrificing service; by and by a reigning, restoring and teaching service. "As he was, so are we in this world." – I John 4:17.

Verse 21 above quoted tells how our Lord became the sin-offering for *us*, the household of faith, and that this is in order that *we* might be made the righteousness of God in him. In other words, we his "members" may be the channels through whom his merit would be applied for the propitiation of the world's sins, under the terms of the New Testament, or bequest, in his blood. This is in harmony with the Apostle's statement that God's mercy through Christ will be extended to Israel through the Church. As it is written, "They shall obtain mercy through your mercy." It is God's mercy through Christ which will pass through the Church to natural Israel to whomsoever wills of all the families of the earth. Thank God for the privilege of this ministry of reconciliation committed unto us! – Rom. 11:27.

