The New Covenant: Enrolled in God's Plan

Let us think about the covenant: what this word means and why we must make a covenant with God. It is important that we understand clearly what we are doing, because when we make a covenant with God, He also makes a covenant with us. And if He makes a covenant with us, He does so for particular reasons.

An illustration will make this easier to grasp. Let's say there is a medical school in Bucharest, Romania's capital. When we decide to become doctors, we go there with our application file and our school records, hand them in, sit an entrance exam, and on the basis of our results the people there accept us. A commitment is made between us and them, and both sides share the same goal: that we become doctors.

Many people, however, make a covenant without having any goal. One brother shared his testimony about the covenant he made many years ago, and it seems that at the time he had no goal at all. It is as if I went to school without knowing what I would become, as if I handed in my application without knowing why I was handing it in or what I wanted to achieve. This brother wanted, let's say, to be saved. But God's plan is broader. The brother only wanted to get into the school, and that was his goal; but the goal should have been to graduate, that is, to become a doctor.

The Goal of God's School

Knowing God's plan is like knowing the plan of that medical school. Its plan is to make doctors; that is why we go there, and that is exactly what it does. Now let us see what goal God has. He pursues His goal, and we must enter into His plan, not come and try to change His plan by our own decisions.

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." In the same way, the medical school calls us according to its purpose, and its purpose is to make doctors.

In the next verse Paul shows what God's plan is: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." So God determined, even before we began His school, that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. That is His plan.

Conformed to the Image of His Son

When we come to make a covenant with God, we must enroll in His plan. His plan is to make brothers for the Lord Jesus. He enrolls us in a school, and the purpose of the school is that the disciple should be like the Teacher. That is why we make the covenant like this: "I have come to

You, Lord, so that You would make me like the Lord Jesus." That is the goal with which we must enter His school.

In verse 30 Paul goes on to say that those whom God predestined, He also called. When He calls us, He does not call us merely to be saved. He calls us with a purpose: to be His children. And to be a child of God means to be born of God.

In John 1 the apostle John calls the Lord Jesus the only begotten. Later, however, in Romans 8, He is no longer the only begotten but the firstborn among many brethren. So God's purpose was that the only begotten should have many brothers. That is the plan of God's school.

If Ye Will Obey My Voice

God has a school, and He admits us into it on the basis of a covenant. In Exodus 19 we see how He carries out His plan, but only with those who enroll in His plan, not with just anyone.

If my plan is to become a shepherd while the medical school's plan is to make doctors, I will not be accepted. If I go there and say, "I want to be a shepherd," they will tell me that only doctors are made there. You have to accept their plan and then enroll in it. You also need the right documents, good enough for the people there to say that you are fit and know enough for them to work with you further.

In Exodus 19:5 God says: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine." That was God's promise: "ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." But it came with a condition: "if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant."

From this text one might think that it was not the people who made a covenant, but that only God makes a covenant with man. Quite a few people think this way today. If you ask someone, "Have you made a covenant with God?" they answer: "What covenant? We don't make covenants anymore. Today we are saved by grace, through faith." Others say: "Yes, there is a covenant, but only God makes it, because Hebrews says He will make a new covenant with them." In other words, only He does.

But a covenant, by its very definition, has two parties, like a contract. The one who is hired must also take on an obligation toward the one who hires him. In Exodus 19 God speaks with the people, and the people answer: "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do." Yet before chapter 24, where the same scene is repeated, a few things take place.

In Exodus 20:18-20 we read: "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." God did not make the covenant with the people without preparing them for it.

How did He prepare them? The people trembled, stood afar off and asked Moses that God would not speak to them anymore, lest they die. But Moses explained that God had come precisely to prove them, so that His fear would be before their faces and they would not sin.

His Fear Before Your Faces

Let us think again, by way of illustration, about the medical school. When you want to get in, it tells you the conditions from the start: if you do a certain thing, a certain consequence follows, and if you do another, you are expelled. If no one told you anything, you wouldn't know what to expect. You would skip lectures, fail to show up for exams, and one day you would be thrown out. Then you would protest: "Why have you thrown me out? You never told me any conditions when you accepted me."

I remember that under Ceausescu, Romania's communist dictator, if you failed your first year at university you were expelled and had to sit the entrance exam again and start all over. That is why you did everything you could not to be left with a failed exam in your first year. In the following years the rule was different. They let you retake an exam once or twice, but if you still didn't pass after those attempts, you were expelled. Students lived with a fear that made them study and be very careful, so that it would not happen to them. Some professors even threatened us and put the fear of God into us.

In the same way God put fear into the people. He brought them to the mountain, and the mountain smoked and blazed with fire, so that the people trembled. I have trembled with fear too, not because anyone threatened me, but at my driving test. On the test course, from nerves and fear of failing, my foot was shaking on the clutch. The course had to be done very quickly, in about a minute, and with my foot shaking everything became very hard. I couldn't understand why this was happening to me just then. I was feeling such deep emotion that my whole body was trembling.

The people trembled. Why? God brought them into that state so that they would understand how important the covenant is.

In Exodus 24 we read about the covenant again, and this time God actually makes it with them. In verse 1 Moses is called up Mount Sinai, and in verse 3 we read: "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do." Now the people were ready. God had come to prove them and to set the fear of the Lord before their faces, so that they would not break the covenant. He was making this covenant with them for a purpose: that they would be His. That is God's purpose. And so as not to lose them, God, in His love for mankind, set the fear of the Lord before their eyes.

Is the fear of the Lord necessary? Let us remember a few people. Cornelius did not tremble, but if we look at all of God's people, we see that they feared God. Saul, on the other hand, feared men. He confessed in 1 Samuel 15:24: "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice." He also feared the

Philistines. When the people around him were trembling for fear of the Philistines, he dared to offer the sacrifice himself. That is how the fear of man works. God's Word says, "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Proverbs 29:25), but "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life" (Proverbs 14:27).

God prepared them, and He prepares us too. When Paul met the Lord Jesus, he did not stand there with his hands in his pockets, and the Lord Jesus did not plead with him, "Please, Paul, would you kindly come into obedience too?" Acts 9:6 says: "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" This is a necessary condition for us as well. What school are we entering? What does God want to make of us? He wants to make us sons of God, and that is no small thing.

Starting from the words "All that the LORD hath said will we do," we read further in Exodus 24:5-7: "And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people." Let us pay attention to this: there is a book of the covenant, and there is one today as well. But where did Moses get the laws from?

He brought them from God, who came and gave them to him. The Lord Jesus also brought everything from God. Did He bring laws too? Yes, for of the new covenant the Lord says, "I will put my laws into their hearts" (Hebrews 10:16).

Behold the Blood of the Covenant

When they stood face to face with the book of the covenant, the Israelites answered, according to Exodus 24:7: "All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient." Then, in verse 8, Moses "took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words." It is on the basis of these words that God enters into covenant with us. But first He makes sure that the covenant we are making is the true one.

Take a man who makes a covenant with God to become a shepherd, but does not become a shepherd. God has not entered into covenant with him. This man should have made a covenant to become a doctor; then, had he fulfilled the conditions, the covenant would have been made.

What does sprinkling the people with blood mean? Moses sanctified the people. Blood means life, and it brings forgiveness. For a sin committed unintentionally, a man had to bring the priest a sacrifice according to the law, in keeping with his means: the better-off brought a lamb, the poorest a pigeon or a turtledove. But without blood there was no forgiveness. To become God's people, the Israelites had to be sprinkled with blood. That is why Moses says so beautifully, "Behold the blood of the covenant."

When a contract is signed between two parties, the employee signs on the left and the employer on the right. When God signs His covenant with me, what seal does He put on it? Blood. When I enter into covenant with God, He must cleanse me, and for this He brings the blood. In Hebrews

10:29 we read: "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Something happened when we entered the covenant. But that does not mean, as some say, that the person who entered the covenant has been cleansed and saved forever, for past, present and future sins, and can therefore go on sinning and living as he lived before. That is not so. What follows after entering the covenant? God says, "Ye shall be mine." That is the new covenant.

One Corner of the Diploma

Deuteronomy 29 helps us understand what happens when we enter the covenant. When I got into university, I became a student. I remember a professor who told us then: "Be careful. Now you have one corner of the diploma. A diploma has four corners. You still have to win the other three. Don't think you have the diploma just because you got in."

We are in the same position. We have been accepted into God's school, and He gives us new birth. But on what basis does He give us new birth? On the basis of the covenant. That is why, when we make it, we must know what we are entering into; otherwise God does not make a covenant with us.

Chapter 29 is headed "The Renewal of the Covenant." This time the covenant was not being made with the fathers who had come out of Egypt, but with their children. The children had not made a covenant, so God had to make a new one with them. It is rightly said that God has only children, no grandchildren. If I am a child of God, my children do not inherit His Kingdom just because I am His child. They too must become children of God and make a covenant with Him themselves.

In Deuteronomy 29:9-11 we read: "Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do. Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water." And verses 12-13 show why they are all standing there: "That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

Who makes this covenant? God and I; not God alone, and not I alone. The text says "this day": there is a day of the covenant, and we must know which day that is, because it is a great day.

Each of us knows his birthday. My mother even told me the hour: "You were born at four in the morning, my child, on the twelfth of April." I also know my wedding day and remember much of what happened then, even if not every detail. Yet the day of our covenant with God we no longer remember, nor what covenant we made then. And still we are talking about real things, not about some chance event. God makes the covenant in order to make us His people, His children.

Let us keep in mind that those people were not born again. God came to the people of Israel, entered into covenant with them, taught them how to enter into covenant and then told them, in verse 18: "Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations."

And He immediately adds: "lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood."

Today the tares grow together with the wheat; that is the rule, and in the church there are all kinds of people. Even so, among God's people there must be no root that bears gall and wormwood, that calls others to worship other gods. And when we are called today to be like the world, are we not being called precisely to worship other gods? The world has its gods. Some say such things are tolerated in the congregation, since there is both wheat and chaff there. That is not so. God's Word tells us that the congregation is a holy place where God makes His dwelling.

No Root of Gall and Wormwood

Moses continues in Deuteronomy 29:19-20: "And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the LORD will not spare him." That was how it was under the old covenant. Of the one who breaks the new covenant, the Epistle to the Hebrews says he will receive an even sorer punishment. Some reply: "No, the new covenant is grace."

The other day a man phoned me and asked about wilful sin. He read me what is written in Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10, and at the end he asked: "Surely that's just for the Jews?" It is not just for the Jews, even though the epistle is addressed to them. He was a serious, sensible man who wanted to understand and was not asking to mock. That is what he had been taught: that it is for the Jews, not for us, because the Gentiles are under grace.

The people in Deuteronomy 29 were not born again. They were God's people only by covenant. And yet God did not allow them to leave the covenant and break it. Of such a man verse 20 says that "the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven." And in verse 21: "And the LORD shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law." The book of the law was also called the book of the covenant. When the book of the law was found in the days of Josiah, the king read the book of the covenant before the people. Scripture uses both names.

Twice Dead

We do not read these things to frighten ourselves, but to understand what the covenant means. The new covenant is different: in it God makes us His children. In John 1:12-13 we read: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that

believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Some say: "There's nothing here about a covenant. How good that there isn't! I received Him. Receive Him into your heart and you're saved." But we can add, because it is plain, that this power was given to those who, on the basis of what they received, entered into covenant.

So what happens in the covenant? God gives us new birth; He gives us life. We have life from Him once more. Can we die a second time? God's Word says we can. In the Epistle of Jude, verse 12, certain people are called "twice dead." What did these people do? They turned back and broke God's covenant. In Hebrews 8:9 the Lord says: "because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not." Do we somehow believe that if we do the same thing, He will regard us?

When we break the covenant and sin wilfully, we are not doing something trivial. We are holding the Son of God up to contempt. He would have to be mocked again, crucified again and die once more for God to give us new birth again. That cannot be; it is finished. That is why, as Paul writes in Philippians 2:12, we must "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling."

When Moses sprinkled the people, he said, "Behold the blood of the covenant." The Lord Jesus took up the same words in Matthew 26:28: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The people must be sanctified and cleansed, and this is done only through blood. The blood of the Lord Jesus was shed once for all. He does not die again next year; He does not die once more for my sins.

God Is Impartial

So the Lord brings me into a new state, and this is the great blessing: He gives me life. I must take care of that life, so as not to lose it. If I lose it, I am the one who loses it; it is not God making a fool of me. Can anyone bless himself in his heart and say, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart"? Certainly not. The Lord will not spare him.

The Lord is good, full of mercy and longsuffering. How then can He do such a thing? The problem is that man loses his life by his own doing. Sin brings death, and there is nothing more God can do for him. Man kills himself, takes his own life, and God does nothing to him. He has rules that He does not break for anyone. God is impartial, not swayed by favour.

Suppose God thought like this: "This man served Me more than that one, so even though he has fallen, I will bring him back." Would God do such a thing? No, because God is impartial. Otherwise He would be showing favouritism and would be a liar. He has set a standard by which He receives people into the covenant and by which He sends them out, and I must take care not to leave it. I cannot come afterwards with the request: "Please take me back. It's true, I went off into the world, I came back, I sinned wilfully, but..."

Perhaps you, too, have heard people pray, "Lord, forgive them their sins, both wilful and unwitting." I have heard it too. But does God forgive wilful sins?

People say that as long as you are alive, you have a chance. Yet those Jude writes about no longer had any chance. Jude 12 calls them "trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots." Many teachings are going around today claiming that we do not die even if we sin wilfully, that we are saved and predestined by God forever, and so on. That is why we must see what God does in this covenant.

All Things Are Become New

In 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 the apostle Paul writes: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." All things become new, not just some. God takes us and translates us out of the kingdom of darkness into a kingdom where everything is new and everything comes from heaven.

So it is not simply a covenant that I follow, break and then return to. When I come to God and make a covenant with Him, I commit myself, and He commits Himself to making me His child. He gives me new birth, and I become a child of God. Being born of God is not something to be taken lightly.

But what happens if you are born of God and then become like the devil again and want to be forgiven and let back in? Was the devil able to get back in? If God received such a person, He would be showing favouritism, and the devil would have the right to ask for another chance too: "Lord, why did You take this one back when You threw me out? Can I have another try as well?" It is no longer possible.

God makes me His child, born of God, a partaker of the divine nature. These are extraordinarily great things, not trifles. We have been called to be like Him. If we did not know what we were called to and wanted to become shepherds instead of doctors, then we did not commit ourselves to anything, and nobody took our application seriously.

Others Cannot Reassure Me

One brother testified that he had made a covenant with God only in his mind. He saw that he had no victory and that things were not right. When he told others, "I'm not right," they lulled him to sleep: "Don't worry, you're saved. Don't fret. That's from the devil. The devil comes to tell you you're not right, but you are right, you're saved."

I knew an old man who, on his deathbed, was seized by the fear of death. He was a born-again believer, an evangelist; he had preached and was a prominent man. That kind of fear does not come from God but from the devil, for, as 1 John 4:18 says, "fear hath torment." Someone beside him said: "Don't doubt now. You are saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus. How can you be afraid after a whole lifetime?" And he answered: "I can't help it, I'm afraid." I heard those words myself.

It is useless for someone else to come alongside you, just as Job's comforters came to him. Did they help Job at all? Not even the whole world put together can convince me that I am all right if there is fear inside me. If I know clearly within myself that something is wrong, anyone can come and tell me, "You're saved," and it will still be no use.

I Sware unto Thee

Many say, following today's theories, that they have received the Lord Jesus into their hearts. But the question remains whether you have made a covenant with Him and, above all, whether He has made a covenant with you.

Those of us who have been through it remember what it was like when we got married or wanted to get married, when a young man loved a young woman or a young woman loved a young man. Even without any thought of marriage, we know what we went through: the excitement, the longing to see each other. Whatever anyone said to us, there was no point arguing with us. We must remember moments like these in our walk with the Lord too. If we cannot remember such moments with Him, then nothing happened. Fear does not bring love.

In Ezekiel 16:6-9 the Lord says: "And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil."

Here we have a love story. But between whom?

It is a love story between the Lord God and His people. What was to come upon His people? Their time had come, the time of love.

A teacher of the Law came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. The answer was the first commandment of the Law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind" (Luke 10:27). Not the second commandment or the third, but the first, the greatest and the most important, the first like a firstborn. And this love is not just any love, but with all your mind, all your heart, all your strength and all your soul.

What God Do We Love?

Some of us have known something of this kind of love when we loved a young woman; others have not. But love looks something like this: all your thoughts, all your mind are there. One brother rightly asked: what God do we love? We must love Him, Him Himself. We must discover the beauty of God, because if we do not, what is left for us to love?

We sing many songs, like "I love You, Jesus." But which Jesus do we love: another Jesus, or Jesus Himself? The Lord Jesus came to His own, and people loved darkness rather than light (John 3:19). He is the light, and light is not darkness and is not sin. People loved wickedness more than righteousness.

But God is the Lord of righteousness. We like a Jesus who does not talk to us about righteousness, but about anything else, and who does not show us our sins, because we don't want to know about them. Our sins must stay swept under the rug; we don't bring them to church, so that no one sees them. But Hebrews 4:13 says: "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

Not Out of Self-Interest

"When I passed by thee... behold, thy time was the time of love." So God has His moment. Many people marry out of self-interest. People say of someone: "What a good match she's made! He has a car, a house, a good job, everything he needs. What a catch!"

My parents taught me not to marry a poor girl. They had been poor and knew what poverty meant. From one point of view they were right, because natural people love for a while and afterwards they hate. If you marry a poor girl, you love her for a time, as long as it lasts. But when hardship, poverty and problems come, nothing is left. Then prosperity seems to bring goodness and happiness, and people look for a better, more attractive solution.

But does God enter into covenant with us if we come to Him out of self-interest? We say to ourselves: "Let's go to heaven, because there are streets of gold and gates of pearl there." It is beautiful, very beautiful in heaven, and we repent so as to get there. But God's covenant is a covenant of love.

As a Chaste Virgin

God is marrying us. What does the Bible call us now? Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:2: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." And in Revelation 19:7 we read: "for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." Today we are preparing to be the wife of the Lord Jesus.

This is God's plan: that the Lord Jesus should have brothers and, figuratively speaking, a bride, the Lamb's wife. There are several images here, but we have one purpose, one plan: God is preparing us so that the Lamb may have a wife. If the Lamb obeys the Father, will His wife not obey too? Will He take a disobedient wife? Will He take a wife who is not pure?

Betrothal comes before marriage. We might say it is even the most beautiful part, because afterwards marriage settles somewhat into the ordinary routine, whereas betrothal, when it is genuine, is something altogether special. What we experience in this corrupt world is no longer real betrothal.

That is how we should look to God, who says: "I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine." God pledges His faithfulness. But shouldn't we pledge ours to Him: "All my life I will be Yours"? He says: you became Mine, and you will be Mine.

They Received the Word with Joy

And what did man answer? In Exodus 24:7 the people said: "All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient." On the basis of these words, God enters into covenant. But He must see the heart, and He knows it. In Acts 15:8 Peter says of the Gentiles: "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us."

What kind of heart did God see there? Those people received the Word with joy; they received their Bridegroom, their Prince, with joy. We see the same thing in the jailer at Philippi, a strange man in our eyes: in the end he "rejoiced, believing in God" (Acts 16:34). And the Lord received him, without a doubt.

The new covenant means receiving the Word with joy, receiving our Bridegroom with joy, because the Lord Jesus is the Word. But it must truly be the Lord Jesus and not someone else, for this is where the greatest deception lies. People say, "Receive the Lord Jesus into your heart." But who is the Lord Jesus? He is the Word, He is God, and God is holy, thrice holy. That is what we are called to.

"Then washed I thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil." If we take these words as a picture, what does it mean that God anoints us with oil? He has cleansed us of our blood, of our filth, and He has clothed us.

After cleansing us, God gave us garments. That is how He works. That is why the Word calls us in Ephesians 4:24 to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Let us see what further steps God takes, so that we understand what we are called to.

Members Set as It Hath Pleased Him

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-18 the apostle Paul writes: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him."

Is this body also part of God's plan? Yes. God has a plan: to bring us "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13), so that the Son "might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). For this we were all baptized by one Spirit.

Paul continues in the same chapter, in 1 Corinthians 12:24-27: "but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

The Church, the body of Christ, is a great mystery. Why? Because Satan does everything he can to keep us from reaching God's goal.

Let me go back to the medical school illustration. If I don't enroll in medicine, what chance do I have of becoming a doctor? I have lost before I've begun. In the same way, if I am not part of the body of Christ, there is no way I can reach the finish. The reason is that the body is part of God's plan. It is not true that God "expels" us or refuses us because He is arbitrary and easily offended with the person who does not want to be part of the body of Christ.

What do you find at a medical school? Many textbooks, but not only textbooks. There are professors, but not only professors. There are laboratories and human organs on which students practise. All of this has a purpose: so that when they practise medicine and examine my body, they will know exactly where the heart is and where every organ is. It is the same with God's plan. The Church, the body of Christ, is part of that plan, and God sets the members in the body, every one of them, as it has pleased Him.

A Child Needs Raising

Think about the birth of a child. When the day comes, the father goes to the hospital with his wife, and after the birth the parents take their child home. Why? Not as a doll they always wanted, but because a child needs raising: milk, food, a mother.

My little girl is eleven and a half. She was abandoned in the hospital and for two years and seven months she had no mother. When she opened her eyes, she didn't know what a mother was. Does it show? It leaves marks, and big ones at that. The first days of a child's life are very important. A child needs to see its mother beside it, to smile at her, to hear the voice it heard before birth and now to see the one who is speaking. Being raised is a necessity.

The apostle Paul says beautifully that we might have ten thousand instructors, yet not many fathers (1 Corinthians 4:15). What does a parent do? Paul reminds the Corinthians that he fed them with milk because they were not yet able to take solid food (1 Corinthians 3:2), and he tells the Thessalonians that he was gentle among them, "even as a nurse cherisheth her children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7). A parent has a role and a purpose.

Let us remember how Paul spoke of his disciples. He called Timothy "my dearly beloved son" and "my own son in the faith." He spoke of Titus the same way, and of Onesimus too. Paul had spiritual children. And what was his role toward them? He gives Timothy a charge, calling him "son" (1 Timothy 1:18).

Can a father give orders to a child? Of course he can. But a stranger remains a stranger: what business does he have telling me what to do? Yet when my father tells me, and I have lived in obedience, I do what I am told. A parent's role is to raise me, and to raise me in submission, so that when I am grown up I will know what submission means. That is why school is needed too.

Babes, Young Men and the Mature

That is why God has given the body of Christ. The Bible shows us that in the body of Christ, that is, in the church, there are babes, children, young men, fathers and mature people. Spiritual life is just like our earthly life.

What do our children do when they reach adulthood? They start a new family of their own. If they stay with us and keep asking us to look after them, buy them milk and everything else, it means those children are sick. If they are healthy, by around twenty or twenty-one they are already thinking about marriage and a new family. That is normal and natural.

It is the same in the body of Christ. The Word tells the Hebrews that "when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk" (Hebrews 5:12). Yet, glory to God, they were not thrown out, even though they still needed milk.

The Living Stones of the Temple

To understand God's plan for us human beings, we must know what we have been called to and why a covenant is needed: God begins this work with us in the covenant and carries it through to completion in the covenant. That is why we must abide in the covenant, for the Lord says of His people: "because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord" (Hebrews 8:9).

We find God's purpose in Ephesians 2:19-22: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

The building fitly framed together is us. Paul also says beautifully elsewhere that from Christ "the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body" (Ephesians 4:16). That is how we grow into a holy temple in the Lord and are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

Those who have read Revelation will remember that in God's eternal Kingdom there is His temple. But what is this temple? A stone building that we walk into? No, we are the temple of God, the living stones that have been built together and are growing into a holy temple in the Lord.

That is why God has given us the covenant and the body of Christ: so that, abiding in the covenant, we may grow from milk to maturity and be built together into a dwelling place for Him.

May the Lord help each one of us to understand His calling, our commitment and our goal, and that goal is to be like the Lord Jesus.

Source: *The New Covenant: Enrolled in God's Plan* — Unmodified Word
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