

A Covenant Between God And Man

By:
His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

It was God who started to make a covenant with man. He wanted to have a relation with him under certain conditions. God executed his promises and was honest in spite of our dishonesty. The covenant of God with man was an everlasting one.

The first covenant that God made was in the days of Noah, before and after the deluge. The condition that God stipulated was that man should get out of the wicked world that was condemned to death and annihilation and enter into the ark. God would grant man life, security, peace and care. Noah and his sons joined that covenant and therefore they gained the blessings of God.

After the ark had come to land and after Noah had presented an acceptable sacrifice to God, God was satisfied and said: "I do set my bow in the cloud and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and earth, and it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth that the bow shall be seen in the cloud. And I will remember my covenant which is between you and me and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." (Gen. 9:12-16)

The second covenant was made between God and the great grandfather: "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house, unto a land that I shall show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great and thou shalt be a blessing...And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3)

Later there was another covenant with Abram: "the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17). This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your seed after you. Every man or child (boy) among you shall be circumcised... And it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you.

And the uncircumcised man or child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."

Circumcision was a symbol of the death of the body so that we might obtain life. A part of the body is cut off to die' it symbolizes death as regards the body and matter.

Circumcision also was a symbol for baptism in which we die with Christ so that we may live with Him. The covenant stated that he who was not circumcised would be cut off from his people, exactly like anyone who would not be baptized.

We notice that the covenant included a blessing as well as punishment. The blessing for anyone who entered the ark was a symbol for the life for anyone who entered the care of God. There was a punishment for anyone who broke the covenant like that which was given to the one who was uncircumcised.

The blessing as is seen in Deuteronomy 28, is for those who abide by the words of God and punishment is for those who disobey them. This covenant which God gave to Moses was sprinkled with blood and for the first time it was a written covenant for all people including blessing and curses.

And Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read to the people saying: "All that God said shall be obeyed. "Then Moses took some of the blood and said: "This is the blood of the covenant which God made with you about all these sayings."

The ten commandments constituted a covenant between God and the people. They were written on two plates that were called the plates of the covenant and these were put into a tabernacle of the covenant was a symbol for the presence of God with people. According to this covenant God gave them the commandments to obey and God would guard and bless them.

All the commandments of God and all the scriptures were a covenant. This is why the old scriptures have been called 'the Old Testament' and the scriptures after the coming of Christ are called 'the New Testament.' The Holy Bible exemplifies a covenant between us and God. We have become believers on the ground of our abiding by all the commandments included in it.

Whenever you see Holy Bible you should remember that there is a covenant between you and God. So long as we are the sons of God and so long as we are believers we are bound by this covenant. We have to observe all the rules in that book and say as our have said before: "We obey all the commandments of God." It is a covenant that is sprinkled with blood.

Thus St. Paul the Apostle says about the Lord Christ that "He is the mediator of a better covenant which was established upon better promises." They are really better promises. The land in the Old Testament is a symbol of the Land of the Living in the New Testament. The fact that it is overflowing with milk and honey is a symbol of what no eye has seen, no ear has heard of and of what has never occurred to the mind of any human being.

The abundance of posterity symbolizes the spread of faith and the increase of the number of believers. The extent of age symbolizes eternity.

There is another covenant that we set up with God through baptism. During baptism we repudiate satan and all his evil deed, his tricks, thought and all his hosts and say to him openly: "I repudiate you; I repudiate you. I repudiate you."

Now, do we still repudiate the devil and all his hosts?

Besides, during baptism we make a vow to believe in God and proceed in his ways, in the new life in which we have worn Christ.

There is another covenant that we keep with God by partaking in the Holy Communion and in Penitence. In connection with Communion, God says to us: "Each time you eat from this bread and drink from this cup you preach my death, acknowledge my resurrection and remember me until I come."

What indicates that communion is a covenant between us and God is that Maundy Thursday, the day on which God made the covenant with his disciples and gave them his flesh and his blood, is called by the church "Thursday of the Covenant." We celebrate this day keeping in our memory a covenant that we pledge with God each time we take part in the Communion.

We also conclude a covenant with God whenever we make a vow. We often undergo pressure in case of sickness, adversity or demands or desires and make vows beyond our capacity and liability of execution and later we try to get rid of those vows or try to change or delay them forgetting the scripture which says: "You had better not make vows at all, rather than make vows and not execute them."

A covenant with God should be regarded with seriousness and not obligation. We should know with whom we are making an agreement. It is with God, the creator, the infinite, the imperceptible, the God of Gods. We should also know about the punishment for those who break the covenant. St. Paul the Apostle explained this punishment in his message to the Hebrews saying: "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye; shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and who hath done despite unto the spirit of grace? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of living God." (Heb. 10: 29-30)

All the covenants of God with the fathers are covenants with us personally. In this connection Moses, the Prophet, says: "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our father, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day." (Deut. 5:2,3)

Our covenants with God are sprinkled with blood and approved with the blood of Christ. This is why the Apostle says about the consecration of the believer, the blood of the covenant with which he has been consecrated: "Our sins are obliterated at baptism by the blood of Christ," and so is the case in the mystery of Penitence and the mystery of Communion, we take the blood of Christ which purifies everything.

How beautiful is the statement of the Prophet David, "O God, bless the covenants of my mouth." There we ask God to give us the power of execution.

I wonder about two things: that a man should make a vow to do things beyond his power with taking the advice of the father of confession, and that he should impose punishments on himself in connection with that vow.

We pray to God to grant us His power to be honest towards Him.

+++++