

TRINITY FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

Cardiphonia

Sounds of the Heart: Reflections on the Christian Life

Dying Seed and Covenant Life

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“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

John 12.24, 25

Series Introduction

This *Cardiphonia* series is presented to provide *pastoral counsel with pastoral heart* for today's Christian. This is part of my intentional pastoral commitment to serve more effectively the theological and character growth of those in my care. I've created this medium to help shine more of *the whole counsel of God* into your hearts.

With its title derived from two Greek words—one meaning *heart* and the other *sounds*—our *Cardiphonia* series expresses the *heart sounds* of the pastoral leadership of Trinity Fellowship Church. In the course of life and ministry, pastors hear God speak through Word and circumstance, and gain perspective for the lives of those entrusted to their care. As they meditate on God's Word and care for God's people, God places within their hearts passions, burdens and joys that are intended for God's church. The *Cardiphonia* booklets attempt to serve both the pastoral team and the congregation of TFC by transferring such joys and concerns from our hearts to yours.

I offer this series in *faith* that God will bless any truth it expresses *and* will guard His church from any error that might creep in. I present it with the prayer that it will help provide more spiritual food for the Lord's flock in ways that will bless and strengthen those I love. May the blessing of God rest upon you as you hear these heart sounds expressed.

Yours in Christ,

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Dying Seed and Covenant Life

Introduction

In John 12:23-26 Jesus calls upon His followers to count the cost of faith and yield everything up, to have Him as Savior and Lord. This call to discipleship is one of dozens of texts which define the true import of saving faith, and challenge perspectives that cheapen the grace of God with easy terms of commitment. So we need to consider these truths carefully to make sure that we are thinking rightly about things that matter ultimately.

From the start let's make sure to set these truths in the context of key Biblical themes which offer God's grace and steadfast love along with His call to saving faith. *God does not simply command our total commitment; He promises His.* In *Dying Seed and Covenant Life* we seek to marry these companion truths to call people to commitment while having their eyes fixed upon the promises and grace of God.

A true relationship with God in Christ, as Biblically defined, is *covenantal* in nature. The whole Bible is filled with the *covenant* motif. God relates to us by promising us Himself and by expecting us to return the commitment. Here are just two of the hundreds of covenant texts we could reference:

Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

Jeremiah 32:37-41

“And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,’ then he adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’”

Hebrews 10:15-1

In these and many other texts relationship with God is described in terms of mutual covenant commitment. Given that Scripture also describes our faith relationship with Christ with *marriage* imagery, it is safe to say that the *covenant of marriage* is reflective of a deeper and even more significant covenant we are to make with God. In other words true faith in Christ will involve sentiments and commitments similar to those in marriage. There are spiritual covenant parallels between the “I dos” and “I wills” of marriage and those that are involved in our Lord’s commitment to us, and ours to Him.

As we covenant to be the true people of God, He covenants to be our God and Savior. In our John 12 text, Jesus makes covenant promises of grace and favor that simply stagger the imagination! He promises us *forgiven life* (through His atoning work on the cross as hinted at in v. 23, 24, 32, and earlier texts like 1:29), *fruitful life* (v. 24; 15:1-17), *eternal life* (defined in 17:1-3 as the soul-awakening, life-sustaining, eternally-enduring *knowledge of God*), and *honored life* (v. 26). These are among the many covenant promises that God makes to us when we come to true faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Also in the John 12 text our covenant commitment is expressed in terms of our need to *hate our lives* (v. 25), *serve Christ* (v. 25, 26), and *follow Christ into death* (v. 26, 23, 24). In short we are to become as seed that, like Christ, falls into the earth and dies, so that we might have Him. As we come to Christ we must promise to die to ourselves and live for Him alone. This is not a commitment marked by perfection, but it is commitment marked by surrender and consecration. And it is, as we shall see, a commitment that needs to be fleshed out in real and practical terms.

In *Dying Seed and Covenant Life* I expand these covenant concepts for the blessing of the church. We begin with a summary covenant which expresses our Lord’s commitment to us. We then include a faith-vow to express what maturing commitment to Christ will involve. Both of these will be accompanied by Scripture-filled footnotes for those wanting to study out these commitments further.

Of course, whole volumes might be written about the obligations and promises of God’s covenant of grace with us. This brief perspective cannot possibly develop our understanding of *covenant* fully or answer all questions adequately. Still I hope that it blesses you, and then challenges all to explore more carefully what it means to be in a saving relationship with God. May God bless you as you read and reflect.

A Covenant Commitment from God in Christ

To grasp the breadth and depth of God's covenant love for us we would have to explore every promise intended for us found everywhere in the Bible. The steadfast covenant love of God is vaster than all, and more deep and strong than can ever be known. In the following you will find but a small expression of your God's covenant of grace and love with you.

“I, the eternal God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—have loved you from before time. I have chosen you to be Mine. In love I have called you to be My eternal children, a Bride for My Son, and a temple for My Spirit. I have set My heart upon you for great good and for everlasting joy.¹

“As the Father, I have chosen you to be delivered from Satan's hold, and brought into My embrace. I promise to justify you freely and fully and forever, through the merit of My Son's righteousness and blood. I will welcome you into My family through adoption. And I pledge to you a room in My house forever.²

“As the Son I have redeemed you from sin and the hell it deserves by sharing your humanity, and bearing your curse on the cross. I have loved you and have chosen to make you My Bride forever. I make My vow to you and enter into a covenant with you that you may become Mine. I will wash you and cleanse you that you may be white and pure at the marriage of the Lamb.³

“As the Spirit I have given you new life, enabling you to hear the Father's voice and trust the Son's promise. I have entered your life to transform you into the image they share. As the Spirit of liberty and holiness I will reveal the Father and Son's glory that by it you may be freed from sin and sanctified to your God. I will indwell and empower you and write the Law of your God upon your hearts, that you may serve Him all your days.⁴

¹ Ephesians 1:3-10; Titus 2:14; Ephesians 5:25-32; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20

² Colossians 1:11-14; Romans 8:29-39; 1 John 3:1-3; John 14:1-3

³ Galatians 3:10-14; Hebrews 2:14-18; Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 19:6-9; Ezekiel 16:6-14

⁴ John 3:5-8; Titus 3:4-6; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18; Romans 8:2-11; Ezekiel 36:25-28

“As your God, I covenant to forgive all your sins, bear all your sorrows, grant all your needs, heal all your diseases, and gladden all your days. In Me you need never be afraid, for I am with you; nor be dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.⁵

“You will be of My people, and I will be your God. I will give you one heart and one way, that you may fear Me forever, for your own good and the good of your children after you. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to you. And I will put the fear of Me in your heart, that you may not turn from Me. I will rejoice in doing you good, and I will plant you in this land in faithfulness, with all My heart and all My soul.⁶

“I pledge to you My unending love, My entire inheritance, My eternal home, and the pleasures of My everlasting presence. In that age My dwelling will be with you, and I Myself will be with you as your God. I will wipe every tear from your eye. Your mourning and crying and pain and death will be no more, for I will make all these pass away *forever*.⁷

“Henceforth and forever, I welcome you into the joys of My heart. Come and delight in Me and I will fill your soul. I will be glorified in you as you are satisfied in Me. In My presence you will have fullness of joy; at My right hand you will have pleasures forevermore.⁸

“I will be your Father, Husband, Comforter and Friend throughout eternal ages—for your joy and My delight forever. As I have said: ‘I, the Lord your God am in your midst, a mighty one who will save; I will rejoice over you with gladness; I will quiet you by My love; I will exult over you with loud singing’—through endless ages.⁹

“These words are trustworthy and true; I, the Lord your God have spoken, and so it will be.”¹⁰

⁵ Psalm 103:1-5; Isaiah 53:4-6; Philippians 4:19; Isaiah 41:10

⁶ Jeremiah 32:38-41

⁷ Psalm 103:17; Jeremiah 31:1-3; Romans 8:17; 35-39; Revelation 21:3, 4

⁸ Psalm 16:11; 17:15; 21:1-7; 36:8-10; Isaiah 55:1-3

⁹ Zephaniah 3:14-20

¹⁰ Revelation 21:3-7; Isaiah 25:6-9

A Covenant Commitment to God through Christ

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has written that “when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die”. This captures the covenant commitment required of all who would follow and have Christ. Every true Christian, in whom God has created a new heart of saving faith, makes such a commitment to God. In heart we all have pledged our complete and total love to Christ and have promised to renounce all, that we may have him and his grace. This is the very essence of saving faith.

This is not a pledge to be perfect, but it is a pledge to belong fully to Christ. Like a groom and bride pledge their all to one another, so must the believer pledge his or her all to Christ. Christ gives all that He is and has only to those who do the same. I would express part of what this covenant involves in the following way.

“Knowing that you have loved me from before time, redeemed me in time and saved me for all time and eternity, I covenant to die to self-rule and self-love to make You o God my Heavenly Father, and You o Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, Defender, Husband and Friend. I promise to forsake all to follow You.¹¹

“As you fill me with your Spirit, empower me to resist sin, and keep me in the way of love and holiness, I will hold no merit of my own, no desire, no dream, no plan, no comfort, no autonomous will or way, dearer than You.¹²

“In my baptism I take Your Name as mine, and give myself to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Holy Communion, I will renew my covenant with You continually by remembering the body and blood given to secure that covenant for me.¹³

“I pledge my first love to You, a love then overflowing to your Body, the church, and streaming into my family, the church in my home. I will devote my time to Your pleasure, my heart to Your love, my solitude to Your presence, my meditation to Your precepts, my family to Your kingdom, my money to Your service, my zeal to Your fame, my retirement years to Your work, my chastity

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:15; Romans 14:7-9; Luke 9:22-26; 14:33

¹² Romans 8:12-16; Philippians 3:7-10; James 4:6-10; 13-15;

¹³ Matthew 28:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

and purity to Your glory, my mind to Your truth, my prayer to Your throne, my will to Your law, my fellowship, gifts and life-agenda to Your church.¹⁴

“I promise to honor, love and obey You in all things, at all times, at all cost, though the world may mock, or my flesh oppose or the church delay. I will submit my opinions to Your unerring truth, my conscience to your inflexible absolutes, my traditions to Your holy commands, my obedience to Your appointed authorities, my plans to Your glorious cause, my sins to Your people’s correction, my soul-care to the leadership and fellowship of Your church.¹⁵

“In my marriage I will reflect Your gospel, in my singleness I will serve Your kingdom, in my parenting I will raise children for Your service alone. If I be a husband I will lead with vision, grace and strength...If a wife I will love my husband, and commit to his kingdom call...If a single I will devote body and soul to the church of Christ...If a teen or twenty-something I will renounce worldly adolescence to pursue maturity, forsaking youthful freedom for undistracted devotion—all for the fame of Your Name.¹⁶

“In body I will be pure, in mind I will be chaste, in fashion I will be modest, in luxury I will be spare, in entertainment I will be watchful, in trial I will be faithful, in loss I will be content, in worship I will be earnest, in witness I will be bold, in giving I will be extravagant, in busyness I will be restrained, in silence I will draw near.¹⁷

“My time I will redeem, my Sundays I will sanctify, my occupation I will consecrate, my home I will open, my welcome I will offer, my freedom and possessions I will risk, and my title to all I have, I will renounce.¹⁸

“I will care for the Church, which is Your Body, as I do my own. Its needs will be my priority, its joys my delight, its sorrows my burdens, its vision my heart, its growth my passion, *its life my life*.¹⁹

¹⁴ Revelation 2:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12:14-26; John 13:34, 35; Psalm 1:1, 2; 46:10; Acts 20:24

¹⁵ John 16:15; 2 Timothy 3:14-4.5; Mark 7:6-8; Hebrews 13:17

¹⁶ Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Corinthians 11:1-12; 7:7, 8, 32-35; 2 Timothy 2:22

¹⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Peter 3:3, 4; 1 Timothy 2:9, 10; Job 1:21; Psalm 90:12; Habakkuk 2:20; John 12:1-5; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

¹⁸ Ephesians 5:15, 16; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; Exodus 20:8; Ecclesiastes 9:9, 10; Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Peter 4:8, 9; Hebrews 13:1, 2; Romans 12:9-13; Acts 2:44, 45

“Forsaking complacency toward the lost, and my fear of their disapproval, I will embrace a compassionate and life-risking care for their souls. I will love those who love You and will seek those You have chosen in love, to lead them into Your saving grace that they may be with You, with us, forever. Impassioned for Your glory and aching for their souls, I will lead many from the brink of hell to the embrace of Your love.²⁰

‘I will trust my needs to your care, my losses to your will, my preferences to your priorities, my tears to Your heart, my vindications to Your justice, my rights to Your throne. “To the world’s ways, wants and praise I will be crucified. To my flesh in all its deceiving desires, I will die. To the fear and approval of man, I will be blind.²¹

“I will not seek true happiness in terrestrial things, but will renounce all worldly treasures to possess heaven. I will choose simplicity before luxury, generosity before accumulation, an open hand before grasping fingers.²²

‘I will embrace mission and martyrdom as my call, and withhold nothing of that which, of me, you require. By your grace and for Your glory I will follow You on the path of pain, suffering, and crucifixion, being faithful, even unto death.²³

“All this I vow, knowing that not one thing can I do without your enabling power and gracious care. I will keep this covenant with you only as You keep Yours with me. I claim Your promise to *give me one heart and one way, that I may fear you forever, for my own good and the good of my children after me. You will make with me an everlasting covenant, and will not turn away from doing good to me. And You will put the fear of You in my heart that I may not turn from you. You will rejoice in doing me good, and will plant me in this land in faithfulness, with all your heart and all your soul.*²⁴

“All this I promise knowing that in no works of my own righteousness will I stand before you. Indeed, I forsake all my own works and righteousness that I

¹⁹ Romans 12:1-13; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 4:1-16

²⁰ Acts 20:24; Romans 1:14-16; Acts 1:8; Romans 15:18-21

²¹ 1 Peter 5:6, 7; Job 1:21; Romans 12:14-21; Galatians 5:14; Proverbs 29:15

²² 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19; Hebrews 13:5, 6

²³ Luke 14:23; Acts 20:24; Revelation 2:10; Revelation 6:10, 11

²⁴ Jeremiah 32:38-41

might have Christ's. I covenant to do all this, not to merit any favor from God, but to have the favor merited by Another, even my Lord and Redeemer, Jesus. By His merit I live, in His righteousness I stand, through His blood I come. I renounce all my empty works to receive His glorious works. He is my covering and robe in the sight of my God.²⁵

My Master, my Lord and my Husband, forsaking all else and all others, I choose you alone. Amen.

Conclusion

It is very important that each of us understands the nature of relationship with God. Today many try to relate to God *on the basis* of their good works—a folly unsurpassed in human experience. Many others think they can relate to God *without* good works—a mistake of truly disastrous consequence. Those guilty of the first error will fall short of the glory of God, for they are sinners (Romans 3.23). Those guilty of the second error turn God's grace into license.

The Biblical response to both is *covenant*. God saves us not on the basis of our good works, but on the basis of the covenant-keeping good works of Christ. He alone deserves God's favor because He alone has kept the covenant of God perfectly. All God's covenant promises are earned for us by Him. And it is only as we trust in His work in our behalf that God will accept us. God promises all He is and has to all who are *in* Christ.

But who are those who are in Christ? Those who covenant to be His alone. He promises His eternal favor to all those who are willing to forsake all to have Him. True faith says: "Father, I renounce all that I have that I may have all the treasure that Jesus is. I count Him and all He has done of greater worth than all else." That is what it means to *believe*. Have you believed?

²⁵ Philippians 3:2-10; Zechariah 3:1-5