

Laying Down Our Lives



Relationship with God's People (Part 2)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again. This week I'm speaking about relationship with God's people.

Yesterday I explained that the same covenant that brings us into relationship with God also brings us into relationship with God's people. The two relationships necessarily go together, just like the two beams of the cross: vertical and horizontal. In each case, the basis of the relationship is a covenant. If you want to picture the cross in your mind and the point where the two beams meet, you could say that point at which they meet is covenant. Covenant is both vertical and horizontal. It relates to God, but it also relates to our fellow men.

Now today I'm going to explain, in a practical way, how the principle of covenant works out in our relationship with our fellow believers. I trust that I'll be able to be practical and down-to-earth.

In previous talks, we've seen that covenant requires sacrifice. There never was a valid covenant without a sacrifice and a sacrifice represents the death of the one who makes the covenant. A person enters into covenant through his own death. This is not merely established in the Old Testament but carried on into the New. In Hebrews 9:16–17, the writer says this:

> "For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives." (NAS)

Let me repeat that phrase, "A covenant is valid only when men are dead." So, in entering into a covenant, you enter in through your own death. Now this has got a very practical application and the practical application is stated for us in 1 John 3:16–17:

> "We know love by this, that He [that is, Jesus Christ] laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in

him?" (NAS)

There are some principles established there. First of all, Jesus has shown us the pattern of love by laying down His life. He said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." Then He said, "This I command you, that you love one another as I have loved you." That we love one another with the same kind of covenant love that's expressed in laying down our life for those with whom we are in covenant and John applies this as an obligation upon all believers. He said, "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Now that does not mean primarily that we ought to be willing a martyr's death if need be. Dying a martyr's death may be included but it's not primarily what John has in mind because the next verse makes it clear. It's very practical and down-to-earth. In the speech of the world, it's in the realm of the "nitty-gritty." "Whoever has the world's goods [that's money, food, clothing, and other things that people need]—whoever has the world's goods and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" In other words, laying down our lives means that we make ourselves and all we have available to our fellow believers. We no longer claim absolute right of possession, absolute right to say what we'll do with what is ours, but we release those things into the totality of the body of Christ. We make them available to our fellow believers. That is laying down our lives in a very practical, on-going, day-to-day way. I don't know what it's like to be a martyr. Sometimes I believe that one day that may be God's decision for me in my life, but I'm convinced of one thing: that a person that does not lay his life down daily will not be ready to die a martyr's death. There's got to be a process of self-denial each day in our lives. That's the outworking of love. That's the exact opposite of the way natural, unregenerate man operates.

Natural man is motivated by his ego. Everything centers around himself. It's I want, I think, I feel. That's what motivates him. Now what the Scripture teaches is that if we are to be in covenant with God and with one another, that ego has to die. We no longer are motivated by what I want, I think, I feel. Something else takes precedence. What is that? What my brother wants, what my brother needs, what my brother thinks, what God says in His Word. These become the main, decisive factors in my way of life. And so that old "I," that old ego that's always asserting itself, has to die. And it dies through the sacrifice of covenant. We lay down our lives one for another. This is the mark that we truly are in covenant.

I've been saying that there are mutual obligations when we are in covenant one with another. There might be many different ways of answering the question. What are those mutual obligations? One of the ways you can do it is to look through the New Testament and pick out all the passages where the phrase "one another" or "each other" is used about believers in their relationship to one another. In other words, these are some of our mutual obligations. I'm just going to read out to you those 19 different passages which speak about one another and emphasize what we're required to do in each passage.

The first one is to wash one another's feet.

The second to love one another.

To build up one another.

To accept one another.

To admonish one another.

To greet one another.

To serve one another.

To bear one another's burdens.

To show forbearance to one another.

To forgive one another.

To be subject to one another.

To teach one another.

To comfort one another.

To encourage one another.

To stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

To confess our sins to one another.

To pray for one another.

To be hospitable to one another.

And to be clothed with humility toward one another.

There are nineteen specific obligations of the New Covenant. I think all of us need to ask ourselves, How far are we fulfilling those obligations? And in some cases, are we perhaps doing the very opposite of what we ought to be doing? We're admonished to "love one another," to "build up one another."

Does it every happen that one group of believers, instead of building up another group actually breaks them down, criticizes them, tears them apart? That's not covenant behavior. We're admonished to "serve one another," to "bear one another's burdens." If we go out selfishly for our own ends and ambitions and pay no heed to other people's needs or problems, we're not acting like covenant brothers and sisters. In actual fact, we're going contrary to the obligations of the covenant.

So, how are we going to work out these obligations? If we don't do that, we're not fulfilling the terms of the New Covenant. Our "horizontal beam" is out of line and that tells us, automatically, the vertical beam must be out of line, too. What I want to suggest to you just two things that are involved in working out these covenant obligations. The first, we need a new attitude. Instead of talking in terms of "I"—I want, I need, I'm right with God, I pray, God blesses me—we've got to substitute for the "I", the "we"—we want, we need, we pray, God blesses us, God helps us.

It is very significant that the pattern prayer that Jesus taught His disciples begins with the word "our," not "My." "Our Father." The first thing that we need to remember in prayer is that we are not individuals just on our own without obligations to our fellow believer. If we could understand what's involved in those two simple words, "Our Father," in many cases it would make a tremendous difference in our whole attitude and outlook as believers.

Secondly, we need a new lifestyle. If you think over that list of obligations that I read out to you just now, I think you'll agree that many of them cannot be worked out in a church building or in a church setting. It's not easy to wash one another's feet, it's not easy to serve one another, it's not easy to be in subjection to one another. Essentially, in a religious setting the kind of situations that we're used to in a church, what we do mainly is look at the back of the neck of the person in front of us and gaze up at a preacher behind the pulpit. That creates a certain kind of result but it gives no opportunity for the fulfilling of many of these obligations. So the truth of the matter is that we've got to get into a new kind of lifestyle, a lifestyle where our obligations are worked out in daily living outside a religious setting. We need more time together in a non-religious setting. Otherwise, we really cannot live up to our obligations to one another and thus our obligations to Jesus.

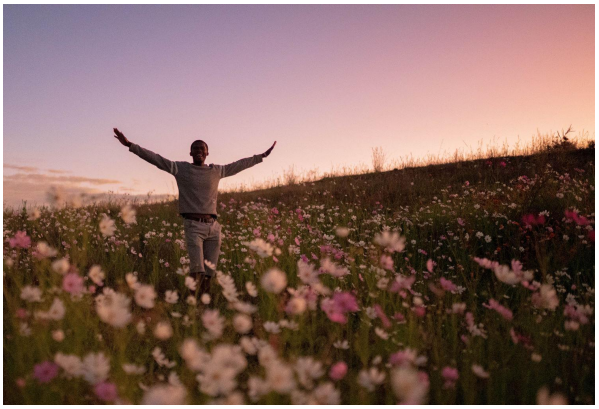
Well, our time is up for the day. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. I'll be speaking further about the new lifestyle of God's people under the new covenant.

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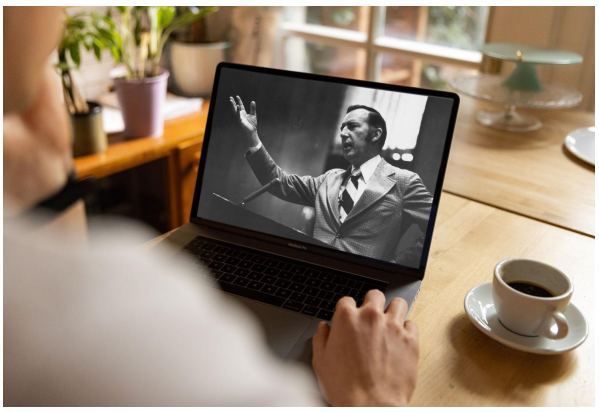
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