

Conduct that Undermines Covenant



Relationship with God's People (Part 5)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you once again.

I've been speaking this week about covenant relationships between God's people. Yesterday, I spoke about the covenant meal instituted by Jesus Himself—the Eucharist, Communion, the Lord's Supper, Breaking of Bread, whatever we may call it. Its purpose, I said, was to commemorate, perpetuate, and renew. Because covenant is so sacred in God's sight, He attaches special blessings to the right observance to this covenant meal but also severe judgments to any form of conduct that constitutes betrayal of our covenant commitment.

Because this is such a solemn and serious subject, today I want to bring you a special word of warning. I want to speak to you about conduct that undermines covenant. Now God's demands for covenant commitment as the basis for relationship are clearly set forth in Psalm 50. In Psalm 50:5, God says:

> "Gather My godly ones to me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." (NAS)

That defines those whom God considers to be godly ones. They are those who have made a covenant with Him on the basis of sacrifice. Of course, the sacrifice upon which the New Covenant is based is the death of Jesus on our behalf.

To be related to God, to be included among His godly ones, we have to be in that covenant relationship with God which is based on the sacrificial death of Jesus on our behalf.

Now, further on in Psalm 50, God gives a promise to those who fulfill His covenant requirements. He promises His help in time of need. In verse 15, He says:

> "And call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me." (NAS)

But later on in the same Psalm, He also speaks a word of stern rebuke to those whose conduct is unworthy of their covenant. These words of warning and rebuke are found in

the same Psalm, verses 16–20:

> "But to the wicked God says, 'What right have you to tell of My statutes, And to take My covenant in your mouth?'"

You will notice that God is angry because these people claim to have a covenant relationship with God. The use the language of covenant, but their conduct doesn't answer to their profession. This makes it very clear that to claim to be in covenant relationship with God puts upon us a very high standard of behavior toward God and toward one another. Then, in the next verses of this Psalm, God goes on to specify the things that He will not accept in those who claim to be in covenant relationship with Him. He says this:

> "For you hate discipline, And you cast My words behind you. When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, And you associate with adulterers. You let your mouth loose in evil, And your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son." (NAS)

There are certain forms of conduct mentioned here that disqualify people from covenant relationship. The first ones mentioned could be summed up by this: undisciplined, rejecting God's Word and associating with thieves and adulterers. But the main emphasis is on evil done by the tongue. "You let your mouth loose in evil," "your tongue frames deceit," "you sit and speak against your brother," "you slander your own mother's son." Four things are done by the tongue. I want to say this: Sins of the tongue do more to undermine covenant relationships than all other sins combined. In James 3:6, James says this:

> "And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell." (NAS)

Notice, the tongue when it's misused defiles the entire body. That's true not merely of each individual believer who misuses his tongue in relationship to his own body, but it's true of the body of Jesus Christ collectively. The misuse of the tongue by believers amongst themselves defiles the entire body. It makes such persons unworthy to claim a covenant relationship with God and with one another.

I want to mention two specific misuses of the tongue that harm the body of Christ, misuses which, I believe, are lamentably common among God's people today. The first is referred to in Psalm 15. Psalm 15 opens with a question: "Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?" The question in essence is, "Who is worthy of a close fellowship relationship with God? And in the remaining verses of the Psalm, the psalmist states eleven requirements in the life of the person who claims to come close and have fellowship with God. I'm not going to deal with all eleven, I'm only going to read the third verse, which contains three of the eleven requirements for fellowship with God. Speaking of that kind of person, the psalmist says, in verse 3:

> "He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend..." (NAS)

Two of those requirements relate to the tongue. The first is that we do not slander; the second is that we do not take up a reproach against a friend. To slander is to spread malicious or damaging or hurtful statements about other persons. I don't suppose I need to remind you that the very word "devil" mean literally "slanderer." In Revelation 12, we are told that the devil is the "accuser of the brethren"; he's the accuser of God's people. Every time we carry slanders about our fellow believers or accuse them, what we are actually doing is doing the devil's work for him. And I just want to beseech you: don't do it. The devil doesn't need your help! He's got enough without finding helpers among the people of God.

But the second thing of that verse 3 of Psalm 15 is that we are not to receive a reproach. When somebody comes to us with a malicious or unkind statement about a fellow believer, we are not to accept it. What should we do? In most cases we should say, "If you've got anything against that brother or that sister, go and tell them directly. Go to them. I'm not the person for you to come to."

Suppose you were a housewife and you had just beautifully cleaned your house and vacuumed the living room, dusted the tables and the chairs and everything was just the way you wanted it and one of your neighbors came in with a rotten, damp, garbage bag and started to empty the garbage on the living room floor. Would you put up with that? Of course not. You would say, "Take your garbage outside. I don't want it here!" That's just exactly what you should say when somebody comes to you with an accusation or a slander against a fellow believer. Say, "Take your garbage outside. I don't want it in my house. My house is clean. I don't want it defiled." So please remember, don't do the devil's job for him.

The other problem that's so common amongst Christians that I want to mention just for a moment is judging one another.

James 4:11–12 says this:

> "Do not speak against one another, brethren. [That's a pretty flat statement. Don't speak against your brother.] He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you to judge your neighbor?" (NAS)

I find that most Christians think that somehow they have been unofficially appointed judges of their fellow believers. I want you to understand that this is a terrible mistake. Picture a law court for a moment. I'm sure you've been in one—I have. When you go into the court, there are benches on which you sit or chairs of some kind and then there's a space and usually there's some kind of a railing or some kind of thing to separate you, and then there's the judge's seat. And usually the judge is the last person to enter the court. And when he comes in, there is a certain amount of ceremony and people are required to stand up.

Now, suppose you went in to that court one day and you sat there and you were waiting for the case to begin and the judge to come in and suddenly you said, "Why shouldn't I be the judge of this court today?" So you got up out of your seat and you walked right up and broke through whatever kind of partition or barricade there was and you sat down in the judge's seat. You know well what would happen to you. You'd be a breaker of the law. You'd come under judgment yourself. You'd be evicted and probably charged and maybe put in prison. Why? Because you're taking the position of a judge which is not yours by legal right and that's why James says when you judge your fellow believer you're no longer keeping the law, you're breaking the law. It's the law who determines who will be a judge and if you make yourself a judge contrary to the law, you're breaking the law. I believe that's one of the commonest mistakes amongst Christians. We abrogate to ourselves the right to judge one another when God hasn't given us that right and consequently we fail in our covenant commitments to be loyal to one another.

So I beseech you today, as I close this message, guard your tongue. Don't stab your fellow believers in the back. Don't be a slanderer, a tale-bearer, or a judge when God hasn't made you a judge.

All right. My time is up. I've been dealing today with some solemn and serious subjects. I pray that my words may help you to maintain conduct that is worthy of your covenant relationship with God and with your fellow believers. I'll be back with you again next week at the same time, Monday through Friday.

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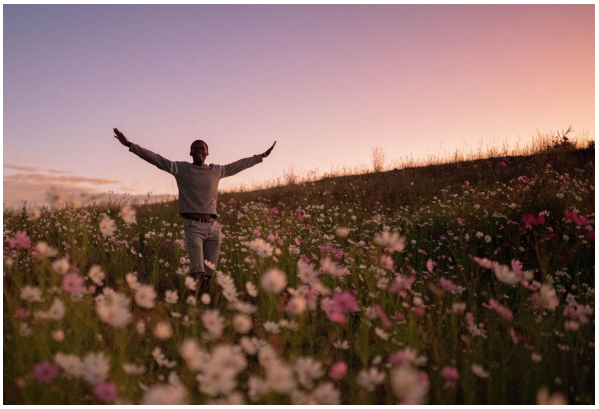

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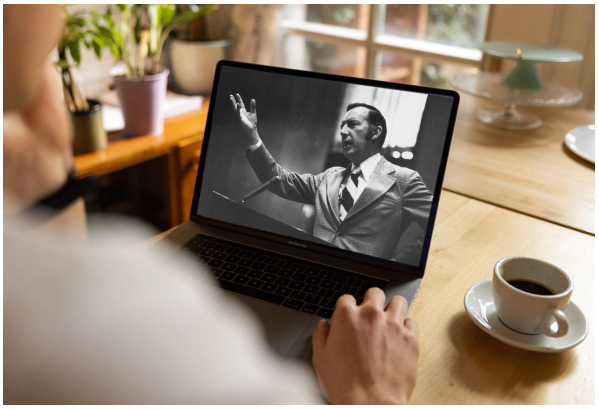

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