

THOUGHTS ON COVENANT IN TEAM RELATIONSHIPS.

Covenant is a big theme with God and His relationship with man is on that basis. The Bible teaches that many relationships have a covenantal nature to them. The most obvious is the covenant of marriage in which a man and a woman most nearly reflect the covenantal nature of God.

In the marriage relationship we see a picture of how God wishes to relate with man and what He will do for us if we will relate to Him faithfully on that basis.

It also shows us how seriously God regards such a relationship. This covenant is indissoluble. The marriage bond between a man and a woman which is a shadow or type of that relationship should never be broken. According to Malachi 2:14-16 she is a wife by covenant and God hates divorce. It is treachery even to think of any alternative. There is no way out, only a way through, which we must find by the grace of God.

To understand more of how God wants men to relate in leadership and in ministry together, we need to look at the covenant between Jonathan and David.

In 1 Sam.18:1-4; 20:14-17,42, we read a number of things that established the covenant between them:-

- 1) They were knitted in heart to one another.
- 2) They became vulnerable to one another as they laid themselves bare before each other and were now capable of doing much harm to one another.
- 3) They made a definite pact by ceremony to one another.
- 4) Once formed this covenant had precedence over natural family relationships.
- 5) In this particular case, because of the way it was expressed, this covenant not only bound the men making the covenant but also their descendants. This was not true of all covenants and cannot be applied as a general rule.
- 6) The penalty imposed on covenant breakers was very severe. As a result, they were not entered into lightly or broken easily.

In my opinion whenever men come together on a leadership team in a Local Church or on an Apostolic Team, the fact that they accept the position automatically brings them into a covenant relationship with the other men, whether such a covenant relationship is formally spelt out between them or not.

Everything God builds is built as a spiritual house with someone appointed as the head of that house and every house is a part of another greater house over which Jesus presides as the Head over all things to the church. The Bible says that every house is built by someone (Heb 4:1-6) and God gives the house and that headship to whomever He chooses. Once given it cannot be revoked

by man but only by God. Every church and ministry established by God is such a house and we labor in vain if God is not building it (Pss.127:1-4). If we come into that church or ministry to work in any way we need to remember that we come into another man's house and we must serve him as the head whom God has appointed. We cannot use his house to further own ends or ministry.

No other covenant between men has the same total insolubility as the marriage bond but any covenant must be seen as permanent until God dissolves it. It must be seen as lasting as long as the Lord chooses to hold these men together to fulfill His specific purpose.

Once that purpose has been accomplished then they may be released for whatever new work the Lord has for them to do. But this must be done in a proper way.

A man must be released by the ones with whom he is currently in covenant and they must agree that it is the Lord who is leading him on. In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas already knew the work to which God was now calling them but it was also necessary for God to speak to the rest of the team to release these two men, which He did, presumably through prophecy. Once they had also heard from God they were able to release the first two missionaries with faith and joy, certain that it was the will of God for them to go.

Once a man has moved to some new task he will need to become joined to those with whom he is now working. As a result it is usually not possible to remain joined in the same way to those with whom he previously worked. While the old affections may remain, the old covenant ties must be released to allow the new covenant relationships to be formed.

Because of the covenant nature of these relationships, the way in which a new man joins a team is also important. It could in one careless moment wreck the careful work of God over many years. David made this tragic mistake with Joab and we need to be warned. Later, David, having learned his lesson, was much more careful. In 1Chr 12:17 he sets out some important principals that we need to heed. As men started to flock to this new popular movement he asked three basic questions regarding their attitude to him and to those already in leadership namely:-

- 1) Do you come peaceably?
- 2) Have you come to help me?
- 3) Will you join your heart to my heart?
- 4) He also gives a clear warning " if you betray me to my enemies, since there is no wrong (violence) in my hands, may God look and bring judgment".

1) The emphasis of the word "peacemaker" in Hebrew and in Greek, is to mend and strengthen relationships. So the question David is asking is "will you come with an attitude to strengthen the relationships between us. Because if you have come to cause turbulence or division in our relationships, we don't want you however gifted you are".

2) The second question focuses on the important issue of singleness of vision. For a team to work harmoniously, it needs to be working to a common vision and it is the particular responsibility of the leader to see and spell out that vision. The other team members can contribute to that vision but they cannot go off at a tangent to try to work out something of their own. They must see themselves as coming to help the leader to fulfill his vision.

If a man already has a distinctly separate vision, he cannot join the team and then try to impose it on the leader or the team. If his vision is that important to him, it's better for him to remain separate so he is free to work out his vision on his own.

Perhaps the most difficult situation of all is when a man develops a distinctly different vision after he has joined the team and feels compelled to go free to fulfill it.

Then the same basic rules outlined above should still apply. He needs to hear from God that this is the time and the right way to go out and do it. It would also be necessary for others to hear and agree that this is the will of God. A man who understands covenant and is in right relationship with his brothers would not want to go out without the security of being sent out by them in joy and faith.

This will still require a great deal of care and integrity if it is to be accomplished successfully.

In my opinion, after having seen this happen a few times, it is imperative to go to a totally new situation well away from the previous location and start on truly virgin ground so that people from the previous location are not attracted to the new work. If God is in it He will cause it to prosper and the man going out should have the faith to be able to start from nothing.

3) David's emphasis on a joining of heart teaches us that in the kingdom of God men are to be relationally joined not simply organizationally joined. They cannot just be employees or "staff members" but we must have fellowship or "koinania". Paul speaks continually of his "fellow-workers", his "fellow-soldiers", his "fellow labourers" etc. Koinania means "to be joined together in a common life or joined together in a common purpose".

Ecclesiastes 4 :9-12, teach the value of a covenant partnership. It applies first of all to marriage but also clearly applies to men in covenant. In the days of hightened conflict that lie ahead it will be very unwise to be alone and the close fellowship of covenant brothers will be the only thing that will keep us at times.

4) If a man was to be part of a team and speak negatively concerning the leader or the team, he would be doing what David described as betraying his covenant brother to his enemies (i.e. Satan the accuser of the brethren). Loving, loyal confrontation in private according to Matt.18:15-17 is not sin but part of real relationships, providing our motive is to gain our brother.

Obviously any leader is going to make mistakes, but if he is honest about them and deals scripturally with them, then as far as God is concerned there is no wrong in him and God will

defend His servant and judge those who speak and act against him.

In the light of all this, joining a team should not be taken lightly. There would need to be a "getting to know you" period during which the style of our relationship should be clearly spelt out.

Provision needs to be made for a man who maybe being called of God to join the team to investigate that call without immediate commitment on either side. He could be invited to attend all or part of a team meeting but may be asked to leave if a particularly sensitive matter is being discussed.

It would not be appropriate for the team leader or any other team member to unilaterally invite a new potential member to join the team without their approval. He needs to be compatible with the whole team and they must be consulted and agree to the addition.

On the other hand there must not be an attitude of exclusivity and the whole team must be open, welcoming and ready to receive anyone the Lord is genuinely sending to strengthen them.

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