

LIVING BY FAITH TODAY: A SOLDIER'S COVENANT

BELIEVING, BEHAVING, BECOMING AND BELONGING

This series of articles by members of the International Theological Council will focus upon the Soldier's Covenant. Building on the series 'Doctrine for Today', a consideration of the eleven articles of faith (*The Officer*, 2014-2015), it will discuss the clauses of the articles of war, looking at our behaviour, lifestyle and relationship with the Army. The series will explore the interaction between right belief (orthodoxy – what we know and understand about God), right behaviour (orthopraxy – how we should act in obedience to God) and right affection (orthopathy – who we become through our relationship with God), and will show how these are woven together in Salvation Army soldiership.

Having accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and desiring to fulfil my membership of his Church on earth as a soldier of The Salvation Army, I now by God's grace enter into a sacred covenant ...

Therefore ...

***I will** be responsive to the Holy Spirit's work and obedient to his leading in my life, growing in grace through worship, prayer, service and the reading of the Bible.*

***I will** make the values of the Kingdom of God and not the values of the world the standard for my life.*

***I will** uphold Christian integrity in every area of my life, allowing nothing in thought, word or deed that is unworthy, unclean, untrue, profane, dishonest or immoral.*

***I will** maintain Christian ideals in all my relationships with others: my family and neighbours, my colleagues and fellow Salvationists, those to whom and for whom I am responsible, and the wider community.*

***I will** uphold the sanctity of marriage and of family life.*

***I will** be a faithful steward of my time and gifts, my money and possessions, my body, my mind and my spirit, knowing that I am accountable to God.*

***I will** abstain from alcoholic drink, tobacco, the non-medical use of addictive drugs, gambling, pornography, the occult, and all else that could enslave the body or spirit.*

***I will** be faithful to the purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, endeavouring to win others to him, and in his name caring for the needy and the disadvantaged.*

I will be actively involved, as I am able, in the life, work, worship and witness of the corps, giving as large a proportion of my income as possible to support its ministries and the worldwide work of the Army.

I will be true to the principles and practices of The Salvation Army, loyal to its leaders, and I will show the spirit of Salvationism whether in times of popularity or persecution.

I now call upon all present to witness that I enter into this covenant and sign these articles of war of my own free will, convinced that the love of Christ, who died and now lives to save me, requires from me this devotion of my life to his service for the salvation of the whole world; and therefore do here declare my full determination, by God's help, to be a true soldier of The Salvation Army.

IT TOOK a few seconds for us to recognise the name of the patient when the hospital social worker telephoned to ask if we would visit a man who said that he belonged to The Salvation Army. Then we realised that this was Bill, a man who came to the community centre every morning for a bacon roll and a cup of tea. He never stayed very long, he never came to a meeting, he didn't show any interest in faith at all, but he had told the hospital that he 'belonged' because five days each week he bought his breakfast at the Army. He had no formal relationship with the corps, but he did *belong* to that extended group of people who would see themselves as somehow a part of our community, linked to our church.

The relationship between 'believing', 'behaving', 'becoming' and 'belonging' has been explored extensively in the Church in recent years. Often the questions have centred around the order in which these actions should or must happen, and whether some are more important than others. Do people need to believe before they can belong, or can belonging come before believing? What is the relationship between behaving and believing? How do behaving and becoming influence each other?

I believe the reality is complex and fluid. These are not items that can be placed in a predetermined order, with the opportunity to move to the next stage once the current one is completed satisfactorily. Believing cannot be seen in isolation from behaving and becoming. N.T. Wright (*Simply Christian: When Christianity Makes Sense*, Zondervan, 2006, 177) describes belief as 'a matter of Someone calling to you with a voice you dimly recognise, calling with a message that is simultaneously an invitation of love and a summons to obedience'. We cannot respond to this voice in isolation from the rest of our lives. Faith is not merely intellectual assent; it changes what we do, who we are and who we become. Faith must be *lived*, and as we live in faith our experience of God grows and develops. So when we believe we discover a new life that is marked by belonging to Jesus.

Believing, behaving, becoming and belonging will interact in our lives and function at different levels according to the development of our faith. Changes in one area will affect the others. For example, if people experience acceptance and love in the Christian community they may begin to explore what it means to be a Christian, or as we gain new understanding of what and why we believe we may find ourselves changing our behaviour. As our relationship with Christ develops, it may lead to a desire to belong, to make a formal declaration of our relationship with him.

The articles of war, also known as 'A Soldier's Covenant', weave together belonging, believing, behaving and becoming, but not as four 'boxes' to be ticked, but rather as an expression of personal commitment to God through The Salvation Army. The final declaration makes clear the intention:

I now call upon all present to witness that I enter into this covenant and sign these articles of war of my own free will, convinced that the love of Christ, who died and now lives to save me, requires from me this devotion of my life to his service for the salvation of the whole world; and therefore do here declare my full determination, by God's help, to be a true soldier of The Salvation Army.

Becoming a soldier in The Salvation Army is an act of obedience to a call. We declare our belief, we promise to behave in certain ways, and through our devotion to God, we continue the process of becoming his children (John 1:12), 'being transformed into his image' (2 Corinthians 3:18). As we work out our belonging to God's Church on earth through soldiery we are committed to a journey of faith. This should lead to a new depth of understanding of what we believe, periodic examination of our behaviour and lifestyle measured against the promises we have made, and a commitment to becoming more like Christ as we mature in our faith.

The promises of the articles of war are described as a 'sacred covenant'. This shows that soldiery is more than merely being added to the 'soldiers' roll' and more than being part of Salvation Army activities and service. It is an integral part of our relationship with God. With this covenant we enter into an agreement that flows from the invitation to love and summons us to obedient living. We make our vows before God, and promise our devotion to him and our service as a soldier of The Salvation Army.

Bill did belong to the community that he knew to be The Salvation Army, but his belonging was not the same as that of soldiers whose belonging was a formal outcome of their deep-seated faith in Christ. He was one of many people who find acceptance within the Army fellowship, but have not yet explored the riches a relationship with Jesus Christ can bring.

As we look into the Soldier's Covenant, we do so believing that it is a pledge of our commitment, a living expression of the reality of the faith of our people, a sign of dedication to action and a mark of belonging to God.

For reflection:

- The articles of war are also known as 'A Soldier's Covenant' and these names are used interchangeably in this article. Which is the most significant for you? Why is this?
- How can we ensure that, as soldiers, we continue to reflect upon and review the promises we have made?
- In your context, do you see one of the four – believing, behaving, becoming or belonging – being emphasised in soldiership so that the others are neglected or seen as less important? If so, how can this be addressed?

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