

# LETTERS TO THE ARMY

September 2007

## PASTORAL LETTERS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL TO SALVATIONISTS ACROSS THE WORLD

*This is the third in a series of Pastoral Letters from the General to every Salvationist across the world.*

*The Pastoral Letters are intended to be distributed unchanged and entire to all Salvationists and may be shared also with others interested in the sacred purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army.*

### INTRODUCTION

Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ.

This comes to all Salvationists with my strong, ongoing affection in Christ for you, and with my prayers for your effectiveness in the sacred calling that God, in his supreme wisdom, has placed upon the peoples known as Salvationists.

It has been laid upon my heart that I am to take a step of obedience under God by reaching out to you all through a Pastoral Letter written from time to time. I write therefore in order to obey the One who has created us all, and with a longing that what is written will affirm, encourage and inspire you.

The themes for these occasional Pastoral Letters continue to be the themes God reveals. His holy will is made known in many ways. I pledge myself to be mindful that his will is often revealed through interaction with members of the Body and not only or always in the seclusion of the place of prayer.

It is my deep hope that each Pastoral Letter will be read wherever Salvationists are to be found, whether in private or in public settings. The chosen themes may prompt discussion, prayer and – as appropriate – action.

All Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise stated.

Shaw Clifton  
General

## PASTORAL LETTER THREE

### COVENANT

Dear Fellow Salvationists,

God the Father is most gracious in all his dealings with us. We have not earned, nor do we deserve, this graciousness from his divine hand, but we receive it with joy and gladness, with humility and gratitude. Like you, I have endless reason to give thanks for the Heavenly Father's patience and love toward me. This is wonderful grace!

One constant, consistent way in which the Father shows his love and grace is his ongoing willingness to let each of us become involved in his divine work in the world. He chooses to make us his co-workers, if we are willing. He is not obliged to do this. He wants to do it, and therefore he does it. He holds out to us the opportunity to join him in the work of salvation for the world, the work of sanctifying grace offered to all. How gracious is the Father!

How then does he do this? One of the main ways he chooses is the way of covenant. He reveals to us repeatedly in Scripture his readiness to enter into sacred covenant with us. How gracious he is!

We note that the Father's covenanting nature is reflected even in the titles we have for the writings of the holy Bible: the Old Covenant (Testament) and the New Covenant (Testament). A covenant is more than a simple promise, more than a legal contract. It is a sacred and solemn thing involving our Heavenly Father. Through sacred covenant we bind ourselves to him with deep seriousness of intention.

Search the pages of the Old Covenant scriptures to find God the Father making covenant with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David. The list goes on. He makes covenant with the entire Israelite people and, even when they break it, he still takes it seriously and offers them restoration. He does this with us as well. How gracious the Father is!

Dear Fellow Salvationists, in the Army we make many sacred covenants. Just think about it for a moment or two.

As little children many of us have stood under the Army flag to make our Junior Soldier's Covenant (Promise; Pledge) and we say in front of our family and our Christian friends that we will, 'by God's help, lead a life that is clean in thought and word and deed'. What a marvellous, simple holiness covenant this is! God takes it seriously all our life long.

Then of course we have the Soldier's Covenant for adults wishing to become senior soldiers. We state publicly and in writing that we hold to the Army's 11 Articles of Faith, going on to covenant about the lifestyle we will follow with the help of God. We covenant to be disciplined believers, foregoing attractive but harmful things of many kinds, and we covenant about our willingness to follow Christ's teaching and example in our personal relationships. God takes all of it seriously. He provides real, daily grace to help us keep to the covenant.

Some of us enter also into the covenant for officers of The Salvation Army, stating in sacred moments that we will make the winning of souls for Christ the first purpose of our lives and will do so all our days. We carry over into this solemn, deep commitment all that has already been covenanted as junior soldiers or as senior soldiers.

As Salvationist parents many of us make sacred covenants, through the dedication of children ceremony, about how we will seek by grace to be examples to our children, and how we will raise them. These are wonderful, profound undertakings for which again real grace is available.

Many of us enter also in sacred covenant upon marriage. We call upon Father, Son and Holy Spirit, upon the Triune God, to witness our solemn vows. Heaven smiles upon our depth of honest intention and takes it all seriously. Great grace there is for every marriage.

Dear Fellow Salvationists, we are a covenanting people in the Army. As I write to you I am pleading with the Father to help me keep my sacred covenants. I am pleading also for you, that you will know that grace from above which helps us each to be faithful. Let us kneel together, you and I. Let us find our way to the mercy seat in our hearts, though separated by many miles, to give thanks for our gracious, covenanting Father in Heaven, and to receive from his generous, gracious hand all that we need to help us press on until he calls us home.

May the Lord bless you and keep you!

Shaw Clifton  
General  
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