

ARE YOU PARTY TO THIS CONTRACT?

⇒INTRODUCTION⇐

The churches are often drawn into political affairs. One recent issue has been their conflict with the government over Sunday trading. A number of leading professional churchmen encouraged Christians to oppose Sunday trading on religious grounds. But does the Bible really support them? The church is divided on the matter of the ordination of women. Each side is convinced that God supports their view. Is there perhaps some more fundamental issue which has the potential to clarify this matter? I believe that these and many other issues are generally misunderstood by Christians today because certain fundamental ideas about Christianity are missing in modern Christian teaching.

When Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples in the upper room on the night of his arrest celebrating the Passover, he did and said something that he had not done before and would not repeat. In the New English Bible from Matthew's gospel we read: "During supper Jesus took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples with the words: 'Take this and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them with the words: 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"

What was this covenant? What did Jesus mean by it? The word itself is a word we rarely use today, except in legal documents, so we don't really understand it unless we are lawyers. And in any case it probably did not mean the same in Jesus's day as now. I want to use a modern word "contract" which we all understand. A contract is an agreement between two or more people. There are conditions laid down which each side of the contract has to keep to. One side may do one thing such as sell a house, the other will do something different such as buy the house. There may be conditions laid down. For example the contract by which I bought my house does not allow me to erect an external television aerial. Some contracts have signing ceremonies. Some contracts have witnesses who also sign. Some contracts are arranged by go-betweens, for example peace agreements.

The Bible tells us of a number of contracts, or covenants, and it is my belief that these contracts form an important framework for the correct understanding of Christianity. This book considers the basic framework of the contracts and draws conclusions about the teaching of Christianity based on them. In doing this it looks both at implications for the individual Christian and implications for the Christian community or church. The teaching of Christ and the apostles as found in the New Testament is taken as the basis for the study and the only safe authority for Christianity.