

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE COVENANT.

A Sermon

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"He will ever be mindful of his covenant."—Psalm cxi. 5.*

It is a wonderful thing that God should enter into gracious covenant with men. That he should make man, and be gracious to man, is easily to be conceived; but that he should strike hands with his creature, and put his august majesty under bond to him by his own promise, is marvellous. Once let me know that God has made a covenant, and I do not think it wonderful that he should be mindful of it, for he is "God that cannot lie." "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?" Hath he once given his pledge? It is inconceivable that he should ever depart from it. The doctrine of the text commends itself to every reasonable and thoughtful man: if God has made a covenant, he will ever be faithful of it. It is to that point that I would now call your attention with the desire to use it practically.

For God to make a gracious covenant with us is so great a boon that I hope every one here is saying within his heart, "Oh, that the Lord had entered into covenant with me!"

We shall practically look into this matter, first, *by answering the question, What is this covenant?* Secondly, *by putting the enquiry, Have I any portion in it?* And, thirdly, by bidding each one say, "If indeed I am in covenant with God, then every part of that covenant will be carried out, for God is ever mindful of it."

I. First, then, **WHAT IS THIS COVENANT?**

* Another Sermon by C. H. Spurgeon, upon the same text, is No. 2,681 in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, "Covenant Blessings."

If you go to a lawyer, and enquire how a deed runs, he may reply, "I can give you an abstract, but I had better read it to you." He can tell you the sum and substance of it; but if you want to be very accurate, and it is a very important business, you will say, "I should like to hear it read." We will now read certain passages of Scripture which contain the covenant of grace, or an abstract of it. Turn to Jeremiah xxxi. 31—34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Print every word of that in diamonds, for the sense is inconceivably precious. God in covenant promises to his people that, instead of writing his law upon tables of stone, he will write it on the tablets of their hearts. Instead of the law coming as a hard, crushing command, it shall be placed within them as the object of love and delight, written on the transformed nature of the beloved objects of God's choice: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;"—what a covenant privilege this is! "And I will be their God." Therefore all that there is in God shall belong to them. "And they shall be my people." They shall belong to me; I will love them as mine; I will keep them, bless them, honour them, and provide for them as my people. I will be their portion, and they shall be my portion. Note the next privilege. They shall all receive heavenly instruction upon the most vital point: "They shall all know me." There may be some things they do not know, but "they shall all know me." They shall know me as their Father; they shall know Jesus Christ as their Brother; they shall know the Holy Spirit as their Comforter. They shall have intercourse and fellowship with God. What a covenant privilege is this! Hence comes pardon, "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." What a clean sweep of sin! God will forgive and forget; the two go together. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." All gone,—all their transgression blotted out, never to be mentioned against them any more for ever. What an unutterable favour! This is the covenant of grace. I call your attention to the fact that there is no "if" in it, there is no "but" in it, there is no requirement made by it of man. It is all "I will" and "they shall." "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." It is a charter written in a

royal tone, and the majestic strain is not marred by a "perchance" or a "may be," but dwells always on "shall" and "will." These are two prerogative words of the divine majesty; and in this wondrous deed of gift, in which the Lord bestows a heaven of grace upon guilty sinners, he bestows it after the sovereignty of his own will without anything to put the gift in jeopardy, or to make the promise insecure.

Thus I have read the covenant to you in one form.

Turn over the pages a little, and you will come to a passage in Ezekiel. There we shall have the bright-eyed prophet—he who could live among the wheels and the seraphim—telling us what the covenant of grace is. In Ezekiel the eleventh chapter, nineteenth and twentieth verses, we read: "I will put a new spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them; and they shall be my people and I will be their God."

You will find another form of it further on in the thirty-sixth of Ezekiel, beginning at the twenty-fifth verse. How intently ought you to listen to this! It is a deal better than hearing any preaching of mortal man to listen to the very words of God's own covenant, a covenant which saves all those who are concerned in it. Unless you have an interest in it you are indeed unhappy. Let us read it: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. . . . And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God." This promise always comes in at the close, "I will be your God." In this form of the covenant, I call you again to witness that God demands nothing, asks no price, demands no payment, but to the people with whom he enters into covenant he makes promise after promise, all free, all unconditional, all made according to the bounty of his royal heart.

Let us just go a little into detail about this. God has made a covenant with certain people that he will do all this for them, and in each case it is of pure grace. He will take away their stony hearts: it is clear from this promise that, when he began with them, they had stony hearts. He will forgive their iniquities: when he began with them, they had many iniquities. He will give them a heart of flesh: when he began with them, they had not a heart of flesh. He will turn them to keep his statutes: when he began with them, they did not keep his statutes. They were a sinful, wilful, wicked, degenerate people, and he called to them many times to come to him, and repent, but they would not. Here he speaks like a king, and no longer pleads, but decrees. He says, I will do this and that to you, and you shall be this and that in return. Oh, blessed covenant! Oh, mighty, sovereign grace!

How came it about? Learn the doctrine of the two covenants.

The first covenant of which we will now speak was that of works, the covenant made with our first father, Adam. This is not first in purpose, but it was first revealed in time. It ran thus: you Adam, and your posterity shall live and be happy if you will keep my law. To test your obedience to me, there is a certain tree; if you let that alone, you shall live: if you touch it, you shall die, and they shall die whom you represent.

Our first covenant-head snatched greedily at the forbidden fruit, and fell: and what a fall was there, my brethren! There you, and I, and all of us, fell down, while it was proven once for all that by works of law no man can be justified; for if perfect Adam broke the law so readily, depend upon it, you and I would break any law that God has ever made. There was no hope of happiness for any of us by a covenant which contained an "if" in it. That old covenant is put away, for it has utterly failed. It brought nothing to us but a curse, and we are glad that it has waxed old, and, as far as believers are concerned, has vanished away.

Then there came the second Adam. You know his name; he is the ever-blessed Son of the Highest. This second Adam entered into covenant with God somewhat after this fashion:—The Father says, I give thee a people; they shall be thine: thou must die to redeem them, and when thou hast done this,—when for their sakes thou hast kept my law, and made it honourable, when for their sakes thou hast borne my wrath against their transgressions,—then I will bless them; they shall be my people; I will forgive their iniquities; I will change their natures; I will sanctify them, and make them perfect. There was an apparent "if" in this covenant at the first. That "if" hinged upon the question whether the Lord Jesus would obey the law, and pay the ransom; a question which his faithfulness placed beyond doubt. There is no "if" in it now. When Jesus bowed his head, and said, "It is finished," there remained no "if" in the covenant. It stands, therefore, now as a covenant entirely of one side,—a covenant of promises, of promises which must be kept, because the other portion of the covenant having been fulfilled, the Father's side of it must stand. He cannot, and he will not, draw back from the doing of that which he covenanted with Christ to do. The Lord Jesus shall receive the joy which was set before him. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." By his knowledge shall the Christ who became God's righteous Servant justify many, for hath he not borne their iniquities? How can it be otherwise than that they should be accepted for whom he was the Surety? Do you see why it is that the covenant, as I have read it, stands so absolutely without "ifs", "buts", and "peradventures", and runs only on "shalls" and "wills"? It is because the one side of it that did look uncertain was committed into the hand of Christ, who cannot fail or be discouraged. He has completed his part of it, and now it stands fast, and must stand fast for ever and ever. This is now a covenant of pure grace, and nothing else but grace: let no

man attempt to mix up works with it, or anything of human merit. God saves now because he chooses to save, and over the head of us all there comes a sound as of a martial trumpet, and yet with a deep, inner peaceful music in it: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." God observes us all lost and ruined, and in his infinite mercy comes with absolute promises of grace to those whom he hath given to his Son Jesus.

So much, then, with regard to the covenant.

II. Now comes the important question, "HAVE I ANY PORTION IN IT?" May the Holy Ghost help us to ascertain the truth on this point! You who are really anxious in your hearts to know, I would earnestly persuade to read the Epistle to the Galatians. Read that Epistle through if you want to know whether you have any part or lot in the covenant of grace. Did Christ fulfil the law for me? Are the promises of God, absolute and unconditional, made to me? You can know by answering three questions.

First, *Are you in Christ?* Did you not notice that I said that we were all in Adam, and in Adam we all fell? Now, "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Are you in the second Adam? You certainly were in the first one, for so you fell. Are you in the second? Because, if you are in him, you are saved in him. He has kept the law for you. The covenant of grace made with him was made with you if you are in him; for, as surely as Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchisedek met him, so were all believers in the loins of Christ when he died upon the cross. If you are in Christ, you are a part and parcel of the seed to whom the promise was made; but there is only one seed, and the apostle tells us, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." If, then, you are in Christ, you are in the seed, and the covenant of grace was made with you.

I must ask you another question, *Have you faith?* By this question you will be helped to answer the previous one, for believers are in Christ. In the Epistle to the Galatians, you will find that the mark of those who are in Christ is that they believe in Christ. The mark of all that are saved is not confidence in works, but faith in Christ. In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul insists upon it, "The just shall live by faith," and the law is not of faith. Over and over again he puts it so. Come, then, do you believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart? Is he your sole hope for heaven? Do you lean your whole weight, the entire stress of your salvation, on Jesus? Then you are in him, and the covenant is yours; and there is not a blessing which God hath decreed to give but what he will give to you. There is not a boon which, out of the grandeur of his heart, he has determined to bestow upon his elect, but what he will bestow it upon you. You have the mark, the seal, the badge of his chosen if you believe in Christ Jesus.

Another question should help you; it is this, *Have you been born*

again? I refer you again to the Epistle to the Galatians, which I would like every anxious person to read through very carefully. There you will see that Abraham had two sons: one of them was born according to the flesh; he was Ishmael, the child of the bondwoman. Though he was the firstborn son, he was not the heir, for Sarah said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." He who was born after the flesh did not inherit the covenant promise. Is your hope of heaven fixed on the fact that you had a good mother and father? Then your hope is born after the flesh, and you are not in the covenant. I am constantly hearing it said that children of godly parents do not want converting. Let me denounce that wicked falsehood. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and nothing better. They that are born after the flesh, these are not the children of God. Do not trust in gracious descent, or in holy ancestors. Ye must be born again, every one of you, or you will perish for ever, whoever your parents may be. Abraham had another son, even Isaac: he was not born of the strength of his father, nor after the flesh at all, for we are told that both Abraham and Sarah had become old; but Isaac was born by God's power, according to promise. He was the child given by grace. Now, have you ever been born like that,—not by human strength, but by power divine? Is the life that is in you a life given by God? The true life is not of the will of man, nor of blood, nor of natural excellence; but it comes by the working of the eternal Spirit, and is of God. If you have this life, you are in the covenant, for it is written, "in Isaac shall thy seed be called." The children of the promise, these are counted for the seed. God said to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," and that was because he meant to justify the Gentiles by faith, that the blessing given to believing Abraham might come on all believers. Abraham is the father of the faithful, or the father of all them that believe in God, and with such is the covenant established.

Here, then, are the test questions:—Am I in Christ? Am I believing in Jesus? Am I born by the power of the Spirit of God according to the promise, and not by the fleshly birth, or according to works? Then I am in the covenant; my name stands in the eternal record. Before the stars began to shine the Lord had covenanted to bless me. Or ever evening and morning made the first day, my name was in his book. Christ before the world's foundation struck hands with the Father in the council chamber of eternity, and pledged himself to redeem me, and to bring me and multitudes of others into his eternal glory; and he will do it, too, for he never breaks his suretyship engagements any more than the Father breaks his covenant engagements. I want you to get quite sure upon these points, for, oh, what peace it will breed in your soul, what a restfulness of heart to understand the covenant, and to know that your name is in it!

III. This is our last point. If indeed we can believe, upon the

good evidence of God's Word, that we are of the seed with whom the covenant was made in Christ Jesus, then EVERY BLESSING OF THE COVENANT WILL COME TO US. I will put it a little more personally,—every blessing of the covenant will come to you.

The devil says, "No, it won't." Why not, Satan? "Why," saith he, "you are not able to do this or that." Refer the devil to the text; tell him to read those passages which I read to you, and ask him if he can spy an "if" or a "but"; for I cannot. "Oh!" says he, "but, but, but, but, but you cannot do enough, you cannot feel enough." Does it say anything about feeling there? It only says, "I will give them a heart of flesh." They will feel enough then. "Oh, but!" the devil says, "you cannot soften your hard heart." Does it say that you are to do so? Does it not say "*I will take the stony heart out of their flesh*"? The tenor of it is,—I will do it; I will do it. The devil dares not say that God cannot do it; he knows that God can enable us to tread him under our feet. "Oh, but!" says he, "you will never hold on your way if you begin to be a Christian." Does it say anything about that in the covenant further than this, "they shall walk in my statutes"? What if we have not power in and of ourselves to continue in God's statutes; yet he has power to make us continue in them. He can work in us obedience and final perseverance in holiness; his covenant virtually promises these blessings to us. To come back to what we said before; God does not ask of us, but he gives to us. He sees us dead, and he loves us even when we are dead in trespasses and sins. He sees us feeble, and unable to help ourselves; and he comes in, and works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure, and then we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. The bottom of it, the very foundation of it, is himself; and he finds nothing in us to help him. There is neither fire nor wood in us, much less the lamb for the burnt offering, but all is emptiness and condemnation. He comes in with "I will," and "you shall," like a royal helper affording free aid to destitute, helpless, sinners, according to the riches of his grace. Now be sure that, having made such a covenant as this, God will ever be mindful of it.

He will do so, first, *because he cannot lie*. If he says he will, he will. His very name is "God that cannot lie." If I am in Christ, I must be saved: none can prevent it. If I am a believer in Christ, I must be saved; all the devils in hell cannot stop it, for God has said, "He that believeth in him is not condemned." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." God's word is not yea and nay. He knew what he said when he spake the covenant, and he has never changed it, nor contradicted it. If, then, I am a believer, I must be saved, for I am in Christ to whom the promise is made; if I have the new life in me, I must be saved, for is not this spiritual life the living and incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever? Did not Jesus say, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"? I have drunk the water Christ gave me, and it must spring

up into everlasting life. It is not possible for death to kill the life that God has given me, nor for all the fallen spirits to tread out the divine fire which Christ's own Spirit has cast into my bosom. I must be saved, for God cannot deny himself.

Next, *God made the covenant freely*. If he had not meant to keep it, he would not have made it. When a man is driven up into a corner by someone who says, "Now you must pay me," then he is apt to promise more than he can perform. He solemnly declares, "I will pay you this day fortnight." Poor fellow, he has no money now, and will not have any then, but he makes a promise because he cannot help himself. No such necessity can be imagined with our God. The Lord was under no compulsion: he might have left men to perish because of sin; there was no one to prompt him to make the covenant of grace, or even to suggest the idea. "With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him?" He made the covenant of his own royal will, and having made it, rest you sure that he will never run back from it. A covenant so freely made must be fully carried out.

Moreover, *on the covenant document there is a seal*. Did you see the seal? The grand thing in a deed of gift is the signature or seal. What is this,—this red splash at the bottom of it? It is blood! Yes; it is blood. Whose blood? It is the blood of the Son of God. This has ratified and sealed the covenant. Jesus died. Jesus' death has made the covenant sure. Can God forget the blood of his dear Son, or do despite to his sacrifice? Impossible. All for whom he died as a covenant Substitute he will save. His redeemed shall not be left in captivity, as if the ransom price had effected nothing. Hath he not said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"? That covenant stands secure, though earth's old columns bow, for despite to the blood can never be possible on the part of the Father.

Again, *God delights in the covenant*, and so we are sure he will not run back from it. It is the very joy of his holy heart. He delights to do his people good. To pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin is the recreation of Jehovah. Did you ever hear of God singing? It is singular that the Divine One should solace himself with song; but yet a prophet has thus revealed the Lord to us, "He will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing." The covenant is the heart of God written out in the blood of Jesus; and since the whole nature of God runs parallel with the tenor of the everlasting covenant, you may rest assured that even its jots and its tittles stand secure.

And then, last of all, O thou who art in the covenant, thou dar'st not doubt but that God will save thee, keep thee, bless thee, seeing thou hast believed on Jesus, and art in Jesus, and art quickened into newness of life! Thou dar'st not doubt if I tell thee one thing more: if your father, if your brother, if your dearest friend had solemnly stated a fact, would you bear for anybody to say that he lied? I know you would be indignant at such a charge; but suppose your

father in the most solemn manner had taken an oath, would you for a minute think that he had perjured himself, and had sworn a lie? Now turn to the Word of God, and you will find that *God, because he knew that an oath among men is the end of strife, has been pleased to seal the covenant with an oath.* "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." God has lifted his hand to heaven, and sworn that Christ shall have the reward of his passion, that his purchased ones shall be brought under his sway, that having borne sin, and put it away, it never shall be a second time charged on his redeemed.

There is all of it. Dost thou believe in Christ? Then God will work in thee to will and do of his good pleasure; God will conquer thy sin; God will sanctify thee; God will save thee; God will keep thee; God will bring thee to himself at last. Rest thou on that covenant, and then, moved by intense gratitude, go forward to serve thy Lord with all thy heart, and soul, and strength. Being saved, live to praise him. Work not that you may be saved, but because you are saved,—the covenant has secured your safety. Delivered from the servile fear which an Ishmael might have known, live the joyous life of an Isaac; and moved by love of the Father, spend and be spent for his sake. If the selfish hope of winning heaven by works has moved some men to great sacrifices, much more shall the godly motive of gratitude to him who has done all this for us move us to the noblest service, and make us feel that it is no sacrifice at all. "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." If you are saved under the covenant of grace, the mark of the covenanted ones is upon you, and the sacred character of the covenanted ones should be displayed in you. Bless and magnify your covenant God. Take the cup of the covenant, and call upon his name. Plead the promises of the covenant, and have whatsoever you need. Amen.
