

Five Sacramental Sermons

Sermon II

A Preparation-Sermon Before The Lord's Supper—The Happiness of Being in Covenant with God.

John Willison

John Willison was born in the year 1680, in the neighborhood of Stirling, Scotland. Not much is known about his personal and private life, but soon after he completed his academic career, he received a unanimous call to serve as pastor from a parish in Brechin in 1703. About the year 1718 he was transferred to Dundee where he remained for the remainder of his life, serving a large congregation. He served as a faithful minister of the gospel for 47 years until his death on the 3rd of May, 1756. John Willison was a man of great piety and a staunch defender of the faith. We are indeed fortunate to have extant copies of his sermons and his polemical works, from which the above sermon is derived.

Happy is that people whose God is the Lord. — Psal. cxliv. 15.

THERE is nothing in the world that is so much talked of, and less understood, than the business of a happy life. All the world is in quest of happiness, some expecting to find it in this, and some in the other thing. The worldling looks for it in riches, the philosopher in knowledge, the ambitious man in honours, and the voluptuous man in pleasures. But how miserably are they mistaken! they seek happiness from the wrong source; from things that can never suit the wants, nor satisfy the vast desires of the immortal soul. True Christians are the only wise men in the world, for they seek happiness where indeed it is to be found, viz. in the enjoyment of God, who is the centre of bliss. And they who attain to this, must surely be the happy men, for the Spirit of God declares them so in my text: "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

In this psalm, the royal psalmist doth bless and magnify the Lord for the signal favours and mercies he had received from him; and from his former gracious experiences, he is encouraged to address God for future mercies, both to himself and his kingdom: particularly, he prays for deliverance from public enemies, and the manifold calamities of war; for the establishing of peace and tranquillity, and for the prosperity of the nation; for the flourishing of their families and children, and for the increase of their flocks and cattle; and, in a word, that his people might abound in peace and plenty. Then he pauses, and makes a reflection upon the nation's prosperous circumstances, which he had prayed for: "Happy is the people that is in such a case;" happy they, who have such temporal prosperity and abundance, who have no want in their families, nor complaining

in their streets. This is the judgment of the flesh, and the opinion of most men. But the psalmist presently corrects himself and retracts his former judgment, and prefers the judgment of faith to that of sense: yea, rather, "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord." As if he said, "The former estate is indeed very desirable for a nation or people; but Israel or the people of God, their true happiness doth not consist in these things that are common to others with them; but only in this peculiar privilege, that the great Jehovah, who is the Lord of heaven and earth, is their God by covenant and special relation. That this God is their God, and they have a special interest in his love and favour, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace. Whatever portion such have in the world's good things, surely they are happy; and let others have what they will if they want this covenant-relation, they are certainly unhappy and miserable; which they can never be that have it, want what they will; seeing they have an interest in God as theirs, makes up the want of all other things; for the blessedness and happiness is included here. "Blessed and happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

Doctrine. That it is the greatest happiness we can possibly attain unto, to be in covenant with God, and to have God for our God.

David was still of this opinion through the whole course of his life, Psal. xvi. 5, 6; xxiii. 1, 2. And he sees no cause to alter it at his death; for, among his last words, he declares that this sweet covenant-religion was "all his salvation, and all his desire," 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

The method I purpose for handling this subject shall be,

- I. To inquire when it may be said that a person or people are in covenant with God, and have a special interest in him as theirs.
- II. What is imported in this great privilege, to have God for our God.
- III. How this privilege appears to be the top of our happiness.
- IV. Make improvement of the whole.

I begin with the *first*, When it may be said that a person or people are in covenant with God, &c.

And for clearing this point the more, I shalt *first*, consider it negatively, and show what it is not; and, *secondly*, positively, wherein it really consists.

1. Negatively, To stand in a covenant-relationship to God is not to be understood here,

(1.) Of our being under the bond and engagement of the covenant of works. Though it is most certain that all Adam's posterity, by virtue hereof, are engaged to God, to perform perfect obedience and fulfil the whole law; yea, and by breaking it, are obliged to pay the penalty thereof, bear God's curse, undergo death, and satisfy God's infinite justice; and so all of us are naturally in covenant with God in this respect. But O! we have no happiness, no comfort, by being so; seeing we have broken the covenant of works, and

incurred the penalty thereof; for though we still stand under engagements to God by it, yet he is loosed from all obligations to us, to make us happy: yea, by our breaking it, he is under engagement to destroy us. O! we cannot, by this covenant, plead any interest in God as our God, or Father: no, we can only look on him as our Lawgiver, our Judge, our Punisher, and Enemy. That is all the relation that God stands in now to us, by virtue of the covenant of works.

(2.) There is more requisite to make up this covenant-relation to God, than that blessed covenant of redemption, which God entered into from eternity with his Son, Jesus Christ, as our head and representative, for saving the elect. That glorious transaction is indeed the foundation and rise of our covenant-relation to God; but doth not formally constitute and make it up. For an elect person cannot be said to be in covenant with God from eternity, unless by God's appointment and designation: he is never formally in until he believe, and thereby ratify and approve what Christ did from eternity engage for him, and personally consent to take God for his God, in and through Jesus Christ the Mediator. So that you see the covenant of redemption will not save you, nor instate you in covenant with God, if ye can say no more; there must be something done in and by you, to entitle you to that covenant of redemption, and to infest and possess you of the privileges and blessings therein promised to Christ our Head; and this is only done by the subsequent ratification of that covenant and treaty, made with the elect in time by the preaching of the gospel, which is called the covenant of grace.

(3.) There is more in this covenant-relation to God which makes us happy than our being visibly and externally in covenant with God by an outward profession of Christianity, and subjection to gospel-ordinances: for thus, every church that hath the word and sacraments is in covenant with God. Hence the Lord says to the church of the Jews, Ezek. xvi. 8. "I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine." They were visibly and externally in covenant with God by their subjection to his ordinances and institutions. They all partook of the seal of his covenant, viz. circumcision: and hence, when a visible church makes defection from God; he threatens to come and "avenge the quarrel of his covenant," Lev. xxvi. 15. All the members of a visible church are federally in covenant with God by their profession of Christ, and being baptized in his name; but such an external covenant-relation to God will not make us happy: therefore, let us beware of resting on it; and let us seek earnestly to be really and internally in covenant with God.

(4.) There is more in it than being nationally in covenant with God by virtue of a solemn transaction entered into, and subscribed by, the rulers, nobles, ministers, and representatives of a land; whereby they, with consent of the whole nation, bind and engage themselves and their posterity to the Lord. This did the nation of the Jews, and so they were God's covenanted people above all other nations of the world; but yet this national covenant did not entitle them to saving blessings, or give them an interest in God as their God in a saving way: for many were in that national covenant that never came to be in a gracious state, though yet they received many special favours and deliverances upon the account of it. Some in this land have the honour of being nationally in covenant with God, which indeed is our glory, and perhaps the ground of

many national mercies and deliverances; though it is not the spring of saving mercies, nor that which entitles us to God as our God in a saving way. Many may profess to own this national covenant, that never took hold of the covenant of grace, and gave themselves to God according to the tenor thereof.

(5.) There is more in this than the drawing up the form of a personal covenant with God, professing to consent thereto, and subscribing it with the hand. For all this may be done in such a manner as will not entitle us to God as our God in a saving way. This work, though good in itself, and profitable to many; yet it may be formed by some in such an hypocritical, formal, or legal manner, as makes it an abomination to a holy God, that looks for truth in the inward parts.

But, 2. Positively, we come to be in covenant with God in a saving way, when we are taken within the bond of the covenant of grace, consent sincerely to the gracious terms of it; for it is only by virtue of our coming into this covenant that we have ground to claim this happiness of having God for our God. Now for us to come into the bond of this covenant of grace, (it) is by faith to “take hold of God’s covenant,” as it is called, Isa. lvi. 4. And this we do when we are thoroughly convinced of our sin, misery, and undone state under a covenant of works, and hence betake ourselves to the new covenant, or gracious method of salvation proposed to us in the gospel, through Jesus Christ and his righteousness; and cordially acquiesce in, and approve of, this noble contrivance, and accept of Jesus Christ as our only Mediator, Surety, and Peace-maker with God: and in him sincerely make choice of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to be our God and portion; and also give ourselves, soul and body, to be the Lord’s, engaging, in the strength of our great Surety, to abandon sin, live for God, and walk with him in newness of life, as becomes his covenanted people. Now when our souls are helped and determined by the Spirit of grace, to do all this heartily and sincerely, then we enter among that “happy people, whose God is the Lord.”

II. The second thing in the method is to inquire into the import of this great privilege, to have God for our God. “I will be your God,” is the greatest promise and substance of the covenant of grace, being the great thing stipulated on God’s part therein, Jer. xxxi. 33, and indeed it is the sum and compend of all his other promises. And imports these things:

1. Reconciliation and friendship with God. “I will be your God,” that is, I will be no longer an angry judge, but a gracious, reconciled God to you; my justice is appeased, wrath pacified, fury is not in me; I have found a ransom in Christ; he is the propitiation for your sins.

2. A near relation between God and you; yea, nearer than any relation among creatures. “I will be your God,” implies, I will be to you instead of all relations.—I will be a Father in Christ to you, adopt you for my children, take you into my family, I will pity and provide for you, I will bequeath to you a rich inheritance, you are heirs of God, and co-heirs with my eternal Son—I will be a Husband to you, “your Maker is your husband,” Isa. liv. 5. I will marry you to myself, I will love you, clothe you, enrich you, and provide

a noble dowry for you.—I will be your King. I will take you for my subjects, I will govern you, protect, and defend you from all your enemies. Yea, I will be your physician, your shepherd, your guide, and instead of all relations to you.

3. “I will be your God,” imports a right and title to God, and all that is in him; intimate communion with him, and a communication of all good things from him. Nay, there is still more in this expression than can be unfolded by words; there is more in it than, I will be father, friend, husband, benefactor, &c. to you: more in it than I will give you heaven and everlasting life, or all the blessings of heaven and earth, time and eternity: no, I will give you more, I will give you myself, a Jehovah, a whole Deity, that is, all that is in me, all I am, all I have, all I can do, is thine. O the magnificent bounty of God! for when he had no greater, no better thing to bestow on his people, he bestows himself on them.

You may say, How can this be? An infinite God, so great, so glorious, we are not capable of receiving, comprehending, or enjoying him. *Ans.* So far as you are capable to receive and enjoy him, he is yours; all that is in him is given to you for your benefit.

1. All he is personally, that is, the three persons of the glorious Trinity are yours, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.—God the Father is yours to love you, to elect you, and contrive redemption for you, John xvi. 27, “The Father himself loveth you.” —God the Son is yours to be a ransom for you, to satisfy justice for you; yours to be born for you, to live, to die for you, to rise again for you, to ascend into heaven for you, to sit at God’s right hand for you, &c. All this is plain from Isa. ix. 6, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.” And Cant. ii. 16, “My beloved is mine. — The Holy Ghost is yours, to apply this redemption to you, to change your hearts, to teach you, sanctify you, work in you, dwell in you, to conduct and guide you to glory, 1 Cor. iii. 16, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.” So you see, O believer; whatever God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is, and can do for your salvation and happiness, they are yours, and made over to you in the covenant of grace.

2. All he is essentially, his infinite essence is yours, that is, all his glorious attributes and perfections.—My mercy is yours, O believer, to pardon your sins and deliver you from guilt, to sympathize with, and comfort you in all your trials and afflictions.—My wisdom is yours to provide for you, to counsel and direct you, and to turn all things about for your good.—My omnipotence is yours, to guard and protect you from all your enemies, to support and preserve you to salvation.—My goodness is yours, to enrich you, bestow grace and glory, and all good things on you.—My omniscience is your overseer, to watch over and warn you against approaching dangers.—My holiness is your fountain of grace, to sanctify and make you holy.—My omnipresence is your companion, to attend and solace you in all places and conditions.—My justice is your rewarder, to bestow heaven on you; and also your avenger to punish those that wrong you.—My all-sufficiency is your inheritance, for giving you complete and perfect happiness. My unchangeableness is the rock of your security. My faithfulness your pledge and surety for the accomplishment of all my promises to you: and my eternity is the date of your happiness. So that, O believer, you see all God’s essential perfections are made over to thee in the covenant of grace, and therein thou hast an unsearchable treasure. In God’s

attributes there is a suitable remedy for all these maladies and miseries which sin has brought on you: his wisdom cures your ignorance, his grace your guilt, his power your weakness, his mercy your misery, his goodness your evil, his faithfulness your inconstancy, his holiness your impurity, his riches your poverty, and his fulness your wants.

Lastly, “I will be your God,” imports that all that God hath shall be made over to you, 1 Cor. iii. 21, “All things are yours.” All mine are thine. As for instance,

(1.) All my promises are yours; the promises both of this life, and that which is to come; my promises of pardon, my promises of healing, my promises of sanctification, my promises of quickening and strength, my promises of through-bearing and comfort in trouble, my promises of grace and glory; they are your inheritance.

(2.) My gifts and graces are yours, faith, love, hope, fear, humility, patience, and all the fulness that is in Christ is yours; all these graces are yours, as armour to defend you, jewels to enrich you, and cordials to refresh you while you sojourn in the wilderness.

(3.) My creatures are yours. My creatures on earth are yours to serve and sustain you; my angels in heaven are yours, to guard and encamp about you. The earth is your walking and sojourning place, the heaven your country and inheritance. In a word, O believer! My ordinances and sacraments are yours, to strengthen and feed you; my providence is yours, to make all things work for your good; my rod is yours; my people is yours; my kingdom is yours; nay, my eternal Son, Christ, is yours; all he has done and suffered, even his whole purchase is yours: both things present and to come, life and death, this world and heaven, “all are yours,” 1 Cor. iii. 22. Behold, when there was a covenant made between Jehoshaphat and the king of Israel, Jehoshaphat promised Ahab whatever he had or could do, 1 Kings xxii. 4, “I am,” says he, “as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses;” so in the covenant of grace, whatever God hath or can do, is made over to you. But what do I speak? For no created mind can conceive, nor the tongues of men and angels show forth the full import of this word, “I will be your God.”

III. The third thing proposed was, to show how this privilege of having God for our God, in covenant, appears to be the top of our happiness. And this doth evidently appear from these things.

I. From the vastness of the portion, which believers have in a covenanted God as above described. There is more comprehended here “than eye hath seen, ear hath heard, or the heart of man can conceive.” In this covenant of grace you have all that is good, all that is great, and all that can make you happy. You have covenant presence, covenant provision, covenant conduct, covenant protection, covenant support, and strength for all duties, trials, and performances in this world. And you have eternal glory covenanted to you for the world to come. Now, can any thing be so satisfying to the renewed mind, as to review this vast portion? It is pleasant for a man to view his temporal interests, to walk about his buildings, plantings, gardens, flocks, fields, &c. But what are these to this

portion of the believer? It was a ravishing prospect that Moses got of Canaan from mount Nebo. How pleasant was it to view the lovely hills, the fruitful valleys, the winding rivers, the beautiful gardens, and flourishing trees, in that incomparable land! But all that was nothing to the believer's covenanted inheritance. View the covenant, and see who can number the promises and blessings contained in it; time would fail to mention them: read the scriptures from the beginning to the end, and behold a dazzling and glorious sight! As the heavens are with stars in a winter night, so is God's word and covenant with shining promises. We may allude to that passage in God's covenanting with Abraham, Gen. xv. 5. God brought him forth abroad, and said, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: so shall thy seed be." Look, O believer, to the firmament of the covenant, and tell the stars of the promises, if thou be able to number or weigh them; so shall also the blessings and benefits be, which thou hast to inherit.

II. To be in covenant with God, must be the top of our happiness, if we consider the suitableness of the promises, and of his covenant to all our wants and exigencies. All that we stand in need of, and all we can desire, is fully provided for here. O believers, what want ye? What fear ye? What are ye troubled with? Here it may be suitably answered and remedied; Is sin and guilt your trouble? In this covenant there is pardon and redemption. Are your sins great? Here is the Redeemer's "blood that cleanseth from all sin." Are ye condemned by the law's sentence? Here is a sufficient righteousness for your justification and acquittance. Are you poor? Here is fine gold. Are you blind? Here is eye salve. Are you naked? Here is white raiment. Are you starving? Here is the manna and the fatted calf. Are you diseased? Here is the balm of Gilead. Are you chained prisoners? Here is deliverance for the captives. Are you drowned in debt? He is an all sufficient surety. Are you dead? Here is the resurrection and the life. Is pollution and filthiness your trouble? Here is a deep and open fountain that runs continually. Art though weak unable for duty? Here a covenanted grace and strength, which shall be sufficient for thee. This covenant contains all necessary and suitable supplies for thy wants; so that if God, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, your needs shall be richly supplied, according to that promise, Phil. iv. 19, "My God shall supply all your needs, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

III. This covenant-relation to God is our greatest happiness, in regard it doth take the terror out of everything that is terrible to the believer.

1. This covenant-relation removes all terror from our thoughts of God's holiness and justice. The wicked cannot think of a just and holy God without horror, and therefore, they banish the thoughts of God out of their minds; hence it is said, Psal. x. 4., "God is not in all their thoughts:" For as many thoughts as are in their hearts, God is in none of them. But believers may have pleasant and delightful thoughts of God as their reconciled Father in Christ: his holiness is a fountain of grace to them, and his justice the security of their happiness. The covenant-relation takes all terror out of justice, though the most terrible attribute of God unto a sinner, and makes it, that before was an enemy, become a friend, and enter into a strict alliance with that believer. Before it stood as a flaming sword at the door of paradise to keep them out: but now it stands as

an advocate pleading for their entrance, 1 John i. 9, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." O believer, thy happiness is certain; for justice is come over to thy side, and pleads for thy pardon, because the debt is paid, and for the crown of glory, seeing the price is laid down.

2. This covenant-relation takes all terror out of afflictions; Why? It alters the very nature of them to believers, and makes them become good and medicinal to them, Psal. cxix. 71; Isa. xxvii. 9. Yea, they are changed into covenanted mercies, Psal. lxxxix. 32; cxix. 75. Christ hath shed his blood to purchase sanctified crosses to his people. So believers, whatever trials you meet with, though they be sharp and smarting, you may make such a reflection as this, the Lord sees I want this, otherwise I should not be exercised with it: my covenanted God knows that this, and no less than this, is needful for me.

3. It takes the terror out of the alarming judgments of God, that come on the wicked and ungodly. When God rises to take vengeance on his enemies, and punish sinful nations with his desolating plagues, you may say, These are the mighty acts of my God and King: these things display my Father's power and glory: but, in the midst of all, his children are safe.

4. It will take the terror out of death: for though death strip you of other comforts, it cannot dissolve your covenant-relation to God. You may sing that swan-song, Psal. xlviii. 14, "For this God is our God for ever and ever, and he will be our guide even unto death." It is this that gives a believer peace in his latter end: it made David to triumph in the view of approaching death, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. Death must surely be the king of terrors to an unbeliever. Why? It is terrible to think, "I am going to appear before that God I do not know, I have no interest in, nor acquaintance with. How can I expect help from him now, whom I have never loved nor sought unto before?" But a covenanted soul may say, "I will not fear, for I know whither I am going, the place I know, and the way I know, and the God of that land I know. Why should I be unwilling to go to my covenanted God and friend, with whom I have had sweet converse, whose presence I have earnestly longed for? Is not death my Father's servant, sent to bring me home to my Father's house, where I will be put in full possession of all the blessings of the covenant? Surely then the day of my death will be better to me than the day of my birth."

5. This covenant-relation takes the terror out of the great judgment day. Why? O believer, it is the day of your covenanted Redeemer's coming to take you home to dwell eternally with him. Doth not a chaste wife long for the return of her husband? And will not a believing soul, betrothed to Christ, long for the glorious bridegroom's return to consummate the happy marriage? Let others tremble at his coming, and cry to the "rocks to hide them from the face of the Lamb;" but surely you have cause to "lift up your head with joy, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh."

IV. This covenant-relation to God is our greatest happiness: for it exceedingly sweetens every thing that is comfortable.

1. It sweetens the thoughts of Christ to a believer. When the word brings the news of his glory to your ears, or the sacrament sets him forth as crucified before your eyes, your hearts may presently warm to him, and cry with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" and with Paul, "It is the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me;" and with the spouse, " My beloved is mine, and I am his." All he did and suffered was for me; his bloody sweat, his painful wounds, his dying groans were for me. He thought on me when he was on the cross: my name is this day on his breast-plate: he still thinks on me and pleads for me as his covenanted spouse. "I know my Redeemer liveth; and because he lives, I shall live also." Good ground have ye to say with the psalmist, Psal. civ. 34. "My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord."

2. It will make gospel ordinances very sweet: As for instance, (1.) Prayer may be sweet to a covenanted soul. Is it not sweet to come into God's presence and call him our Father, and speak to him as such? "Father, grant me this, and the other good thing which I want." An uncovenanted soul comes before God as his judge: but O! it is comfortable to draw nigh to him as our reconciled God and Father in Christ, and with a holy confidence spread our wants before him. (2.) It will make the word sweet; a covenanted soul may read, and hear it as a love-letter come from his friend and husband, and may sweetly apply the promise of it to himself, and say, This is mine; this was God's gracious unchangeable purpose to me in Christ: and O, but that would make the word as a lovely song in our ears! (3.) It will make the Lord's supper sweet. O covenanted souls, you can come to this holy table as to a precious feast provided for you; you can come as God's friends and invited guests, and expect a kindly welcome from him: It is to you he saith, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved," Cant. v. 1. This is your Father's table covered for you; many presume thither who have no right; but you have no ground to question your right, nor doubt your welcome: a communion day may be a pleasant day to you, and you may rejoice at the intimation and approach of it, and lock on it as a fortaste of heaven, and a pledge of your eternal communion with God.

3. This covenant-relation will sweeten your thoughts of God's works, both of creation and providence. When you walk through the fields, you may say, I walk on my Father's footstool, which he hath given me to sojourn upon while I am here below. When you view the structure of the heavens, you may say, Behold my Father's palace, where he dwells, and where I will dwell with him ere long. If the floor and pavement of it be so glorious, what must its roof, walls, gates, and furniture be? Yet it is my home and dwelling place, prepared by Christ my forerunner. When you consider the dispensations of providence, and God's various dealings towards you, you may say, how great pains is he at with me to promote my welfare, and prepare me for heaven? Though dispensations be sometimes mysterious now, yet how wise and beautiful will the whole scheme of providence concerning me appear in the issue?

4. It will sweeten all your outward mercies: why? you may receive them as love-tokens from heaven, and pledges of God's fatherly good will to you in Christ. Art thou raised from a sick bed, or delivered from any trouble? you may say of it as Hezekiah did, Isa. xxxviii. 17, "Thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption." Again,

every meal of meat, or morsel of bread thou eatest, may be doubly sweet to you for it is the fruit of Christ's purchase; it is dipt in his blood, and comes through the covenant channel to thy hand; thou mayest spy covenant-love in every common mercy; thou enjoyest it not as a creature, but as an heir: thy Father sends it from his own table to thee, as an earnest of greater and better things laid up for thee hereafter. That word belongs to thee, which we have in Eccl. ix. 7, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works."

Lastly, This covenant-relation to God is our greatest happiness in regard of the sure and indissoluble nature of it, Isa. liv. 10. Mutable creatures alter their purposes, and break their leagues and covenants which they made; but God will never break his covenant of grace with his people. A covenant with a nation may be dissolved, as with the people of the Jews, because it is not built on the eternal purpose of God, to put his fear in their hearts; but it hath a respect to their obedience. But his covenant with the elect is indissoluble, seeing it depends on God's eternal purpose, to make them persevere in his ways. The covenant of grace doth not run thus, "I will be their God, if they will be my people;" but "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." He puts a condition indeed in his covenant of grace; but he has resolved and decreed from eternity, to work that condition in their hearts, Jer. xxxii. 40, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." There we see that God is on both sides in this covenant; he engages not only for his own part, but for ours, that we shall fear him, and shall not depart from him. How happy then are believers who are in covenant with God! They are a happy people; and nothing can deprive them of their happiness. Adultery may dissolve the marriage-covenant among men, but not so here; for God saith to his covenanted people, "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again unto me: Turn, ye backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you," Jer. iii. 1, 14. Again, death cannot dissolve this covenant-relation, as it doth among men; but brings us the nearer to our covenanted God; so that a covenanted soul, when he finds death begin to assault his clay-tabernacle, he may even rejoice and sing with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxiii. 26, "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." What though my eye and heart-strings be ready to break, and the lamp of my life be like a candle burned to the socket, and near the going out; yet still God is my God, and portion for ever. Thus Olevian, a dying saint, comforted himself, "My hearing is gone, my smelling is gone, and my sight is going: my speech and feeling are almost gone; but the loving-kindness of God is still the same, and will never depart from me."

APPLICATION

Use I. Of *Information*. We may hence see,

1. How far mistaken the world is about a believer's lot; they many times reckon them poor and despicable, and the off-scouring of all things; but certainly they are, of all persons in the world, the wisest; for they make the wisest choice, and the best bargain:

nay, they are the richest too, for all things are theirs; though they oft seem to the world to have nothing, 2 Cor. vi. 10.

2. We may hence infer, that believers have no ground to envy the worldling of his portion, but rather to pity him; for he hath no more than what is seen by all, and that but for a short time, Psal. xvii. 14; Luke vi. 24. A carnal man may say, This house, this estate, this money is mine; but a Christian can say, This God is mine. And a covenanted God is more than ten thousand kingdoms.

Use II. Of *Terror*, to those that are out of the bond of this covenant; for if the people be so happy whose God is the Lord, how unhappy and miserable must they be, whose God is not the Lord: nay, your case is unspeakably sad and dismal; and O! that God would send a wakening word to all such, and sound an alarm in your ears this day.

1. You have neither art nor part in the God of Israel, Eph. ii. 12. He stands in no relation to you but that of Creator, and so stands he to the devils: but what comfort can they draw from that? for "he that made them, will not have mercy on them; and he that formed them, will show them no favour."

2. You are under a covenant of works, and under its fearful curse and sentence for the breach thereof. It is terrible to be under sentence of death by an earthly judge, and to be looking every hour to be taken forth to the scaffold; but your case is far worse; you are doomed to eternal death, and you may be looking every moment to be led forth to execution. When you awake in the morning, you may say, Shall this be the day of my execution? Shall I be taken to the scaffold of divine vengeance before night? Every headache or sick heart, every pain or stitch in back or breast, may put you to say, Is this the messenger that the Judge is to send to bring me forth? Sad is your case, O uncovenanted soul, you may sleep and wake in continual fear: for you are still tottering on the brink of hell and ridge of destruction. O! tremble then to lie down another night in this condition. In the name of God, I beseech you to awake from sleep, and find no rest for the sole of your foot till, like Noah's dove, ye come into the ark of the covenant.

Use III. Of *Examination*. O communicants, try if ye be within this covenant; remember, if you be not you have no right to the seals of it; no right to sit down at the Lord's table. "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat." And examine yourselves by these marks.

1. Know you any thing of a change of your state? Can you say, "Once I was a bond-slave to Satan, and an enemy to God: once I loved sin, and hated holiness: but now God hath opened my eyes, and humbled my heart for sin, and made me cast down the weapons of my rebellion at his feet: once I was at peace without Christ the Mediator; but now I see nothing but fire and wrath out of him: once I thought little of sin; but now I see it to be the most black and bloody thing in the world." Then this is a good sign.

2. If you be in covenant with God, you will certainly love God with your hearts, and love the Mediator, who brought you into the covenant. Can you say then with Peter, "Lord,

thou that knowest all things, knowest that I love thee?" Lord, though I cannot hear, pray, praise, or communicate as I ought, yet thou knowest I love thee; yea, I love thee above all things. And though all the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world were in my offer or possession, and Christ would say, you must either part with these, or part with me; my heart would answer, Lord, abide thou with me, and let them all be gone.

3. Those that are in covenant with God, have certainly made choice of God, as their God and portion. Can you say you have done this, O doubting communicant? Though you cannot say that God hath chosen you, yet doth your heart truly choose him? And are you resolved never to be satisfied without him? And whatever offers be made to you, yet you will be put off with nothing besides God. Then this may give you comfort.

4. Can you say you have made a resignation of yourselves, and of all you have to God, and you resolve to renew it again this night in secret, and to-morrow before men and angels? Then it is a token for good. It may be, doubting soul, thou art afraid to say, Lord, thou art my God; but canst thou venture to say, "Lord, I am thine, I resolve to be thine, and thine only; I will not be mine own, I will not be the devil's, I will not be the world's, I will not be my lust's; Lord, I am resolved to be no one's but thine." Well, let this comfort you when other marks cannot. For if once you come the length to say, "Lord, I am thine," you may say in the next place, "Lord, thou art mine;" for the relation is always reciprocal: and this is the reasoning of the spouse, Cant. vi. 3, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."

5. Are you mightily pleased with the contrivement and design of this covenant, which is to debase self; and exalt free grace? And would you desire heaven, though it were for no more than to stand eternal monuments of free grace, and join your note with the redeemed, eternally to cry, "Not unto us, not unto us, but to thee be the glory?"

And, *Lastly*, Are you inclined to perform covenanted-duties conscientiously, and that in a covenant-way, relying on covenant strength, and from a principle of love and gratitude to your covenanted God, and with an eye to glorify his name: then fear not to come forward to take the seal of the covenant, for you belong to it.

Use IV. Of *Exhortation*. And this I shall direct to all that hear the gospel, especially communicants. O come take hold of God's covenant and enter yourselves within the bond of it; and then come and take God's seal to the bargain. I here, in my great Lord and Master's name, make offer of God's covenant to all of you, be what you will, gospel-slighters, rebels against God, graceless and profane sinners, carnal and earthly-minded souls, hypocrites, formalists, backsliders, weary and heavy laden sinners, doubting and discouraged souls; I exhort and beseech you all to come and take hold of God's covenant, make choice of God for your God and portion, and Jesus Christ for your Mediator and Peace-maker with God, and resign yourselves freely to God in Christ. O sinners, the covenant is free, the call is pressing, the offer is great, the bargain excellent.

This is the most honourable and advantageous bargain that ever you made; the design

of my whole sermon has been to recommend it, and I persuade you to close with it: God knows how your hearts stand inclined. But I would have you all to remember, that our time is short, and the hour is coming, when we that are ministers must leave this work of beseeching, pressing, and arguing with you, and go to him that sent us, with a faithful account of the issue of our message. And O how sad and unpleasant will the account be that we must give of those of you whom we leave unpersuaded to take hold of God's covenant. It will be a melancholy thing, and matter of grief, to accuse any of you to the Father; but we must do it, if you will not prevent it by your hearkening and obeying. If you do it not in time, as God is in heaven you will eternally repent it: I do here warn you of your danger, and call heaven and earth to record against you that I am free of your blood. O young people! what say ye to it? Will ye take hold of the covenant? Your baptism will not profit you, unless now, when ye are of age, ye ratify your parents' deed, renew your baptismal engagements, and personally join yourselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant. If ye approach to the Lord's table without doing it, you will be unworthy communicants, you will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, you will but mock God and deceive your own soul. I have not time to answer objections against covenanting with God; I shalt only ask one question, and then conclude.

QUEST. But you may say, What would you have us doing, in order to our being brought into God's covenant? We would gladly be among the number of that happy people, whose God is the Lord, and who are in covenant with him; but we know not how to get into it.

ANS. Surely the soul is not wholly passive in this transaction, but must be active in it. Something is to be done on our part, when we enter into covenant with God; and therefore we are called to "join ourselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant" Jer. 1. 5. I do not mean, that we can do any thing to enter ourselves into covenant with God in our own strength; no, it is God by his Spirit "that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The duty is ours, but the work is the Spirit's. It is the Spirit that courts the heart, and prevails with the soul to give its consent to this blessed bargain. But, in the mean time, let us be aiming at our duty as we can, looking for the Spirit's concurrence. And there are four things to be done by us, in order to our being in covenant with God.—Renunciation. —Acceptation.—Dedication. —Solemn engagement.

1. You must heartily renounce and break league with all the Lord's enemies and rivals, Hos. xiv. 8, and particularly renounce,—Satan's government; though formerly you was led captive by him at his will, yet now solemnly renounce all subjection to him, and hearken no more to his suggestions and temptations, let God alone have the throne—Renounce the world, be no more a slave to it as you have been; set your heart no longer on its profits and pleasures, as your portion and inheritance; but make God your treasure.—Renounce the flesh; however its lusts have been beloved by you, let them reign no more in you; but condemn them to be crucified as the murderers of Christ.—Renounce your own righteousness in point of justification and acceptance with God, and solemnly disclaim all trust and confidence in your own duties and performances.

2. *Acceptation.* Heartily aim to make choice, and accept of God in Christ, as your soul's portion and inheritance, Psal. lxxiii. 25. But observe, how God is to be chosen, only in and through Christ the Mediator; for "out of Christ he is a consuming fire;" therefore accept of precious Christ as your guide and, way to the Father, and of his satisfaction and merits, as the ransom for delivering you from wrath. Accept of the Holy Ghost as your sanctifier, quickener, and comforter; and heartily acquiesce in the covenant of grace, and gospel-method of salvation through Christ, as "well-ordered in all things."

3. *Dedication.* As God gives himself wholly to you, so do you dedicate and give up yourselves, and all that you have, wholly and unreservedly to God, 2 Chron. xxx. 8. Give up your souls, with all their powers and faculties; your bodies, with all their senses and members; and all your enjoyments, temporal and spiritual, to be employed for God and his honour, and to be entirely disposed of for his service and glory.

4. *Solemn engagement.* You must resolve and engage, in the "strength of Christ our Surety," to live wholly to your covenanted God, and walk with him in newness of life, perform every duty he commands, suffer patiently what he inflicts, watch against every sin he forbids, and manfully fight against his enemies. Thus be aiming at your duty, and lay yourselves in the Spirit's way, and who knows but God will pity and help you honestly to take hold of his covenant, and also himself say *Amen* to the bargain. The Lord bless his word. Amen.

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