



MEMORIAL VOLUME.

COVENANT RENOVATION

BY THE SYNOD OF THE

✓
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

^{et}
IN NORTH AMERICA. *Synod*

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF SYNOD.

“They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD, in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten.” Jer. 50: 5.

PITTSBURGH:
BAKEWELL & MARTHENS.

1872.

COVENANTING A DUTY IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES.

BY REV. H. H. GEORGE.

2 COR. 8:5. "And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

THAT covenanting is a duty, the Scriptures clearly teach, a duty binding alike upon individuals and society, upon churches and nations. As an act, it is one of great solemnity and importance; a contract with God, a link of connection with his throne, and an oath of loyalty to him. It is one, whose impress upon the church must be marked either for good or ill: for good, if done with honest purpose and sincerity of heart; for ill, if unworthily and in hypocrisy.

*contract
link
oath*

We select this text as an example of covenant renovation by the New Testament church.

The three churches of Macedonia, viz., Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica, were endowed with the grace of God that disposed them to contribute liberally to the poor saints at Jerusalem; "this they did," as the result of a solemn dedication of themselves to the Lord. It was an ecclesiastical covenant, in which all the churches of Macedonia participated. It could have been none other than an act of covenanting, because they had given themselves to God in a profession many years before; and their dedication in baptism no doubt took place at the time of their profession, as it was customary to administer baptism immediately upon conversion: The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, and "she was baptized and

her household." The same night the jailor of Philippi believed on the Lord Jesus, he "was baptized," he and all his, straightway."

Nor could it have been an ordinary communion season, for such was no more than the apostle expected of them; but this was an unlooked for occasion, "not as we hoped or expected;" some high, extraordinary consecration, verified only in public social covenanting.

Granting that covenanting was a duty recognized and observed in former times, practiced by Jews and early Christians, the question still arises in the minds of many, what is the use of it now? Has it any appropriateness to our day? To this we might answer, a moral duty never ceases in its obligations. Instituted by God for both Old and New Testament dispensations, it remains with perpetual force upon the church as long as her organization continues.

When any thing is plainly directed in the word of God, it is presuming to be wiser than he to ask what is the use of it. But yet many obvious reasons may be adduced to convince the inquirer that it is a duty now as ever before. Let us first consider a few of these reasons.

1st. The visible oneness of the church is maintained by covenant renovation. No Bible reader will deny that the church was a covenanted society in the days of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. "Which covenant he made with Abraham and his oath unto Isaac, and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant." It was the basis of God's dealing with the Patriarchs.

Nor was it different through the entire period of Moses, of Samuel, and all the prophets.

When the prophets foretold that glorious era yet to dawn upon our world, they gave prominence to the fact, that it should be a covenanting period. "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." *Jer 50:*

See also Is. 19 : 18-21, and 44 : 5.

Our text illustrates the same idea in New Testament times. And history records on many a page, that the true church of Christ owned publicly her covenant relations to him.

The Waldenses were a covenant society, bound by an oath, and they required all who joined them to subscribe the covenant. / A German divine writes, "that both the Waldenses of Toulouse, and the Hussites of Bohemia, ratified their federal transactions with solemn oath." In the year 1530, a historic covenant was made and entered into by the Protestant people of Germany, together with their princes, denominated the League of Smalkald. Seven years subsequently, the Genevan church and republic bound themselves by solemn covenant to the principal doctrines of the Christian religion, and to the order and discipline of the primitive church.

In 1620, the Reformed churches of France entered into a public covenant, swearing conformity to the confession of faith then adopted. The record says, "we

swear, as well in our own names as in the names of the churches and provinces which have commissioned us to be their deputies unto this assembly, that we will live and die in this confession.”

And as to Great Britain, no Protestant need be told that it is a covenanted land. To those bonds that bound church and nation to God, we look back as bulwarks of defence to the followers of Christ; as towering monuments of that favor of God that led them through the struggles of their persecutions, to the enjoyments and privileges of a glorious reformation. The Second Reformation is known by all readers of history as the covenanted reformation.

Now, with this line of history, is the Covenanter of to-day in the visible oneness of the church, or the man who derides the solemn act? Is the true church of Christ transmitted through the line of covenants, or by the way of covenant renunciation and disregard? Let the reader of his Bible and of history answer. By this solemn act we join hands with all the faithful of past generations back to Abraham; by it, we identify with the true church to-day, and by it we reach forward our hand to unborn generations, the grand gathering of all which shall constitute one general assembly around the throne of God, in everlasting covenant with himself.

2. But a 2d reason. It is the best means of maintaining the church's testimony.

In those days of the past, when it was necessary for truth to have an edge upon it, when it was necessary to draw a clear dividing line between the friends and enemies of truth, as, *e. g.*, the days when Protestantism was born,

and had to struggle through years of blood for an existence; those were days when covenants were a felt necessity. Then God's people felt the need of being bound together, hand and heart together, to stand or fall, to live or die in defence of glorious principles. As our nation, amid the struggles of rebellion, bound her subjects by an oath of loyalty, so the church amid the fires of persecution bound her subjects with an oath of fealty to the great Captain of her salvation.

The first reformation, from popery, had been a failure. (1.) had not strong men, bound by solemn oath, stood unflinchingly together. The second reformation, from prelacy, would have been trodden under foot, when popish influence combining with corrupt civil authority drew the sword against all nonconformists, had not worthy men, bound to God and one another, faced the storms, and held aloft their testimony, till God gave them victory through the blood of the Lamb and the word of that testimony.

In these days when the enemy of souls has intoxicated the church with the idea of popularity, persuading her that she must let down her standards in order to suit the wants of the day, that she must be accommodating, and have no distinctive principles at all, no explicit testimony, it is no wonder that covenanting is unpopular. There is not that unity of faith, oneness of sentiment, and uniformity of practice against the crying evils of the world, to make a basis for covenanting.

Men may agree together on election in the same church, but they differ on politics; they agree on temperance and Sabbath keeping, but they differ on secret

societies; they stand together in resisting popery, but they differ widely in regard to the propriety of connection with Masonic lodges. But those who have a testimony, and have a heart to maintain it, a courage to stand by and defend it, such greatly reinforce themselves by covenanting; thereby they combine their strength with their courage, and unite their labor and effort in its maintenance.

3 — In the 3d place. It is the best means of transmitting a faithful legacy to our children. “For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children.” Another command with reference to this testimony is, “Bind it up, and seal the law among my disciples.”

No more effectual bonds can be put upon it, than those of covenant obligation; and in no better way can it be kept safe, and preserved intact, for transmission to posterity, than by an oath of fidelity.

One of the aims prominently held forth in all the ancient covenants was the transmitting to future generations the blessings vouchsafed in them. “I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” To those who were actually engaged in crucifying the Messiah, Peter says, “Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our

fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."

The principle of the descending obligations of cove-
nants is one familiar to every mind. A parent contracts
an honest debt, and his surviving children are morally
bound to pay it. A nation assumes obligations in one
period that are justly entailed upon future generations
to be discharged.

Many of the benevolent schemes in operation, such
as schools of learning, asylums for the poor, and even
missionary efforts, are only the carrying out of contracts
made by such as lived years ago. Property not directed
by will, may be squandered in many a way ; but fixed
by testamental stipulation, it must take that direction.
So in like manner, principles, covenanted, oath-bound
principles, are transmitted, and bear with all the weight
of solemn, sworn contract, upon the children of those
that take them.

The covenant God made with Israel at Horeb bound
with equal weight in all its provisions upon those who
stood there at the taking of it, and upon the generation
who lived long afterwards. "The Lord our God made
a covenant with us in Horeb; the Lord made not this
covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who
are all of us here alive this day." When Joseph was
about to die, he "took an oath of the children of Israel,
saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up
my bones from hence." Several hundred years after-
wards, when Israel was setting out on their departure,
we read, "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with
him; for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel,

saying, God will surely visit you ; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you."

When the Gibeonites came to Joshua under false pretences, he made a covenant with them that they should not be put to death ; years afterwards, Saul broke the covenant by slaying them ; and five hundred years from the time the covenant was made, there was a famine in Israel, because of Saul and his bloody house, for he had slain the Gibeonites.

God will see to it, that faithful covenant contracts are transmitted to posterity, and as faithfully observed ; or else the breach will be atoned for by suffering the penalty.

On the principle that human contracts are binding, and after confirmation can never be withdrawn or mutilated, Paul says, " Brethren, I speak after the manner of men, though it be but a man's covenant, yet, if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto ;" which is to say, that every principle in the bond that we are about to swear, will not only be binding upon us, but upon our children in all time to come.

A second general thought we notice is, the times that call for covenanting.

And 1st. A time when danger threatens the cause of truth and righteousness.

In those days when the storm-cloud gathered thick and dark over ancient Israel, threatening to pour out the floods of Jehovah's indignation, Israel, under the leadership of such wise men as Hezekiah, Josiah and Nehemiah, who could discern the signs of the times, were led to God in holy covenant. "Now, it is in my heart

to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us." In the days of our fathers, when the ark of God trembled upon the cart wheels, when the conflict raged between the blind and maddened forces of popery and the friends of civil and religious liberty, when the great issues pressing upon the world were, whether the night of ignorance and superstition shall continue, or the sunlight of truth and righteousness dawn upon the earth; whether the yoke of popery should continue to gall the necks, and the chains of superstition fetter the limbs of mankind, or should liberty, glorious liberty, bless the earth; amid the struggles of such times, the friends of God and truth took refuge in solemn covenant. They believed the promise, "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion." They heard the invitation, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers" of covenant security, "and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." They entrenched themselves within the covenants, as bulwarks of defence.

And are not the aspects of danger equally threatening to the cause of God in our own day? When enemies, strong and mighty, are massing their forces, and "taking counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us," it is manifest to every observer that the enemies of God and his church are augmenting their strength, organizing their effort and increasing in boldness.

Already they hesitate not to make open warfare upon

the Bible and the Sabbath of the Lord. With foul hands they are attempting to disrobe the Redeemer of the world of his divinity, and with blasphemous tongues they assert that in his stead there is a coming man. They are crucifying the Lord that bought them, and infamously casting his authority behind their backs. As Prophet they deny him, as Priest they disown him, and as King they proudly rebel against him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

Never, perhaps, was a more opportune time for the friends of Christ to bind themselves to him, and to one another in holy covenant, as a bulwark of defence against his and their enemies. When the enemy's flood of infidelity, Sabbath desecration, profanity, intemperance, licentiousness, and every species of rebellion, is threatening to sweep all before it, by covenanting the Spirit of God will enable the church "to lift up a standard against him."

2d. Times of declension, when the faith and practice of the church are weakening, when lukewarmness is pervading the ranks, and covetousness, which is idolatry, is captivating the hearts of God's people.

During the last days of Joshua, Israel had become greatly addicted to idolatry; they served the gods their father's served on the other side of the flood, and the gods of the Amorites. Joshua summoned them all to Shechem. There he put the test, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." In response they said to Joshua, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in

Shechem." This covenant was made for a state of declension, and designed as a reclamation from idolatry.

What true lover of Christ does not feel to-day that vital piety is low; that while there is much of the form, there is but little of the power of godliness; that worldliness has taken a deep hold upon the church, and folly and fashion have made many inroads upon her? X

"The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper." S

But, for such a state of things there is a remedy, for such decline there is an antidote; and that is found in returning to God with sorrow in our hearts, and honest confession upon our lips, binding our souls in solemn covenant to be obedient. "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." X

To arrest the back slider, to stay the tide of declension, and to return again to the favor of God, there can be no more direct and efficient way than by swearing anew to be his, and only his, and his forever. X

3d. Times when we are desiring and praying for a revival. An immediate outgrowth, or evidence of a grand revival contemplated by the prophet, when God says, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring," is covenant engagement. X X X
 "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." L

Not only is it an evidence, but also the procuring cause of a revival. To swear a covenant is only a new engagement to be the Lord's, an additional bond of devotedness, a superadded vow to be faithful and true; and what else is a revival? In Hezekiah's day, the people rejoiced when they had taken the oath.

The history of all such occasions shows an awakened interest upon the part of the covenanters. Amid the dark days of Scotland, when the sword of persecution was being glutted with the blood of the saints, those who had solemnly covenanted with God never lost faith in the moral force of their vows.

When James Guthrie, a faithful martyr, was led to the scaffold, his eyes were bandaged, and all things made ready for the execution; the last moment before the fatal platform was turned, he raised the napkin from his eyes, and cried aloud, "The covenants, the covenants shall yet be Scotland's reviving."

Amid the excitements of this day, the great feature of a genuine revival, viz., fidelity to God and his truth, seems to be in no small degree ignored. The fact that revivals are only by the Spirit of God, and that according to his word, seems oftentimes to be lost sight of. The prayer of the psalmist of Israel, "Quicken thou me according to thy word," is unheeded; and hence their spasmodic character. We hail with gladness the promised day of revival, grand, universal revival, but we expect it not till men are ready to make a complete surrender of themselves, and all they have and are, to God; to pledge themselves in solemn vow to be for him, and not for another.

“In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.”

Conclusion.

1. In covenanting, we should have a deep view of sin. It is our nearest approach to Him “who cannot look upon sin,” “whose eyes see and whose eyelids try men’s sons.”
2. We need great faith. In the darkest hour that ever brooded over this lost world, when the Saviour of men was suffering, he set us an example of faith, “My God, my God.” Well he knew, though all else should prove a wreck, that God who had made the covenant with him was still his God.
3. We need importunate prayer. “Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.” Num. 14:2
4. We need to know and feel our own personal covenant relation to God. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.”