

The Duty of Social Covenanting Illustrated and Enforced

by

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION UNDER MY
PASTORAL CARE.

Beloved Brethren:

In the publication of the following discourse you have my compliance with your request. Its not appearing sooner, was owing to doubts in my mind whether, notwithstanding your request, it was my duty to publish it. Circumstances seemed at length to indicate the propriety of publication; the more so, as I have not seen in any thing written on the subject of covenanting, the seasonableness of the duty at the present time noticed. In some things I find myself anticipated by the excellent work of the Rev. D. Scott on the distinctive principles of our church. But as that does not touch the point hinted at above, (as from the nature of such a work it could not,) and as this discourse was nearly all written before that came into my hands, I judged it best to let it come to the light. That our covenant God would bless it and make it the means of awakening in the church more earnest attention to the important duty which it is intended to illustrate and enforce—that so "the bride may make herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb"—and "the kingdoms of this world become," by national covenanting, "the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ,"—is the earnest prayer of your pastor,

THE AUTHOR.

ALLEGHENY AUGUST, 1841.

THE DUTY OF SOCIAL COVENANTING.

2 Cor. 8:5. *"They—first gave their own selves to the Lord."*

Emulation in a good cause is laudable. Christians are commanded to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." In the minds of those who are possessed of genuine liberality, the judicious and seasonable commendation of the good deeds of others, produces no painful emotion. Instead of indulging in feelings of envy they will rejoice in their diligence and success, and stir themselves up to imitate their example. It is to this constitutional principle of our nature that Paul addresses himself, when he exhibits to the Macedonian saints the piety and liberality of the Macedonian churches. At the same time he leaves the latter no ground of boasting. What they did was by "the grace of God bestowed" on them. Paul was very attentive, in the various places he labored, to make collections "for the poor saints at Jerusalem." He had, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, both enjoined the duty and prescribed the manner of making their collections. "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." It would appear that they had been remiss in relation to this duty. In his second epistle he repeats the injunction, and to excite them to greater diligence and liberality, he tells them what had been done by "the Churches of Macedonia." "In a great trial of affliction the abundance of their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, yea and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of ministering to the saints." The apostle takes particular notice of the manner in which they had attended to this duty. "Not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

The Macedonian churches gave themselves to God by covenanting. No other satisfactory exposition can be given of our text. It cannot mean converts joining the church, for the act is predicated of "churches" and not of individuals. Nor does it mean their participation of the Lord's supper, for certainly the apostle hoped that the churches which he had planted would show forth the Lord's death. The only fair and rational interpretation is, that these churches either "general assembly," or in their respective congregations, solemnly covenanted to be the Lord's. And as the apostle evidently commends

them for this transaction, their approved example is a warrant for all churches to go and do likewise. We deduce the following doctrine from the text:

Social covenanting with God is a moral and permanent duty. Our plan is,

I. *To make some general remarks on this duty.*

II. *To show when God calls to engage in it.*

III. *To apply the subject.*

I. General remarks on the duty.

1. Covenanting with God is the swearing of an oath of fidelity to him. It is the act of subjects engaging in the most solemn manner to be true to their king. This was the import of the covenant entered into by the kingdom of Judah at the inauguration of Joash: "And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord, and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people." 2 Kings, 11:17. God's right to men is not based on any conventional arrangement between him and them. It is original and absolute. "All souls are mine." "It is he that made us, and not we ourselves, we are his people." It is however their indispensable duty, as rational and moral creatures, to recognise that relation which by a divine constitution they sustain to their Creator; and to give all the security which he requires, that they will be his true and faithful subjects. It is perfectly reasonable—that intelligent beings governed by moral laws, should give their consent to that constitution under which Infinite Wisdom has placed them, and swear allegiance to the "Lord of the whole earth," by whom it is administered. There is something analogous to this in the constitution of human governments. Nations usually require an oath of allegiance in order to citizenship. And though the principle has been wickedly misapplied, by requiring of men oaths of fidelity to governments that are not in a state of voluntary subjection to the Lord and his Anointed, yet the fact that they do so, demonstrates that men have naturally, some sense of the duty of covenanting.

The Scriptures are plain and pointed in relation to this duty. "The churches of Macedonia—gave their own selves to the Lord." In doing so they recognised the authority of God, as their Lawgiver and King, and entered into an obligation to be his faithful subjects. This duty is also enjoined in Romans 12:1. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your, bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." The allusion here is to offerings under the law. "The cattle of a thousand hills" are the Lord's. This the worshiper acknowledged when he

presented his offering, and by this act he made a formal dedication of all he had to the Lord. The spirit of the injunction is, still binding. We are required to give ourselves wholly to the Lord. This dedication on our part does not constitute a new relation between us and our Maker. By it we express our approbation of a relation already existing, and engage to perform all the duties devolving on us as his moral subjects. "It is our reasonable service." Most reasonable—that the creature should swear allegiance to the Creator—that the redeemed should vow fidelity to their Redeemer. "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

It is fit that this pledge should be given under the solemnity of an oath. Swearing is an act of religious worship, in which there is a direct appeal to the Searcher of hearts. It pleased God that he might "show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel to confirm it by an oath." "When he made promise to Abraham because he could swear by no greater he swore by himself." This gracious act of condescension he was pleased to perform "that we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." And is it not most reasonable that on our part, when we are taking the Lord to be our God, and engaging to be his people, we should confirm the deed by the same solemn sanction? God's covenant with us is not only our warrant for covenanting, but also with respect to its sanction, it is a pattern for our imitation. As he swore by himself, so we should swear by him and to him. In this way Israel covenanted on the plains of Moab. Their engagement is called a "covenant and an oath." Deut. 29:14. The covenanters in the days of Nehemiah "entered into a curse and into an oath." Neh. 10:28. Whatever variety of forms may have been observed by Old Testament saints in ratifying their covenants, there can be no doubt, that in every instance there was an appeal to the divine omniscience for the sincerity of the covenanters. "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and serve him, and swear by his name." Deut. 6:13. "He that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth." Isa. 65:16.

2. The whole law of God must be embraced in covenanting. This was done in the covenant made at Mount Sinai. "Moses told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." Ex. 24:3. In this obligation there was no reservation. They bound themselves to keep the whole law of God. And of the same extent was the obligation of the covenant entered into by the Jews after their return from Babylon. "They entered into a curse and into an oath to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God,

and his judgments; and his statutes." Neh. 10:29.

When the believer in the moment of union to Christ, "joins himself to the Lord in a perpetual covenant," he binds his soul to do all God has commanded. On no other terms would his act of personal dedication be acceptable to God. He must renounce all sin and engage to perform all duty, or he cannot take hold of God's covenant. No creature has the power to lower the standard of moral obligation. That covenant engagement which falls short of binding to take the whole word of God as the only rule of faith and practice, to believe and profess all divine truth, and to obey all divine commands, is but a mockery of God, a perversion of a divine institution. To limit the obligation of the covenant by engaging to perform our duty, only so far as we may be enabled, would render it worse than useless. This limitation could be pleaded as an excuse for every sin committed, and the prisoner at the bar of his own conscience would be acquitted of the crime of covenant-breaking. Such obligations instead of increasing, would have a direct tendency to diminish our motives to obedience.

It strengthens our position to remark, that the divine law is called "the covenant." He wrote upon the tables "the words of the covenant—the ten commandments." Ex. 34:28. Here "the covenant," and "the ten commandments," are identical. "The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments." As it flows from the authority of God, and binds the subjects to obedience, it is the law, and as it respects the obligations into which the subjects voluntarily enter it is the covenant. Sin is called a transgression of the covenant, as well as of the law, "They have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law." Hos. 8:1. This is true of every sin committed by those who are in covenant with God. Hence the inference is, that the obligation of God's covenant is co-extensive with the demands of his law.

It is sometimes alleged, that inasmuch as we commit sin daily, we expose ourselves to the guilt of perjury by covenanting to keep the whole law of God. This allegation arises from a mistaken view of what constitutes perjury under an oath of fidelity. It is only by the deliberate and habitual renunciation of the whole or a part of the obligation of such an oath that perjury is committed. The violation of God's law by those who have sworn to observe it, is indeed covenant-breaking, but not perjury, unless it be preceded in form or in fact by a renunciation of covenant obligation. The covenanter does not swear that, as a matter of fact, he will from that time and onward render an unsinning obedience to the divine law. Such an oath would be rash and presumptuous. He does, however, under the solemnity of an oath, recognise perfect obedience

to the whole law to be his duty, and declares that it is his will, nay, his most earnest desire, to render such obedience. "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments."

3. This duty is binding on communities under the New Testament dispensation. In support of this position we adduce the very remarkable prophecy in Isaiah 19:18-21, "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts—In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt—and the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea they shall vow a vow unto the Lord and perform it." Without examining minutely into the precise time and circumstances of the fulfillment of this prophecy, it is sufficient for our present purpose to show, that it refers to a time yet future, and of course under the New Testament dispensation. No "altar has yet been erected to the Lord in the land of Egypt" "the Egyptians have not yet known the Lord nor done sacrifice and oblation." As the prophecy is yet to be fulfilled; so the promise connected with it remains to be performed. When "the great city which spiritually is called Egypt," Rev. 11:8, shall have "an altar to the Lord" in its midst—and a "pillar to the Lord at its border"—the worship of God established in its purity in the church and the law of the Lord made the main "pillar" of the political superstructure—when the inhabitants of the city shall do sacrifice and oblation—then five cities "the cities of the nations," Rev. 16:19, "shall swear to the Lord of hosts." These predictions containing promises of good to the subjects of them are preceptive. What God has said they shall do, he commands them to perform. It is the duty of not only five cities of mystical Egypt, but of all its cities—of all the cities and kingdoms on the face of the earth to swear to the Lord of hosts—to vow a vow and perform it. And in this way will "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Our text adds confirmation to this important truth. The Macedonian churches gave themselves to the Lord. Most likely, the noble Bereans "who received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so," took the lead in this solemn work. They had learned from the "lively oracles" that it was the duty of communities as well as individuals to "vow and pay to the Lord their God." And by their example and influence the Christians at Philippi, Thessalonica, Amphipolis, and Apollonia, would be induced also to give themselves to the Lord. It at least furnishes a strong presumption that the duty of social covenanting in New Testament times is found in the Old Testament Scriptures, that the Bereans, who were scrupulously careful to look to the Scriptures for a warrant for everything,

were engaged in such a transaction.

We might reason the permanance of this duty, and the obligation to observe it under the present dispensation, from the fact that covenanting was not a typical institution. All the ceremonies of the Old Testament worship were indeed done away in Christ. But of what was covenanting typical? Can it be thought, that while before the death of Christ, believers were required to engage personally to be the Lord's, when they took hold of his covenant, they are now free from such a requisition? And yet this will naturally follow from the sentiment, that covenanting is typical, for if it be so, it is abolished by the appearing of the Antitype. It may be alleged, that this duty is moral in relation to individuals but typical in relation to communities. But as the distinction in the allegation between the moral covenanting of individuals and the typical covenanting of communities, is without the slightest foundation in Scripture, we forbear to notice it, and unhesitatingly assert that covenanting was not typical but moral in respect both to individuals and communities. And being moral it has survived the abolition of ceremonial institutions, and continues and will continue till the end of time, the indispensable duty of all the moral subjects of God's government, whether individual or social. It is also a precious privilege, securing to them who in faith bind their souls to God, the certainty and perpetuity of the manifestations of his love. "For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

4. The obligation of social covenants descends to posterity. The covenant into which Israel entered on the plains of Moab embraced their children to the latest generation. This is evident from the words of God to them by Moses on the occasion. "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath, but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him who is not with us here this day." Deut. 29:14, 15. The two classes described, as included in the covenant, by the terms "him that standeth here with us this day," and "him that is not with us here this day," must mean children then present, and posterity yet unborn. This covenant was made with Israel in their successive generations and for the breach of it long afterwards, a sore curse is denounced against them by the prophet Jeremiah. "Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers, in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt." Jer. 11:3, 4.

We produce from Scripture two remarkable instances of the descent of covenant obligation. When Joseph was dying, "he took an oath of the children

of Israel saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." Gen. 50:25. When Israel came out of Egypt, long after those who had sworn to Joseph were laid in their graves, "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." Exodus 13:19. Moses felt and scrupulously fulfilled the obligation of the oath taken by the people of Israel long before he was born. The other instance is the case of the Gibeonites, to whom the princes of Israel "swore by the Lord God of Israel that they would let them live." Joshua 9:15-18. Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah slew the Gibeonites, for which violation of covenant obligation, God sent three years of famine on the land in the reign of David. 2 Sam. 21:1,2.

The ordinance of circumcision under the old Testament dispensation, and of baptism under the now, serves to illustrate and confirm this principle. Abraham circumcised Isaac, when he was eight days old, and this was a standing rule in the administration of that ordinance so long as it was in force. Infant children are legitimate subjects of baptism. Those who receive this ordinance professedly take hold of God's covenant, and bind themselves to obey his laws. But how can children of eight days make such a profession, or enter into such an obligation? Only as identifying with their parents in this transaction. The parents represent the children, and from the very nature of representation the children are bound by all the engagements which their parents make in their name. Covenant obligation descends to posterity, else children receive the baptismal seal of the covenant of grace in vain.

We may reason in support of this point, from the common sense and the common practice of men. No intelligent man ever thought that a nation was freed from an obligation, when the persons by whom it was given cease by death or otherwise to be its constituent members. Such a principle reduced to practice would soon break up all national intercourse. Men in giving bonds, bind their heirs and assigns, on no other principle than that for which we are contending. This descent of covenant obligation results from the fact, that the identity of moral persons is not lost, by the changes of their constituent parts. They live, exercise their rights, and fulfill their obligations in the succeeding generations of which they are composed.

These remarks apply eminently to the church. She is an immortal corporation. A family soon loses its identity. Nations by their rejection of the revealed will of God sow the seeds of destruction in their very constitutions. But the church is imperishable. She is the same moral person that was constituted by the Mediator in the garden of Eden—the same that covenanted in the days of

Noah—of Abraham—and in all similar transactions down to the present time. And by all these engagements she is bound to be a faithful spouse to Christ her Husband. "I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord."

5. By this ordinance God dispenses the blessings of the covenant of grace. All the transactions of God with his people are covenant transactions. He has in the covenant with his Chosen, secured the stability of his throne and the perpetuity of his seed. With each believer, in the day of his effectual calling, God "makes an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." This is done by giving to him, through Christ, a personal interest in the covenant of grace, and a right to all its blessings. The believer is, by the Holy Spirit, convinced of the suitableness of the salvation offered, and is "persuaded and enabled to embrace Christ" its glorious Author. This he does by entering into a personal covenant with God in Christ, assenting to the plan of salvation, consenting to the terms on which it is offered, and engaging in the most solemn manner to take the Lord to be his God, and to fear, and love, and serve him always with his whole heart. This consummates the spiritual marriage, and the believer, by virtue of his union to Christ, is endowed with a good dowry—with all the fulness which it pleased the Father should dwell in the Head of the covenant. All things needful for life or death, for time or for eternity are his; for he "is Christ's, and Christ is God's."

In the light of these blessed and consoling truths, we may see the advantages resulting to communities from entering into covenant with God. The Bible contains promises to man in his social as well as in his individual capacity. The Scriptures abound with promises to families, to nations, and to the church. Now, "all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus." 2 Cor. 5:20. In him they are made and in him fulfilled, and it is only by virtue of a covenant connection with him that the promised blessings are received. Hence, not only the church, but the nations of the earth, must enter into covenant with God in order to partake of the promised good. By swearing allegiance to him who is "the Head of all principality and power," nations act the part of loyal subjects, and receive to themselves those unspeakable national blessings which result from his peaceful reign. "He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he has chosen for his own inheritance." "The sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre."

The manner in which the Israelites covenanted at mount Sinai, and in the land of Moab, adds confirmation to the point we are examining. We have the account of the former in Ex. 24:3-8. "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments, and all the people answered with one voice and said, all the words which the Lord hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." The blood of the victims, here called "the blood of the covenant," undoubtedly typified the blood of Christ. By blood this covenant was ratified, and as the transaction was beyond dispute a national one, the sprinkling of the blood on the people denoted the removal of their national sin, and their interest as a nation in God's covenant ratified by the blood of his well-beloved Son, and secured on their part by the solemn transaction in which they had just been engaged.

At the renewal of this covenant in the land of Moab, Moses in his address to the people tells them, Deut. 30:11-14, "This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it." In Romans 10:6-9, we have an inspired commentary on this passage: "The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring down Christ from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach: That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The apostle's object is to show that "righteousness by faith" was known to the church under the former dispensation. What Moses calls "the commandment," Paul calls "the word of faith." Some indeed view this as an accommodation of the words of Moses to suit the apostle's design, but on the principle that God dispenses his gracious covenant to men, by bringing them individually and

socially into covenant with him, it is a fair and instructive exposition. The covenanting Israelites were informed that God did not require of them in order to either their individual or national salvation, an impossibility like mounting to heaven or transporting themselves to the utmost limits of the universe. "The commandment" under "the law which had a shadow of good things to come," is the "word of faith" under the gospel, and both these are contrasted with legal righteousness, which Moses describes when he says, "The man which doeth these things shall live by them." From the whole it appears, that God in bringing his people into covenant with himself, taught them to look to the Lord Jesus Christ, for all covenant blessings purchased with his precious blood. "He shall sprinkle many nations." "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

6. Covenanting is an extraordinary duty. Some duties are of the ordinary kind: such as prayer, praise, reading and hearing the word. These are to be attended to always as we have opportunity. But covenanting like fasting is an extraordinary duty. It is to be performed once and repeated as often as God calls to it by the voice of his providence. The necessity for a repetition of covenanting does not arise from any effect that the lapse of time may have in weakening our voluntary bond. As the principle that covenant obligation descends to and binds posterity, is an essential part of the doctrine we are discussing, it cannot be supposed that the bond at any time needs to be strengthened. It is probable that a mistake on this subject has led to loose views in relation to the renewal of covenants. Periodical, social covenanting seems to imply in those who do so, a belief that our voluntary obligation would soon cease to be of use to us unless it were renewed. This is not the case. The church is as much bound now by every covenant she has entered into since her organization in the garden of Eden, as at each respective time of covenanting. The obligation does not need to be strengthened; but our sense of it needs to be quickened, our assurance of an interest in God's covenant renewed, and our acknowledgment of him to be our Lord frequently repeated.

On this principle of, renewing their solemn obligations the people of God have frequently acted. The covenanting in the land of Moab was a renovation of the covenant at Sinai. Shortly before the death of Joshua it was again renewed at Shechem with great solemnity. Josh. 24:25,26. The same thing appears to have been done at the inauguration of Saul. Samuel wrote "the manner of the kingdom in a book, and laid it up before the Lord." 1 Sam. 10:25. "The manner of the kingdom" can mean nothing else than the duties mutually devolving on the king and the people. We may well infer, that on the rehearsal of these duties the parties bound themselves respectively to perform them, and that the whole nation vowed fidelity to their Lord and king. When David was

proclaimed king at Hebron the elders of Israel came and "he made a league with them before the Lord." There was a mutual engagement by the parties, and the whole nation with David at its head covenanted to be the Lord's. After the revolt of the ten tribes the kingdom of Judah frequently observed this duty. We instance the reign of Asa, 2 Chron. 15:12—of Joash, 2 Kings 11:17—of Hezekiah, 2 Chron. 39:10—and of Josiah, 2 Kings 23:3. Nehemiah and the Jews who had returned from Babylon engaged in covenanting. These instances with others that could be produced serve to show that covenanting is an extraordinary duty, to be attended to according to the indications of divine Providence. This leads to the second topic of discussion.

II. To show when God calls to this duty.

1. At the organization of ecclesiastical and civil communities. Though the church is really one, "the only one of her mother," she nevertheless subsists in visibly distinct organizations. This arises in some instances from sin, and in others from necessity. Whenever conflicting views of divine truth separate the disciples of the Lord, it is on the part of those whose faith and practice are not according "to the law and the testimony," a sinful separation. The church, however, may and does subsist in different communities, all "walking by the same rule, and minding the same thing," without violating her unity. It does not appear as a charge against any of the seven Asiatic churches, that they were not all united in one visible organization. When owing to the extent of territory included within the limits of the church, or any other insuperable difficulty, there cannot be a supreme judicatory over all who are "perfectly joined in the same mind and in the same judgment," it becomes a matter of necessary duty to have a plurality of coordinate synods, each exercising supreme jurisdiction over that part of the church under its supervision. It is so with the Reformed Presbyterian church. In Scotland, Ireland, and the United States, though under the supervision of three supreme co-ordinate synods, she is really one, united in holding all the attainments of the reformation.

It is only in this view of the subject, that an ecclesiastical community can have, since the organization of the church in the garden of Eden, a legitimate origin. Error and schism furnish no apology for rending the body mystical of Christ. Branches thus torn from the vine and planted apart, however much they may seem to flourish, are not "the planting of the Lord." Unless they return from their wandering, and by professing the whole truth, and binding themselves to obey all the commands of God, endeavor to heal the breaches which they have made in Zion, they "shall be rooted up, east forth as a branch, and be withered."

When the people of God find themselves in circumstances which render a distinct ecclesiastical organization necessary, then only, are they warranted to form themselves into a community visibly distinct from, but really united with their brethren of the same faith. And the first step must be that taken by the churches of Macedonia: "to give their own selves to the Lord." The Lord Jesus Christ is "the stone that is laid in Zion." "Other foundation can no man lay." On this foundation every spiritual edifice must be located, in order to be permanent. But it is only by taking hold of God's covenant that any can build on that foundation. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ unites the believer to the "Head of the corner." By entering personally into covenant with God, he binds his soul to be for him and not for another. And in no other way can the church "the building of mercy," be located on the "sure foundation." She must "make herself ready for the marriage of the Lord," and "join herself to him in a perpetual, covenant not to be forgotten."

It is thus that the witnesses one hundred years ago, unfurled the banner of the covenant in the United States. Though without any formal ecclesiastical organization, they considered it their duty to give themselves to the Lord. They renewed their covenant engagements. It would have been well if this transaction of the church in her primary meetings, had been repeated when organized under a judicatory.[1]

This is the duty of nations as well as of churches. Nations are not bound together by the ties that unite the church. National oneness is neither promised nor enjoined. God has not given to them, as he has to the church, "one unalterable form of government." Their rise and their fall are settled in the purpose and effected in the providence of God. "God is the Judge, he putteth down one and setteth up another." When, in the administrations of providence, the way is opened for any portion of the human family to promote the legitimate ends of civil government—their own good—the interests of the church—and the glory of God, they should embrace the opportunity, and unite themselves in civil compact. And in doing so, they should "first give their own selves to the Lord." Their constitution must contain an explicit acknowledgment of the authority of God and Christ, as well as a solemn engagement to obey the divine law. In this way alone can they comply with the high and solemn injunction of the Father. "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings, be instructed ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry." Psalm 2:10-12. A kiss given by a subject to his prince is an expression of his allegiance. When Samuel kissed Saul he gave a token of his fidelity. The command to kings to kiss the Son requires them, so soon as they are kings—nations, so soon as they become nations, to do national homage by swearing allegiance to the Lord's

Anointed.

This was the course pursued, by divine direction, at the organization of the tribes of Israel into a political community. At mount Sinai, at the suggestion of Jethro, and by the appointment of God, "Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over all the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." Ex. 18:25. There God proposed the terms of his covenant, and promised if they would keep his covenant then they should be "a peculiar treasure to him above all people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." Ex. 19:5,6. It was to these terms that "they answered together and said, All that the Lord hath spoken will we do." ver. 8. It is worthy of notice, that this response was given by the elders of Israel in their official capacity, as well as by "all the people." Here at the very commencement of their organized civil community, they pledged themselves to do "all that the Lord had commanded." "They first gave their own selves to the Lord."

Reason lends its aid to strengthen our position. A community so soon as it exists, is a subject of the government of God, and under obligation to obey his laws. And should not its recognition of that obligation be coeval with its own existence? Can a state be conceived in which a subject of the divine government is under no obligation to bind itself to obey the whole law of God. The obligation to obey includes the obligation to promise obedience. The two are inseparable, and "what God has joined together let not man put asunder." Indeed it is by covenanting only, that vitality is infused into any moral association. Without this society is lifeless—civil rulers are but "the carcasses of kings, in high places." "Let them put away the carcasses of their kings, far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever." Ez. 43:7-9.

2. After a season of covenant-breaking. It was in response to a call of this kind, that the people of Israel renewed their covenant in the reign of Joash. 2 Kings 11:17. The whole nation under the wicked Ahaziah and the subsequent usurpation of his mother, had most heinously broken their covenant engagements. The connection of Ahaziah with the family of Ahab is recorded as furnishing the immediate occasion of developing his corrupt principles. "He walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Ahab, for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab." This was mingling with the heathen and learning their way, for Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, was a Zidonian, and a vile idolatress. Idolatry was a most aggravated breach of covenant engagement. Against it the Israelites had pledged themselves in their covenant at Sinai, in the renewal of it on the plains of Moab, and at Shechem. "Thou shalt make no covenant with them and with

their gods—for if thou serve their gods it will surely be a snare to thee." Ex. 23:32, 33. "I make this covenant and this oath with you, lest there, should be among you man or woman, family or tribe, whose heart turneth away from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations." Deut. 29:14-18. "If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you. And the people said unto Joshua, Nay, but we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:20, 21. But "they brake God's covenant." So deeply had they sunk into idolatry that at the end of the usurpation of Athaliah, Baal had his house, and his altars, and his images, and his priests in the land. 2 Kings 11:18. In such a state of things, a reformation was commenced by the instrumentality of Jehoiada the priest, which placed a covenanted king on a covenanted throne. "Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord, the king, and the people, that they should be the Lord's people." It cannot be doubted by any who attentively examine this subject, that the pious and faithful priest was moved to renew the covenant, by the sad declension and covenant-breaking with which he was surrounded. And he availed himself of the favorable opportunity, when the hearts of the people were united in sustaining the young prince against a wicked and cruel usurper, to bring them again into a state of professed and public allegiance to the Lord their God.

The renovation of the covenant by Hezekiah farther confirms the point under consideration. In the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord, which had been shut, and brought in the priests and Levites, who had been driven out by his wicked father. 2 Chron. 29:3-7. The worship of God had been sadly corrupted. Hezekiah directed the Levites to sanctify themselves and the house of the Lord, and to carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place. Lamenting the deep degeneracy into which the nation had sunk, he formed the design of renewing the covenant. "Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel." He felt himself called to this duty by the numerous instances of Covenant breaking which his elevated position enabled him to discover.

We adduce but one more instance from Scripture, in proof of the seasonableness of this duty after a time of covenant-breaking, it is the case of Josiah, 2 Kings 23. The prophetess Huldah, in expounding the book of the law found in the house of the Lord, detailed the sins by which the nation had broken covenant with God, and provoked his sore displeasure. "They have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods." Chap. 22:17. This alarming announcement awakened the king to a sense of his duty. He gathered together all the people, and read in their ears "the book of the covenant." "And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all

their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book; and all the people stood to the covenant." Chap. 23:3.

We reason in proof of this position, from the relation which the church sustains to Christ. She is "the bride"—"the Lamb's wife." He has betrothed her to him in "loving-kindness and in faithfulness." Every violation of her marriage covenant is spiritual adultery. But he does not apply to her the law of divorce. "They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return to her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord." Jer. 3:1. He is graciously willing to receive her, though she may have treacherously departed from him. "Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you." It is but reasonable, however, that on her return she should renew her marriage covenant. And this she will do. "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. 50:4, 5.

The church has, even in modern times, acted on this principle. We mention one instance, which, though but little known, is worthy to be recorded. We allude to that transaction usually called the Auchensaugh renovation of the covenants. The revolution of 1688 left the British nation deeply involved in the sin of covenant-violation. The church partook her full share in the guilt. The few witnesses for a covenanted reformation were, by the defection of their pastors, left as sheep without a shepherd. But the good Shepherd remembered them, and sent them ministerial aid. In 1712, with the assistance of John M'Millan, minister, and John M'Niel, probationer, they, with great solemnity, renewed their covenants, viewing themselves as called to that work by the defection and covenant-breaking of the nation in which they lived, and the church of which they were members.

The same reasoning will apply to national covenanting. Nations are subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ. Covenanted nations are married to the Lord. "Thy land shall be married." Isa. 62:4. Subjects who rebel against their rulers, are required, when subdued, to renew their allegiance. This is a reasonable course among men, and surely no less so in relation to God. Nay, what more reasonable than that the national subjects of Prince Messiah, who have bound themselves to obey him, should, after breach of their obligation, return and renew their oath of fidelity? And without this can they be considered as in a state of voluntary subjection? So far from it that they are justly chargeable

with rebellion, so long as they refuse to renew their violated engagements to "the King of kings and Lord of lords." And the treatment due to rebels, whose guilt is aggravated by perfidy to their covenants, they shall receive—"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." Ps. 2:12. "As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head." Ez. 17:19. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." Isa. 60:12.

3. When a spirit of lukewarmness prevails. Lukewarmness is always an accompaniment of covenant-breaking. God will not grant manifestations of his favor to those who treacherously depart from him. If his spouse refuse to hear his voice, and to respond to his call, when in the most melting language he says, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled, for my head is filled with the dew, and my locks with the drops of the night," he will withdraw himself. And a certain result of his withdrawal will be a state of great lifelessness. "Love will wax cold." The affections will be set on earthly objects, and a Laodicean spirit will prevail. This is as great a calamity as can befall either an individual believer or the church. "Woe be to them when I depart from them." "I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offences and seek my face." When such a state of things exists it is a call to covenanting. And the soul convinced of insensibility will "stir itself up to take hold of God" by renewal of covenant. Every believer, who is endeavoring to walk with God, finds it necessary, in order to preserve the vitality of religion in his own soul, frequently to renew his covenant. This is one consideration that makes the sacrament of the Lord's supper so dear to the people of God. There, at his table, in partaking of the symbols of the body and blood of Christ, they seal their engagement to be the Lord's. And from the right performance of this duty they derive fresh strength, and increased life and activity in their Master's service. And many with whom is "the secret of the Lord," avail themselves of other opportunities to renew their personal covenant. A day of public, family, or personal fasting, is embraced as a suitable time for this important work. Some commemorate in this way the day of their birth, while others favored with the knowledge of the time when they were called out of darkness into God's marvellous light, spend the anniversary of that day in repeating their act of personal dedication to God. And it may be fairly assumed, that religion is not in a flourishing state in that man's soul, who is not frequently employed in this work. The conclusion from all this is, that there is in every believer, a sense of the importance of this duty as a means of both removing and preventing that most dangerous and distressing spiritual disease insensibility.

It is easy to apply these remarks to communities. The rules according to which the intercourse between heaven and earth is conducted, are the same, whether we consider man in his individual capacity, or in his social relations. Sin is infinitely hateful to God, whether it be committed by an individual, by a nation, or by the church. And God will always express his displeasure at the sin of his people in much the same way. He will withhold from them the light of his countenance and leave them to walk in darkness. Since the cause of the evil is the same in communities as in individuals, the same remedy must be employed. Many of those instances of covenanting already noticed, took place at a time of great lifelessness in religion. Some who had the eyes to see and the hearts to feel that it was an evil and a wicked thing to depart from God, stirred up themselves and others to make a vigorous effort to regain the divine presence, and by taking hold on God's covenant received "a time of refreshing from his presence."

Nations also have their seasons of darkness. Some, indeed, never saw the light, and of course do not know their loss. "They know not, neither do they understand, they walk on in darkness." But we speak of nations that have fallen away from former zeal and attainments. In such cases, there is but little regard for the interests of the church, the glory of God, or the honor of Immanuel. For this lamentable state of things covenanting is the cure. By taking hold of God's strength they receive renewed light and life in prosecuting the ends for which God has instituted civil rule. "They shall be a blessing in the midst of the land whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt, my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance." Isa. 19:24, 25.

4. A time of adversity. The Jews were in a very afflicted condition when they covenanted in the days of Nehemiah. And this they assigned as the reason of engaging in that transaction. "The kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins, have dominion over our bodies, and our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress; and because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it." Neh. 9:37, 38. God employs afflictions as means to reclaim his backsliding children. "If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." Psalm 89:31,32. By chastisement he brings back to the "Shepherd and Bishop of souls," those who had gone astray. And in this way he addresses communities as well as individuals. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name, hear the rod and who hath appointed it." Micah 6:9.

It is indeed a lamentable fact, that when "the Lord's hand is lifted up men will

not see." "The people turn not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts." "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and I smote him; I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." When this is the case with the church her candlestick is near to be removed out of its place. If less severe judgments do not awake her from her spiritual slumber, God will add to them. "And if ye will not be reformed by me, by these things, but will walk contrary unto me, then wilt I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins." Lev. 26:23, 24. We learn from prophecy that the church has her sorest trials yet to endure. "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time." Dan. 12:1. "For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." Matt. 24:21 Sore suffering is the consequence of great sinning. Iniquity will abound, and the love of many will wax cold. The last apostacy is the greatest. "When the Son of Man cometh will he find faith on the earth." "He will avenge the quarrel of his covenant," and call to a renewal of its obligation. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips." Hos. 14:1,2.

When God afflicts his church, he calls her to consider her ways. A retrospect of her course will bring to her view numerous instances of unfaithfulness to her Lord. She will see that "as a wife treacherously departs from her husband," so she has departed by breaking her covenant engagements; and she will acknowledge that God has afflicted her in truth and in faithfulness. Through the divine blessing on her afflictions, she will return to him that smiteth her. "Come and let us return to the Lord, for he hath torn and he will heal us, he hath smitten and he will bind us up." Hos. 6:1. Turning to the Lord is done by covenanting. A sinner in coming to Christ lays hold on him by faith and covenants to be his. And in all his after life, when through the infirmities of his flesh, and the power of temptation, he is led away from God, he recovers himself by renewing his personal covenant. He comes to Christ—confesses his backsliding—bewails the corruptions of his heart—and again promises and vows fidelity to his Savior and Lord. Nor is it otherwise with the church—the spouse of Christ. When she departs from him, he follows her with the most tender and affectionate addresses, and when these fail he employs other means to reclaim her. "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." This is God's language to the church in every afflictive dispensation. And her answer to such calls should be, "Behold we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God."

The instruments of the church's affliction are either open enemies or false friends. The former attack her by violence—the latter harm her by treachery. When the sword of persecution is drawn against her, the condition of her faithful children is peculiarly hard. Men of "whom the world is not worthy" are forced "to wander in deserts and in mountains, and in den and in eaves of the earth; being destitute, afflicted, tormented." This has often been her lot, and however much she can complain of the wickedness and cruelty of men, she never can charge her Lord with injustice. She is then called to remember her unfaithfulness to former engagements, and "with weeping and mourning to join herself to the Lord in a perpetual covenant." At other times, by the agency of false, as well as by the imperfection of *true* friends, she is left to mourn over declension from former attainments—schism in the body of Christ—strife and contention within her walls—and a great decay of vital godliness among her members. For all these things she should weep sore, and apply the sovereign remedy of divine prescription—"Vow and pay unto the Lord your God."

Circumstances like these gave occasion for "the national covenant of Scotland." An attack on the reformation cause in that kingdom was meditated and put in train by the popish king of France. A knowledge of this, and especially of the plan adopted to render the design effectual, determined the reformers to bind their whole nation to the protestant interest, and prepare a test that would prevent any foreign popish emissary from meddling with the affairs of the nation. This was done by swearing "the national covenant." By doing so, they gave evidence of both their piety and wisdom—their sense of the duty they owed to God, and their knowledge of the true way to seek deliverance in the hour of danger. In their distress they called on God, and he delivered them.

The point under consideration is strengthened by the fact that men in affliction are disposed to make promises of amending their ways. The profligate, on a bed of sickness, promises that if his life be spared, he will abandon his vicious course. The tendency of affliction is to produce such solemn resolutions. It is true they are often rashly made, and afterwards but little regarded, but the fact mentioned proves that there is within us a principle favorable to covenanting, which afflictions tend to develop. The abuse of it by those whose sorrow is "the sorrow of this world," is proof of its existence, and ought to be improved by taking hold of God's covenant of grace, and binding our souls to follow him through evil and through good report. "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised—Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God." Jer. 31:18. "When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God; and they remembered that God was

their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer." Psalm 78:34,35.

5. When there is important work to be done. This appears to have been one reason for Israel's renewing their covenant immediately before they crossed the Jordan. They were about to take possession of the land of promise, and exterminate the Canaanites whom God had devoted to destruction. For a work of such magnitude it behooved them to make due preparation. The land of Canaan was not given them because they were more in number or mightier than any other nation. "For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but thy right hand, and thine arm, because thou hadst a favor unto them." Psalm 44:3. On the arm of the Lord alone was their dependence. It was by taking hold of God's strength that they became "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." "By faith they escaped the edge of the sword—out of weakness were made strong—waxed valiant in fight—turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Heb. 11:35. Faith was exercised and strengthened by the renewal of their covenant. The tribes of Israel in that transaction professed anew their sole dependence on the God of armies; and engaged again to be faithful soldiers of the Captain of salvation. Confiding in their covenant God, they were certain of success—they knew that through God they would push down their enemies.

It was by covenanting that our fathers in Scotland carried forward the work of reformation. By the National covenant, near the close of the 16th century, they laid popery prostrate. By the Solemn League and Covenant, the presbyterians in the three kingdoms were enabled successfully to resist prelatic encroachments and civil tyranny. By it they were enabled to achieve the second Reformation, and furnish to the church a Confession of Faith—Catechisms [Larger and Shorter]—Form of Church Government, and Directory for Worship, which have descended to our day as her subordinate standards. Thus, while our fathers were employing means for the prosecution of the Reformed religion in Scotland, and the extension of it in England and Ireland, they were also setting up landmarks, by which the location and limits of the city of God will be known at the dawn of the millennial day.

It is by renewing their covenant engagements that the witnesses of Jesus will be enabled to stand in the time of trial. In the last fierce contest with the powers of darkness, their place will be the "hottest of the battle." The beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them. For such a conflict their hearts need to be filled with courage, and their arms girded with strength. By repeating their pledge of fidelity to the "Captain of the Lord's hosts," they secure anew the panoply of heaven, and grasp more firmly the sword of the Spirit, and use more skillfully the shield of faith. They thus

put on the breastplate of righteousness, and cover their heads with the helmet of salvation. Thus armed they go forth to the conflict, and "in the day of battle and of war" they are made "more than conquerors through him that loved them." Yea, though in the last struggle they fall, "they shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth them with his hand." It is indeed given them on behalf of Christ to suffer for his sake, but their sufferings will redound to the glory of God, and put to shame and confusion their enemies. When the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife having made herself ready, shall give herself away to him in a perpetual covenant, she shall be seen "coming up out of the wilderness," the place of her exile for 1260 years, "leaning on her Beloved." And then she will urge by all the eloquence of love, her claims to the affections of her Husband's heart, and to the protection of his almighty arm. "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death." Cant. 8:6. Let us turn aside and hear the pleadings of the purest and strongest love. "O thou whom my soul loveth," I have been long deprived of the sense of thy loving kindness which is better than life. I have been driven from the society of men, and banished to the waste howling wilderness. Now I ask to be indelibly impressed on thy heart—to have a lasting place in thy affections—and to enjoy sensible manifestations of thy love. Place me as a signet on thy hand, that I may be secure from all the attacks of hell and of earth combined for my destruction. I take thee as my Husband, and ask to be refreshed by thy love, and supported by thy power through the arduous work still before me. I confess that as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have I dealt treacherously with thee. "Behold I come to thee, for thou art the Lord my God." "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."

III. Application.

1. The great mass of the human family entirely neglect this duty. All unrenowned men are in an uncovenanted state. They are far from God and far from holiness. Slaves of sin, and bond-slaves of Satan, they will not serve the Lord. In their madness they embrace their chains, and refuse to enjoy the liberty with which Christ makes his people free. They hate God and his Son, and they will not have him to reign over them. It is indeed the strangest thing imaginable, that rational beings should reject a proposal so reasonable as that which God makes in his covenant of grace: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord—If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." And yet such is the stupidity of men by nature, that they prefer

the slavery of Satan to "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

This opposition to entering into covenant with God is as real and strong in communities as in individuals. When wicked men can give a character to society, it will be adverse to the authority of God. A family composed of irreligious persons will be an irreligious family. If the members have not individually taken hold of God's covenant for their personal salvation, it is not to be expected, that as a family they will dedicate themselves to Him who is "the God of the families of Israel." When the majority of a nation are infidels, we cannot expect to see the nation any thing but infidel in its national capacity. The mass must partake of that which characterises its constituent parts. Society will be no better in any of its forms, than the individuals of which it is composed.

The history of nations furnishes ample evidence of their unwillingness to be in a state of voluntary subjection to "the Prince of the kings of the earth." Constitutions are framed, and laws enacted, defining the mutual duties of rulers and subjects, without any recognition of the allegiance nations owe to him by whom "kings reign and princes decree justice." Of this the history of our own country furnishes a most remarkable and humiliating instance. Was not the expectation most reasonable, that a nation which, by the blessing of the God of armies had gained its independence, would acknowledge his authority and bind itself to obey his laws, especially when it is considered, that all the knowledge of the principles of civil liberty which its members possessed, they owed to a covenanted ancestry? The disappointment of these just expectations can be ascribed only to the fact, that the revolutionary patriots had degenerated far from the high and noble attainments of the covenanted martyrs. "The things that are God's—the glory due to his name" they overlooked, intent only on breaking the yoke of oppression under which they had groaned. They regarded not, they heard not the high command of "the Ancient of Days"—"Kiss ye the Son, lest he be angry."

It is still more strange to see any part of the church of Christ indifferent to the claims of her Head and Lord. "This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation." Alas! that while the kings of the earth and the rulers take counsel against the Lord and against his Anointed, to break their bands and cast away their cords, "the bride, the Lamb's wife" should, by her silence, connive at the dishonor done to her Husband, and even in some instances make a feeble attempt to justify this practical rebellion among his subjects. This is a shameful abandonment of reformation attainments—base recreancy to the cause of Immanuel. The covenants were the glory of the church and nation of Scotland. And how can they be said to "go forth by the footsteps of

the flock," who have declined from the attainments, renounced the covenants, and contradicted the testimony of "the cloud of witnesses." It is not the way to follow those "who through faith and patience inherit the promises," to refuse the obligation of the oaths by which they bound their souls in allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. And there can be no doubt, that all the schisms that disfigure the body mystical of Christ—the errors which mar and deform "the pillar and the ground of truth," and the insensibility which, with the weight of a great millstone, crushes down all the spiritual energies of professors, are the legitimate consequences of the abandonment of reformation attainments—the violation of Covenant engagements. Nor are we to expect to see visible unity restored to the church, until filled with the spirit that actuated our martyred fathers, all the people of God shall join themselves to him in a covenant that shall not be forgotten. "The watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." [see Appendix, note 1]

2. Covenant-breaking is exceedingly displeasing to God. "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Heb.10:38. "Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed no man disannuleth or addeth thereto," Gal. 3:15. Covenant-breaking is spiritual adultery. It is a violation of the marriage contract made "in the day of espousals." "I swear unto thee, and entered into covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine." Ez. 16:8. "But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot." ver. 15. "And I will judge thee as women that break wedlock, and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy." ver. 38.

God avenged "the quarrel of his covenant" on his people in all the calamities which they experienced, from their entrance into Canaan till the death of Christ. And the descendants of Abraham are feeling even now, that it is an evil and bitter thing that they have forsaken the covenant which the Lord God made with their fathers. From their sufferings, let individuals, families, nations, and churches, learn how dangerous it is to "forsake the guide of their youth, and forget the covenant of their God." They who do so, need not think to escape. "The Lord whose name is Jealous is a jealous God." "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

Children are in baptism given away to the Lord. Parents acting as their representatives engage for them, that they will, when they arrive at years of maturity, take hold formally of God's covenant. This is a subject for the serious consideration of those baptized youth who are slow to make a public profession of God's name and cause. It is not a matter left for their choice, whether or not they will be the Lord's. The act dedicating them to Him, has

already been performed, and it is at the peril of bringing on themselves the judgment of the covenant-breaker, if they refuse to give themselves to God by personal dedication. Let every one who has been baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," say, both by profession and practice, "I am the Lord's, and let him subscribe with his hand to the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel."

The British nation is eminently guilty in this matter. In the covenants, National and Solemn League, they swore allegiance to "the Lord God Omnipotent." But their covenants were most wantonly violated, not by gradual steps of declension, but by a national deed rescinding their obligation. This great evil was not redressed by the revolution of 1688. The present British throne is based on the violation of these national engagements. Erastianism, essential to the crown, is in direct opposition to those memorable deeds; and the infamous "act rescissory" stands unrepealed on the British statute book. Verily, a severe reckoning awaits that covenant-breaking nation.

It is time for those churches that have been long indifferent to their duty in this respect, to awake. Will they too slumber till the day of wrath overtakes them? What signifies their apparent zeal—their prosperity—their number and their influence, so long as they remain unfaithful to him whom they claim as their Lord? And is it not unfaithfulness not only to reject the obligations of the covenants of former times, and refuse to engage to be the Lord's, but also to countenance the nations of the earth in their impious determination not to do homage to him that is "the King of kings and Lord of lords?" Such churches may well be called "Ichabod." Tekel is written upon them. That the Spirit of God is departing from them is but too evident from their unfaithfulness in preaching—their laxness in discipline—and the low state of personal and family religion among their members. "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings."

3. The signs of the times indicate that covenanting is a seasonable duty. Every close and intelligent observer will admit that this is an eventful age. The whole world is in a state of excitement and activity. "Many are running to and fro, and knowledge is increased." The rights of men are more investigated and better understood now than at any former time. And why should not the rights of God be pressed on the attention of men as an important element in genuine reformation? This, it behooves the witnesses to do. They are required to sustain by faithful and clear testimony the right of "the Governor among the nations" to universal subjection and homage. The duty of men in every relation of life to enter into covenant with God, must be exhibited in principle, and carried out in practice, as the only sure foundation for the superstructure,

of moral and religious reformation. All the efforts unconnected with this, to render society better, are but to erect an edifice on the sand. It may rise rapidly, and dazzle with its splendor and flatter with its apparent stability, but it cannot be permanent because it is not based on a render. Surely, then, no philanthropist knowing this, can look on with indifference, when men with the best design are "spending their strength in vain, and their labor for that which will not profit." In these days covenanters should be active, and in order that they may induce others to engage in the work of covenanting, let them "first give their own selves to the Lord."

If we have been successful in ascertaining the circumstances which require the performance of this duty, it will be easy to demonstrate that it is now seasonable. Should it be essayed when the obligation of covenants is but little regarded? Surely that is eminently the case in our day. The covenanted British Isles are living in a total disregard of their covenant obligations. The churches there are deeply guilty in this matter. They support the crown with all its Erastianism, contrary to their most solemn engagements. To this the Reformed Presbyterian church is the only exception. The yoke of patronage bound by civil authority on the neck of the Presbyterian church in Scotland is indeed felt to be galling, but the tardy measures adopted to throw it off, prove that she has not yet returned to "her first love." In our own land the descendants of covenanted fathers, who succeeded in bringing the land of their nativity into covenant with God, refuse to acknowledge the Lord as the God of the American nation. The church here is, to a great extent, insensible to covenant obligation.—We ourselves are not guiltless. While we contend for the binding obligation of the covenants of our fathers, we do not prize and improve as we should this invaluable legacy. Surely it is time to be awake and alive to this important work.

The evidence that this is an insensible age is painfully abundant. There is but little life among professors of religion. "Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold." God is also afflicting his church. He has sent on her brokenness in judgment. Divisions destroy her visible unity. She is made a "reproach to her neighbors, a scorn and a derision" to them that are round about her. Moreover there is now important work to be done. Every thing indicates our nearness to the time of the end. When the potsherds are preparing to dash against one another, the church is in a most trying condition. She can identify herself with neither party in the conflict between "the ten horns, and the great whore that sitteth upon many waters." She has to guard the interests and honor of her Husband, and this will expose her to peculiar danger. While they raise the standard and unfurl the flag of war, she is called on to "display a banner for truth." On her banner the inscription must be,

"King of kings, and Lord of lords," and under this she must fight the battles of the Lord against the mighty. Victory is certain. "The Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful."

4. This duty should be observed in the proper manner. This consideration is of the utmost importance. For the want of attending to it many a good work has been marred. The divine law is the only rule for observing divine institutions, In the Bible we have both precept and approved example to direct us in covenanting.

Confession of sin, and especially of the sins of covenant-breaking should always accompany the renewal of our obligations. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you." Jer. 3:13, 14. It was so at the renewal of the covenant in the reign of Hezekiah, 2 Chron. 29; of Josiah, 2 Kings 23; and in the days of Nehemiah, Neh. 9. There should also be sorrow for sin. This is inseparable from sincere confession. Fasting should also be observed. "In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth." Isa. 22:12. "Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning." Joel 2:12. Moreover, the matter of the covenant should be right. It should not only contain nothing wrong, but it should bind to every thing right. And in the renewal of covenants, there should be no abridgment of former obligations. To this there is in our day a great tendency. The opposition is not so much to covenanting, as it is to the covenants of our fathers, and to the permanence of their obligation. The church never will renew her covenants aright until she embraces in her obligation all the attainments sworn to in the covenants National, and Solemn League. This was done in the renovation at Auchensauigh in Scotland, and at Middle Octorara in North America. These specifications are necessary, in addition to the obligation to observe the whole divine law, that the covenanters may testify their belief that these covenants were entered into in the true spirit of the institution of covenanting, and thus "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." "Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Phil. 3:16.

5. There is much to encourage in attempting this duty. While the signs of the times call to this work, they also pretty plainly indicate that it will be crowned with success.[see Appendix, note 2] It is true that the devil has great wrath,

and he will vent it against those who are in covenant with God. Against no other divine institution has he and his followers from the beginning evinced more deadly hatred; because there is none else the observance of which more promotes holiness of heart and life. Our hopes of success arise not from any expectation of a cessation of the opposition against those who are in covenant with God. No such cessation so long as their "adversary the devil" is permitted as a roaring lion to go about, seeking whom he may devour, should be either expected or desired. Our hope is in our covenant God. By a remarkable dispensation of divine Providence, the minds of men seem to be undergoing a process of preparation for the duty of covenanting. There is a general tendency towards concentrated action. We can view this in no other light than a common operation of the Spirit of God to prepare men for a renunciation of their "covenant with death, and their agreement with hell," to join themselves to the Lord. Infidelity is indeed making use of this tendency of our age, and is thereby rapidly extending its dominion. And what has it not perverted to the same end? But a still nearer approximation to covenanting is found in the modern practice of signing pledges, by which the signers bind themselves to one another, to promote with all their ability some cause in which they are embarked. This has also been misemployed. Hitherto there has been little in common between pledge-signing and covenanting, but the mere mode of operation. Still, when the time comes for publicly swearing, and signing, and sealing the covenants, it will not be a new thing under the sun for a great multitude to listen to the addresses of public speakers, and at the same time "subscribe with their hand" a document containing an important obligation.

The prevalence of a spirit of investigation and inquiry furnishes also ground of encouragement in this duty. Our age is characterized by a fondness for novelty. And there can be no doubt, that this is the result of a want of confidence in opinions long held, and fondly cherished. Old systems of philosophy have been exploded, and those which have been introduced in their place are undergoing constant change and sometimes improvement. Moral maxims, and political dogmas are closely investigated, and many of them of long standing, are found utterly erroneous. This often suggests the question whether men ought not to improve in the science of religion, as well as in politics and in morals. And the answer is given in the affirmative by all those who forget, that the church has derived her views of religion from the Bible, a source very different from that whence the men of the world draw their notions of politics and morality. The effect of this is—the former is immutable, the latter is subject to constant change. The human mind wearied of such uncertainties excites itself to remedy the evil. Hence the disposition to invent, and the fondness for novelty. Nor do men stop with making discoveries in things that pertain to this life. It were well if they would. Emboldened by

their success in these things, they go farther, and rashly lay their hands on the ark of God. New measures are introduced into the worship of God. And all this tends to feed, not to satiate a craving appetite for novelty.

As these are the natural workings of the mental constitution which God has given us, it might be well to endeavor to turn them to some good account. If men love novelty and will be satisfied with nothing else, why not direct their attention to the duty of covenanting? Here their desire could be lawfully and profitably gratified. And this would be introducing a divine institution into the place occupied by human invention. The result could not, but be highly beneficial to the interests of pure and undefiled religion.

But the sure ground of encouragement is, that covenanting is a duty. If God calls us to it we may trust him with the result. He never "said to any of the seed of Jacob, seek my face in vain." Let us trust in him, and go forward. What, although it may expose us to the reproach of "mother's children?" What, although it may require us to make painful sacrifices? What, although it may provoke the men of this world to unsheath against us the sword of persecution? Are these things to be put into the scale and be made to outweigh the command of God—the glory of the Messiah—and the obligation of the church? No: "let Zion's children be joyful in their King." Let them "vow and pay to the Lord their God." They should not be the last to bring the King of Israel back. While they testify for the royal claims of Immanuel let them demonstrate the reality of their profession by swearing allegiance to him. Awake ye sleeping virgins—"Behold the bridegroom cometh." Go ye forth to meet him. Trim your lamps—and supply your vessels with oil. "Let your loins be girded and your lights burning." In a little time you shall realize the fondest desire of your hearts. The crown on Immanuel's head shall flourish. "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." "And let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen."

APPENDIX.

NOTE 1

The author of the preceding discourse, has, in common with his brethren, had to bear some reproach, for declining to take a part in the efforts which some are now making to restore visible unity to the church. To prevent a misunderstanding of the views of Covenanters on this point, he would declare

that they earnestly desire to see an end put to ecclesiastical strife and division. For the peace of Zion they pray, and to produce it they are employing the only legitimate means. A union based on either a profession of error, or a relinquishment of truth, all admit cannot be permanent. And yet this is the fact in relation to the plan proposed and recommended, by many professed friends of union. Mutual compromise is the means a meeting place on which all might agree is supposed might be found, and about those things on which there is a diversity of opinion, let them agree to differ.

Against this plan there are insuperable objections. But without waiting to present them, as they have been often presented, the writer would propose a plan, the only one as he believes to attain the desired end, The churches usually called Presbyterian, all claim to be the descendants of the Church of Scotland. All—whether Reformed Presbyterian, Associate, Associate Reformed, or Presbyterian—claim her as their mother, and boast of the relationship. It is also agreed by all, that the church of Scotland lost part of her independence, purity, and glory, by the Revolution settlement of 1688, which laid on her neck the yoke of Erastian supremacy. Between the years 1638 and 1649, the reformation was at its height, and the church was in her purest state. Why then not base the union of the church now on the same foundation on which she was then united? All the divisions which have been made in the church since that time, have been the effects of leaving that foundation. All the attempts made to restore unity have been failures. And why? Was it not because the builders deserted the old, and attempted to build on a new foundation?

Were it merely as a matter of experiment, it should be tried. The most skillful physician, when all his efforts to remove the disease are baffled, will not hesitate to try some very simple nostrum, especially if he is satisfied, that in a similar case it has been successful. And why do spiritual physicians adhere so obstinately to their own prescriptions, which have in every instance failed? Strange that the inquiry has never been made.—What united the Presbyterians in England, Scotland, and Ireland, about the middle of the 17th century, in opposition to Episcopacy, backed by the throne? Or, if the inquiry has been made, it is stranger still, that those who are laboring now for union, have not learned an important practical lesson from the answer.

But it is no matter of experiment. Experience, observation, reason, and Scripture, give their joint testimony to the truth, that the church cannot be permanently united at the expense of yielding a single truth for which she has ever contended. What then is to be done? Just let all return to the point from which they diverged. Let each church retrace her steps of defection from

reformation attainments. Let the mutilations of the Westminster Confession of Faith by some, and misrepresentations of it by others, be thrown away, and let all agree to take that system of truth, in connection with the Catechisms [Larger and Shorter], Form of Church Government, Directory [for Public Worship], &c. as the standards of the church. And let them bind themselves in solemn covenant engagement to maintain all the truths therein contained, and to testify against all contrary error. In a word, let the covenants sworn by our common mother, the church of Scotland, in her purest times, be renewed, divested of their local peculiarities, retaining all their moral principles. Let this be done, or let those who refuse to do it, act consistently, and disclaim all connection with her, as their mother.

But it may be retorted. If your plan is the right one, why have you not long ere now succeeded? I reply, the question is not what plan is most likely to receive the most general concurrence of the churches? In this respect yours has the decided advantage. But the question is what plan, if accomplished, would bid the fairest to be permanent? And here ours has the preference. You can by opposing us, prevent the execution of our plans; and you do oppose us not because you think a union in our way would not be permanent, but because it cannot be effected. That is, you make the result of your opposition the reason of it. For, if all would cease to oppose, and on the other hand unite with us, the point is gained. But we oppose you, because a union on your terms, we believe, would be at the expense of truth. It would not be permanent, and, of course, all the labor would be lost.

May the time soon come, when "the watchmen shall see eye to eye," and, "when there shall be one Lord, and his name one."

NOTE 2

The witnesses of Christ should be "men that have understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do." The good tree "bringeth forth its fruit in season." In maintaining the testimony of Jesus, prominence should always be given to "the present truth." The experienced commander will direct his strongest force to the point where the enemy is making his fiercest attack. The same course must be pursued by the soldiers of Christ in their conflict with the principalities and powers of darkness.

In every age of the church there have been some leading principles for which she has successively contended and suffered. In general, the whole force of the

kingdom of darkness has been directed against the Lord Jesus Christ, in "the offices which he executes as our Redeemer." And for these, in regular succession the church has borne a faithful and honorable testimony. Paganism in the primitive ages of the New Testament church assailed the Redeemer's prophetic character. The light which, by his word and Spirit, he diffused throughout the Roman Empire, roused the hostility of the votaries and victims of pagan superstition. In ten successive persecutions the witnesses maintained in their life, and sealed by their death, their testimony to the genuineness of that religion which the Lord Jesus Christ revealed, in opposition to heathen superstition and idolatry.

For the priestly office of Christ, witness was borne against the presumptuous claims of papal Rome. The doctrine for which the witnesses contended was, that the sinner is justified only by the righteousness of Christ. For their faithfulness they were put to death by the Man of Sin, and by their death they sealed their testimony to the priestly office of the "one Mediator between God and men."

The kingly office of Christ is two-fold: "He is the head of the church," and he is "the head of all principality and power." "King of saints," and "Prince of the kings of the earth." The former is denied by Episcopalians, who give ecclesiastical supremacy to an earthly monarch. Against this unhallowed infringement on the rights of Messiah, the witnesses loudly protested in the seventeenth century, and again sealed their sincerity with their blood, under the tyrannical domination of Charles II. and his successor James.

The authority of Christ as "Governor among the nations," remains yet to be witnessed for by the blood of the martyrs. This is eminently "the present truth." The principles of government are now undergoing a severe examination. A great deal wrong has been discovered in the old systems, while there is but little indication that those who have made the discovery, know how to remedy the evil. Those who clamor most for liberty, are as unmindful of the Headship of Christ over the nations, as the votaries of despotism. It is a mere struggle on the one hand to retain power—on the other, to enjoy right; while neither party recognises the obligation to "honor the Son." And whether the sovereignty be claimed by an individual, or by the people, both claims equally conflict with his rights. "It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Ez. 21:27.

For this important truth the witnesses should now testify. Their voice has indeed been heard, but let it sound above the increasing uproar about the things of men, calling loudly and distinctly—"Render unto God, the things

that are God's."

An important duty devolves on us in these times of agitation, and let us see that we be faithful. While we are not to be unmindful of the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Prophet, and as the Priest, and as Head of the church, let us see that we give special attention to his claims as "Prince of the kings of the earth." Above all, let us beware of wasting our time, exhausting our strength, and weakening our mutual affection, by contentions in relation to matters in no way connected with the present truth. Now is the time for the witnesses to be united. Let us, in the strength of that "grace which is sufficient for us," lift up our hands to the most High God, in the renovation of our solemn covenant engagements. This will give our testimony efficiency, "Our God will bless us, and all the earth shall fear him."