

CHAPTER II.

**THE TWO COVENANTS:
THEIR RELATION**

“It is written, that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondmaid, and one by the freewoman, Howbeit, the one by the bondmaid is born after the flesh; but the son by the freewoman is born through promise. Which things contain an allegory: for these women are two covenants. “ GAL. 4. 22-24.

THERE are two covenants, one called the Old, the other the New. God speaks of this very distinctly in Jeremiah, where He says “The days come, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, not after the covenant I made with their fathers” (Jer. 31.). This is quoted in Hebrews, with the addition “In that He saith a new covenant, He hath made the first old.” Our Lord spoke Himself of the New Covenant in His blood. In His dealings with His people, in His working out His great redemption, it has pleased God that there should be two covenants.

It has pleased Him, not as an arbitrary appointment, but for good and wise reasons, which made it indispensably necessary that it should be so, and not otherwise. The clearer our insight into the reasons, and the Divine reasonableness, of there thus being two covenants, and into their relation to each other, the more full and true can be our own personal apprehension of what the New

Covenant is meant to be to us. They indicate two stages in God's dealing with man; two ways of serving God, a lower or elementary one of preparation and promise, a higher or more advanced one of fulfillment and possession. As that in which the true excellency of the second consists is opened up to us, we can spiritually enter into what God has prepared for us. Let us try and understand why there should have been two, neither less nor more.

The reason is to be found in the fact that, in religion, in all intercourse between God and man, there are two parties, and that each of these must have the opportunity to prove what their part is in the Covenant. In the Old Covenant man had the opportunity given him to prove what He could do, with the aid of all the means of grace God could bestow. That Covenant ended in man proving his own unfaithfulness and failure. In the New Covenant, God is to prove what He can do with man, all unfaithful and feeble as he is, when He is allowed and trusted to do all the work. The Old Covenant was one dependent on man's obedience, one which he could break, and did break (Jer. 31. 32). The New Covenant was one which God has engaged shall never be broken; He Himself keeps it and ensures our keeping it: so He makes it an Everlasting Covenant.

It will repay us richly to look a little deeper into this. This relation of God to fallen man in covenant is the same as it was to unfallen man as Creator. And what was that relation? God proposed to make a man in His own image and likeness. The chief glory of God is that He has life in Himself; that He is independent of all else, and owes what He is to Himself alone. If the image and likeness of God was not to be a mere name, and man was really to be like God in the power to make himself what he was to be, he must needs have the power of free will and self determination. This was the

problem God had to solve in man's creation in His image. Man was to be a creature made by God, and yet he was to be, as far as a creature could be, like God, self made. In all God's treatment of man these two factors were ever to be taken into account. God was ever to take the initiative, and be to man the source of life. Man was ever to be the recipient, and yet at the same time the disposer of the life God bestowed. When man had fallen through sin, and God entered into a covenant of salvation, these two sides of the relationship had still to be maintained intact. God was ever to be the first, and man the second. And yet man, as made in God's image, was ever, as second, to have full time and opportunity to appropriate or reject what God gave, to prove how far he could help himself, and indeed be self-made. His absolute dependence upon God was not to be forced upon him; if it was really to be a thing of moral worth and true blessedness, it must be his deliberate and voluntary choice. And this now is the reason why there was a first and a second covenant, that in the first, man's desires and efforts might be fully awakened, and time given for him to make full proof of what his human nature, with the aid of outward instruction and miracles and means of grace, could accomplish. When his utter impotence, his hopeless captivity under the power of sin had been discovered, there came the New Covenant, in which God was to reveal how man's true liberty from sin and self and the creature, his true nobility and God-likeness, was to be found in the most entire and absolute dependence, in God's being and doing all within him.

In the very nature of things there was no other way possible to God than this in dealing with a being whom He had endowed with the Godlike power of a will. And all the weight this reason for the Divine procedure has in God's dealing with His people as a whole, it equally has in dealing with the individual. The two

covenants represent two stages of God's education of man and of man's seeking after God. The progress and transition from the one to the other is not merely chronological or historical; it is organic and spiritual. In greater or lesser degree it is seen in every member of the body, as well as in the body as a whole. Under the Old Covenant there were men in whom, by anticipation, the powers of the coming redemption worked mightily. In the New Covenant there are men in whom the spirit of the Old still makes itself manifest. The New Testament proves, in some of its most important epistles,- especially those to the Galatians, Romans, and Hebrews, how possible it is within the New Covenant still to be held fast in the bondage of the Old.

This is the teaching of the passage from which our text is taken. In the home of Abraham, the father of the faithful, Ishmael and Isaac are both found-the one born of a slave, the other of a free woman; the one after the flesh and the will of man, the other through the promise and the power of God; the one only for a time, then to be cast out, the other to be heir of all. A picture held up to the Galatians of the life they were leading, as they trusted to the flesh and its religion, making a fair show, and yet proved, by their being led captive to sin, to be, not of the free but of the bond woman. Only through faith in the promise and the mighty quickening power of God could they, could any of them, be made truly and fully free, and stand in the freedom with which Christ has made us free.

As we proceed to study the two covenants in the light of this and other scriptures, we shall see how they are indeed the Divine revelation of two systems of religious worship, each with its spirit or life-principle ruling every man who professes to be a Christian. We shall see how the one great cause of the feebleness of so many

Christians is just this, that the Old Covenant spirit of bondage still has the mastery. And we shall see that nothing but a spiritual insight, with a whole-hearted acceptance, and a living experience, of all the New Covenant engages that God will work in us, can possibly fit for walking as God would have us do.

This truth of there being two stages in our service of God, two degrees of nearness in our worship, is typified in many things in the Old Covenant worship; perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the difference between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the temple, with the veil separating them. Into the former the priests might always enter to draw near to God. And yet they might not come too near; the veil kept them at a distance. To enter within that, was death. Once a year the High Priest might enter, as a promise of the time when the veil should be taken away and the full access to dwell in God's presence be given to His people. In Christ's death the veil of the temple was rent, and His blood gives us boldness and power to enter into the Holiest of all and live there day by day in the immediate presence of God. It is by the Holy Spirit, who issued forth from that Holiest of all, where Christ had entered, to bring its life to us, and make us one with it, that we can have the power to live and walk always with the consciousness of God's presence in us.

It is thus not only in Abraham's home that there were the types of the two covenants, the spirit of bondage and the spirit of liberty, but even in God's home in the temple. The priests had not yet the liberty of access into the Father's presence. Not only among the Galatians, but everywhere throughout the Church, there are to be found two classes of Christians. Some are content with the mingled life, half flesh and half spirit, half self-effort and half grace. Others are not content with this, but are seeking with their whole heart

to know to the full what the deliverance from sin and what the abiding full power for a walk in God's presence is, which the New Covenant has brought and can give. God help us all to be satisfied with nothing less. (See Note A, on the Second Blessing.)