

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT

“They shall be My people, and I will be their God. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.” JER. 32. 38, 40.

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them: it shall be an everlasting covenant with them.” EZEK 36. 26, 27; 37. 26.

WE have had the words of the institution of the New Covenant. Let us listen to the further teaching we have concerning it in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where God speaks of it as an everlasting Covenant.

In every covenant there are two parties. And the very foundation of a covenant rests on the thought that each party is to be faithful

to the part it has undertaken to perform. Unfaithfulness on either side breaks the covenant.

It was thus with the Old Covenant. God had said to Israel, Obey My voice, and I will be your God (Jer. 7. 23, 11. 4). These simple words contained the whole Covenant. And when Israel disobeyed, the Covenant was broken. The question of Israel being able or not able to obey was not taken into consideration: disobedience forfeited the privileges of the Covenant.

If a New Covenant were to be made, and if that was to be better than the Old, this was the one thing to be provided for. No New Covenant could be of any profit unless provision were made for securing obedience. Obedience there must be. God as Creator could never take His creatures into His favor and fellowship, except they obeyed Him. The thing would have been an impossibility. If the New Covenant is to be better than the Old, if it is to be an everlasting Covenant, never to be broken, it must make some sufficient provision for securing the obedience of the Covenant people.

And this is indeed the glory of the New Covenant, the glory that excelleth, that this provision has been made. In a way that no human thought could have devised, by a stipulation that never entered into any human covenant, by an undertaking in which God's infinite condescension and power and faithfulness are to be most wonderfully exhibited, by a supernatural mystery of Divine wisdom and grace, the New Covenant provides a guarantee, not only for God's faithfulness, but for man's too! And this in no other way than by God Himself undertaking to secure man's part as well as His own. Do try and get hold of this.

It is just because this, the essential part of the New Covenant, so exceeds and confounds all human thoughts of what a covenant means, that Christians, from the Galatians downwards, have not been able to see and believe what the New Covenant really brings. They have thought that human unfaithfulness was a factor permanently to be reckoned with as something utterly unconquerable and incurable, and that the possibility of a life of obedience, with the witness from within of a good conscience, and from above of God's pleasure, was not to be expected. They have therefore sought to stir the mind to its utmost by arguments and motives, and never realised how the Holy Spirit is to be the unceasing, universal, all-sufficient worker of everything that has to be wrought by the Christian.

Let us beseech God earnestly that He would reveal to us by the Holy Spirit the things that He hath prepared for them that love Him; things that have not entered into the heart of man; the wonderful life of the New Covenant. All depends upon our knowledge of what God will work in us. Listen to what God says in Jeremiah of the two parts of His everlasting Covenant, shortly after He had announced the New Covenant, and in further elucidation of it. The central thought of that, that the heart is to be put right, is here reiterated and confirmed. "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good." That is, God will be unchangeably faithful. He will not turn from us. "But I will put My fear into their heart, that they shall not depart from Me." This is the second half: Israel will be unchangeably faithful too. And that because God will so put His fear in their heart, that they shall not depart from Him. As faithfully as He undertakes for the fulfillment of His part, will He undertake for the fulfillment of their part, that they shall not depart from Him!

Listen to God's word in Ezekiel, in regard to one of the terms of His Covenant of peace, His everlasting Covenant. (Ezek. 34. 25; 36. 27; 37. 26) : "I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them." In the Old Covenant we have nothing of this sort. You have, on the contrary, from the story of the golden calf and the breaking of the Tables of the Covenant onward, the sad fact of continual departure from God. We find God longing for what He would so fain have seen, but was not to be found. "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always" (Deut. 5. 29). We find throughout the Book of Deuteronomy, a thing without parallel in the history of any religion or religious lawgiver, that Moses most distinctly prophesies their forsaking of God, with the terrible curses and dispersion that would come upon them. It is only at the close of his threatenings (Deut. 30. 6) that he gives the promise, of the new time that would come: "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and thou shalt obey the voice of the Lord thy God." The whole Old Covenant was dependent on man's faithfulness: "The Lord thy God keepeth covenant with them that keep His commandments." God's keeping the Covenant availed little, if man did not keep it. Nothing could help man until the "If ye shall diligently keep" of the law, was replaced by the word of promise, "I will put My Spirit in you, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them." The one supreme difference of the New Covenant; the one thing for which the Mediator, and the Blood, and the Spirit were given; the one fruit God sought and Himself engaged to bring forth was this: a heart filled with His fear and love, a heart to cleave unto Him and not depart from Him, a heart in which His Spirit and His law dwells, a heart that delights to do His will.

Here is the inmost secret of the New Covenant. It deals with the heart of man in a way of Divine power. It not only appeals to the heart by every motive of fear or love, of duty or gratitude. That the law also did. But it reveals God Himself, cleansing our heart and making it new, changing it entirely from a stony heart into a heart of flesh, a tender, living, loving heart, putting His Spirit within it, and so, by His Almighty Power and Love, breathing and working in it, making the promise true, “I will cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments.” A heart in perfect harmony with Himself, a life and walk in His way—God has engaged in Covenant to work this in us. He undertakes for our part in the Covenant as much as for His own.

This is nothing but the restoration of the original relation between God and the man He had made in His likeness. He was on earth to be the very image of God, because God was to live and to work all in him, and he to find his glory and blessedness in thus owing all to God. This is the exceeding glory of the New Covenant, of the Pentecostal dispensation, that by the Holy Spirit God could now again be the indwelling life of His people, and so make the promise a reality: “I will cause you to walk in My statutes.” With God’s presence secured to us every moment of the day—“I will not turn away from them”; with God’s “fear put into our heart “by His own Spirit, and our heart thus responding to His holy presence; with our hearts thus made right with God, we can, we shall walk in His statutes, and keep His judgments.

My brethren, the great sin of Israel under the Old Covenant, that by which they greatly grieved Him, was this: “they limited the Holy One of Israel.” Under the New Covenant there is no less danger of this sin. It makes it impossible for God to fulfil His promises. Let us seek, above everything, for the Holy Spirit’s teaching, to show us exactly what God has established the New

Covenant for, that we may honor Him by believing all that His love has prepared for us.

And if we ask for the cause of the unbelief, that prevents the fulfilment of the promise, we shall find that it is not far to seek. It is, in most cases, the lack of desire for the promised blessing. In all who came to Jesus on earth the intensity of their desire for the healing they needed made them ready and glad to believe in His word. Where the law has done its full work, where the actual desire to be freed from every sin is strong, and masters the heart, the promise of the New Covenant, when once really understood, comes like bread to a famishing man. The subtle unbelief, that thinks it impossible to be kept from sinning, cuts away the power of accepting the provision of the everlasting Covenant. God's Word, "I will put My fear in their heart, that they shall not depart from Me"; "I will put My Spirit within you, and ye shall keep My judgment," is understood in some feeble sense, according to our experience, and not according to what the Word and what God means. And the soul settles down into a despair, or a self-contentment, that says it can never be otherwise, and makes true conviction for sin impossible.

Let me say to every reader who would fain be able to believe fully all that God says: Cherish every whisper of the conscience and of the Spirit that convices of sin. Whatever it be, a hasty temper, a sharp word, an unloving or impatient thought, anything of selfishness or self-will, cherish that which condemns it in you, as part of the schooling that is to bring you to Christ and the full possession of His salvation. The New Covenant is meant to meet the need for a power of not sinning, which the Old could not give. Come with that need; it will prepare and open the heart for all the everlasting Covenant secures you. It will bring you to that humble and entire dependence upon God in His Omnipotence and His Faithfulness, in which He can and will work all He has promised.