

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO COVENANTS: THE TRANSITION

“Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, in the blood of the everlasting covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.” HEB. 13. 20, 21.

THE transition from the Old Covenant to the New was not slow or gradual, but by a tremendous crisis. Nothing less than the death of Christ was the close of the Old. Nothing less than His resurrection from the dead, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, the opening of the New. The path of preparation that led up to the crisis was long and slow; the rending of the veil, that symbolised the end of the old worship, was the work of a moment. By a death, once for all, Christ's work, as fulfiller of law and prophets, as the end of the law, was for ever finished. By a resurrection in the power of an endless life, the Covenant of Life was ushered in.

These events have an infinite significance, as revealing the character of the Covenants they are related to. The death of Christ shows the true nature of the Old Covenant. It is elsewhere called “a ministration of death” (2 Cor. 3. 7). It brought forth nothing but death. It ended in death; only by death could the life that had been lived under it be brought to an end. The New was to be a Covenant of Life; it had its birth in the omnipotent resurrection power that brought Christ from the dead; its one mark and blessing is, that all it gives comes, not only as a promise, but as an experience, in the power of an endless life. The Death reveals the utter inefficacy and insufficiency of the Old; the Life brings nigh and imparts to us for ever all that the New has to offer. An insight into the completeness of the transition, as seen in Christ, prepares us for apprehending the reality of the change in our life, when, “like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also walk in newness of life.”

The complete difference between the life in the Old and the New is remarkably illustrated by a previous passage in the Epistle (Heb. 9. 16). After having said that a death for the redemption of transgressions had to take place ere the New Covenant could be established, the writer adds, “Where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it.” Before any heir can obtain the legacy, its first owner, the testator, must have died. The old proprietorship, the old life, must disappear entirely before the new heir, the new life, can enter upon the inheritance. Nothing but death can work the transference of the property. It is even so with Christ, with the Old and the New Covenant life, with our own deliverance from the Old and our entrance on the New. Now, having been made dead to the law by the body of Christ, we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were holden—here is the completeness of the deliverance from Christ’s side; “so that we serve”—here is the completeness of the change

in our experience “in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter.”

The transition, if it is to be real and whole, must take place by a death. As with Christ the Mediator of the Covenant, so with His people, the heirs of the Covenant. In Him we are dead to sin; in Him we are dead to the law. Just as Adam died to God, and we inherit a nature actually and really dead: in sin, dead to God and His kingdom, so in Christ we died to sin, and inherit a nature actually dead to sin and its dominion. It is when the Holy Spirit reveals and makes real to us this death to sin and to the law too, as the one condition of a life to God, that the transition from the Old to the New Covenant can be fully realised in us. The Old was, and was meant to be, a “ministration of death”; until it has completely done its work in us there is no complete discharge from its power. The man who sees that self is incurably evil and must die; who gives self utterly to death as he sinks before God in utter impotence and the surrender to His working; who consents to death with Christ on the cross as his desert, and in faith accepts it as his only deliverance; he alone is prepared to be led by the Holy Spirit into the full enjoyment of the New Covenant life. He will learn to understand how completely death makes an end to all self-effort, and how, as he lives in Christ to God, everything henceforth is to be the work of God Himself.

See how beautifully our text brings out this truth, that just as much as Christ’s resurrection out of death was the work of God Himself, is our life equally to be wholly God’s own work too. Not more direct and wonderful than was in Christ the transition from death to life, is to be in us the experience of what the New Covenant life is to bring. Notice the subject of the two verses. In ver. 20 we have what God has done in raising Christ from the dead; in ver.

21, what God is to do in us, working in us what is pleasing to Him. (20) “The God of peace, who brought from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep, even our Lord Jesus, (21) Make you perfect in every good thing to do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.” We have the name of our Lord Jesus twice. In the first case it refers to what God has done to Christ for us, raising Him; in the second, to what God is doing through Christ in us, working His pleasure in us. Because it is the same God continuing in us the work He began in Christ, it is in us just what it was in Christ. In Christ’s death we see Him in utter impotence allowing and counting upon God to work all and give Him life. God wrought the wonderful transition. In us we see the same; it is only as we give ourself unto that death too, as we entirely cease from self and its works, as we lie, as in the grave, waiting for God to work all, that the God of resurrection life can work in us all His good pleasure.

It was “ through the blood of the everlasting Covenant,” with its atonement for sin, and its destruction of sin’s power, that God effected that resurrection. It is through that same blood that we are redeemed and freed from the power of sin, and made partakers of Christ’s resurrection life. The more we study the New Covenant, the more we shall see that its one aim is to restore man, out of the Fall, to the life in God for which he was created. It does this first, by delivering him from the power of sin in Christ’s death, and then by taking possession of his heart, his life, for God to work all in him by the Holy Spirit. The whole argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews as to the Old and New Covenants is here summed up in these concluding verses. Just as He raised Christ from the dead, the God of the everlasting Covenant can and will now make you perfect in every good thing to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ. Your doing His

will is the object of creation and redemption. God's working it all in you is what redemption has made possible. The Old Covenant of law and effort and failure has ended in condemnation and death. The New Covenant is coming to give, in all whom the law has slain and brought to bow in their utter impotence, the law written in the heart, the Spirit dwelling there, and God working all, both to will and to do, through Jesus Christ.

Oh for a Divine revelation that the transition from Christ's death, in its impotence, to His life in God's power, is the image, the pledge, the power of our transition out of the Old Covenant, when it has slain us, to the New, with God working in us all in all!

The transition from Old to New, as effected in Christ, was sudden. Is it so in the believer? Not always. In us it depends upon a revelation. There have been cases in which a believer, sighing and struggling against the yoke of bondage, has in one moment had it given to him to see what a complete salvation the New Covenant brings to the heart and the inner life, through the ministration of the Spirit, and by faith he has entered at once into his rest. There have been other cases in which, gradual as the dawn of day, the light of God has risen upon the heart. God's offer of entrance into the enjoyment of our New Covenant privileges is always urgent and immediate. Every believer is a child of the New Covenant, and heir of all its promises. The death of the Testator gives him full right to immediate possession. God longs to bring us into the land of promise; let us not come short through unbelief.

There may be someone who can hardly believe that such a mighty change in his life is within his reach, and yet who would fain know what he is to do if there is to be any hope of his attaining it. I have

just said, the death of the testator gives the heir immediate right to the inheritance. And yet the heir, if he be a minor, does not enter on the possession. A term of years ends the stage of minority on earth, and he is no longer under guardians. In the spiritual life the state of pupillage ends, not with the expiry of years, but the moment the minor proves his fitness for being made free from the law, by accepting the liberty there is in Christ Jesus. The transition, as with the Old Testament, as with Christ, as with the disciples, comes when the time is fulfilled and all things are now ready.

But what is one to do who is longing to be thus made ready? Accept your death to sin in Christ, and act it out. Acknowledge the sentence of death on everything that is of nature: take and keep the place before God of utter unworthiness and helplessness; sink down before Him in humility, meekness, patience, and resignation to His will and mercy. (If you would understand the full meaning of this clause and know how to practise its teaching, consult a little book just published, *Dying to Self: A Golden Dialogue*. By William Law, with Notes by Rev. Andrew Murray. (Nisbet & Co.) See also Note E.) Fix your heart upon the great and mighty God, who in His grace will work in you above what you can ask or think, and will make you a monument of His mercy. Believe that every blessing of the Covenant of grace is yours; by the death of the Testator you are entitled to it all—and on that faith act, knowing that all is yours. The new heart is yours, the law written in the heart is yours, the Holy Spirit, the seal of the Covenant, is yours. Act on this faith, and count upon God as Faithful and Able, and oh! so Loving, to reveal in you, to make true in you, all the power and glory of His everlasting Covenant.

May God reveal to us the difference between the two lives under the Old and the New; the resurrection power of the New, with

God working all in us; the power of the transition secured to us in death with Christ and life in Him. And may He teach us at once to trust Christ Jesus for a full participation in all the New Covenant secures.