

# THE BALM OF THE COVENANT

APPLIED TO THE BLEEDING  
WOUNDS OF AFFLICTED SAINTS



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## Wounds of Afflicted Saints

by John Flavel

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## **To the Virtuous and Much Honoured Madam, Ursula Upton**

MADAM,

IF I find it an hard task to write on such a doleful subject, it cannot be imagined but your part must be abundantly harder, who feel over and over what is here written. Could I tell how to administer counsels and comforts to you, without exasperating your sorrows, I would certainly take that way; but seeing the one (in this case) cannot be done without the other, it is our duty to submit to the method Providence hath prescribed to us.

The design of the ensuing discourse, is to evince the truth of what seems a very great paradox to most men, namely, that the afflictions of the saints can do them no hurt, and that the wisdom of men and angels cannot lay one circumstance of their condition (how uneasy soever it seems to be) better, or more to their advantage than God hath laid it. I attempt not by a flourish of rhetoric to persuade you against the demonstrations you can fetch from sense and feeling to the contrary, but to overthrow the false reasonings of flesh and sense, by the allowed rules of Scripture, and sure principles of religion.

And methinks you, and every Christian, should gladly entertain that comfortable conclusion, when you shall find the foundation of it as strong, as the influences thereof are sweet and comfortable.

Certainly, Madam, the intent of the Redeemer's undertaking was not to purchase for his people riches, ease, and pleasures on earth; but to mortify their lusts, heal their natures, and spiritualize their affections; and thereby to fit them for the eternal fruition of God. Upon this supposition the truth of this conclusion (how strange soever it seems) is firmly built.

It was not without divine direction, that the subject of the ensuing discourse was as pertinently, as seasonably, recommended to me by your dear husband, in the day of your sorrows for your only son. He took, I hope, his portion of comfort out of it before he died, and it is now left as a spring of comfort to you, who then mourned with him, and now for him.

Heavy pressures call for strong support, and fainting seasons for rich cordials. Your burden is indeed heavy: yet I must say it is much our own fault our burdens are so heavy as we feel them to be; for according to the measure of our delight in, and expectation from the creature, is our sorrow and disappointment when we part from it. The highest tides are always followed with the lowest ebbs. We find temperance and patience knit together in the same precept, and intemperance and impatience as inseparably connected in our own experience. It may be we did not suspect ourselves of any sinful excess in the time of their enjoyment; but it now appears the creature was gotten deeper into our hearts than we imagined, by the pain we feel at parting: Did we not lean too hard upon it, there would not be such shakings as we feel when it is slipt from us.

But, Madam, it is high time to recal your thoughts, and bound your sorrows, which the following considerations would greatly assist you in.

1. What is the very ground and reason of our excessive sorrows for the loss of earthly comforts? Is it not this, That they are perishing and transitory? That is, that you find them to be as God made them. And can we expect that God should alter the laws of nature to please

and humour us? It is as natural to our relations to die, as it is for flowers to wither, or the moon to wane.

2. That there is no such necessary connection betwixt these things and our comfort, that whenever God removes the one, he must needs remove the other with it. Christ and comfort are indeed so united, but nothing beside him is or can be so. I hope you will shortly experience the truth of this conclusion, by the comfort God will give you in the absence of those comforts you have lost. Can you not now have as free access to God as before? Yea, do not these very afflictions send you oftener into his presence? And if God meet you in those duties, (as in days of distress he uses to meet his people,) then it will be evident to you that your joy and comfort lives, though your husband and children be laid in their graves.

3. That the removing of your earthly comforts hinders not but that you may still pursue the great end and business of your life, and carry on all your designs for heaven as successfully as ever. Indeed, Madam, had we been sent into this world to raise estates; contract relations, and then sit down in the midst of them as our portion, then our design had been utterly dashed and disappointed; but you know this is not your main end, or great business upon earth, but to honour God by an holy fruitful life here, and make ready for the full enjoyment of him hereafter. And what hinders but you may as prosperously manage and carry on this your design as ever? You do not think the traveller is disabled for his journey, because he hath fewer clogs and hinderances than before. I think few Christians find much furtherance heavenward by their multiplicity of engagements or enjoyments in this world. Your cares and fears about these things, will now lie in a narrower compass than they did before, and thereby you may have your thoughts more about you, to attend the great concerns of God's glory, and your own salvation.

4. But above all, you will certainly find your relief and consolation to lie in the everlasting covenant of God. Thence it was, that David fetched his support under a much heavier burden and smarter rod

than yours: For your relations were such as gave you comfort in their lives, and left you many grounds of hope in their deaths; but his were taken away in their sins. But though the grounds of his sorrow (blessed be God) are not yours, yet I hope the grounds of his comfort in the text are fully yours.

I confess, I have prepared these things in too much haste and distraction of thoughts, which in this juncture was unavoidable; nor have I bestowed much of art or language upon them: And if I had, they would have been never the more effectual to your relief for that. But such as they are, I humbly present them to you with my hearty prayers, that God would make them a sovereign balm, by the blessing of his Spirit on them, to your wounded spirit, and to all other godly families groaning under the like strokes of God with you, and remain,

MADAM,

Your most Faithful

Sympathizing Friend and Servant,

JOHN FLAVEL.

## **The Balm of the Covenant**

Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. - 2 SAM. 23:5

THESE are part of David's last words. The last words of dying saints, but especially of dying prophets, are ponderous, memorable, and extraordinarily remarkable; and such are these acknowledged to be, by all expositors. It is a golden sentence, a divine oracle, fit to be the last words of every dying saint, as well as of David.



They are called his last words, not simply and absolutely, as though he breathed them forth with his last breath; (for he spake many things afterwards) but either they are the last he spoke as a prophet, by Divine inspiration, or because he had them often in his mouth, to his last and dying day. They were his epicedium, his sweet swan-like song, in which his soul found singular refreshment, and strong support, amidst the manifold afflictions of his life, and against the fears of his approaching death.

The whole chapter is designed for a coronis or honourable close of the life of David, and gives us an account both of the worthy expressions that dropped from him, and of the renowned worthies that were employed by him. But all the heroic atchievements recorded to the honour of their memories, in the following part of the chapter, are trivial and inglorious things, compared with this one divine sentence recorded in my text; in which we have two things to consider, viz.

1. The preface, which is exceeding solemn.
2. The speech itself, which is exceeding weighty.

1. In the preface, we have both the instrumental and principal efficient cause of this divine sentence distinctly set down, ver. 1 and the efficient, or author of it, ver. 2.

The instrument or organ of its conveyance to us, was David; described by his descent or lineage, the son of Jesse; by his eminent station, the man that was raised up on high; even to the top and culminating point of civil and spiritual dignity and honour, both as a king, and as a prophet; by his divine unction, the anointed of the God of Jacob; and lastly, by the flowing sweetnees of his spirit and stile, in the divine psalms that were penned by him, whence he here gets the title of the sweet psalmist of Israel; the pleasant one, in the psalms of Israel, as some read it.

The principal efficient cause of this excellent passage, is here likewise noted, and all to commend it the more to our special observation and acceptance: "The Spirit of God spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." This stamps my text expressly with divine authority. The Spirit of God spake by David, he was not the author, but only the scribe of it. Thus the ensuing discourse is prefaced. Let us next see,

2. The matter or speech itself, wherein we shall find the maxims and general rules of government prescribed, and the felicity of such a government elegantly described. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." Princes being in God's place, must exalt the righteousness of God, in the government of men; and when they do so, they shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds, &c. What halcyon days shall that happy people see, whose lot is cast into such times and places! All this is typically spoken of David, and those pious princes who succeeded him; but mystically and eminently points at Christ, who was to rise out of David's seed, Rom. 1:3 and to sit upon his throne, Acts 2:30. So that in this he was raised on high to an eminency of glory and dignity indeed: he was so in his ordinary natural seed; a royal race, deriving itself from him, and sitting upon his throne in a lineal succession, till the Babylonish captivity, which was about four hundred and thirty years. And after that, the Jews had governors of his line, at least rightful heirs to that crown, till the promised Messiah came. But that which was the top of David's honour, the most sparkling jewel in his crown, was this, that the Lord Jesus was to descend from him, according to the flesh, in whom all the glorious characters before given should not only be exactly answered, but abundantly exceeded. And thus you find the natural line of the Messiah is drawn down by Matthew, from David to the virgin Mary, Matth. 1. And his legal line by Luke, from David to Joseph, his supposed father, Luke 2:23.

Now, though the illustrious marks and characters of such a righteous, serene, and happy government, did not fully agree to his day, nor would do so in the reigns of his ordinary natural successors,

his day was not without many clouds both of sin and trouble; yet such a blessed day he foresaw and rejoiced in, when Christ, the extraordinary seed of David, should arise, and set up his kingdom in the world, and with the expectation hereof, he greatly cheers and encourages himself: Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made "with me an everlasting covenant," &c. In which words four things are eminently remarkable.

1. Here is a sad concession of domestic evils.
2. A singular relief, from God's covenant with him.
3. The glorious properties of this covenant displayed.
4. The high esteem and dear regard his house had unto it.

1. Here is David's sad and mournful concession of the evils of his house, both moral and penal. "Although my house be not so with God," i.e. neither so holy, nor so happy as this description of a righteous and flourishing government imports; alas! it answers not to it: For though he was eminent for godliness himself, and had solemnly dedicated his house to God, Psal. 30 as soon as it was built, yea, though he piously resolved to walk in the midst of it with a perfect heart, and not to suffer an immortal person within his walls; yet great miscarriages were found even in David's house and person, which God chastised him for, by a thick succession of sharp and sore afflictions, Psal. 101:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Tamar was defiled by her brother Amnon, 2 Sam. 13:13. Amnon was barbarously murdered thereupon, by the advice of Absalom, 2 Sam. 13:28. Absalom unnaturally rebels against his father David, and drives him out of the royal city, and perishes in that rebellion, 2 Sam. 15:1 then Adonijah, another darling-son, grasps at the crown settled by David upon Solomon, and perishes for that his usurpation, 1 Kings 2:25. O what a heap of mischiefs and calamities did this good man live to see within his own walls, besides the many foreign troubles that came from other hands! How many flourishing branches did God lop off from him, and that

in their sins too? So that his day was a day of clouds, even from the morning unto the evening of it: Psal. 132:1. "Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions." Well might he say, "his house was not so with God." But what then, doth he faint and despond under these manifold calamities? Doth he refuse to be comforted, because his children are gone, and all things involved in trouble? No, but you find,

2. He relieves himself by the covenant God had made with him: "Yet hath he made with me a covenant." He looks to Christ, "There is more in the covenant than this my house before God," as the Chaldee turns it\*. This little word yet, wraps up a great and sovereign cordial in it. Though Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah be gone, and gone with many smarting aggravations too; "yet hath he made with me a covenant," yet I have this sheet-anchor left to secure me. God's covenant with me, in relation to Christ, this under-props and shores up my heart.

This covenant was, without controversy, a gospel-covenant. It was David's gospel: For all his salvation and all his desire were in it; which could never be, except Christ had been in it, who is the salvation of all the ends of the earth, and the desire of all nations.

It is true, it was a more obscure and imperfect edition of the covenant of faith; yet clearer than those that were made before it; it came not up to the fulness and clearness of the discoveries made by Jeremy and Ezekiel: But yet in this covenant with David, God revealed more of Christ than had been ever revealed before; for the light of Christ, like that of the morning, increased still more and more, till it came to a perfect day. It is worthy our observation, how God made a gradual discovery of Christ from Adam, down along to the New Testament times. It was revealed to Adam, that he should be the seed of the woman, but not of what nation, till Abraham's time; nor of what tribe, till Jacob; nor of what sex and family, till David; nor that he should be born of a virgin, till Isaiah; nor in what town, till Micah. The first revelation of this covenant with David, was by

Nathan the prophet; 2 Sam. 7:12, 13, 14 afterwards enlarged and confirmed, Psal. 89. By it he knew much of Christ, and wrote much of him. He spake of his person, Psalm 45:6, 11. Psalm 8:4, 5, 6. of his offices, both prophetic, Psal. 40:8, 9, 10. priestly, Psal. 110:4 and kingly, Psal. 2:6. of his incarnation, Psalm 8:5. of his death on the cross, Psal. 22:16, 17. of his burial, Psal. 16:8, 9, 10. resurrection, Psal. 2:7 and triumphant ascension, Psalm 68:18 there was the sum of the gospel discovered, though in dark and typical terms and forms of expression; but if out of this covenant as obscure as its revelation was, David fetched such strong support and consolation amidst such a heap of troubles, then the argument is good a fortiori: What support and comfort may we not draw thence, who live under the most full and perfect display of it, in all its riches and glory; enough hath been said to prove it a gospel-covenant; but if any doubt should remain of that, it will be fully removed, by considering,

3. The eximious properties and characters of the covenant, as we find them placed in the text; and they are three, viz.

(1.) Everlasting.

(2.) Ordered in all things, and

(3.) Sure.

(1.) It is an everlasting covenant, or a perpetual covenant, a covenant of eternity,\* not in the most strict, proper, and absolute sense: For that is the incommunicable property of God himself, who neither hath beginning nor end; but the meaning is, that the benefits and mercies of the covenant are durable and endless to the people of God: For Christ being the principal matter and substance of the covenant, there must be in it an everlasting righteousness, as it is called, Dan. 9:24. everlasting kindness. Isa. 54:8. everlasting forgiveness, Jer. 31:34 and in consequence to all these, everlasting consolation, Isa. 51:11 in all which the riches and bounty of free grace shine forth in their greatest glory and splendor.

(2.) It is a covenant ordered in all things, or orderly prepared, disposed, and set, as the word imports †. Every thing being here disposed and placed in the most comely order, both persons and things here keep their proper place: God the Father keeps the place of the most wise contriver and bountiful donor of the invaluable mercies of the covenant: and Christ keeps the proper place both of the purchaser and surety of the covenant; and all the mercies in it; and believers keep their place, as the unworthy receivers of all the gratuitous mercies and rich benefits thereof, and the most obliged creatures in all the world to free grace, saying, although my house, yea, although my heart and my soul be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant. And as persons, so things, all things in this covenant stand in the most exquisite order, and exact correspondence to each other. O it is a ravishing sight to behold the habitude and respect of the mercies in the covenant, to the sins and wants of all that are in it! Here are found full and suitable supplies to the wants of all God's people. Here you may see pardon in the covenant, for guilt in the soul; joy in the covenant, for sorrow in the heart; strength in the covenant, for all defects and weaknesses in the creature; stability in the covenant for the mutability in the creature. Never did the wisdom of God shine forth more in any contrivance in the world, (except that of Christ, the surety and principal matter of the covenant) than it doth in the orderly dispose of all things in their beautiful order, and comely proportions in this covenant of grace.

(3.) It is a sure covenant, or a covenant safely laid up and kept, as the word imports\*; and upon this account the mercies of it are called, "The sure mercies of David," Isa. 55:3. And so Psal. 89:28. speaking of this very covenant, God saith, "My covenant shall stand fast with him;" there shall be no vacillancy, nor shaking in this covenant: and ver. 34. "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." Every thing is as its foundation is. Now, God's covenant being founded in his unchangeable counsel and purpose, wherein there can be no lubricity, and Christ being the surety of it, it must needs be, as the text calls it, a sure covenant, wherein the faithfulness of God is as illustriously displayed, as his bounty and

wisdom are in the two properties of it. And such a covenant as this, so everlastingly, aptly disposed, and sure, must needs deserve that precious respect and high esteem from every believing soul, which David here doth pay it in.

4. The singular and high valuation he had of it, when he saith, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire," or as some translate<sup>†</sup> all my delight, or pleasure;" i.e. here I find all repaired with an infinite overplus, that I have lost in the creature: Here is a life in death, fulness in wants, security in dangers, peace in troubles. It is all my salvation; for it leaves nothing in hazard that is essential to my hapiness; and all my desire for it repairs whatever I have lost, or can loose: It is so full and complete a covenant, that it leaves nothing to be desired out of it. O it is a full fountain! Here I repose my weary soul with full satisfaction, and feed my hungry desires with sweetest delights: so that my very soul is at rest and ease in the bosom of this blessed covenant. Thus you have the parts and sense of the text. The notes from it are three.

## Observations

**Observation 1. That God's covenant people may be exercised with many sharp afflictions in their persons and families, Eccl. 9:9.**

Even David's house was the house of mourning; "Although my house be not so with God, though he make it not to grow." All sorts of outward afflictions are incident to all sorts of men, "All things (saith Solomon) come alike to all: There is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the clean, and unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not." The providences seem one and the same, though the subject on whom they fall be vastly different. Estates and children, health and liberty will still be like themselves, vanishing comforts, whoever be the owners of them. No man's spiritual estate can be known by the view of his temporal estate. A godly family

cannot be a miserable, but it may be a mournful family. Religion secures us from the wrath, but it does not secure us from the rod of God. The Lord hath chosen another way of expressing his love to his people, than by temporal and external things: Therefore all things come alike to all. The covenant excludes the curse, but includes the cross, "If his children forsake my law, &c. then will I visit their iniquity with the rod, and their sin with stripes: nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take away."

Nor indeed would it be the privilege of God's covenanted people, to be exempt from the rod; a mark of bastardy can be no man's felicity, Heb. 12:8 to go without the chastising discipline of the rod, were to go without the needful instructions and blessed fruits that accompany and result from the rod, Psalm 94:12.

Let us not therefore say as those irreligious persons did in Mal. 3:14. "It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and walked mournfully before him?" Surely none serve him in vain but those that serve him vainly. Godliness cannot secure you from affliction, but it can and will secure you from hell, and sanctify your afflictions to help you to heaven. But I stay not here.

**Observation 2. A declining family is a sore stroke from the hand of God, and so to be acknowledged wherever it falls.**

It was a growing sorrow to David, that his house did not grow; and he eyed the hand of God in it, He made it not to grow, as he speaks in the text. He felt as many deaths as he had dead children. It is God that builds and destroys families; he enlargeth and straiteneth them again. A family may decline two ways, viz. either,

1. By the death: or,

2. By the degeneracy of its offspring.

1. By their death, when God lops off the hopeful springing branches thereof; especially the last and only prop of it, in whom not only all



the care and love, but all the hope and expectation of the parents is contracted and bound up. For,

The hearts of tender parents are usually bound up in the life of an only son\*. As a man's wife is but himself divided, so his children are but himself multiplied: and when all love and delight, hope and expectation, is reduced to one, the affection is strong, and that makes the affliction so too. If it were not an unparalleled grief among all earthly griefs and sorrows, the Spirit of God would never have chosen and singled it out from among all other sorrows, to illustrate sorrow for sin by it, yea, sorrows for that special sin of piercing Christ, as he doth, Zech. 12:10. "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for him, as one that mourneth for an only son." How naked are those walls, and how unfurnished is that house, where the children (its best ornaments) are taken down and removed by death? It is natural to all men to desire the continuance of their names and families on the earth; and therefore when God cuts off their expectations in that kind, they look upon themselves as dry trees, or as the withering stalks in the fields, when the flowers are fallen off, and blown away from them.

2. Or, which is yet much worse, a family may decline by the degeneracy of its offspring. When the piety, probity, and virtues of ancestors descend not with their lands to their posterity, here the true line of honour is cut off, and the glory of a family dies, though its children live; the family is ruined, though there be a numerous offspring. Surely it were better mourn for ten dead children, than for one such living child.

How many such wretched families can England shew this day! How hath Atheism and debauchery ruined and subverted many great and once famous families! O it were better the arms of those families had been reversed, and their hands alienated, yea, better had it been a succession had failed, and that their names had been blotted out, than that Satan should rule by profaneness in the places where God was once so seriously and sweetly worshipped.

Whensoever therefore God shall either of these ways subvert a family, it becomes them that are concerned in the stroke, not only to own and acknowledge the hand of God in it, but to search their hearts and houses to find out the sins which have so provoked him; yet not so as to fall into an unbecoming despondency of spirit, but withal to relieve themselves, as David here doth, from the covenant of God; "Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant." Which brings us to the third and principal point I shall insist on.

**Observation. 3. That the everlasting, well-ordered, and sure covenant of grace, affords everlasting, well-ordered, and sure relief to all that are within the bonds of it, how many or how great soever their personal or domestic trials and afflictions are.**

This point will be cleared to your understandings, and prepared for your use, by clearing and opening three propositions, which orderly take up the sum and substance of it, viz.

## **Propositions**

**Proposition 1. That the minds of men, yea, the best men, are weak and feeble things under the heavy pressures of affliction, and will reel and sink under them, except they be strongly relieved and under-propped.**

A bowing wall doth not more need a strong shore or buttress, than the mind of a man needs a strong support and stay from heaven, when the weight of affliction makes it incline and lean all one way, "Unless the law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction," Psal. 119:92. q. d. What shift other men make to stand the shock of their afflictions, I know not; but this I know, that if God had not seasonably sent me the relief of a promise, I had certainly

gone away in a faint fit of despondency. O how seasonably did God administer the cordials of his word to my drooping, sinking soul!

This weakness in the mind to support the burdens of affliction, proceeds from a double cause, viz.

1. From the sinking weight of the affliction.

2. From the irregular and inordinate workings of the thoughts of it.

1. From the sinking weight that is in affliction, especially in some sorts of afflictions: they are heavy pressures, ponderous burdens in themselves. So Job speaks, "O that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea, therefore my words are swallowed up," Job 6:2, 3, 4. q. d. If all the sand that lies upon all the shores in the world, were shovelled up into one heap, and cast into one scale, and my sorrows into the other, my grief would weigh it all up. How heavy are the hearts of the afflicted! what unsupportable sorrows do they feel and groan under, especially when God smites them in the dearest and nearest concerns they have in the world.

2. But especially the reelings and staggerings of the mind, are occasioned by the inordinate and irregular workings of its own thoughts. Were it but possible to keep the mind in a serene, sedate, and ordinate frame, our burdens would be comparatively light to what we now feel them to be; but the falling of the thoughts into confusions, and great distractions, spoils all. Upon this account it is, that afflictions are compared to a stupifying doze, which casts the soul into amazement, Psal. 60:3. "Thou hast shewed thy people hard things, thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment." Afflictions are called the wine of astonishment, from their effects upon the mind: for under a great and sudden stroke of God, it is like a watch wound up above its due height, so that for a time it stands still, neither grace nor reason move at all: and when it begins to move again, O how confused and irregular are its motions! it is full of

murmurs, disputes, and quarrels: these aggravate both our sin and misery. It is our own thoughts which take the arrow of God shot at us, (which did but stick before in our clothes, and was never intended to hurt us, but only to warn us,) and thrust it into our very hearts.

For thoughts as well as poniards, can pierce and wound the hearts of men, Luke 2:35. "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul;" i.e. Thy thoughts shall pierce thee. They can shake the whole fabric of the body, and loose the best compacted and strongly jointed parts of the body: Dan. 5:6. "His thoughts troubled him, and the joints of his loins were loosed." And thus a man's own mind becomes a rack of torment to him; a misery which no creature, except men and devils, are subjected to. O how many bodies have been destroyed by the passions of the soul! they cut through it, as a keen knife through a narrow sheath, "Worldly sorrow works death," 2 Cor. 7:10.

**Proposition 2. The merciful God, in condescension to the weakness of his people, hath provided the best supports and reliefs for the feeble and afflicted spirits.**

"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul," Psal. 94:17. Carnal men seek their relief under trouble, from carnal things; when one creature forsakes them, they retreat to another which is yet left them, till they are beaten out of all, and then their hearts fail, having no acquaintance with God, or special interest in him: for the creatures will quickly spend all that allowance of comfort they have to spend upon us. Some try what relief the rules of philosophy can yield them, supposing a neat sentence of Seneca may be as good a remedy as a text of David or Paul; but, alas! it will not do: submission from fatal necessity will never ease the afflicted mind, as Christian resignation will do. It is not the eradicating, but regulating of the affections, that composes a burdened and distracted soul. One word of God will signify more to our peace than all the famed and admired precepts of men.

To neglect God, and seek relief from the creature, is to forsake the fountain of living waters, and go to the broken cisterns which can hold no water, Jer. 2:13. The best creature is but a cistern, not a fountain; and our dependence upon it makes it a broken cistern, strikes a hole through the bottom of it, so that it can hold no water. "I, even I (saith God) am he that comforteth you," Isa. 57:12. The same hand that wounds you, must heal you, or you can never be healed. Our compassionate Saviour, to assuage our sorrows, hath promised he will not leave us comfortless, John 14:18. Our God will not contend for ever, lest the spirit fail before him, Isa. 57:16. He knew how ineffectual all other comforts and comforters would be, even physicians of no value, and therefore hath graciously prepared comforts for his distressed ones, that will reach their end.

**Proposition 3. God hath gathered all the materials and principles of our relief into the covenant of grace, and expects that we betake ourselves unto it, in times of distress, as to our sure, sufficient and only remedy.**

As all the rivers run into the sea, and there is the congregation of all the waters; so all the promises and comforts of the gospel are gathered into the covenant of grace, and there is the congregation of all the sweet streams of refreshment that are dispersed throughout the scriptures. The covenant is the store-house of promises, the shop of cordials and rare elixirs, to revive us in all our faintings; though, alas! most men know no more what are their virtues, or where to find them, than an illiterate rustic put into an apothecary's shop.

What was the cordial God prepared to revive the hearts of his poor captives groaning under hard and grievous bondage, both in Egypt and in Babylon? Was it not his covenant with Abraham? And why did he give it the solemn confirmation by an oath, but that it might yield to him and all his believing seed, strong consolation, Heb. 6:17, 18 the very spirit of joy amidst all their sorrows.

And what was the relief God gave to the believing eunuchs that kept his sabbaths, took hold of his covenant, and chose the things in which he delighted? "To them (saith he) will I give in mine house, and within my walls, a place, and a name better than that of sons or of daughters," Isa. 56:4, 5. Though they were deprived of those comforts other men have in their posterity, yet he would not have them look upon themselves as dry trees; a covenant-interest would answer all, and recompense abundantly the want of children, or any other earthly comfort.

Certainly, therefore, David was at the right door of relief and comfort, when he repairs to the covenant, as here in the text, "Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant." There, or nowhere else, the relief of God's afflicted is to be found.

Now, to make any thing become a complete and perfect relief to an afflicted spirit, these three properties must concur and meet in it, else it can never effectually relieve any man.

I. It must be able to remove all the causes and grounds of troubles.

II. It must be able to do so at all times.

III. It must be capable of a good personal security to us.

For if it only divert our troubles, (as creature-comforts use to do,) and do not remove the ground and cause of our trouble, it is but an anodyne, not a cure or remedy. And if it can remove the very ground and cause of our troubles for a time, but not for ever, then it is but a temporary relief: our troubles may return again, and we left in as bad case as we were before. And if it be in itself, able to remove all the causes and grounds of our trouble, and that at all times, but not capable of a personal security to us, or our well established interest in it, all signifies nothing to our relief.

But open your eyes and behold, O ye afflicted saints, all these properties of a complete relief meeting together in the covenant, as it

is displayed in the text. Here is a covenant able to remove all the grounds and causes of your trouble; for it is ORDERED in all things; or aptly disposed by the wisdom and contrivance of God, to answer every cause and ground of trouble and sorrow in our hearts. It is able to do this at all times; as well in our day, as in David's or Abraham's day: for it is an everlasting covenant; its virtue and efficacy is not decayed by time. And, lastly, is capable of a good personal security or assurance to all God's afflicted people; for it is a sure covenant. The concurrence of these three properties in the covenant makes it a complete relief, and perfect remedy, to which nothing is wanting in the kind and nature of a remedy. These three glorious properties of the covenant are my proper province to open and confirm, for your support and comfort in this day of trouble.

I. That the covenant of grace is able to remove all the causes and grounds of a believer's trouble, be they never so great or many. This I doubt not will be convincingly evidenced and demonstrated by the following arguments, or undeniable reasons.

## Arguments

**Argument I. Whatsoever disarms afflictions of the only sting whereby they wound us, must needs be a complete relief and remedy to the afflicted soul.**

But so doth the covenant of grace, it disarms afflictions of the only sting by which they wound us.

Therefore the covenant of grace must needs be a complete relief and remedy to the afflicted soul.

The sting of all afflictions is the guilt of sin; when God smites, conscience usually smites too: and this is it that causes all that pain

and anguish in the afflicted. It is plainly so in the example of the widow of Zarephath, 1 Kings 17:18 when her son, her only son, and probably her only child, died, how did that stroke of God revive guilt in her conscience, and made the affliction piercing and intolerable! as appears by her passionate expostulation with Elijah, who then sojourned in her house: "What have I to do with thee, O man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" q. d. What injury have I done thee? Didst thou come hither to observe my sins, and pray down this judgment upon my child for them? The death of her son revived her guilt, and so it generally doth, even in the most holy men.

When Job looked upon his wasted body under afflictions, every wrinkle he saw upon it, seemed to him like a witness rising up to testify against him. "Thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me; and my leanness rising up in me, beareth witness to my face," Job 16:8.

Affliction is like a hue and cry after sin in the ears of conscience, and this is the envenomed poisonous sting of affliction: pluck out this, and the afflicted man is presently eased, though the matter of the affliction still abide with him, and lie upon him. He is afflicted still, but not cast down by affliction; the anguish and burden is gone, though the matter of trouble remain.

This is plain both in scripture, and in experience. Suitable hereunto is that strange, but sweet expression, "The inhabitants shall not say I am sick, the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquities," Isa. 33:24. It is not to be imagined these people had found such a fortunate island, or happy climate, where no disease could touch or invade their bodies; no, sickness will find out the bodies of the best men, wherever they live; wherever sin hath been, sickness and death will follow it. Heaven is the only privileged place from these miseries: but the meaning is, though they be sick, they shall not feel the pains and burdens of sickness, "they shall not say they are sick:" And why so? because their iniquities are forgiven;



plainly confirming what was before asserted, that the anguish of an affliction is gone as soon as ever the sting of guilt is pluck out. And hence, pardoning of the soul, and healing of the body, are put together as conjugate mercies; "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who "forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases," Psal. 103:1, 3. When the soul is at ease, the pains of the body are next to nothing: Sickness can cloud all natural joys, but not the joy of a pardon.

Nay, which is yet more; pluck out but the sting of sin, and there is no horror in death, the king of terrors, and worst of all outward evils. See how the pardoned believer triumphs over it: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin," 1 Cor. 15:55. They are words of defiance, as men use to deride and scorn a boasting, insulting enemy, when they see him cast upon his back, and his sword broken over his head.\*

Where are your boasts and menaces now? O death, thou hast lost thy sting and terror together. Thus the pardoned believer, with an holy gallantry of spirit, derides and contemns his disarmed enemy death. So then it is manifest, that whatever plucks out the poisonous sting of affliction, must needs be an effectual remedy and cure to the afflicted person.

But this the covenant of grace doth; it reveals and applies gospel-remission to them that are within the blessed bond of it. "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more," Jer. 31:33. 34.† Behold here a gracious, full, and irrecoverable pardon! I will forgive, or be propitiously merciful, as that word imports; pointing plainly to Christ our propitiation, our sins are forgiven us for his name's sake. And a pardon as full as it free; iniquity and sin, smaller and greater, are here forgiven; for God, in the remission of his people's sins, having respect to the propitiating blood of Christ, he pardons all as well as some; that blood deserving and purchasing

the most full and complete pardons for his people, 1 John 1:7. "The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

And this covenant-pardon is as firm, as it is free and full. So run the expressions in the grant, I will remember their sin no more: Or in the apostle's works, Heb. 8:12. ου μημνεσω επι, I will not remember them again: That is, not so remember, as to impute them, or condemn my pardoned ones for them: For the pardoned persons come no more into condemnation, Job 5:24. Their sins are cast into the depths of the sea, Mic. 7:19. Sooner shall the East and the West, the two opposite points of heaven, meet, than the pardoned soul and its sins meet again in condemnation, Psal. 103:12.

Now, the case standing thus with all God's covenant people, all their sins being graciously, fully, and irrevocably forgiven them, how convincingly and sweetly doth this conclusion follow, that the covenant is a complete remedy to all afflicted believers? As nothing can befall us before Christ and pardon be ours, which is sufficient to raise us, so nothing can befall us afterwards, which should deject and sink us. This is the first benefit afflicted believers receive from the covenant, and this alone is enough to heal all our sorrows.

**Argument. II. As the covenant of grace disarms all the afflictions of believers of the only sting by which they wound them: so it alters the very nature and property of their afflictions, and turns them from a curse into a blessing to them: And in so doing, it becomes more than a remedy, even a choice benefit and advantage to them.**

All afflictions in their own nature, are a part of the curse; they are the consequence and punishments of sin; they work naturally against our good: But when once they are taken into the covenant, their nature and property is altered. As waters in their subterranean passages, meeting some virtuous mineral in their course, are thereby impregnated, and endowed with a rare healing property to the body; so afflictions passing through the covenant, receive from it a healing

virtue to our souls. They are, in themselves, sour and harsh, as wild hedge-fruits; but being ingrafted into this stock, they yield the pleasant fruits of righteousness. "If his children break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their iniquity with the rod, and their sins with stripes: Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take away, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." Psal. 89:30, 31. Here you may see all the rods of affliction put into the covenant, as Aaron's rod was into the ark. And hence two things necessarily follow.

(1.) That such afflictions can do the children of God no hurt. They may affright, but cannot hurt them: We may meet them with fear, but shall part from them with joy: An unsanctified rod never did any man good, and a sanctified rod never did any man hurt: He may afflict our bodies with sickness, deny, or cut off our comfort in children, impoverish our estates, let loose persecutors upon us; but in all this he really doth us no hurt, as he speaks in Jer. 25:6. No more hurt than a skilful surgeon doth in saving his patient's life, by cutting off a mortified, gangrened member: No more hurt than frost and snow do the earth in killing the rank weeds that exhausted the sap and strength of it, and preparing and mellowing it to produce a fruitful crop of corn. By these he recals our minds from vanity, weans our fond and ensnaring affections from the world, discovers and mortifies those lusts which gentler methods and essays could not do: And is this for our hurt?

I confess God's thoughts and ours often differ upon this case. We measure the good and evil of providences, by their respect to the ease and pleasure of our flesh, but God sees this is the way to cast our spirits into a dead formality, and in removing them, he doth but deprive us of the occasions and instruments of spiritual mischiefs and miseries, in which certainly he doth us no hurt.

(2.) But that is not all. Afflictions once put into the covenant, must promote the good of the saints; they are beneficial, as Well as harmless things. "We know (saith the apostle) that all things work

together for good to them that love God." This promise is the compass which sets the course, and directs the motions of all the afflictions of the people of God; and no ship at sea obeys the rudder so exactly, as the troubles of the righteous do the direction of this promise. Possibly we cannot discern this at present, but rather prejudge the works of God, and say all these things are against us; but hereafter we shall see, and with joy acknowledge them to be the happy instruments of our salvation.

How often hath affliction sent the people of God to their knees, with such language as this, 'O my God, how vain and sensual hath this heart of mine been under prosperity! How did the love of the creature, like a sluice, cut in the bank of a river, draw away the stream of my affections from thee! I had gotten a soft pillow of creature-comforts under my head, and I easily fell asleep, and dreamed of nothing but rest and pleasure, in a state of absence from thee; but now thy rod hath awakened me, and reduced me to a right sense of my condition. I was negligent or dead-hearted in the course of my duty, but now I can pray more fervently, feelingly, and frequently, than before. O it was good for me that I have been afflicted. O, saith God, how well was this rod bestowed, which hath done my poor child so much good; now I have more of his heart, and more of his time and company than ever; now I hear the voice, and see the gracious workings of the spirit of my child after me again, as in the days of his first love.' The sum of all this you may see in the ingenuous meltings of Ephraim under a sanctified rod, Jer. 31:19, 20 and the sounding of the bowels of mercy over him. 'Ephraim mourns at God's feet, and God falls upon Ephraim's neck. I have been as a beast, saith Ephraim: Thou art a dear son, a pleasant child, saith God. My bowels are troubled and pained for sin, saith Ephraim: And my bowels are troubled for thee, and my compassions rolled together, saith God. O blessed fruits of sanctified rods! such precious effects as these richly repay you for all the pain and anguish you feel. And thus as the wound of a scorpion is healed by applying its own oil, so the evil of affliction is cured by the sanctified fruits that it produceth, when it is once put into the covenant.

**Argument. III. The covenant doth not only alter the nature and property of the saints, afflictions, but it also orderly disposes, and aptly places them in the frame of providence, among the other means and instruments of our salvation;** so that a council of angels could never place them, or the least circumstance belonging to them, more aptly and advantageously than it hath done. The knowledge of this must needs quiet and fully relieve the afflicted soul: And who can doubt it that believes it to be a covenant ordered in all things, as the text speaks? Here all things, yea, the most minute circumstances that befall you, are reduced to their proper class and place of service; so exactly ordered, that all the wisdom of men and angels know not how to mend or alter any thing to your advantage.

If a small pin be taken out of the frame of a watch, and placed any where else, the motion is either presently stopped, or made irregular. And as Galen observes of the curious fabric of an human body, that if the greatest naturalists should study an hundred years to find out a more commodious situation, or configuration of any part thereof, it could never be done. It is so here: No man can come after God and say, this or that had been better placed or timed than it is, if this affliction had been spared, and such an enjoyment stood in the room of it, it had been better. All God's providences are the results and issues of his infinite wisdom: For "he works all things according to the counsel of his own will," Eph. 1:11. The wheels, i.e. the motions and revolutions of providence are full of eyes, Ezek. 1:18. They are well advised and judicious motions, *Non cœco impetu volvuntur rotæ*; they run not at random. The most regular and excellent working must needs follow the most deep and perfect counsel, Isa. 28:29. "He is deep in counsel, and excellent in working."

Now, every affliction that befalls God's covenanted people, being placed by the most wise and infinite counsel of God in that very order, time, and manner in which they befall them, this very affliction, and not that, at this very time, and not at another, (it being always a time of need, 1 Pet. 1:6.) and ushered in by such forerunning

occasions and circumstances: it must follow, that they all take the proper places, and come exactly at the fittest seasons; and if one of them were wanting, something would be defective in the frame of your happiness. As they now stand, they work together for your good, which displaced, they would not do.

It is said, Jer. 18:11. "Behold, I frame evil, and I devise a device." It is spoken of the contrivance and frame of afflictions, as the proper works of God. The project of it is laid for his glory and the eternal good of his people. It turns to their salvation, Phil. 1:19. But O how fain would we have this or that affliction screwed out of the frame of providence, conceiving it would be far better out than in! O if God had spared my child, or my health, it had been better for me than now it is. But this is no other than a presumptuous correcting and controuling of the wisdom of God, and so he interprets it, Job 40:2. "He that reproveth God, let him answer it." God hath put every affliction upon your persons, estates, relations, just where you find and feel it; and that whole frame he hath put into the covenant, in the virtue whereof it works for your salvation; and therefore let all disputings and reasonings, all murmurs and discontents cease; nothing can be better for you, than as God hath laid it; and this, one would think, should heal and quiet all. You yourselves would mar all, by presuming to mend any thing. "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor, hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?" Isa. 40:13, 14. Well then, be satisfied it is best as it is; and nothing can be so advantageous to you, as God's projects and contrivance, which you are so uneasy under, and dissatisfied about.

**Argument. IV. As the covenant sorts and ranks all your troubles into their proper classes and places of service, so it secures the special, gracious presence of God with you in the deepest plunges of distress that can befall you; which presence is a full relief of all your troubles, or else nothing in the world is or can be so.**

The very heathens thought themselves well secured against all evils and dangers, if they had their petty household-gods with them in their journeys: but the great God of heaven and earth hath engaged to be with his people, in all their afflictions and distresses. As a tender father sits up himself with his sick child, and will not leave him to the care of a servant only; so God thinks it not enough to leave his children to the tutelage and charge of angels, but will be with them himself, and that in a special and peculiar way: so run the express words of the covenant, Jer. 32:40. "I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put my fear into their hearts; and they shall not depart from me." Here he undertakes for both parts, himself and them. I will not, and they shall not.

Here is the saints security for the gracious presence of God with them, a presence which dispels all the clouds of affliction and sorrow, as the sun scatters the morning mists. The God of all consolation is with you, O poor dejected believers, and will not such a presence turn the darkness into light round about you? There is a threefold presence of God with his creatures.

1. Essential, which is common and necessary to all.
2. Gracious, which is peculiar to some on earth.
3. Glorious, which is the felicity of heaven.

The first is not the privilege here secured; for it is necessary to all, good and bad: In him we all live, and move, and have our being. The vilest men on earth, yea, the beasts of the field, and the very devils in hell, are always in this presence of God, but it is their torment, rather than their privilege. The last is proper to the glorified saints and angels. Such a presence embodied saints cannot now bear; but it is his special gracious presence which is made over and secured to them in the covenant of grace; and this presence of God is manifested to them two ways.

1. Internally, by the Spirit.

## 2. Externally, by Providence.

1. Internally, by the Spirit of grace dwelling and acting in them, this is a choice privilege to them in the day of affliction: for hereby they are instructed and taught the meaning of the rod, Psal. 94:12. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law." O it is a blessed thing to be taught so many lessons by the rod, as the Spirit teacheth them! Surely they reckon it an abundant recompense of all that they suffer. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes," Psal. 119:71. Yea, he refreshes as well as teaches, and no cordials revive like his. "In the multitude of the thoughts I had within me, thy comforts delight my soul," Psal. 94:19.

Yea, by the presence and blessing of his Spirit, our afflictions are sanctified to subdue and purge out our corruptions. "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away sin," Isa. 27:9. Now, if a man be instructed in the ends and designs of the rod, refreshed and comforted under every stripe of the rod, and have his sins mortified and purged by the sanctification of the Spirit upon his afflictions; then both the burdensomeness and bitterness of his afflictions are removed, and healed by the internal presence of the Spirit of God with his afflicted ones.

2. Besides this, God is providentially present with his people, in all their troubles, in a more external way; ordering all the circumstances of their troubles to their advantage. He orders the degree and extent of our afflictions, still leaving us some mercies and comforts to support and refresh us, when others are cut off. In measure doth he debate with his covenanted people, staying the rough wind in the day of the east-wind, Isa. 27:8. He might justly smite all our outward comforts at once, so that affliction should not rise up the second time: for what comfort soever hath been abused by sin, is thereby forfeited into the hand of judgment. But the Lord knows our inability to sustain such strokes, and therefore proportions them to our strength. We have some living relations to minister comfort to us



when mourning over our dead: He makes not a full end of all at once. Yea, and his providence supports our frail bodies, enabling them to endure the shocks and storms of so many afflictions, without ruin. Surely there is as much of the care of Providence manifested in this, as there is in preserving poor crazy leaking barks, and weather-beaten vessels at sea, when the waves not only cover them, but break into them, and they are ready to founder in the midst of them.

O what a singular mercy is the gracious presence of God with men! even the special presence of that God, "who is above all, and through all, and in you all," as the apostle speaks, Eph. 4:6. Above all, in majesty and dominion; through all, in his most efficacious providence; and in you all, by his grace and Spirit. As he is above all, so he is able to command any mercy you want, with a word of his mouth; as he is through all, so he must be intimately acquainted with all your wants, straits, and fears; and as he is in you all, so he is engaged for your support and supply, as you are the dear members of Christ's mystical body.

**Objection.** But methinks I hear Gideon's objection rolled into the way of this sovereign consolation: "If God be with us, why is all this evil befallen us?"

**Solution.** All what? If it had been all this rebellion and rage against God, all this apostasy and revolting more and more, all this contumacy and hardness of heart under the rod; then it had been a weighty and stumbling objection indeed: but to say, If God be with us, why are all these chastening corrections and temporal crosses befallen us? why doth he smite our bodies, children or estates? is an objection no way fit to be urged by any that are acquainted with the scriptures, or the nature and tenor of the covenant of grace. Is afflicting and forsaking all one with you? must God needs hate, because he scourgeth you? I question whether Satan himself hath impudence enough to set such a note or comment upon Heb. 12:6. "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

No, no, Christian, it is not a chastening rod, but the denying of such a favour, and suffering men to sin with impunity, and go on prosperously in the way of their own hearts, that speaks a rejected man, as the next words, ver. 7 inform you. As he never loved you the better for your prosperity, so you may be confident he loves you never the less for your adversity: and will not this close and heal the wounds made by affliction? What, not such a promise as this, I will be with him in trouble, Psal. 91:15. Will not such a presence revive thee? What then can do it! Moses reckoned that a wilderness with God, was better than a Canaan without him, "If thy presence go not with me, (saith he) then carry us not hence," Exod. 33:15. And if there be the spirit of a Christian in thee, and God should give thee thine own choice, thou wouldst rather chuse to be in the midst of all these afflictions with thy God, than back again in all thy prosperity, and among thy children and former comforts, without him.

**Argument. V. As this covenant assures you of God's gracious and special presence, so it fully secures all the essentials and substantials of your happiness, against all hazards and contingencies; in which security lies your full relief and complete remedy against all your troubles for the loss of other things.**

There be two sorts of things belonging to all God's people, viz.

1. Essentials.

2. Accidentals.

1. They have some things which are essential to their happiness; such are the loving-kindness of God, the pardon of sin, union with Christ, and eternal salvation. And they have other things which are accidentals, that come and go, live and die, without affecting or altering their happiness; such are health, estates, children, and all sorts of relations and earthly comforts. These are to our happiness, as leaves are to the tree, which fade and fall away without

endangering the tree; but the other as the vital sap, without which it withers and dies at the very root. Now if it can be made out that the covenant fully secures the former; then it will strongly follow, that it therein abundantly relieves us under all our sorrows for the latter: And that it doth so, will evidently appear by reviewing the covenant, wherein you shall find all these substantial and essential mercies of believers, fully secured against all hazards and contingencies whatsoever.

There the loving-kindness of God is secured to their souls, whatever afflictions he lays upon their bodies, "Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not take away," Psal. 89:33. And their pardon is as safe as the favour of God is; it is safely locked up in that promise, "I will remember their sins no more," Jer. 31:34. Yea, heaven, together with our perseverance in the way to it, are both put out of hazard by that invaluable promise, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," John 10:28.

Thus are all the essentials of a believer's happiness secured in the covenant; and these being safe, the loss of other enjoyments should not much affect or wound them, because if he enjoy them, they add nothing to his happiness; and if he lose them, he is still happy in God without them. And this unriddles that enigmatical expression of the apostle, 2 Cor. 6:10. "As having nothing, yet possessing all things:" i.e. the subtraction of all external things cannot make us miserable, who have Christ for our portion, and all our happiness entire in him.

If a man travelling on the road, fall into the hands of thieves, who rob him of a few shillings, why this doth not much affect him; for though he has lost his spending money, yet his stock is safe at home, and his estate secure, which will yield him more. Or if a man has been at court, and there obtained a pardon for his life, or a grant of a thousand pound per annum, and returning home should chance to lose his gloves, or his handkerchief, sure if the man be in his wits, he will not take on or mourn for the loss of these trifles, whilst the

pardon or grant is safe. Surely these things are not worth the mentioning.

It is true, the loss of outward and earthly things are to a believer real trials, yet they are but seeming losses: and therefore they are expressed in the apostle's phrase, with a *tanquam, sicut*: "As chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," 2 Cor. 6:9. And if your losses be but as it were losses, your sorrows should be but as it were sorrows: much like a physic-sickness, which we do not call a proper sickness, but as it were a sickness because it conduceth to the health, and not to the hurt of the person; as all God's medicinal afflictions on his people also do.

Indeed, if the stroke of God were at our souls, to cut them off from Christ and heaven, to raise our names out of the covenant, or revoke the pardon of sin; then we had cause enough to justify the extremity of sorrow; cause enough to weep out our eyes, and break our hearts for such a dismal blow as that would be. But blessed be God you stand out of the way of such strokes as these; let God strike round about you, or lay his hand upon any other comforts you possess, he will never smite you in these essential things, which is certainly enough to allay and relieve all your other sorrows.

My name is blotted out of the earth, but still it is written in heaven. God hath taken my only son from me, but he hath given his only Son for me, and to me. He hath broken off my hopes and expectations as to this world, but my hopes of heaven are fixed sure and immoveable for ever. My house and heart are both in confusion and great disorder, but I have still an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure. I cannot say my son liveth, but I can still say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth. The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth; but the word of the Lord abideth for ever," Isa. 40:8.

**Argument. VI. As God strikes none of the substantial mercies of his covenant people, so when he doth smite their external accidental comforts, the covenant of grace**

**assures them, that even those strokes are the strokes of love, and not wrath; the wounds of a friend, and not of an enemy; which is another singular relief to the afflicted soul.**

The most frightful thing in any affliction, is the mark or character of God's wrath which it seems to bear: take away that, and the affliction is nothing. "O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure," Psal. 6:1. He doth not deprecate the rebukes, but the anger of God; not his chastening, but his hot displeasure. God's anger is much more terrible than his rebuking, and his hot displeasure than his chastening. Therefore he intreats, that whatever God did to him in the way of affliction, he would do nothing in the way of wrath; and then he could bear any thing from him. A mark of Divine anger engraven upon any affliction, makes that affliction dreadful to a gracious soul.

But if a man be well satisfied, that whatever anguish there be, yet there is no anger, but that the rod is in the hand of love: O how it eases the soul and lightens the burden! Now this desirable point is abundantly cleared in the covenant; where we find a clear consistence, yea, a necessary connection betwixt the love and the rod of God, Psal. 89:31 and Heb. 12:6. Nay, so rare are the afflictions of the saints from being marks of his wrath, that they are the fruits and evidences of his fatherly love.

Two men walking through the streets, see a company of boys fighting, one of them steps forth, and singles out one of those boys, and carries him home to correct him; which of the two, think you, is that child's father? The case standing thus with all God's people, surely there is no reason for their despondencies whatever their afflictions be.

**Argument. VII. Lastly, The covenant doth not only discover the consistence and connection betwixt the love and the rod of God, but it also gives full satisfaction to the saints,**

**that whatsoever contemporary mercy they are deprived of, which was within the bond of the covenant when they enjoyed it, is not lost, but shall certainly be restored to them again with a rich improvement, and that they shall enjoy it again to all eternity.**

What a rare model or platform of consolatory arguments hath the apostle laid down to antidote our immoderate sorrows, for the death of our dear relatives which died interested in Christ and the covenant! 1 Thes. 4:13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18. "I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep," they are not dead, but asleep. Sleep is but a parenthesis to the labours and travels of this life; and it is but a partial privation, not of the habit, but acts of reason, to which, upon awaking, the soul returns again. Just such a thing is that which in believers is commonly called death. And we do not use to bewail our friends because they are fallen asleep: and therefore it no way becomes us to sorrow as those that have no hope, nor to look upon them as lost; for as he strongly argueth and concludeth (ver. 14.) their restoration to their bodies, yea, and to our enjoyment again, is fully secured both to them and us by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The influence of his resurrection is by the prophet Isaiah compared to the morning-dew, Isa. 26:19 to shew that what virtue there is in the morning-dew, to cause the languishing plants of the earth to revive and flourish, that and much more there is in the resurrection of Christ, to revive and quicken the dead bodies of these saints; their bodies shall be restored by virtue of the warm animating dew or influence of his resurrection.

**Objection.** But the marvellous change which the resurrection makes upon glorified bodies, and the long separation of many ages betwixt us and them, seems to make it impossible for us to know them, as those that were once related to us upon earth; and, if so, then that comfort which resulted from them, as in relation to us, is perished with them at death.

**Solution.** Whatever change the resurrection shall make on their bodies, and the length of time betwixt our parting with them on earth, and meeting them again in heaven shall be; neither the one nor the other seem sufficient to destroy the grounds of our hope, that we shall know them to be the very persons that were once so dear to us upon earth. There may remain some lineament or property of individuation, whereby the acute glorified eye may possibly discover who they were; or if not, yet none can doubt but it may be discovered to us by revelation from God; and that one way or other it will be discovered, is highly probable, because nothing will be denied to that perfect state which may contribute to, or complete the joy and happiness thereof, as we cannot but think this knowledge will do. If Adam knew Eve to be flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, in the state of innocence; and if the apostles knew Moses and Elias upon the mount, yea, if Dives in hell knew Abraham and Lazarus in heaven; sure we may well allow that knowledge to the glorified saints in heaven, which we find in the state of innocence, or in the sinful state on earth, or in the state of the damned in hell.

And if so, then the covenanted parents shall be able to say in that day, this was our child for whom we prayed and travailed again, till Christ was formed in him; this is he whom we educated for God, and trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord: and now we see the fruit of our prayers, counsels, catechisings; a child of so many prayers perished not. And the covenanted child shall say, this was my pious Father, who took such care for my soul; and this my tender mother, who, like another Monica, was zealously concerned for my eternal happiness. These are they that sowed so many prayers, which God gave them not time to reap the fruits of on earth, but now they shall reap the fruit and comfort of them for ever. O joyful meeting in the kingdom of God! The joy of such a meeting abundantly recompenses for all the tears and groans of a dolorous parting.

Now, put all this together, and value the arguments produced to make good the first thing propounded, namely, the sufficiency of the covenant to relieve and remedy all the sorrows and losses of

believers, be they never so many, or so great: this cannot be doubted, since it hath been proved, that it disarms all their afflictions of the only sting by which they wound; alters the very nature and property of their afflictions, turning them from curses into blessings; ranks and disposes them into their proper class and place of service, so as the counsel of men and angels could never lay them better to our advantage; engages the gracious and special presence of God with you in all your troubles; secures all your essential and substantial mercies from all hazards and contingencies; discovers a consistency, yea, a connection betwixt the rod and the love of God; and assures you, that whatever temporal mercy you ever enjoyed, in and by virtue of the covenant, shall be restored to you again with an admirable improvement, and singular advantage. It is by all this, I say, abundantly proved, that the covenant is a sovereign and effectual remedy to all the sorrows of God's people; and that it was no hyperbole in David's encomium, when he called it his salvation, and all his desire. But then, as I hinted before,

**II. It must be able to do these things at all times, and in all ages,** or else it will be but a temporary relief to some only and not to all. Now, that the covenant hath this ability in all ages, and is as able to relieve us now, as it was to relieve David in his day fully appears by the epithet given it in the text, it is an EVERLASTING COVENANT. "Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant."

Time is the measure of other things; but everlastingness is the measure of the covenant. When the Lord espouseth a people to himself in covenant, "he betrothes them to himself for ever," Hos. 2:19. And from that day forward they may say on good grounds, "This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death," as it is in Psal. 48:14. Nothing in nature is so firmly established as the covenant is. Hills and mountains shall sooner start from their basis and centre, and fly like wandering atoms up and down in the air, than this covenant shall start from its sure and steadfast foundation, Isa. 54:10.



## **The causes and reasons of the immutability of the new covenant, are,**

1. The unchangeable purpose of God, which is a sure and steady fast foundation, 2 Tim. 2:19. "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his." The first act of God's love to the creature, is that by which he chooseth such a one to be his, and is therefore called the foundation of God, as being that on which he lays the superstructure of all other mercies. And this stands sure, there can be no vacillancy or slipperiness in such a foundation; for he knows who are his; he knows them as his creatures, and as his new creatures in covenant with him; as his by election, and his by covenant-transaction and compact. The purpose of his grace before time, gave being to the covenant of grace in time, and is the foundation of it.

2. The free grace of God in Christ, is that which gives immutability to this covenant. It is not built upon works, but grace: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace: to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed," Rom. 4:16. This covenant is not founded as the first was, upon the variable and inconstant obedience of man, but upon grace, which is a steady and firm foundation of it.

3. The suretyship of Christ gives everlasting stability to this covenant, Heb. 7:22. "He was made\* the surety of a better testament," or covenant: For διαθηκη signifies both; he struck hands, or engaged himself for the whole covenant, and every condition in it, and that both on God's part and ours; to undergo all our punishments, to pay all our debts, and to work in us all that God required of us in the covenant of grace: And all this under the penalty that lay upon us to have undergone. And this not as other sureties, who enter into one and the same bond with the principal, so that the creditor may come upon which he will: but he lays all upon Christ, and relies wholly upon him for satisfaction, knowing he was able to perform it; and so under the type of God's covenant with David, Christ is brought in, Psal. 89:19. "Thou spakest in vision to thy holy One, and saidst, I

have laid help on one who is mighty:" q. d. I know thy ability, my Son, thou art able to pay me, and therefore I lay all upon thee.

It follows strongly from what hath been said, that the virtue of the covenant decays not by time as other things do, but is at this day, and will be to the end of the world, as potent and efficacious a relief to all God's people, as ever it was to David, or any of the believers of the first ages.

And if so, certainly nothing can be more strongly supporting, or sweetly relieving in such a changeable world than this, He hath made with me an everlasting covenant. What David speaks of the natural heavens will be found true, of things overspread and covered by them, Psal. 102:26, 27. "They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: and all of them shall wax old like a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." The creature was, and is not; but my covenant God is the same; his name is I am, and his covenant is the same that ever it was; which is the second property or ingredient of this complete remedy to the saints afflictions. The covenant hath not only all power, virtue, and efficacy in itself to relieve a distressed Christian, but it hath it in all ages, as well for one as for another. The third and last follows, namely,

**III. That it is a sure covenant.** So David stiles it in my text. The certainty of the covenant is the glory of the covenant, and the comfort of all that are in it. The certainty of it in itself is past all doubt, by what hath been said before. It is certain God did make such an everlasting covenant with his people in Christ, and it must remain an eternal truth, that such a covenant there is betwixt God and them. It is as impossible that this everlasting covenant should not be made with them, as it is impossible for God to lie, Heb. 6:18. If he might make himself not to have covenanted everlastingly with them when once he had so covenanted, such a supposition would destroy the foundation of all faith and certainty, and overthrow the apostle's consequence on which the faith and comfort of believers is built. Nor

is it an infringement of the Almighty power, to say, God himself cannot do that which implies a plain contradiction, as factum infectum reddere, to make that which was done, not to be done.

But of this there is no doubt; it is a sure covenant in itself. That which makes to my purpose here, is to prove it capable of personal security and certainty to us. David had, and all the federates, as well as he, may have a subjective or personal certainty also. He speaks categorically and positively in the text. "Yet hath he made [with me] an everlasting covenant."

**Objection.** If it be said, he might have a personal certainty of it, because it was revealed to him in an extraordinary way by the prophet Nathan, 2 Sam. 7:12, 13, 14 and extraordinaria non current in exemplum, this was a peculiar favour, which we may not expect.

**Solution.** I reply, and why may not we know it with as full a certainty to whom God is pleased to make it known in his ordinary way? Think you his word and Spirit cannot ratify it as fully and firmly to our souls, as Nathan's discovery of it did to David's soul? God give me but such a seal of it in his ordinary method and way of confirmation, and I will desire no more of him in this world for my relief and comfort, whatever afflictions it shall please him to lay upon me.

And thus you see all the properties of a complete remedy in the covenant, and of it every believer may say, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire, though he make not my house to grow." And now what hinders, but that all God's afflicted should say from henceforth, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee," Psal. 116:7. I have all the desires of my heart in the covenant of God, though he take away the desire of mine eyes upon earth with his stroke. In this covenant my soul is at rest, and my very heart is centred. No affliction can be great enough to make the consolations of the Almighty seem small in mine eyes. Worldly

sorrows may swallow up worldly comforts, but no sorrows upon earth can swallow up the consolations of the covenant.

I know many Christians droop and are dejected under the rod, notwithstanding such sovereign cordials are prepared for them in the covenant; but this is not for want of efficacy in the covenant, but for want of faith to clear their interest, and draw forth the virtue of it to their relief. Some are ignorant of their privileges, and others diffident about their interest. It is with many of God's children, as it is with our children in their infancy, they know not their father, nor the inheritance they are born unto.

That which remains, is the improvement of this truth to our actual comfort and relief in the day of trouble. And this I shall assist you in, as God shall assist me, by way of,

1. Information.
2. Exhortation.
3. Examination, and
4. Consolation.

## Uses

### **Use I. For information, in three corollaries.**

Corollary 1. By what hath been discoursed from this text, it appears, That God governs the spiritual part of the world by faith, and not by sense. He will have them live upon his covenant and promises, and fetch their relief and comfort thence, under all their sorrows and distresses in this life.

God never intended temporal things for his people's portion, therefore from them they must not expect their relief in times of

trouble. He will have us read his love to us by things within us, not by things without us. He hath other ways of expressing his love to his people, than by the smiles of his providence upon them. How would earthly things be overvalued and idolized, if besides their conveniency to our bodies, they should be the marks and evidences of God's love to our souls! A Christian is to value himself as the merchant, or the husbandman doth. The merchant values himself by his bills and goods abroad, not by the ready cash that lies by him. And the husbandmen by his deeds and leases, and so many acres of corn he hath in the ground, and knows he hath a good estate, though sometimes he be not able to command twenty shillings. Christian, thy estate also lies in good promises, and new-covenant-securities, whether thou hast more or less of earthly comforts in thy hands.

Every creature feeds according to its nature; the same plant affords food to several sorts of creatures: The bee feeds upon the flower, the sheep upon the branch, the bird upon the seed, and the swine upon the root. One cannot live upon what the other doth. So it is here: A Christian can feed upon the promises, and make a sweet meal upon the covenant, which the carnal mind cannot relish. "The life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God;" saith the apostle, Gal. 2:21.

This is that mysterious and excellent life of faith, and the test of true Christianity, to relieve ourselves by our hopes of things to come, against present evils; to balance the sorrows and losses of this life, with the promises and expectations of the next. Thus did the renowned believers of the first age; whenever they felt a pang or qualm upon their hearts, under their trials and sorrows from the world, they would presently run to their cordial, the promises, and, by faith, from thence would refresh and invigorate their souls with new life and power. "We faint not, whilst we look not at the things which are seen, for they are temporal; but at the things which are not seen, for they are eternal," 2 Cor. 4:16, 17, 18. And truly so must we also, when our hearts are faint within us in days of affliction, or our spirits will fail, and we shall go away in a faint fit of despondency.

Corol. 2. Learn hence the sovereign efficacy of the word, and what a choice privilege it is to have these lively oracles of God in our hands, in a day of distress and trouble.

It is no ordinary mercy to be born in a land of bibles and ministers; to have these choice supports and reliefs at hand, in all our fainting hours. "This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me," Psal. 119:50. It was no small mercy gained by the reformation, that it put the oracles of God into our hands. It affords us many cordials for the support of our souls. For this, among other great and excellent uses, the scriptures were written, "That we, through patience, and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope," Rom. 15:4. In other parts of the world, it is a sealed book; bless God it is not so to you. All creature-comforts have a double defect, they are neither suitable nor durable; but the word is so. Compare the arguments that have been urged from the covenant with such as these. It is in vain to trouble ourselves about what we cannot help: We are not alone in trouble, others have their losses and afflictions as well as we. Alas! what dry and ineffectual comforts are these! they penetrate not the heart, as pardon of sin, peace with God, and sanctification of troubles to our salvation do.

And no less is the mercy of an able New-testament ministry, to open, apply, and inculcate the consolation of the scriptures, to be esteemed. It is no common favour to the afflicted soul, to have with or near him an "Interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto him his uprightness," Job 33:23. O England, prize and improve these mercies, and provoke not thy God to bereave thee of them.

I can find no such settlement made of the gospel and ministry upon any place or people, but that God may remove both upon their abuse of them; and if he do, sad will the case of such a people be, especially when a day of distress and trouble shall be upon them. It is sad to be in a storm at sea, without a compass or pilot to direct and advise the distressed passengers. Much so is the case of the afflicted, when deprived of the word and ministry.

Let it therefore be your care to hide the word in your hearts, and get the teachings of the Spirit; that whatever changes of providence be upon the world, you may have the light and comfort of the scriptures to direct and cheer your souls. Sanctification is the writing of God's law in your hearts; and what is written there is secure and safe. The word within you is more secure, sweet, and effectual, than the word without you. Jerom saith of Nepotianus, that by long and assiduous meditation of the scriptures, his breast was at last become the library of Christ. O that the breast of every Christian were so too.

Corol. 3. How sad and deplorably miserable is their condition, who have no title to, nor comfort from the covenant of God, when a day of affliction and great distress is upon them!

Unrelieved miseries are the most intolerable miseries. To be overweighed with troubles on earth, and want support and comfort from heaven, is a dismal state indeed; yet this is the case of multitudes in the world. If a believer be in trouble, his God bears his burden for him, yea, he bears up him and his burden too; but he that hath no covenant-interest in God, must say as it is, Jer. 10:19. "This is my affliction, and I alone must bear it."

There are but two ways they can take for relief, either to divert their trouble by that which will inflame them, or rest their burdened spirits upon that which will fail them. To run to the tavern or ale-house, instead of the closet, is to quench the fire by pouring on oil: and to run from one creature which is smitten and withered, to another which still continues with us, is to lean upon a broken reed, which not only deceives us, but wounds and pierceth us. What a miserable plight was Saul in, and how doleful was his cry and complaint to Samuel, 1 Sam. 28:15. "I am sore distressed, for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more." Heaven and earth forsook him at once.

Reader, if this be thy case, I advise thee to rest no longer in so miserable a condition. Thy very distress seems by an happy necessity

to put thee upon God, and drive thee to him for refuge; and it seems to be the very aim and design of God in blasting all thy earthly comforts, to necessitate thee to come to him, which thou wouldst never be persuaded to do, whilst thou hadst any creature-prop to stay and rest upon. And think not that thou shalt be rejected, because thou art brought by a plain necessity to him; come sincerely, and thou shalt not be upbraided because a necessity threw thee upon him.

**Use II. Seeing then that the covenant of God is the great relief and support of all his afflicted people, let the afflicted soul go to this blessed covenant; study and apply it in all distresses.** It is in itself a sovereign cordial, able to revive a gracious spirit at the lowest ebb; but then it must be studied and applied, or it will never give forth its consolations to our refreshment. Extreme sorrows are apt to deafen our ears to all voices of comfort. The loud cries of affliction too often drown the sweet still voice of spiritual consolation; but either here or no where our redress is to be found. Why seek we the living among the dead? Comfort from things that cannot yield it? The covenant can discover two things which are able to pacify the most discomposed heart, viz.

1. The good of affliction.

2. The end

1. It will discover to us the good of affliction, and so rectify our mistaken judgments about it. God is not undoing but consulting our interest and happiness in all these dispensations. It will satisfy us, that in all these things he doth no more than what we ourselves allow and approve in other cases. It is not merely from his pleasure, but for our profit, that these breaches are made upon our families and comforts, Heb. 12:10. Who blames the mariner for casting the goods over-board to save ship and life in a storm? or the surgeon for lancing, yea, or cutting off a leg or arm to preserve the life of his patient? or soldiers for burning or beating down the suburbs to save



the city in a siege? And why must God only be censured, for cutting off those things from us which he knows will hazard us in the day of temptation? He sees the less we have of entanglement, the more promptness and fitness we shall have to go through the trials that are coming upon us; and that all the comforts he cuts off from our bodies are for the profit and advantage of our souls.

2. Here you gain a sight not only of the good of affliction, but also of the comfortable end and issue of affliction. This cloudy and stormy morning will wind up in a serene and pleasant evening. There is a vast difference betwixt our meeting with afflictions, and our parting from them. "You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." O get but Job's spirit under affliction, and you may see as happy an end of them as he did.

Had Naomi seen the end of the Lord in taking away her husband, and starving her out of Moab, she would not have changed her name, or said the Lord had dealt bitterly with her, in grafting her daughter by that providence into that noble line, out of which the Saviour of the world was to rise; and could you but see that good in order to which all this train of troubles is laid, you would not murmur or despond as you do.

**Objection 1.** O but this is a grievous stroke; God hath smitten me in the apple of mine eye, and written bitter things against me. No sorrow is like my sorrow; it is a mourning for an only son; I have lost all in one.

**Solution 1.** You can never lose all in one, except that one be Christ; and he being your's in covenant can never be lost. But your meaning is, you have lost all of that kind in one, no more sons to build up your house, and continue your name.

2. But yet religion will not allow you to say that your dead children are a lost generation. Præmittuntur, non amittuntur; They are sent before, but not lost. For they are a covenant-seed, by you dedicated

to the Lord: They were children of many prayers; a great stock of prayers was laid up for them; in them also you, and all that knew them, discerned a teachable spirit, pious inclinations, and conscience of secret duties, some good things toward the Lord God of Israel, as was said of young Abijah, 1 Kings 14:13. So that you parted from them upon easier terms than good David parted from his Amnon, Absalom, or Adonijah, who died in their sins and open rebellions. There was a sting in his troubles which you feel not; and if he comforted himself, notwithstanding, in the covenant of his God, in this respect you may much more.

**Objection 2.** O but my son was cut off in the very bud, just when the fruits of education were ready to disclose and open.

Solution 2. Let not that consideration so incense your sorrows; God knows the fittest time both to give and to take our comforts; and seeing you have good grounds to hope your child died interested in the covenant of God, you have the less reason to insist upon that afflicting circumstance of an immature death. He that dies in Christ hath lived long enough both for himself and us. That mariner hath sailed long enough that hath gained his port; and that soldier fought long enough that hath won the victory; and that child lived long enough that hath won heaven, how early soever he died.

Beside, the sooner he died, the less sin he hath committed, and the less misery he saw and felt in this wretched world, which we are left to behold and feel. And it is but a vanity to imagine that the parting pull with him would have been easier, if the enjoyment of him had been longer: For the long enjoyment of desirable comforts doth not use to weaken, but abundantly to strengthen and fasten the ties of affection.

Submit your reason therefore, as is meet, to the wisdom of God, who certainly chose the fittest season for this affliction.

O but,——No more buts and objections, I beseech you. Enough hath been offered from the covenant of your God, to silence all your objections, and to give you the ease and pleasure of a resigned will. And what are all your buts and objections, but a spurning at Divine Sovereignty, and the thrusting in the affliction deeper into your own hearts, which are wounded but too deep already?

I persuade you not to put off, but to regulate natural affections. To be without them would deservedly rank us among the worst of heathens: but rightly to bound and manage them, would set you among the best of Christians.

I cannot imagine what ease or advantage holy,\* Basil gained by such a particular and heart-piercing account as he gave of a like affliction with this; nor to what purpose it can be to you, to recal and recount those things which only incense and aggravate your troubles: Doubtless, your better way were to turn your thoughts from such subjects as these; to your God in covenant, as David in the text did, and to recount the many great and inestimable mercies that are secured to you therein; which death shall never smite, or cut off from you, as it doth your other enjoyments.

**Quest.** But yet unless we can in some measure clear our covenant-interest, all these excellent cordials prepared, will signify no more to our relief, than water spilt upon the ground: Help us therefore to do that, or else all that hath been said is in vain? How may a person discern his covenant-right and interest.

**Answ.** This indeed is worthy of all consideration, and deserves a serious answer, forasmuch as it is fundamental to your comfort, and all actual refreshment in times of trouble; and will bring us to the next use, which is for trial of our covenant-interest.

**USE III.** The great question to be decided, is, whether God be our covenant-God, and we his people? A question of the most solemn nature, and such as requires awful attention.

We cannot expect satisfaction in this matter by such an extraordinary way as David had it, but we may know it by,

First, Our covenant-engagements.

Secondly, Our covenant impressions.

Thirdly, Our covenant-conversations.

First, By our covenant-engagements, or dedications of ourselves to God; sometimes called our joining ourselves to the Lord, Zech. 2:11. our yielding ourselves to him, Rom. 6:19. our giving ourselves to him, 2 Cor. 8:5. The soul that freely and deliberately consents to take or choose the Lord to be his God, may warrantably conclude the Lord hath taken or chosen him: for our choice of God is but the result of his choice of us, John 15:16. "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," i.e. you could never have chosen me, but in consequence to, and by virtue of my first choice of you.

Well then, let it be seriously considered, whether you have duly consented to take the Lord for your God, and Christ for your Redeemer. This includes two things in it.

1. Your relinquishing of all things inconsistent with him.
2. Your acceptation of all that promotes the glory and enjoyment of him.

1. Your relinquishing of all things that are inconsistent with an interest in him. Except we let these go, God cannot be our God, nor Christ our Redeemer. The things to be relinquished for Christ are, in short, both our sinful, and our righteous self. Sinful-self must be disclaimed and renounced: For we cannot be the servants of sin, and the servants of Christ too, Rom. 6:14, 18. And righteous-self must be renounced also or we can have no part or interest in his righteousness, Rom. 10:3. These are two difficult points of self-denial, to part with every beloved lust, and to give up our own

righteousness. Thousands choose rather to be damned for ever, than to do either of these.

2. Your acceptance and embracing of all things that promote his glory, and further the enjoyment of him. As all the painful ways of duty, hearing, praying, meditating, and all this with the intention of the inner-man, and offering up of the soul to God, in these duties; and the more painful ways of suffering for God, and enduring all losses, reproaches, torments, and death for him, if his glory requires it, and you may be thereunto called. All this is included in your choosing God to be your God. And upon our understanding and free consent, and sealing to these articles, we have right to call him our God. Matth. 21:24. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Now, have you considered the terms of the covenant, weighed and balanced all the conveniences and inconveniences of godliness, and then determined for Christ and holiness, let the cost be what it will; then you have chosen him aright for your God. Many think they have chosen God for their God, that never understood or deliberated these terms. But non consentit, qui non sentit: He that neither knows nor ponders them, is not capable of giving a due consent.

Secondly, We may discern our covenant-interest, in the covenant-impressions that are made upon our souls. All God's covenant-people have a double mark or impression made upon them, viz.

1. Upon their minds.

2. Upon their hearts.

1. Upon their minds, in a more spiritual and efficacious knowledge of God, Jer. 31:33. "They shall all know me, from the "greatest of them, even to the least of them." This knowledge is said to be given, not acquired by mere strength of natural abilities and human aids; and given as in the face of Christ, not by the footsteps of the creatures only, as he speaks, 2 Cor. 4:6. It is the choice teaching of the

anointing, 1 John 2:27. A knowledge springing from inward experience and spiritual sense; as we know the sweetness of honey by tasting, better than by all the descriptions and reports that can be made of it.

2. Upon their hearts, in that gracious tenderness and meltings of it for sin, or the discoveries of free-grace in the pardon of it. So you read in Ezek. 36:26. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

It is as easy to melt the obdurate rocks into sweet syrup, as it is to melt the natural heart into a penitential and tender melting for sin; but now there is a principle or habit of tenderness implanted in the soul, whereby it is disposed and inclined to relent and thaw ingenuously upon any just occasion.

Thirdly, Our covenant-interest may be evinced in and by our covenant-conversations. All the knowledge which is communicated to our minds, and all the tenderness given to our hearts, do respect and tend to this: Ezek. 36:27. "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Habits and principles are for action and practice: Grace in the heart is for obedience and holiness of life.

It is true, that as our graces are imperfect, so is our obedience also. Perfect working is not to be expected from imperfect creatures. God's own covenanted-people do often grieve him, and provoke him to bring them under the rod of affliction; but those their infirmities break not the bond of the covenant, Psal. 89:30, 31, 32. Care and watchfulness ordinarily go before them, conflicts and resistance accompany them, and shame, grief, and renewed care, usually follow them, 2 Cor. 7:11. By these things (which deserves a more copious discourse than my present design can allow) we may be helped to clear our interest in the covenant of grace: And that being done, it

should be out of the power of all the afflictions in the world to sink your spirits. Let me therefore in the last place add,

**USE IV. A word of consolation to your dejected and drooping hearts, upon this sad and mournful occasion.** Why are you so troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Methinks there hath been so much of support and comfort already discovered to you in this blessed covenant, that could your faith but once fix upon it, and realize and apply it, I might lay down my pen at this period, and say, The work is done, there needs no more; but knowing how obstinate deep sorrows are, and how difficult a task the comforting of an afflicted mind is, I will, for a close, superadd a few considerations more, to all that hath been urged and argued before.

Consideration I. Consider how small and trivial the comforts, whose loss you bewail, are in comparison with Jesus Christ, who is still your own, under the bond of a sure covenant. A son, an only and promising son, is a great thing, when he stands in comparison with other creature-comforts, but surely he will seem a small thing, and next to nothing, when set by, or compared with Jesus Christ. Behold the Father, Son, and Spirit! Pardon and eternal salvation are this day presented in the covenant of grace before your souls, as your own. "God, even our own God, shall bless," Psal. 67:6. When you feel your hearts wounded with such a thought as this, I cannot embrace my children in my arms, they are now out of my reach; then bless and admire God, that the arms of your faith can embrace so great, so glorious a Saviour, and that you can say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his."

Consid. II. Consider what evil days are coming on, and what a mercy it is to your dead, that God hath taken them away from the evil to come, Isa. 57:1, 2. There are two sorts of evils to come, viz. Evils of sin, and evils of sufferings; and it is no small favour to be set out of the way of both. The grave is the hiding-place where God secures some from the dangers of both.

We are apt to promise ourselves times of tranquillity, and then it cuts us to think that our dear ones shall not partake with us in that felicity: But if we wisely consider the sins or the signs of the times, we have more cause to rejoice that God hath set them out of harm's way.

All things seem to conspire and work towards a day of great temptation and tribulation. Now as Christ told his disciples, who were so dejected, because he was to leave them, John 14:28. "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go to the Father:" So truly you would much better express and manifest your love to your children, in your satisfaction in the will and appointment of God, in taking them into rest and safety, than in your dejections and sorrows for their removal. Surely they are better where they are, than where they were, whom God hath housed in heaven out of the storm and tempest. And could your deaf friends that are with Christ, have any more intercourse with this world, and see your tears, and hear your sighs for them, they would say to you, as Christ did to those that followed him wailing and mourning, Weep not for us, but for yourselves, and such as remain in the world with you, to see and feel the calamities that are coming on it.

Consid. III. Consider how near you are to that blessed state yourselves, where God shall be all in all, and you shall feel no want of any creature-comfort, 1 Cor. 15:28.

Creature-comforts are only accommodated comforts to this animal life we now live, but shortly there will be no need of them: for God will be all in all: That is, all the saints shall be abundantly satisfied in and with God alone. As there is water enough in one sea to fill all the rivers, lakes, and springs in the world: And light enough in one sun to enlighten all the inhabitants of the world: So there is enough in one God eternally to fill and satisfy all the blessed souls in heaven, without the addition of any creature-comfort. God is complete satisfaction to all the saints in the absence (I cannot say want) of wives and children, meats and drinks, estates and sensitive



pleasures; There will be no more need of these things, than of candles at noon-day. You shall be as the angels of God, who have no concernment for relations.

Your fulness of years, infirmities of body, and I hope, I may add, your improvements in grace, speak you not far short of this blessed state: And though you may seem to need these comforts in the way, your God shall supply all your wants.

Consid. IV. To conclude, Whatsoever your troubles, wants, fears, or dangers are, or may be in your passage to this blessed state, the covenant of grace is your security, and by virtue thereof your troubles shall open and divide, as Jordan did, to give you a safe passage into your eternal rest.

Look, as when the Israelites came near the land of promise, there was a swelling Jordan betwixt it and them, which seemed to forbid their farther passage and progress; but as is said, Josh. 3:17. "The priests that bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, stood firm on the ground in the midst of Jordan; and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan." Just so it is here: The covenant of grace stands on firm ground, in the midst of all the deep waters of tribulation you are to pass through, to secure unto you a safe passage through them all. Rejoice, therefore, and triumph in the fulness and firmness of this blessed covenant, and whatsoever affliction your God shall please to lay upon you, or whatsoever comfort he shall please to remove from you, still comfort and encourage yourselves, as David here doth. "Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: For this is all my salvation, and all my desire; although he make it not to grow."

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