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THE TRUE NATURE

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Evangelical Covenanting with God,

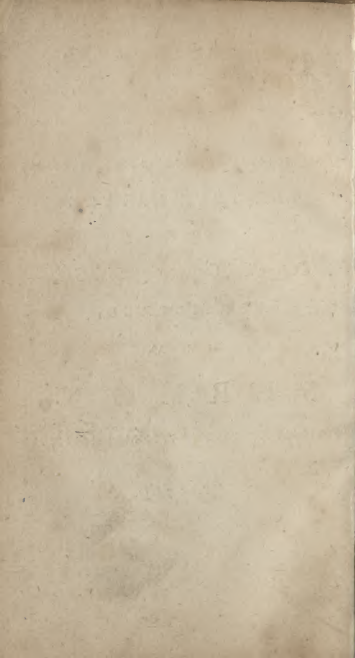
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[Price 3d.]



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Evangelical Covenanting with God,

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I N A

S E R M O N:

Preached at KELSO, Feb. 26. 1778, and enlarged
elsewhere.

BY JOHN YOUNG,
Minister of the Gospel at HAWICK.

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LECTURE 6

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE reasons which prevailed with the Author of these Pages to make them public, are known already, to most of those to whom it can be of any importance to know them. As for others, if he shall find it to be the opinion of serious Christians, after perusing them, that they ought not to have been published,—no apology that he can make, will be a sufficient reparation for what is past; but he will not hastily offend, in the same manner, a second time.

THE first Head, with so much of the application, as was immediately connected with the work of the day, was delivered at Kelso, immediately before the renovation of our solemn Covenants.—The rest was but glanced at, on that occasion, and delivered more at large in another place afterwards. So much of the enlargements as was necessary to preserve the connection, and give a distinct view of the subject, behoved to be published. To publish any more, was purposely avoided.

THE Author has not the vanity to think, that he can offer any thing new, on a subject that has already been investigated by so many abler hands. But, he presumes, the light in which the important duty of covenanting with God is here represented, will neither

ther be found detrimental to the duty itself, nor disagreeable to its true friends : Though, he is afraid, it is but too little attended to, both by Covenanters, and others.

If the following Discourse may be useful, to rectify any mistaken notions, that some professed friends of that duty may have fallen into,—to clear up the doubts of any who were in darkness about it,—or to reconcile any, who, from mistaken views of the genuine nature of it, were, or appeared to be its enemies ; if it shall prove a mean of bringing any within the bond of God's Covenant of Grace, or of confirming and edifying any of those who are already within it,—The trouble and expence of publication will be abundantly compensated, to

JOHN YOUNG.

THE

THE TRUE NATURE

O F

Evangelical Covenanting with GOD, C O N S I D E R E D.

PSALM I. 5.

*Gather my saints together unto me : those that have
made a Covenant with me by sacrifice.*

THE work about which we are met in this place to-day, is very awful and solemn. It is no less than the making of a *Covenant with Almighty God*. It is, therefore, a work that ought to be set about with the utmost caution and circumspection. The smallest mistake in our manner of conducting it, may be of the most fatal consequence. Let us, therefore, look to God himself for his direction how it should be managed. And, when he gives us his counsel relative thereto, let us beware of rejecting it. He really gives us his counsel in the words now read. And I come, by his authority, to tell you, whether you intend to be covenanters or not; that you cannot spend the day acceptably, unless it be an essential branch of your exercise to *make a Covenant with God by sacrifice*.

A

In

In this Psalm, we have a very solemn and striking representation of God's manner of pleading his controversy with his professing people. We do not apprehend, as some have done, that the Spirit of God, in this part of Scripture, has any immediate eye to the last and general judgment: tho' there are various circumstances in which the procedure here exhibited, and the procedure of the same Judge, in that great day, will be found to agree. But to reprove his people for their sins, and bring them to due humiliation on account of them; God represents himself as erecting a tribunal among them, calling them before him, summoning heaven and earth to be witnesses of the justice and impartiality of his procedure; and passing sentence upon all the different sorts of persons among them, according to their works.

After a very sublime and poetical account of the majestic appearance of the Judge, the fencing of the Court, the calling of the witnesses, and the sitting of the parties, which we have in the preceding verses; the great Judge is represented as finding among his professed worshippers, three sorts of persons, with whom he deals respectively in the following part of the Psalm.

First, There are some whose profession is genuine, their natures sanctified, and their practice conformable both to their godly profession and to their sanctified nature. Of these he speaks, *ver. 5, 6.*

Secondly, There are many who are no better than hypocrites, resting on outward forms; and particularly in legal and ceremonial observances. These he reproves at large, and exhorts from *ver. 7, to ver. 15.*

Thirdly,

Thirdly, There are some who, though they wait upon the ordinances of God, and have a place among his worshippers, are yet habitually wicked in their lives, and indulge themselves in the grossest immoralities. To them he speaks terrible things from *ver. 16*, to *ver. 22. inclusive*. Then the Psalm is concluded with a general direction how we may answer the end of our creation, at the same time that we attain true happiness, *ver. 23*.

The great Judge begins with the few who are sincere, and are saints indeed. He separates them from the rest, brings them near to himself; gives them an absolution so public, that even the inhabitants of heaven are witnesses of it; are in a condition to proclaim the justice of the Judge in their acquittal, and to celebrate that spotless righteousness on account of which they were declared righteous; and then he makes them his assessors, while he calls and judges the rest: precisely in the same manner as we expect he will do in the day of the general judgment.

This verse may be viewed as containing an order delivered by the Judge from his tribunal, and addressed to the officers of the Court, relative to the few who worshipped God in sincerity; to gather them out from among the bulk of professors with whom they stood intermixed, and to bring them before his judgment-seat; that he might begin his work by passing a sentence of absolution in their favours.

In the words more particularly, we have,

1. The character of the genuine worshippers of God, intimated in the designation which is given them. They are called *saints*. The original word signifies

signifies *holy ones*; as does also the word *saints* in our language. *Without holiness no man can see God** in peace, either here or hereafter. And though their acquitment does not proceed upon their personal holiness; yet none have reason to consider themselves as acquitted from his throne of grace now, nor shall any be acquitted from his awful tribunal, when he shall come finally to judge the earth, but they who are habitually holy, both in their nature and in their life. We have,

2. God's propriety in all those to whom this character belongs, intimated in the pronoun *my*. None can be saints unless God make them such. If he make them, he may justly claim them as his property. Nor are they unwilling that it should be so. Being sensible that *he made* them, and not they themselves, they readily acknowledge that they are *his people*. They glory in being *the sheep of his hand*. All souls are his in one sense. But he claims a peculiar property in the saints, as they also do in him. He says, *it is my people*; while they say, in the exercise of faith, *the Lord is my God*†.

3. God's command concerning his saints, *gather them together unto me*. The saints of God, in this world, live intermixed with hypocrites and wicked men. And never shall they be finally separated from them till the day of the general judgment. This command, therefore, does not import any resolution to have any complete separation made between them and the rest of mankind while they continue in this world. The allegory which is continued through the Psalm, is also pursued in this verse. And God, as the great Judge, seated

* Heb. xii. 14.

† Zech. xiii. 9.

seated upon his throne or judgment-seat, is represented as commanding the officers of the Court, in which capacity angels may be supposed to act, to separate the saints from others; that, when he should pass sentence against false worshippers, they might not be included.

This command, therefore, I take to be of the same import with that in Ezek. ix. 4. to *set a mark upon the foreheads of them who sighed, and cried for all the abominations that were done in the midst of the land.* Both are designed to intimate, that when God comes to plead a controversy with a sinning people, it is not the few saints that are among them; but the sinners and hypocrites in Zion, who are the objects of his just resentment and displeasure.

4. We have the foundation of that relation in which the saints stand unto God. They are related to him by a *Covenant.*

5. The manner of their entering upon that relation; they *have made this Covenant with him.* The Covenant is really and originally of God's making. It was made, and sworn to on both sides, between God the Father and God the Son, before *they* had any Being. Yet, as there can be no covenant, subsisting between different parties, without the mutual consent of both; as God's Saints, when brought within the bond of this Covenant, really give their consent to every part of it, and thus are, in some degree, active in their accession to it; God graciously condescends to speak of it, as a Covenant made by themselves.

6. We have a particular circumstance, in their making of this Covenant, specially attended unto; they have made it, *by sacrifice.*

A full elucidation of all these particulars is not proposed, nor would it be possible at this time. It is only the three last that we have principally in our eye, as most intimately connected with the work of this day. It deserves to be noticed, before we proceed, that the last part of the verse, as it runs in the original, is peculiarly expressive and emphatical. It would be literally translated thus; *those who are cutting my Covenant, upon a sacrifice.* The import of the phrase will be more fully inquired into afterwards. At present, we shall only take notice of two things, plainly intimated by this expression, which cannot be gathered from our translation, viz. 1. That the Covenant, by which the saints are related to God, is none of their own framing or contriving. It is God's Covenant. It is no other than the Covenant of Grace, which he made with his *chosen*, from all eternity; and which he delights to call, by way of eminence, and in preference to all others that ever he made, *his Covenant.*

2. That the business of making a Covenant with God is never over with the saints in this life. The exercise is, and ought to be, habitual. At every time, in every period, and in every circumstance of life, in what manner soever they are otherwise employed; the saints, when acting like themselves, are always *cutting God's covenant upon a sacrifice.* They habitually enter by faith, into the Covenant of God; and, in so doing, they habitually make use of the sacrifice of Christ.

The words of the text, as thus explained, among other truths which they exhibit to us, lay an ample foundation for the following proposition:

All the saints of God are persons who make a Covenant with him by sacrifice.

In opening this proposition a little, it is only proposed, thro' divine assistance,

First, To give some general account of the manner in which the saints make a Covenant with God.

Secondly, To consider, more particularly, the use of sacrifice in this business; And then,

Thirdly, To apply the subject.

I. That you may have some general account of the manner in which the saints of God make a Covenant with him, it will be necessary that you attend to the following things.

1. God having, from all eternity, foreseen the early breach of the Covenant of Works, and the consequent ruin of the whole Family of Adam; and having determined, in the riches of his unmerited love and grace, to restore a number of that family to himself and to happiness; entered, for that behoof, into a Covenant with his own eternal Son: The tenor of which was, That the Son of God, the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, should take upon him human nature, when the fulness of the appointed time should come; that, with their nature, he should also take the law-room and place of all those sinners of mankind, whom God chose in him; that, in their name, he should fulfil all that righteousness which the Covenant of Works demanded of them; and give a full and complete satisfaction to the justice of God in their behalf, for all that sin with which they stood chargeable at his bar..

On this condition, it was stipulated by God the Father, on the other part, That Christ himself, in
human

human Nature, should be advanced to the right hand of God, and have a Name given him above every other Name; that all the fulness of God should be lodged in his hand, with a commission to bestow it upon that elect Company, and upon every individual among them, when and how he pleased; that, for this purpose, Christ being invested with the threefold office of Prophet, Priest and King, should publish this Covenant to sinners indiscriminately, inviting and intreating them all to enter into it by faith: That every person, who should thus enter into it, and lay hold upon it, as every elect vessel should sooner or latter be determined to do, should be admitted to an interest in all that happiness that he lost by the breach of the first Covenant; and gradually brought forward from the estate of Sin and Misery, in which the first Adam left him, to an estate of Happiness and Glory, in which he should *be filled with all the fulness of God*; even that same inexhaustible fulness, which, according to this Covenant, *dwells in Christ bodily*.

2. This Covenant, as it was originally entered into by the Father and the Son, when no created being existed; so it was to be compleatly fulfilled by these two adorable Persons, to one another: The conditional part by the Son, and the promissory part by the Father. As none can pretend to fulfil any of the promises of this Covenant to Christ but the Father, so neither can any part of its condition be fulfilled by any other but the Son.

Accordingly, when the fulness of the time was come, the Covenant was actually fulfilled and implemented by the contracting parties, each to other;

ther; and that in the fullest manner. Christ the Son, took upon him our nature, sustained our law-room and place, obeyed the whole law in our stead, and in the character of our Surety gave a satisfaction to divine justice; so complete, that *the Lord was well pleased for his righteousness sake, as having magnified the law and made it honourable**. Wherefore also God hath highly exalted him, and given into his hands all those gifts and blessings which, according to the Covenant, were originally designed for men: that he, in the exercise of his Mediatorial offices, may communicate and give those gifts unto men; till, in this way, the whole elect-
seed be gathered and put in full possession of all that happiness, which by the Covenant is provided for them.

3. In consequence of this, and in agreeableness to the original compact, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Prophet sent from God, publishes the Covenant of Grace in the dispensation of the Gospel; and makes a free offer of it, as a Covenant already fulfilled, to every sinner of Adam's family without any exception; inviting every one to accede to it by faith: to lay claim to the condition of it, which is already fulfilled by Christ, as the payment of all his debt to the law and justice of God; and to the promises of it, as likewise fulfilled already by God the Father to Christ, and so become *yea and amen in him to the glory of God by us* †: to lay claim, I say, to these promises, as his only and all-sufficient security for all happiness; and, in this way, to lay claim to all that infinite fulness that is laid up in Christ's hand; trusting in the merit of Christ's obedience, and in the unchangeable faithfulness
both

* Isa. xlii. 21.

† 2 Cor. i. 20.

both of God the Father and of God the Son, as mutually pledged to one another in the Covenant ; that he shall eventually be made a partaker of all that happiness and glory which Christ himself now possesses, though but in his own measure and degree.

4. To this gracious proposal, the sinner, in the day of his espousals to Christ, is powerfully determined to say *amen* ; and so to accept of the offered Covenant, and of all that it contains. He gives his free consent, that the righteousness of Christ, by which the condition of the Covenant was fulfilled, should be sustained before God as the ransom of his soul ; that the fulness of God, as it is lodged in Christ, be his everlasting inheritance ; that the promise of God, as already fulfilled to Christ by the Father, and to be fulfilled by Christ to him, be his only security for that inheritance ; and that he be brought forward to the possession of it, as well as gradually fitted for it, in the manner that seems best to infinite wisdom ; always in exact agreeableness to what was graciously stipulated in the Covenant itself from all eternity.

Thus it is, that the Covenant is actually made between God and his saints : God offers the Covenant by Christ in the gospel ; the sinner accepts the offer, and gives his consent to every article of the Covenant. He considers it as *well ordered in all things and sure* : He accounts it *all his salvation and all his desire* *. Thus the happy bargain is struck, and the person is actually in Covenant with God : yet the Covenant by which he stands related to God, is none of his own contriving ; the terms of it were all unalterably fixed, before he or
any

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

any other creature existed ; and he only gives his consent to them as they are in reality : he is related to God by no other Covenant save that of which Christ is the Head ; the Covenant of Grace which was made with him from eternity. The Covenant that God proposes to make with us, and which all the saints make with God in the day of believing, is no other than *the sure mercies of David**.

5. Every person, when he thus enters into Covenant with God, necessarily lays himself under the strongest obligations to be the Lord's ; and to walk as becomes one of God's covenanted people, in all the ways of new obedience. This might be various ways illustrated.

Though the whole condition of the Covenant is fulfilled already, and must be viewed by us as fulfilled in our acceptance of the Covenant ; though we are to perform nothing as any part of the ground of our claim to the blessings of the Covenant : yet, surely, a principle of gratitude for the making of the Covenant, for the fulfilment, the exhibition, and the unfailing stability of it,—will influence every person who really takes hold of it, to do that, and to aim at doing that only which is acceptable and pleasing to his God and Redeemer.

In laying claim to what is contained in the Covenant, we necessarily lay claim to Christ himself as our King ; and to the law of Christ, as the rule of our life. This cannot but include a resolution to subject ourselves to Christ's royal authority, and to walk according to his law ; otherwise both the Kingly-office of Christ, and his holy law, would continue useless to us, notwithstanding our interest in them.

The

* Isa. lv. 3.

The promise of the Covenant secures us holiness, as well as happiness. Indeed, it could not secure us the one without the other. The two are inseparable in the nature of things. When, therefore, we give our consent to the Covenant, we must needs consent to *be holy* in heart and life, and *in all manner of conversation*; as well as to be completely happy: and that God should make us so, according to what is promised in the Covenant. And a consent that God should make us holy cannot but include a resolution, through his grace, to *be holy*; because *the Lord our God is holy*.

In a word, The sum and substance of the Covenant, as it is exhibited to us in the gospel, is express'd in that cardinal promise; *I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people* *. Now, it is manifest, that this promise consists of two parts: And the believer consents to both; saying, as the Church, *He is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand* †. Thus all the saints of God consent, not only that God should be their God, and should always deal with them according to that relation; but also that they should be his people, and should still walk before him as becomes that character, in all the beauty of holiness. And this consent to be his, and to behave as his people, must surely include an engagement that, through his grace, it shall be so. Yet,

6. All the engagements that we come under, when we enter into covenant with God, must go upon the supposition, or rather^d upon the persuasion,—that the Covenant is already fulfilled in the promissory

* Heb. viii. 10.

† Psal. xciv. 7.

promissory part of it by God the Father to Christ, as well as in the conditional part by Christ to the Father; and that the whole contents of it are to be fulfilled by God through Christ to us, in consequence of our being brought within the bond of it. Our part of the Covenant, as well as God's part, is to be fulfilled by God himself. In other words, it is God, and not we, that must fulfil our engagements to God, as well as God's engagements to us.

Thus, when we consent, according to the comprehensive promise already referred to, that God should be our God, and we his people; we do not barely consent that he, by his own free and gracious grant, should become our God: And then resolve, that we, by our own endeavours, shall become his people, and behave accordingly. But we consent, that God should make us his people, as well as make himself our God; and that he should both act towards us as our God, and enable us to behave towards him as his people; powerfully, though sweetly, constraining us to do so: Knowing that he has promised the one, as well as the other; and trusting that he will perform both alike.

In this view, our vows and engagements to God, which are necessarily included in our consenting to the Covenant of Grace, are not so properly declarations or promises of what we will do; but rather declarations of what we believe God will do, and consent that he should do for us, and in us. Our engagements to God, being really included in his engagements to us, are to be performed by him as part of his own. And, in making our vows, we do but say over what God has

said before us; in the faith that he who was the first sayer of it, will be sure to make it good by our instrumentality.

7. Our acceptance of God's Covenant ought always to correspond to the offer and exhibition that God makes of it to us in the gospel. Various particulars might be mentioned, in which this correspondence ought to obtain. He offers it freely and sincerely, without any secret exception or reservation: and we should accept it freely and in sincerity, without indulging any secret hankering after the Covenant of Works, or any secret inclination to any of God's rivals; to any practice, or to any object, inconsistent with that relation which is constituted betwixt God and us, when we enter into Covenant with him. He offers it fully, without any separation or reserve. He gives the whole Covenant; and we must receive the whole. A partial consent to it, is no consent at all. They make not a Covenant with God, who do not consider the Covenant of Grace, and consent to it, as *ordered in all things, as well as sure*. For instance, we can have no interest in the promises of the Covenant, unless we be pleased also with the condition of it, as fulfilled by Christ; and accept of his Righteousness, as the sole ground of our claim to all the blessings of the Covenant. Nor, on the other hand, can we have any interest in that righteousness which fulfilled the condition of the Covenant, unless we are satisfied with every promise which it contains; and with the promise of sanctification among the rest. What God has inseparably joined together, in the original making of the Covenant, men can have no right to separate when they accede to it by believing,

ieving. Nay, gospel-hearer, unless you consent to God's Covenant, and come into it as it is; you can have no reason to expect, that God will make any changes or alterations in it for you.

Our acceptance ought, moreover, to correspond to God's offer; as being constant, permanent, and habitual. God's offer has been the same since the first gospel-promise was published. He never revoked any part of it. And, when we accept that offer, we do it for eternity. We have no liberty to retract; nor should we allow in ourselves the least disposition to do so. Yea, as God continues to offer his Covenant to those who are already within it, as well as to them who are without; it must be the duty of believers, as well as unbelievers, to give their consent to it. As often as the call and offer of the gospel reach their ears, so often the saints of God, when acting like themselves, renew their acceptance of the Covenant; by repeated actings of the same faith, by which they entered into it at the first. Hence it is, that they are represented in the text as constantly and habitually *making a Covenant with God by sacrifice.*

In one word, our manner of entering into God's Covenant, ought to correspond to the manner in which he offers it to us in this circumstance, That, whereas God makes his proposals openly, in the sight of all the world; and is not ashamed, either to call himself our God, or to be so called by us: so it is our duty to enter into God's Covenant in the most public and explicit manner; and never to be ashamed, either to *avouch the Lord to be our God*, or to avow and acknowledge ourselves to be his people, before angels, men or devils. This

is one irrefutable argument in favours of that despised work about which we are this day met. If God offered his Covenant to us only in secret, by the inward motions of his Spirit upon our hearts; an acceptance of the Covenant by faith, in the heart, might suffice. If he only came into our closets, to make his gracious proposals to us; we might satisfy ourselves with an acceptance of them in our closets, and personal covenanting would be enough. But God meets us, with the offers of his Covenant, in the public assemblies of the church: He calls himself our God in the hearing of all the world; and openly publishes all the terms of that Covenant to which he requires our consent. Must it not, therefore, be fit that we give the consent which he requires, in the same public and explicit manner? As openly as God says, *I will be their God, and they shall be my people*; so openly and avowedly should every saint of God say, *He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture*. This is the very thing that a few, in this assembly, are proposing, through the grace of God, this day to do. And if this is not a duty, let any of its opposers tell us, How else it is possible for us to take hold of God's Covenant in a manner corresponding to his public offer and exhibition of it. We know it is our duty to accept of it by faith in the heart, because he offers it by the inward motions of his Spirit; and because an outward acceptance of it, without this, cannot be sincere. We allow that personal covenanting is a duty, because the offers of grace follow every man into his closet, and wherever his Bible goes. But are not the public offers of grace that we e-

very

very day hear in the church, a sufficient warrant for our taking part also in public covenanting?

You have no reason, intended covenanter, to be ashamed of this day's appearance. This solemn duty is, indeed, an object of contempt and ridicule; not only to a profane generation among whom we live, but even to many who have a profession of Christianity in our day. And you may lay your account with having a share of that contempt and ridicule: But, be of good courage; whatever be the opinion of men, and whatever their treatment, either of you, or of the work in which you propose to be engaged; you have reason to rest assured, that it is a work pleasing and acceptable unto God. You have no reason to be either afraid or ashamed to say, and even to swear, in the most public and explicit manner,—what God has said and sworn as publicly and explicitly before you. And, if you are rightly exercised, you propose to do no more.

II. We are now, according to the method proposed, to consider somewhat more particularly, the use of sacrifice in the business of making a Covenant with God. And, to pave the way for a more distinct view of the meaning of this part of the text, we shall observe in general; that in this phrase, there seems to be a manifest allusion to two things.

The *first* is, That of old every covenant used to be ratified and confirmed by sacrifice. There was a custom, and it is mentioned in several places of scripture, that when a covenant was made, though but between man and man; the covenanting parties joined together in offering a sacrifice to
God,

God, of some clean beast. The beast which had been offered in sacrifice, was divided into two equal parts; which were laid one over against the other, with some distance between them. The contracting parties passed through between the pieces of the slain beast; and afterwards feasted together upon it. A remarkable instance of this, is that which took place between the king of Babylon, and Zedekiah king of Judah; as mentioned by the prophet *Jeremiah*, chap. xxxiv. 18, 19.—On account of this custom it is, that the original word which is used in this text, and in various other parts of scripture, to signify *a covenant*, is derived from a root that signifies *to cut off*. And, on the same account, it is usually joined with another word, the same which is here rendered *to make*; that signifies *to cleave, or divide asunder in the midst*. Thus the phrase here used, signifies literally, *those who cut or cleave my covenant*. It is perhaps from the same, or a similar custom, that we, in our language, derive the expression of *striking a bargain*. It was; properly, the sacrificed beast that was cut asunder, or cleft in the midst. Yet the scripture every where speaks of the cutting of a covenant; because, as soon as the sacrifice was slain and cut into its pieces, the covenant was considered as ratified and confirmed; so that neither party was at liberty to go back.—Now, by the use of this ceremony, the following things were intended.

1. The parties covenanting together did hereby call upon God, in the most solemn manner, to bear witness to the transaction; to their uprightness and sincerity in entering into it, and to their firm resolution to keep it: thus the ceremony included

cluded the solemnity of an oath. And they who brake their covenants, after they had been thus ratified, were guilty of the sin of perjury.

2. They hereby acknowledged, that they durst not draw so near to God, nor call upon him, to be witness to their transactions, in such a solemn manner, any otherwise than by sacrifice. Sacrifices, you know, were appointed by God, for the expiation of sin. If there had been no sin, there could have been no use for sacrifice. But now no sinner can be admitted into the presence of God, nor have any comfortable fellowship with him; unless on the footing of a sacrifice, by which his justice may be satisfied for the person's sin. As the man would be guilty of the highest presumption, who should take upon him to approach to God without a sacrifice; so every one who brings a sacrifice in his hand, when he approaches to God, acknowledges himself to be a sinner, unworthy to appear in his presence on another footing. Covenanters, therefore, offered a sacrifice to God when invoking him, as the witness of their transactions; thereby acknowledging, that they were sinners: that they durst not take upon them to call upon God, nor expect him to take any friendly notice, either of them, or of what they did; unless he was first reconciled to them by an atoning sacrifice.

3. They signified their consent, that, if they should break their covenant, after it had been so confirmed; God should deal with them, in the same manner as they had done with the beast which had been sacrificed: That their perjury and breach of faith should be punished by a most ignominious death. Hence is that dreadful threatening denounced against Zedekiah, and his courtiers, Jerem. xxxiv. 18—21. *And I will give the men that transgressed*

gressed my covenant; who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof: The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs and the priests, and all the people of the land, who passed between the parts of the calf: I will even give them into the hands of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life; and their dead bodies shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. Even Zedekiah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, &c. The meaning is, when these men, in making a covenant with the king of Babylon, cut the calf in two, and passed between the parts thereof; they signified, by that ceremony, their consent, that, if they should break their covenant, they should be made as the calf that had been killed: that they should be delivered into the hands of those who sought their life, by them slain, their carcases divided asunder, so as persons might have an opportunity of passing between the parts of them; and that they should become meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. And now, out of their own mouth they shall be judged: I will even take them at their word, and subject them to the same punishment which they consented to bear. I will execute upon them, the curse which they pronounced against themselves; and will make them like the calf which they slew.

This ceremony was sometimes used, even when God admitted persons to enter into covenant with him. And thus he condescended to bind himself to the fulfilment of his engagements, in the same manner as men usually were bound. The most remarkable

remarkable instance hereof, is what took place with Abram; recorded Gen. xv. from *ver.* 9. and downward. There you see, that Abram, by God's appointment, took various beasts; and having slain them, divided them in the midst, and laid the pieces one over against another, as was usual in the making of covenants. This being done, Abram fell into a deep sleep: And God appearing to him, repeated the substance of what he had covenanted to do for him, as in *ver.* 13—16. And, in consequence of all this, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp were seen to pass between the pieces of the beasts that had been slain.

This smoking furnace and burning lamp, were, doubtless, intended as visible symbols of God's presence; as were the fire and smoke that were seen upon mount Sinai, when he entered into a covenant with Abram's posterity, four hundred years after. And thus God himself passed between the pieces, in a symbol, to signify his ratification and establishment of his Covenant with Abram; and to convince the Patriarch, that it was as impossible for God to violate his word, as it was that he should be made like the carcases of those slain beasts, among which the symbol of his presence had been seen to pass. Thus, as God, because he can swear by none greater, condescends to swear by himself; so, in this instance, he was pleased to confirm his Covenant, by sacrifices offered to himself.

The *second* thing to which there seems to be a reference in the text, is this; that all the sacrifices that ever were offered to God, by his own appointment, were intended as so many sacraments and seals of that Covenant by which God stood

related to those who offered them. This was the case, particularly with all those sacrifices which belonged to the Mosaic œconomy. God made a Covenant with the people of Israel, at mount Sinai: And all the sacrifices enjoined by the Ceremonial Law, were so many seals of that Covenant. Every person who offered sacrifice in an acceptable manner, under that dispensation, had *God's covenant cut upon his sacrifice*; and the sacrifice was a seal and confirmation of the Covenant, both upon God's part and his.

But it is manifest that sacrifices of slain beasts could be no seals of the Covenant of Grace, unless in a shadowy and typical manner.—The true design and use of sacrifice, is to make an atonement for sin, by satisfying the justice of God on account of it. The justice of God can never be satisfied for sin, till that punishment be inflicted and born which justice denounces against the sinner. Now *the wages of sin is death* * : and nothing can satisfy justice, but either the life of the sinner, or another life at least as valuable. But the life of a beast could never be as valuable as the life of a man; and therefore it is not possible *that the blood of bulls and of goats could take away sin* †. It is therefore manifest, that those sacrifices of slain beasts, behoved to be types and figures of a more excellent sacrifice. In contemplating those sacrifices, therefore, it was the duty of God's people, to look through them to the sacrifice of Christ, which is the only proper atonement for sin. And still the sacrifice of Christ was to be viewed as the only sacrifice by which the Covenant of grace could possibly be confirmed. Thus, even under

* Rom. vi. 23. † Heb. x. 4.

under the Old Testament, every person who offered a sacrifice in an acceptable manner, had in it a confirmation of the Covenant of Grace in a figure. He entered into that Covenant by faith; and, in a figurative manner, he *cut that Covenant upon his sacrifice*.

Under the New Testament, the Covenant of Grace, which was formerly exhibited under a figure, is set forth to us in its naked simplicity, without any types or shadows. And the sacrifice of Christ, by which this Covenant is confirmed, is likewise exhibited without a figure; while Christ is evidently set forth among us as crucified.—When, therefore, we enter into covenant with God, we take hold of the Covenant of Grace immediately; and in so doing, we make use of the sacrifice of Christ immediately, without having any occasion for a typical sacrifice to exhibit or point it out to us. We make the same use of this sacrifice by faith, and without any type, which Old Testament believers made of it as they viewed it through the type; and so we also *cut God's Covenant upon a sacrifice*. As we enter into no Covenant but the Covenant of Grace, we have no occasion for any other sacrifice of atonement but the sacrifice of Christ. This is the only sacrifice upon which this *Covenant can be cut*, or by which it can be confirmed.

In agreeableness to all this, the expression of *making a Covenant with God by sacrifice*, or of *cutting his Covenant upon a sacrifice*, as applicable to the saints in all ages, especially under the New Testament; may be considered as importing the following things.

1. That it is only upon the footing of a sacrifice, that any of mankind can be admitted into
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Covenant with God. When God made man after his image at the first, as a token of that favour by which he was distinguished above all the other creatures in this lower world, God graciously condescended to take him into Covenant with himself. This was indeed a step of glorious condescension ; but there was nothing in it derogatory to the justice of God, nor to any other of his adorable perfections: because, though Adam was a creature, yet he bore the image of God, and deserved no evil at God's hand. It is far otherwise with Adam's posterity since that Covenant was broken. Now we are all exposed to the stroke of incensed justice, by reason of sin. That tremendous perfection can never admit of the restoration of any sinner to God's favour, without a satisfaction : far less of their re-admission into a covenant-relation with him. No satisfaction could ever be made to justice, unless by a sacrifice ; nor could any sacrifice be accepted, but one whose value was proportioned to the dishonour that was done to God by our sin. A life more precious than the lives of all the elect company taken together, behoved to be the ransom of their souls. And it is only upon the footing of such a sacrifice, that any of Adam's family can be allowed to make a Covenant with God.

2. That the Covenant which we are allowed and called to make with God, is offered by God to us ; and is to be received by us as a Covenant ratified, sealed and confirmed by sacrifice. It is manifest, from what has been said already, that no sacrifice but that of Christ was capable of answering the end. And it is likewise manifest, that none could provide the sacrifice but God himself : Both because none had a right to propose the
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method of reconciliation by sacrifice, but God himself; and because the only sacrifice that could reconcile us to God, was such as no created wisdom could ever have thought of. Accordingly, *God did provide himself a Lamb for a burnt-offering: Even Jesus, his own eternal Son; who gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour unto God**. This sacrifice Christ has offered already, and God has accepted it at his hand. In the Gospel, therefore, when God makes an offer of his Covenant to us, he offers it as a Covenant already confirmed. And, at the same time, he offers to us the sacrifice upon which his Covenant has been cut; to be improved by us, as the sole ground of our title to all the Blessings which the Covenant contains. As we are to make no Covenant with God, distinct from that which he has made with Christ; so neither are we to offer any sacrifice of our own, for the confirmation of the Covenant between God and us; but only to receive and improve that sacrifice, which Christ has already offered in our name.

3. That tho' the sacrifice, by which God's Covenant is confirmed, has been offered already by Christ, and accepted by God at his hand; yet there is a sense in which the saints themselves offer this sacrifice to God when they enter into Covenant with him, as the only ratification of the Covenant between him and them. Under the Law, the sacrifices which were intended for the people, behoved to be offered by the Priests. But it was necessary that the people should have some concern in the offering of them. The people brought the sacrifice to the Priest; and when it

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* Tit. ii. 14.

was presented before the Lord, the people laid their hands upon it, otherwise it could not have been accepted for them. In like manner, tho' our Lord Jesus Christ, the great High-priest of our profession, was alone qualified to offer this sacrifice, and offered it accordingly; so that none was properly employed in that work but himself; nor was it possible that it could be offered a second time: Yet no person has any interest in this sacrifice, nor can have any advantage by it, unless they bring it to God in the hand of faith; lay their hand upon it before God, and confess their sin over it. When persons made a Covenant by sacrifice of old, it was the Priest who struck the blow by which the sacrifice was killed, and who cleft it into its pieces: But each of the covenanting parties behoved to have his interest in the sacrifice; otherwise, it could not have been accepted of God, as his sacrifice, even though it had been accepted at the hand of the Priest who offered it. So, although Christ's sacrifice was accepted at his hand, when he offered it; it cannot be accepted *for us*, unless we have a real and actual interest in it. This we obtain by faith. And it must be obtained the moment that we enter into covenant with God. Every person, therefore, who makes a covenant with God, in the sense of the text, must, at the same time, offer to God, in the hand of faith, the sacrifice of Christ; as the only proper and sufficient confirmation of the Covenant.

4. The phrase imports, that, in taking hold of God's Covenant, we should still have our eye to God as the witness of our Covenant, as well as the party to whom it is made.—The Covenant, as offered to us in the gospel, is a sworn Covenant on

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God's part. He has sworn, and that formally, by himself, and is the witness of his own sincerity, in all that he graciously stipulates with us. In like manner, all the saints take hold of the covenant, as in God's sight. They appeal to him as the witness of their sincerity; and so, materially at least, they swear by him, as they did who made a Covenant of old by sacrifice. Thus, there is the matter, though perhaps, not the form of an oath, in the exercise of every person who enters into Covenant with God. And if the matter cannot be wanting, why should any startle at the form? When we covenant with God in the form of a solemn oath, we only put into words what is necessarily included in the exercise of every *saint*; when, in his heart, he takes hold by faith of the Covenant of Grace: or, as the text expresses it, *cuts God's Covenant upon a sacrifice*.

5. In a word, it imports, that every person who enters into Covenant with God, in an acceptable manner, does thereby give his consent, that, if ever he shall be found going back, totally or finally; if ever he shall be found without the BOND of God's Covenant: in that case, God should deal with him precisely as Christ was dealt with, when he made his soul an offering for our sins; when justice struck the blow, which severed his soul from his body, and so cleft his holy human nature into two. Every person who takes hold of God's Covenant, is sensible that, as a sinner, he justly deserves to become an eternal sacrifice to the justice of God. He knows that there is no way to escape this, but by entering into Covenant with God. And he cannot but approve of what God has threatened against those who continue strangers

strangers to the Covenant, and will assuredly execute; by subjecting them, through eternity, to the same punishment that Christ suffered in the room of his people. This method of procedure, he is sensible, God might justly take with him. And he is not only convinced, but satisfied,—that he has no other way to escape, but by the Covenant of Grace, as confirmed by Christ's sacrifice. Nor can he refuse his consent, that he be dealt with in this manner, if ever he is found without the Bond of God's Covenant.—Thus, however uncouth the assertion may appear at first view, it may be said of every saint, when entering into Covenant with God; that, like Nehemiah and his people, he *enters into a curse; as well as into an oath, to walk, through grace, in God's law, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God, and his statutes, and his judgments* *.—As covenanters of old, by passing between the parts of the sacrifice, signified their consent to be made like the slain beast if they should break their covenant; so, every Christian, when he *cuts God's covenant upon the sacrifice of Christ*, consents, upon the matter, to be slain by Divine justice as Christ was, if ever he is found without the Bond of God's Covenant; or if ever he violates that Covenant totally or finally.—This he does, not under any persuasion that ever it will be so, nor yet under any apprehension that perhaps it may; for he is assured, by the infallible word of a *God who cannot lie*, that it never can. He is sensible of the treachery of his own heart, and of his disposition to break his most solemn engagements; but he knows who has said, and that, as an article of that

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* Neh. x. 29.

everlasting Covenant which he makes with them who are his saints, and which they, according to the text, are enabled to make with him; *I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me* *. In the faith of this promise, he rests assured, that he shall never be suffered totally to break the Covenant. And therefore, that he shall never be subjected to the punishment of a Covenant-breaker. But yet he is satisfied that if the first were possible, the latter would be no more than just.

III. We come now to endeavour some application of the subject. And it may be improved, 1st, For information; in the following particulars.

1. From what has been said, we may see wherein true and evangelical covenanting with God consists. It really consists in *our taking hold of God's Covenant of grace, on the footing of the free exhibition that is made of it in the gospel; as a covenant ratified and confirmed by the sacrifice of Christ: including a resolution, through the grace exhibited in the Covenant, to walk before God as becomes his covenanted people.* This is what the Spirit of God means in the text, by *cutting God's Covenant upon a sacrifice.* None of Adam's seed could ever have been taken into Covenant with God, unless God himself had first made the Covenant, and confirmed it by sacrifice. The only Covenant that God proposes to make with us, is the same that he made with Christ from eternity; called in scripture, *the sure mercies of David.* And surely it would be the highest presumption for any creature, more especially for any sinner, to entertain a thought of

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* Jer. xxxii. 40.

making any other Covenant with God but that of his own devising.—A Covenant, in the nature of the thing, is binding upon both parties; and how can any of mankind pretend to frame a Covenant, which shall bind God as well as themselves? As the scheme of bringing us into Covenant with God, arose wholly from God himself; so it was necessary, that all the terms of the Covenant should be fixed and determined by him only. They are fixed by him accordingly, and published by his command in the gospel: And our covenanting, whether it is inward, by the exercise of faith, or outwardly express in words or in writ; whether it is secret or open, personal or public; amounts to no more, and can amount to no less, than an acceptance of that exhibition which God makes to us of *his* Covenant in the gospel.

Against this view of the matter, it may be objected, that a Covenant of Duties has always been spoken of as a distinct Covenant by itself. It is a Covenant of our own framing, express in our own words. Our Covenant, in particular, had no existence till it was composed by the Associate Presbytery, about five and thirty years ago. How then can it be the same with the Covenant of Grace, which was made from all eternity; and has been published to the Church in all ages, not in the words of men, but of God?

To this objection it may be answered, that we neither consider our Covenant of Duties as a distinct Covenant by itself; nor as precisely the same with the Covenant of Grace. It cannot be a distinct Covenant; because there can be no complete or proper Covenant, which does not contain mutual engagements, binding upon both parties:
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and our Bond contains nothing but what is binding upon ourselves. It never was pretended, either by friends or enemies, that it contains any obligations which we presume to lay upon God. Neither can it be precisely the same with the Covenant of Grace; for the same reason. The Covenant of Grace, as established between God and us through our Lord Jesus Christ, binds God to us as well as us to God. But in our Bond or Covenant of Duties, we only bind ourselves.—What we say is, That our covenanting is the same with *our acceptance* of the Covenant of Grace. God's part of that Covenant is contained at large in the scriptures; and our part of it is express in our Covenant of Duties. God's part of it is necessarily express in his own words: But our part of it must, as necessarily, be express in our words; as will appear from the following considerations.

(1.) In the scriptures, the Covenant of Grace is set forth in such words as are proper to express God's gracious engagements to us: Our covenanting must be in such words as are proper to express our believing engagements to God. God's words are the most proper that can be used, for expressing an offer and exhibition of the Covenant, in all its terms, to us; but our covenanting must be in words that are fit and proper to express our acceptance of that offer. Now, it is manifest, that the same words can never express God's engagements to us and our engagements to him. The same expressions can never convey an offer of the Covenant from God to us, and convey back an acceptance of that offer from us to God. It is absurd,

absurd, therefore, and altogether ridiculous, to argue, as some have done; that our covenanting should always run in the words of scripture. Such a thing were altogether impossible.

(2.) Our covenanting ought to be adapted, not only to the general exhibition of the Covenant that God makes to us, in common with all the hearers of the gospel; but also to those peculiarities in our own condition, that render some particular parts of the gospel-revelation peculiarly applicable to us. For instance, a man who labours under peculiar trials in his lot, ought to consider those promises that belong to an afflicted state, as peculiarly directed to him: and, in his acceptance of the Covenant, he should declare particularly, his acceptance of those promises. A person who finds himself liable to the prevalence of any particular corruption, has a special need of those promises which secure him the victory over it: And in taking hold of God's Covenant, he ought to have a peculiar eye to those promises, and a peculiar dependence upon the grace therein conveyed for enabling him to mortify it. And this necessarily includes a peculiar resolution, thro' the strength of that grace, to aim at the mortification of it.—And this must be the case, even when the Covenant is only accepted by faith in the heart.

If any saint expresses the language of his heart in words, and so takes hold of God's Covenant vocally, then his word must correspond to the peculiarities of his condition, in the same manner as the exercise of his heart does. The same thing will hold, if his acceptance of the Covenant is committed to writing. And thus, in personal

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covenanting, tho' all acceptable Covenants must agree in their general scope and tenor, as being neither more nor less than an acceptance of God's Covenant of Grace; yet they may widely differ in respect of the particular parts or articles of God's Covenant, that are expressly mentioned in each. Were a particular mention to be made of every promise of the Covenant, to which the person consents; of every particular blessing that he expects to enjoy; and of every duty which he expects, and resolves, through grace, to perform: then every person's Covenant behoved to express all that is contained in the Bible. But it is enough that every one express what is peculiarly adapted to his own condition. All the rest must be considered as included in the general acceptance of the Covenant.

The same observation applies equally to Public covenanting. Every particular Church, in every particular period, has some peculiarities in her condition, as well as every individual. And, when the Covenant of God is accepted by the Church, in her public capacity, it is necessary that it be done in a manner adapted to these peculiarities. This makes it necessary, that, in different Churches, and in different periods of time, the public Bonds, which are used in covenanting with God, should run in different terms. Thus, if a Church is under persecution, she ought peculiarly to declare her acceptance of the Covenant, as adapted to such a state: expressing her trust in God, for keeping *in the hour of temptation*; as well as for grace to *keep the word of Christ's patience*. If she is in danger of being leavened with any heresy, she ought to accept of the Covenant, in a way of declaring her
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abhorrence of that heresy ; her adherence to the truth, published in the exhibition of the Covenant in opposition to it ; and her dependence upon the Holy Spirit of promise, for guidance into all truth. If any particular corruption has been introduced, or is in danger of being introduced into her ; she ought, in her acceptance of the Covenant, to make a peculiar application and use of covenanted grace, in opposition to that corruption : resolving, in the strength of that grace, to *purge out the old leaven, that she may be a new lump, a lump unleavened* *.

This was the manner in which the Church of Israel covenanted of old. All her Covenants contained a general adherence to the Covenant which was made with her at Sinai : and there was nothing contained in any of their after Covenants, that was not contained in that. But, along with this general adherence, there was a particular mention of such articles of that Covenant,—as were peculiarly adapted to their condition at that particular time. It would be easy to illustrate this, by an attentive consideration of the various instances of their covenanting recorded in scripture. We shall satisfy ourselves with one instance. In the days of Nehemiah, after a general engagement to *walk in God's law, which was given by his servant Moses* ; they engaged particularly, that they would not give their daughters to the people of the land, nor take their daughters for their sons : and that they would not buy *viſuals on the Sabbath* : These being the sins that they had then the greatest temptation to. They likewise engaged particularly, to those duties which they were at that time most in danger of neglecting,

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* 1 Cor. v. 7.

viz. that they would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt *. Yet, after all, their covenanting was no more than an acceptance of, or adherence unto, the Covenant which God made with them at Sinai : Because all these things were expressly contained in that Covenant.

In one word, our making use of our own words in covenanting with God, can no more make our Covenant different from God's; than our expressing the doctrines of the holy scriptures in our own words, makes ours a different doctrine from that of the Spirit of God.—The truth is, it is not a set of words, letters, or syllables, that constitutes the Word or Covenant of God; but the sense of the Spirit of God, as express'd by these. And, so long as that sense is retained, it matters not how often the words be changed. The Word of God is still retained; the Covenant of God is not changed for another. If this were not the case, the Bible could not be translated into any vulgar language; nor could ever the gospel be preached, unless in the very words of scripture. Whatever the words of our Covenant be, if they are agreeable to the *Law and the Testimony*, we mean to the written Word of God; we are not to be considered as making any Covenant of our own, distinct from the Covenant of God.

But if the Covenant which we accept, is not the same that God offers; if the Covenant that we make with him, is not the same that he proposes to make with us, *even the sure mercies of David*; then we cut not *his* Covenant upon a sacrifice, and our covenanting cannot be acceptable to him. If we bind ourselves to any thing to which God has not bound us, or for which

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* Neh. x. 29, 30, 31.

his Covenant does not furnish us with strength; much more, if we pretend to bind God to any thing, to which he has not graciously bound himself; we are guilty of the highest presumption. If we were sensible that our Bond contained any thing more than an explicit acceptance of God's Covenant, we would hold it our duty to renounce it. Yea, we hesitate not to say, Cursed be all that religious covenanting that amounts to any thing more than this. Far, far be it from us to pretend to bind the Creator of heaven and earth, by a Covenant of our making.

I believe the important duty of covenanting with God has suffered, not only from the opposition made to it by its enemies; but also from the unworthy and indistinct views that have been entertained of it, by some of its professed friends. All that doctrine, which represents a Covenant of Duties as really distinct from the Covenant of Grace; or represents covenanters as making any Covenant of their own, different from that which God proposes to make with us in the dispensation of the Gospel: Such doctrine, I say, tends to mislead the friends of this duty; and it gives its enemies a strong handle against it. If any person pleads for such covenanting, I am persuaded the scriptures of truth will afford him no arguments in its behalf. And if any person attempts to covenant with God in such a manner, he really seeks him not after the due order.—All evangelical Covenanters endeavour to *join themselves to the Lord, by that everlasting Covenant only which shall never be forgotten* †. Our Covenant of Duties is nothing else than our acceptance of
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† Jer. l. 5.

the Covenant of Grace, declared before the world in the same explicit manner in which God publishes his offer of that Covenant. And, if any person will give himself the trouble to look over our Bond, and compare it with the two last paragraphs of the Acknowledgment of Sins; he will find, that this is the express view that the compilers of the Bond had of the matter, and is the very thing express in the Bond itself.

2. From what has been said, we may see the groundlessness of that distinction, which has sometimes been made between the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace: as if the first had been made with Christ from eternity, and the other were made only with believers in time. The truth is, believers are related to God by no other Covenant but that of which Christ is the Head. The Covenant was really made with him from eternity. All the terms of it were unalterably fixed at that early period. And, by it, Christ was then constituted the Head of the mystical Body. It is true, that there was no person actually within that Covenant, till after the fall, but Christ himself.—But it is equally true, that every saint is really brought within it, the moment of his union with Christ: and from that moment, he is interested in its whole contents, as really as Christ is. God is his God in Covenant, as truly as he is Christ's God. And there is a true and proper Covenant, subsisting between God and that soul; whereby God is bound to him, and he to God, through Christ the Mediator: as really as God the Father and God the Son were mutually bound, by Covenant, to one another, from eternity. Indeed the Covenant between

God and him is, in every article, the same, that obtained between those two Divine Persons before the world was.

3. We may see our warrant for that solemn work, about which we are this day met. I believe one of the strongest arguments in behalf of public covenanting, may be drawn from this text, compared with some other passages of scripture; particularly, with that memorable passage, in the viii. chap. of the Epistle to the Hebrews, from *ver.* 8. to *ver.* 12.—Even under the Old Testament dispensation, there could be no warrant for attempting to make any other Covenant with God but that which God had made with his Church. Then, as well as now, it was God's Covenant that was to be cut upon a sacrifice. It was only in consequence of God's making a Covenant with them, that they were warranted to make any Covenant with him. He made a Covenant with them at mount Sinai. That Covenant, as himself expressly declares, was made, not with that generation only, but also with those who were not there on that occasion *; even with their posterity, till the promised seed should come. It was therefore the duty of every Israelite, to accede to that Covenant in person, as soon as he was capable of doing so, in an understanding manner. But his doing it personally, and in secret, did not excuse him from doing it publicly also. That Covenant was made with the Church of Israel as such; and therefore the Church, in her public and constitute capacity, declared her acceptance of that Covenant, and her adherence to it, from time to time. And thus all their public

* Deut. xxix. 14.

lic covenanting consisted, properly, in their explicitly taking hold of that Covenant which God had made with their fathers, and by which they had been erected into a visible church-state. They did not make any new Covenant with God, in a proper sense, when they covenanted from time to time; but only *cut God's Covenant a-new, upon a sacrifice.*

Now, though the two Covenants differ very much, in a variety of respects; yet God as really makes a Covenant with the New Testament Church, in a gospel-dispensation, as he did with the Church of Israel at mount Sinai. And the consent of the Church, in her constitute capacity, is as necessary to the one Covenant as to the other. God makes not the Covenant of Grace now, any more than he made the Covenant at Sinai, with particular persons only; but also with the Church as such. Hence the promise, Heb. viii. 8. *Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new Covenant, not with particular persons only, in a private manner; but in an open and public manner, with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; i. e. with the Church, collectively taken.* And, if God's making a Covenant with the Church of Israel, in her collective capacity, warranted her to declare her consent to his Covenant in a public manner, from time to time, by public covenanting; surely then, his making a Covenant now, with the New Testament Church, in her collective or constitute capacity, must be an equal warrant for her to give her consent to God's Covenant; or, in other words, to covenant with God, in the same public manner, and in her constitute capacity. Neither is it possible

sible for her to give her consent to God's Covenant, in a manner corresponding to God's offer, without this; any more than it was for the Jewish Church. Thus, public covenanting is both as warrantable, and as necessary now, as it was then. As God makes, or proposes to make, a Covenant, not only with particular members of the Church; but also with the Church as such; it must be necessary that the Church as such, as well as particular *saints*,—*cut God's Covenant upon a sacrifice.*

4. From what has been said, it appears how inconsistent it is; and how much out of character, for any person, who professes to be a Christian, to be an enemy to the duty of covenanting, whether personal or public. The truth is, all the saints of God are persons who have made a Covenant with God by sacrifice. Every Christian is materially a covenanter; and there is a nearer resemblance between the exercise of every Christian, in entering into Covenant with God by faith, and the exercise of public covenanters, than most people are aware of. Every Christian takes hold of God's Covenant, as it is offered in the gospel; and in fact, covenanters do no more. Every Christian, at the same time that he takes God for his God, gives himself away to God to be one of his people; and engages, thro' grace, to walk as becomes that character; as really as covenanters do. Yea, every Christian who makes a proper use of the sacrifice of Christ, in taking hold of God's Covenant, appeals to God himself, as to his sincerity in the matter. He considers and embraces it as a sworn Covenant on God's part; and it becomes materially a sworn Cove-

Covenant on his part also. We have seen that the ceremony of covenanting by sacrifice, included the solemnity of an oath: and surely the antitype of that ceremony cannot include less than the type. This being the case, how can any person, who has taken hold of God's Covenant in his heart, speak against his neighbour for doing the same thing before the world?—If it is not a duty, why should you do the same thing materially, in your closet, or in your heart? And if it is a duty, how dare you condemn others for doing it openly? Yea, how dare you refuse to do it openly yourself? Are you willing to be ashamed of Christ, of his Covenant, or of your acceptance of it before men? Or how is it, that, being within the Bond of God's Covenant yourself, you so far contradict your own practice, and become a reproach to your privilege, as to speak or act in opposition to those who explicitly take hold of the same Covenant.

5. We may here see, how preposterously men argue against the practice of public covenanting in our day, from an apprehension that it is not *now* a proper season for it. It is true, there may be various circumstances, which, in certain periods, render this solemn duty peculiarly necessary and seasonable. And a very little attention to the *Signs of this Time*, will convince every one that circumstances of this kind are far from being wanting among us. But if the nature of this duty is properly adverted to, it will easily and clearly appear, that it can never be out of season. Nothing can make it reasonable for men to enter into any Covenant with God, that is of men's contriving. All attempts to make any covenant with him,

him, distinct from that which he proposes to make with us; will, at every season, be impious presumption.—But surely, so long as God's Covenant continues to be offered and exhibited to us, it can never be unseasonable for us to lay hold upon it. Nor will it ever cease to be our duty, to lay hold on it, as openly, as explicitly, and as solemnly, as God offers it to us. While God says to the Church, to particular members of the Church, and to every hearer of the gospel; *I will make an everlasting Covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David:* It can never be out of season for us to *cut God's Covenant upon a sacrifice.* All reasoning therefore, against the seasonableness of this duty, is of the same import, and deserves the same reproof, as the reasonings of the carnal Jews, in the days of the Prophet Haggai, who said, *The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built* *.

6. In a word, we may see how safe, and how proper an exercise it is, in such a day as this, to lay hold on God's Covenant in the most explicit manner; and so to enter ourselves among the number of those *saints, who have made a Covenant with God by sacrifice.* You have heard, that when God came to plead his controversy with a sinful church and nation, his first business was to gather such persons to himself; that, being acquitted at his tribunal, they might be free from those dreadful reproofs, which he intended afterwards to reach to those hypocrites and wicked persons, who abounded in that church. We live in a part of the world, where the Church of God has been shamefully corrupted; and his anger provoked a-
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* Hag. i. 2.

gainst the generation, both by our own sins, and by those of our forefathers. Often and loudly has God threatened, to come out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of our land for their iniquity; and never did he threaten more loudly than at this day. If he should proceed to put those threatenings in execution, who are like to be safe? Alas! *who shall live, when God doth this?* The passage before us affords a satisfactory answer. Only God's *saints, who have made a Covenant with him by sacrifice.* I dare not say, that all such shall escape any share in the common calamity; but I have good authority to say; that they shall be so hid, in the day of the Lord's anger, that nothing really hurtful shall befall them. *A thousand may fall at their side; and ten thousand ly dead at their right hand: but it shall not so come nigh them, as to do them any injury.* The outward stroke may; but that which, to all others, is the principal ingredient in the calamity, the vindictive wrath of an angry God, *shall not once come nigh them* *.

We are far from saying that this shall be the case with public covenanters only: it shall be so, with all who are really within God's Covenant; having laid hold upon it by faith. But we would not have you think, that, because, if you are really within the Covenant, you are safe; therefore you have nothing to do with the duty of entering within the Covenant, publicly and explicitly. The more publicly and solemnly your acceptance of the Covenant is declared, the more honour you put upon the Covenant; upon him who contrived it, and upon him who is the Head of it: the
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* Psal. xci. 7.

more fully and honourably you do confess Christ; the more honourably will he acknowledge and confess you, in the day of his second coming, before his Father, and before his holy angels.— Yea, we hesitate not to say, the more fully and openly will he befriend you and protect you, in a day of public calamity. See to this purpose what Christ says to the Church of *Philadelphia*, Rev. iii. 10. *Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation; which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth.* Your being a public covenanter, if you take not hold of God's Covenant by faith, will but place you among the hypocrites in Zion, whom fearfulness shall surprize. But, on the other hand, your being within the Covenant by faith, will not entitle you to the accomplishment of *this* promise, if you are an enemy to the solemn work about which we are met to-day. This duty seems, at this day, to be a principal article of the *word of Christ's patience*. And if this is not kept by us, how can we expect, or with what confidence can we ask, that he should keep us in that *hour of temptation*; which God threatens to send upon these nations, *to try all ranks of persons that dwell in Britain and Ireland?*

2dly, This subject may likewise be improved, for Trial. It is of the utmost consequence for every one who hears the gospel, not only to be among those saints, *who have made a Covenant with God by sacrifice*; but also to know that they are so. I presume you are all externally and visibly in covenant with God: having been initiated into God's Covenant by baptism. Most of you have professed to confirm the Covenant by sacrifice at the

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Lord's table; and not a few of you have openly avouched your acceptance of the Covenant, by public swearing to the Lord of Hosts. But all this length you may have come, without being savingly instated in the Covenant by faith. And if this is the case, all will avail you nothing. Try yourselves, therefore, whether you are among those whose character is drawn in the text; or not. Let intended covenanters, especially, try themselves. If you have not already taken hold of God's Covenant, there is reason to fear that you may not do it,—even when professing it with your hand lifted up unto God. And, in that case, your swearing to God will be the grossest perjury. You will expose yourselves to the most dreadful of those punishments, that a holy and jealous God has in reserve for the man that taketh his name in vain. Try yourselves therefore before-hand. And, for your assistance, we shall propose to you, and we call you to ask at your own consciences as in the sight of God, the following questions.

1. Are you weary of the Covenant of Works; sensible of your danger while under it; and sincerely desirous to be divorced from it? To all who are under the law, as a Covenant, it saith; *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them**. Have you heard it speaking thus to you? Have you felt yourself incapable of fulfilling its demands; and therefore incapable of escaping its curse, unless in a way of being totally delivered from its power? And are you freely willing to deal with God on another footing? Having seen your own *righteousnesses* to be as filthy rags, are

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* Gal. iii. 10.

you willing utterly to renounce them; and to give up with all expectations of any good from that quarter? So are all that have made a Covenant with God by sacrifice.

2. Are you satisfied of the vanity of all attempts to make a Covenant with hell and death? The Prophet Isaiah speaks of some who said; *We have made a Covenant with death, and with hell are at an agreement* *. The meaning is; they reckoned themselves as safe from the stroke of death, and from the pains of hell, as if they had been in league with both. They were persons obstinately bent upon sinful courses; and poured contempt upon all the threatenings of hell and death, denounced by God against such as they were. But the Lord tells them by the Prophet, that their *Covenant with death should be disannulled; and their agreement with hell should not stand* †. i. e. He would effectually convince them, that they were in danger both of death and hell; and let them see that they had no way of escaping misery, but by becoming friends with him.—Now, the condition of these men was precisely your condition by nature. And, if ever you was brought within the Bond of God's Covenant, you have been convinced of the truth of what God said to them, as applicable to yourself. You have, therefore, given up with all hope of ever escaping hell, or enjoying comfort in death unless; in the way of being in covenant with God, on the footing of the sacrifice of Christ.

3. Have you been determined to consider the offers of God's Covenant, in the gospel, as made to you; and to welcome them accordingly? Persons

* Isa. xxviii. 15. † Ver. 18.

sons in a natural estate, however much they are convinced that God speaks in the gospel to sinners, they never consider him as speaking to *themselves*. They cannot deny that the Covenant of Grace is exhibited to all the hearers of the gospel in general; but they never attend to it, as exhibited to *them* in particular. Hence, they still put away from themselves what God graciously brings near to them; and refuse to make a *Covenant* with him *by sacrifice*, through their not viewing him as willing to *make an everlasting Covenant with them*. But, if you have any saving interest in God's Covenant, you have heard him speaking to you in the gospel offer; as expressly and particularly, as if no person on earth had any thing to do with that gracious offer but yourself. You consider the Covenant as offered to you; and believe that God is as willing to admit you to the full enjoyment of all its rich contents, as ever he was to admit any other of Adam's family.

4. Have you got a discovery of the Covenant of God, which the gospel exhibits, as well *ordered in all things, and sure*? Have you seen it, and do you still esteem it as a contrivance every way worthy of God, and every way suitable to your condition? Are you satisfied that there is nothing wanting in it which it ought to have, or would be the better to have? Are you convinced that it contains nothing which should be, or can be, a wanting? And are you pleased with it just as it is? You have heard, that all the terms of it were fixed, and that unalterably, by God himself, from eternity; and that nothing can now be added to it, or taken from it. They who are strangers to it, would still be at having it altered and new-modelled. Some things which they see in it, they would have
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taken away. Some new articles they would have added. And much about it they wish to have changed, or amended. But if you are interested in it, it will please you better as it is than it could do in any other form. You wish for no amendments; but are disposed to say in the last words of David, *Altho' my house be not so with God as it ought to be; yet he hath made with Christ, and with me thro' him, an everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure: This is all my salvation, and it is all my desire* *.

5. Are you presently willing, through the Grace of God, to embrace the Covenant, as it is offered to you in this gospel. Persons may be long enough before they can determine as to the time past, whether ever they have taken hold of the Covenant in earnest, or not; if they confine their enquiries to the past time. The readiest way to come to a conclusion about your interest in the Covenant, is to examine your present disposition. The moment that a person is brought within the Bond of the Covenant, a disposition is given him by faith, to give his consent to the Covenant as offered to him in the gospel. And ever afterwards, however far the exercise of this faith may be to seek; the habit, or disposition, still remains. As the offer continues still to be made to him, as well as others; he is still disposed through divine Grace, to give his consent anew: And by repeated actings of the same faith, by which he took hold of the Covenant at the first, to renew his acceptance of it from time to time. Instead, therefore of wearying yourself with fruitless enquiries, about what you *have* been, or what you *have* done? say, What are you disposed to do
now?

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

now? How do you relish the proposal that God makes to you just now; of making *with you an everlasting Covenant, even the sure mercies of David?* Upon supposition that you was a stranger to the Covenant till this moment; if you are disposed now to consent to this gracious proposal, if you do but desire to consent to it; however weak that desire is, if it be real and unfeigned, you thereby enter into Covenant with God. But if you have no disposition *now*, to consent to the offered Covenant; it is a sad evidence, that you never consented before. You are still *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.*

6. In taking hold of God's Covenant, and intermeddling with the promises of it; is your eye still fixed upon the sacrifice of Christ as the sole ground of your access to the Covenant itself, and as the only foundation of your claim to any part of its rich contents? You have heard, that no person can be taken into Covenant with God but on this footing. And if you are truly within the Covenant, you are satisfied that it should be so. The man who pretends to lay hold on God's Covenant, or to look for the accomplishment of any of its promises, without any consideration of this wonderful sacrifice; is really the person represented by the man without the wedding garment, in the parable of the marriage-feast*. And therefore, such a man's claim must be rejected in heaven; and himself is in danger of being *cast into utter darkness, where is eternal wailing and gnashing of teeth.* But your claim to the Covenant of Grace, or to any thing that it contains, shall assuredly be sustained; if you come to the
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* Matth. xxii. 11, 12, 13.

rich banquet covered with the wedding-garment of imputed righteousness: and holding up to God the sacrifice of Christ, as the sure ground of your hope; saying as David,—*Behold O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed**.

7. In one word, are you saints? The two branches of the character in the text are of equal extent. As all the *saints have made a covenant with God by sacrifice*; so all who have *made a Covenant with him* in this manner, are *saints*, or holy persons. Are you therefore careless about holiness, if you could obtain happiness without it? Are you willing to live in sin, if you might do so with impunity? Do you think yourself holy enough? Or do you apprehend that you can make yourself holy when you please; by a reformation of your life, or by abstaining from those sins to which you have been habituated? In any of these cases, you may be assured, you are no saints; and therefore, you are none of those who have made a Covenant with God. But you are doubtless in covenant with him, if you daily press after conformity to his image; and that from a sincere love to *the beauty of holiness*: if you hate sin for its native deformity, and lothe yourselves on account of it: if you daily mourn on account of the remainder of unholiness, both in your nature and practice; and pour out your complaint before the Lord on that subject. You are saints indeed, if, with a view to make daily progress in holiness, you aim at drawing constant supplies of grace and strength from him, *who, of God, is made unto us, not only wisdom and righteousness; but also sanctification and complete redemption.*

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* Psal. lxxxiv.

3dly, The subject might be improved for exhortation. It affords various exhortations, to various sorts of persons.

1. To all the *saints* of God, *who have made a Covenant with him by sacrifice*. Let such be exhorted, to live constantly upon the provision that is made for them in the Covenant. Keep the great and precious promises of it ever in your eye as the ground of your faith, and of all your hope for time and for eternity. And see that you draw from thence all your necessary supplies, by the constant exercise of an appropriating faith. Be much employed in contemplating the riches, the fulness, the freedom, and the inviolable stability of the Covenant. This will furnish you with comfort and encouragement under your heaviest trials with courage and holy boldness in your sharpest conflicts, with strength sufficient for the most difficult parts of your work; and with holy filial confidence in your approaches to God, even tho' iniquities prevail against you. Make daily use of the sacrifice of Christ; as that by which alone the Covenant is ratified beyond a possibility of violation, either on God's part or on yours. This alone can secure you against all that wrath which is due to you for your daily shortcomings in the payment of your vows; and maintain, inviolate, your federal relation to God, notwithstanding all partial breaches of Covenant on your part. And, as you are daily sinning, you will find daily need of it for this purpose. In a word, be more and more careful every day, to be saints; and to live as becomes that character. To this you are bound, in the strongest manner, by that Covenant in which you stand related unto God. And the
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same everlasting Covenant insures your success in all such endeavours. Go forward, therefore, in *the way of holiness; travelling towards the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you, in an unshaken dependence upon covenanted grace. And thus, though you pass through the valley of weeping; and such will this world ever be to you: yet, you shall go from strength to strength, without either fainting or being weary; until every one of you appear before the Lord in Zion.*

2. To those who have a view, this day, to avouch the Lord to be their God, and themselves to be his people; by openly recognizing and declaring before the world, their acceptance of God's Covenant, as ratified and confirmed by the sacrifice of Christ. Our advice to you, covenanter,—Nay, rather the advice of God, in the text, consists of the three following articles.

(1.) Be sure that you have some competent acquaintance with the nature of the duty you set about,—as it has been explained above. Every oath should be sworn *in judgment, as well as in truth and righteousness.* Much more should this be the case, when you *swear to the Lord of Hosts, as well as by him.* If you really apprehend that you have any thing else to do this day, but explicitly to lay hold of the Covenant of Grace in both its general parts; consenting that God be your God, and that you be among his people: If you consider the Covenant of duties, as a Covenant really different from God's Covenant of Grace; if you apprehend that it lays you under any obligations, which the Covenant of Grace lays not upon you; or, if you expect to perform your vows, any otherwise than in the way of God's accom-

accomplishing to you the promises of his Covenant; then you are really ignorant of the nature of that work which you propose to set forward in: And you cannot proceed but at your peril. I presume, there are few *children* in this assembly who have not learned to tell us, that there are only two Covenants by which men can be related to God; the Covenants of Grace and of Works. But if our Covenant of Duties is really distinct from both these; then, besides these two Covenants of God's making, there is also a third that is of man's making. There can be no Covenant where there is not the consent of two covenanting parties. The Covenant which we this day avouch, is confessedly between God and us. But, if it is distinct from the Covenant of Grace, where has God given his consent to it? Or how can we expect that he will? Who dare have the blasphemous boldness, to require, or to expect his consent to any Covenant that is not of his own making, of his own proposing? There is no' other sacrifice by which we can make a covenant with God, but the sacrifice of Christ: And that sacrifice is adapted for the confirmation of no other covenant, but God's Covenant of Grace. And, therefore, if your work this day be in any degree acceptable to God, it must be neither more nor less than what this text expresses; the *cutting of God's Covenant upon a sacrifice*.

(2.) Be sure, both in the making and in the payment of your vows, to make a proper improvement and use of the sacrifice of Christ; as the only ratification of the Covenant, on God's part, or on yours. This sacrifice is the only ground upon which the Covenant is offered to you: And it is the

only ground upon which it can be accepted by you. It is your only security for the accomplishment of God's engagements to you: And it is God's only security for the performance of your engagements to him. That it is your security for the accomplishment of God's promises to you, cannot be doubted; for it fulfilled the whole condition upon which their accomplishment depends: And it is not less true; that it is God's security for the payment of your vows to him; for these vows can only be performed by strength communicated to you from Christ, as the Administrator of the Covenant. And, surely, Christ's fulfilment of what he undertook as the *Surety* of the Covenant, contains an inviolable security,—that he will likewise accomplish what he has in commission as the Administrator of it: and so will *strengthen* you *in the Lord*, and in consequence of your interest in his sacrifice; in such a manner, that, according to this day's engagements, you *shall* still *walk up and down in his name* *. If you lose sight of this sacrifice, you have no security left for the fulfilment of the Covenant. You have no other possible method of having your Covenant ratified. Of consequence, no covenant can be made between God and you; or if you pretend to make it, it cannot be ratified in heaven: And therefore, it cannot stand.

(3.) Be sure to maintain a firm dependence upon the grace exhibited in the Covenant, both for vowing and for paying. You have heard that our engagements, in taking hold of God's Covenant, must be professions of our faith; as well as of our resolution. You have heard that our en-
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* Zech. x. 12.

agements to God, are included in God's engagements to us. He has graciously promised that we shall do all that we promise, thro' his grace, to do. And he it is that must accomplish the whole; doing all our works in us, and for us, and by us. And if you are rightly exercised; as you resolve only to say and swear what God has said and sworn before you; your dependence, both in swearing, and in performing unto the Lord your oath, will be upon him only: believing that he who said it first, and not you who only say it after him, will assuredly make it good. Among the other promises to which you are this day to say *Amen*, there is one that may be of peculiar use to you on this occasion. It had a primary relation to the Egyptian Church, in the first ages of Christianity; but it looks also to every Christian Church, in every age, and in every place; and to every member of every Church to the end of the world. You have it, Isa. xix. 21. *They shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and shall perform it.* You are altogether unfit for the work in which you are going to be engaged, if you are not sensible that, of yourself, you can neither vow nor pay; and that the whole business will be marred in your hand, if you are not strengthened for it by the grace of God. In this promise, that very grace is exhibited which answers your present necessity. Though you can neither vow nor pay acceptably, God has said you shall do both. Surely he who has said it, is able to make it good: And he will do it, unless your unbelief provoke him to make you *know his breach of promise* *. Go forward, therefore, in the work of this day, and in the work of every future day of your life, accord-

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* Numb. xiv. 34.

ing to this day's engagements; *in the strength, the covenanted strength of the Lord your God; making mention of his righteousness, even of his only* †.

3. We just conclude with a word to those who are hitherto strangers to God's Covenant; and perhaps never entertained a serious thought about *making a Covenant with him by sacrifice*. O wretched and miserable sinner, (for wretched and miserable you are, whatever be your deluded apprehension about your own condition); consider what is the footing upon which you stand with God. There are but two Covenants that ever God proposed to mankind: And every son and daughter of Adam, is under the one or the other. While you are a stranger to the Covenant of Grace, you are fast bound by the Covenant of Works: And very dreadful must the consequences be, if you continue under it. To all the happiness promised in the Covenant of Grace, you must, for ever, be a stranger. And for ever must you be subject to all the curses denounced by the Covenant of Works against the transgressor. Never will you be able to perform that perfect obedience which this Covenant demands. If you foolishly dream that you can; yet, how will you satisfy for the sins that your conscience already charges upon you? What will you do then when God comes *out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of these sinning lands for their iniquity*? If he does so in your day, you must be subject, not only to the outward stroke; but also to that wrath and curse which shall accompany it, to those who are enemies to God. What will ye do in the solemn day, when the glorious Head of God's Covenant shall *come to take*

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† Psal. lxxi. 16.

vengeance on them who know not God, and who obey not the gospel? Unless you are in Covenant with him, and with God through him, you must be joined in the conspiracy against him. And how will you bear the stroke of that *weighty rod of iron, which shall eternally break you in pieces as a potter's vessel?* Then you will find no possible way to escape; but hitherto there is. The sacrifice of Christ is in your offer, as the ground of your admission into a Covenant-relation to God. God's Covenant of Grace is in your offer, as ratified and confirmed by this sacrifice. Whatever you are, or have been; if you are a descendant of Adam, God has no objections against your admission within the Bond of his Covenant. And surely you can have no relevant objection against taking hold of it. Whatever your objections be, and whether you will hear or forbear; be it known unto you, that God is really and presently saying to every soul among you, what he said long ago by the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah: *Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear and your souls shall live: For I will make an everlasting Covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.* The Lord determine you to embrace his call, and so to make a Covenant with him by sacrifice. Amen.

What will ye do in the ioyfull day, when the glorious Head of God's Covenant shall come to take ven-

† Pſal. lxxi. 16.

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