

# **COVENANTING WITH GOD PRESSED**

**THOMAS MANTON**

**(FROM VOLUME 8 OF HIS 22 VOLUME WORKS)**

## Still Waters Revival Books

www.swrb.com (FREE BOOKS here too!)

Contact us today for your FREE mail order catalogue!

swrb@swrb.com • Fax 780-468-1096 • Phone 780-450-3730

4710-37A Ave., Edmonton, AB, Canada T6L 3T5

Reformation resources at great discounts!

## SERMON CXIV.

*I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.—VER. 106.*

IN the former verse David had commended the word for a sure direction; it is a light and a lamp. How so? Not only by God's designation and appointment, but by David's choice, 'It was a light to my feet, and a lamp to my steps.' Now, in this verse, he speaks of his firmness and constancy to that choice; I have taken thy word for my guidance and direction, and there he did resolve to stick. His constancy was grounded upon a vow, or upon a promissory oath, which he saw no cause to retract or repent of: 'I have sworn, and I will perform it,' &c.

In which words you may observe—

1. The strength of David's resolution and purpose, expressed in his oath; not I must, or I will keep, but *I have sworn*, &c.

2. The matter of this purpose or oath, and that was to *keep God's judgments*.

3. One great motive and reason that inclined him so to do, in the word, *thy righteous judgments*; the marvellous equity that was to be observed in the things commanded by God.

4. The conscience that lay upon him of observing this oath, *I will perform it*. As if he had said, I saw a great deal of reason to make the promise so solemnly to God, and I see no reason at all to retract it.

Four points I shall observe:—

1. That it is not only lawful, but good and profitable, to bind ourselves to our duty by a vow, solemnly declared purpose, and holy oath; so David, *I have sworn*.

2. That this help of an oath or vow should be used in a matter lawful, weighty, and necessary, 'I have sworn,' saith David; but what hath he sworn? *To keep thy righteous judgments*. A great duty which God had enjoined him in his covenant.

3. Those that are entered into the bond of a holy oath must religiously observe and perform what they have sworn to God: I have sworn, *and I will perform*.

4. That we may perform our oaths, and lie under a sense and conscience of our engagements to God, it is good that they should be often revived and renewed upon us; for so doth David here recognise his oath, *I have sworn that*, &c.

*Doct. 1.* That it concerns us sometimes to bind ourselves to God, and the duty that we owe to him, by an oath.

1. That it is lawful so to do appears from God's injunction, and the practice of the saints.

[1.] From God's injunction. He hath commanded us to accept of the gospel covenant, and not barely so, but to submit unto the seals and rites by which it is confirmed, which submission of ours implieth an oath made to God. Baptism is our *sacramentum militare*, sacramental vow, our oath of allegiance to God; and therefore it is called, 1 Peter iii. 21, *ἐπερώτημα*, 'The answer of a good conscience towards God,' an answer upon God's demands in the covenant. God does, as it were, in the covenant of grace, put us to the question, Will you renounce all your sins, and all the vanities you have doted upon? And we answer to God, enter into a solemn oath, that we will renounce sin, that we will accept of Christ as our Saviour, and will walk before him in all holy obedience. Among the Romans, when any soldier was pressed for war, he took an oath to serve his captain faithfully, and not to forsake him, and then he was called *miles per sacramentum*, a soldier by sacrifice or by oath; and sometimes one took an oath for all the rest, and the others only said, The same oath he took, the same do I; and these were called *militēs per conjurationem, et militēs evocati*. Thus every Christian is a professed soldier of Christ; he hath sworn to become the Lord's, to cleave faithfully to him; and this oath, that it may not be forgotten, is renewed at the Lord's supper, where again we solemnly engage, by the public rites that are there used, to stand to our covenant. We do not only come and take God's enfeoffment, take a pledge out of God's hands, to be assured of the privileges of the covenant, but we bind ourselves to perform the duty thereof; for as the blood of the beast, Exod. xxiv. 7, 8, that was offered in the sacrifice, which is called there the blood of the covenant, was sprinkled not only upon the altar, to show that God was engaged to bless, but sprinkled half upon the people, to show they were engaged to obey; there was a confirmation of that promise made to God, 'All that the Lord hath commanded us, that will we do.' Well, now, if God thought such a course necessary and profitable for us, certainly we may upon occasion use the like means for our confirmation, for our strengthening in the work of obedience. That there is such a vow expressed or implied in every prayer may be easily made good in the whole tenor of our Christianity; therefore certainly it is lawful so to do, to make our duty more urgent, and explicit upon our souls, by solemn vow and serious oath of dedication of ourselves to God's use and service.

[2.] The practice of the saints, who have publicly and privately engaged themselves to God, do show the lawfulness of it. Public instances: 2 Chron. xv. 12-14, 'They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul; and they sware unto the Lord,' &c. So in Josiah's time: 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31, 'And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and keep his commandments,' &c. So Neh. x. 29, 'They entered into an oath to walk in God's laws.' And for private oaths, we have David's instance here in the text; and Job

xxx. 1, 'I made covenant with mine eyes.' He had bound himself by a holy vow and purpose to guard his senses, and take heed his heart did not take fire by the gazing of his eye, that it was not inflamed with lust and sin.

2. That it is convenient so to do.

[1.] To answer God's love and condescension to us in the covenant, God thinks he can never be bound fast enough to us, and therefore interposeth by an oath. An oath is properly conversant about a doubtful matter, of which there is some question or scruple, which cannot otherwise be decided; then the law saith, he should give his oath to his neighbour. Why then doth the Lord swear? Is there any doubtfulness in his promises? No; the apostle saith, Heb. vi. 18, the Lord swears, being willing over and above to give 'the heirs of promise' ample satisfaction. Now for God, that cannot lie, and whose word is above all assurance, to stoop to us, and put himself to an oath, certainly this should work upon our hearts, and draw from us some answerable return on our part, there being great and visible danger of our breaking with God, none of God's breaking with us; therefore, that we may not play fast and loose with him, we should come under this engagement to him of vow and public promise to God.

[2.] To testify our affection to his service, we should put ourselves under the most high and sacred bonds that can be found out. Many have some slight and wandering motions towards God, and cold purposes of serving him, which soon vanish, and come to nothing; but now it argueth the heart is more thoroughly bent and set towards God, and that we have a deep sense of our duty, when we seriously confirm our purpose by a vow and holy oath. There are divers sorts of men in the world, some that are of that spirit as to break all bonds, cast away all cords, and think they can never be loose enough in point of religion, Ps. ii. 3. They seek to deface and blot out of their conscience the natural sense which they have of religion and of their duty to God, and so give up themselves headlong to all manner of impiety. There are others have some cold approbation of the way of God, and which manifests itself by some faint, weak, and wavering purposes, and slight attempts upon religion, but are soon discouraged, and never come to a fixed resolution, or serious dedication or surrender of themselves to the Lord's use. Now, a gracious heart thinks it can never be bound fast enough to God, therefore doth not only approve the ways of God, or desire to walk therein, but issues forth a purpose, a practical decree in his soul. Besides the approbation of conscience, there is a desire of heart, and this desire backed with a purpose, and this promise backed with an oath, which is the highest way of obligation; and thus doth he dedicate himself to the Lord and his service, in the strictest way of expressing his consent, for an oath binds more than a promise.

3. It is very profitable so to do, because of our backwardness, laziness, and fickleness.

[1.] Because of our backwardness; we need to thrust forth the heart into the ways of obedience, for we hang off from God. Though we are his by every kind of right and title, yet we are very slow of heart to do his will, and therefore an oath is profitable to increase the sense of our

duty; a threefold cord is not easily broken. Now there is a triple tie and bond upon a man.

(1.) There is God's natural right that he hath over us and to our service, the sovereignty and dominion that he hath over us. We are not free as to obedience before the oath, but are bound by creation; for God hath created us, not only as he created other things, ultimately and terminatively, but immediately, for his service. All things were created for his glory, so that ultimately they are for his use; but the proper end and use wherefore man was created was for the immediate service of God. He that planteth a vine expecteth fruit from it. By continual preservation; he giveth us maintenance, and therefore justly expecteth service. By redemption, as having bought us with a dear price, 1 Cor. vi. 20. From all which there resulteth a natural duty which we owe to him as our sovereign, and he may command us what he will.

(2.) There is the bond of voluntary consent, that our duty may be more active and urging upon our hearts. God doth not only interpose his own authority and command us to keep his laws diligently, Ps. cxix. 4, but requires a consent on the creature's part. All the treaties and tenders of grace are made to draw us to this consent, that we may voluntarily and by the inclination of our own hearts present ourselves before the Lord, and yield up ourselves to his service, Rom. vi. 13.

(3.) Besides this there is the bond of an oath, which is the strictest way of voluntary resolution and highest engagement that a man can make; therefore when the heart is so backward, and hangs off from God and duties we owe to him, it is good to declare our assent in the most solemn way. That the saints have made use of purposes thus solemnly declared in case of backwardness appears in scripture. David, when his heart was shy of God's presence, and had sinned away his liberty and peace, and so could not endure to come to God, what course doth he take? He issues forth a practical decree in his soul, and binds his heart by a fixed purpose that he would come to God, Ps. xxxii. 5. So Acts xi. 23; he exhorteth them with full purpose of heart to draw nigh to God; it should be the fixed resolution of the soul. And Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.' We should lay the strongest bonds and engagements we possibly can, whereby God's authority may be backed, and his right confirmed, by the most solemn assent that we can make.

[2.] In regard of our fickleness and inconstancy; we are slippery, off and on with God: 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways,' James i. 8. We have unsettled hearts, and when we meet with temptations from without we shall soon give up at the first assault, and so be now for God, anon for Satan; therefore this is a lawful and sanctified means to help us to constancy. Indeed, before we come to this fixed settled purpose we lie open to temptation; and when our first heats are spent we tire and wax weary in the Lord's service, therefore we had need make the most sacred engagements to God, that we may keep to God and persist in our duty. Now a solemn oath seems to be the most serviceable for this use. Why? For it implies a severe and dreadful imprecation. In an oath God is not only invoked as a

witness but as a judge. We appeal to his omniscience for the sincerity of our hearts in making promise, and to his vindictive power as a judge if we shall act contrary to what we have sworn. Saith Plutarch, Every oath implies a curse, or a desire of vengeance, in case of the breach of that oath; therefore it is said, Neh. x. 29, 'They entered into a curse to walk in God's law;' that is, a curse in case of disobedience. And this was supposed to be the meaning of that rite by which they were wont to confirm their covenants. Jer. xxxiv. 18, when the calf was cut in twain they did as it were devote themselves thus to be cut in twain and torn in pieces, and to be destroyed as that creature was, if they violated the covenant thus solemnly sworn; and though this imprecation or execration should not be expressed, yet every promissory oath necessarily implies a curse in case of unfaithfulness. Well, now, this is a good means to keep us constant when we have bound ourselves to God upon such strict terms; therefore some derive ὄρκος from εἴργω, to hedge, because it is as a hedge to keep us within the compass of our duty, and confirm our hearts in that which is good. Well, then, because of our fickleness it is not enough to leave the soul to the mere bonds of duty, but confirm our resolution by an oath. I may illustrate this by that passage, when Hooper the blessed martyr was at the stake, and the officers came to fasten him to it, saith he, Let me alone; God that hath called me hither, he will keep me from stirring; and yet, because I am but flesh and blood, I am willing; tie me fast, lest I stir. So we may say in this case, though the authority of God commanding his right in us and sovereignty over us is reason enough to enforce the duty we owe to him, and bind the heart and sway the conscience, yet because of the weakness of our hearts we should make this bond the more urging upon us by a solemn consent, thus ratified and confirmed by the solemnity of an oath, vow, or promise made to God.

[3.] It will be very profitable because of our laziness; by resolution we are quickened to more seriousness and diligence. When a man hath the bond of an oath upon him, then he will make a business of religion, whereas otherwise he will make but a sport and a thing he only regards by the by. Oh! but when his heart is fixed this is the thing he will look after, Ps. xxvii. 4. When our heart is set upon a thing we follow it close; and when it is so set upon a thing as that we have bound ourselves by the strictest bonds we can lay upon our heart, it will engage us more seriously.

*Doct. 2.* That this help of an oath or holy vow should be used in a matter lawful, weighty, necessary.

1. In a matter lawful. There is a vow and covenanting in that which is evil; as those that 'bound themselves with a curse that they would not eat nor drink until they had killed Paul,' Acts xxiii. 12. And many will make a vow and promise with themselves that they will never forgive their neighbour such an offence. And we read of a covenant made with death and hell: whether it be meant of the king of Babylon or no, as he is called death and hell by the prophet, some evil covenant is intended thereby; and thus a vow is made the bond of iniquity, and must be broken rather than kept, or indeed it must not be made. To vow that which is sinful, this is like the hire of a

whore, or the price of a dog offered to the Lord for a vow, Deut. xxiii. 18.

2. It must be in a matter weighty, necessary, and acceptable unto God. There are two things come under our vow and oath:—

[1.] That which is our necessary work, religious obedience to God in the way of his commandment; for this is not a rash and unnecessary vow, but that we were sworn to in baptism; this is that which David promiseth here, 'I have sworn, and I will perform it, to keep thy righteous judgments.' And this is the vow which Jacob made, though there was something of a particularity he adds to it, Gen. xxviii. 20, 21; but the substance of it was this, 'If the Lord will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, then shall the Lord be my God.' There are many that will vow and promise trifles, and so infringe their own Christian liberty, and needlessly bind themselves in chains of their own making, where God hath left them free. This help is for the weighty things of Christianity, not for by-matters. Those monkish by-laws have filled the world with superstition, not with religion, while they have been only conversant about some indifferent things, as pilgrimages, abstinences from meats and marriages, wherein they place the height of Christian perfection.

[2.] Helps to obedience. Such things as we shall find to be helps, and do conduce to the removal of impediments, such should come under a vow and solemn promise to God: Job xxxi. 1, 'I made a covenant with my eyes;' that was a help to the preserving of his chastity, that he would not allow himself to gaze, to take a view of the beauty of others. And the apostle, when it was for the glory of God, makes a vow or kind of solemn promise that he would take no maintenance in Achaia, 2 Cor. xi. 10; he solemnly binds himself, that he might not hinder the progress of the gospel. So when we find our heart ready to betray us by this or that evil occasion, we may in this case interpose a vow and promise, but then with this caution, that we do not unreasonably destroy our Christian liberty, and so occasion a snare to our souls, and that we do not think this to be a perfect cure of these distempers, while we neglect the main things; as many will make a vow to play no more at such a game, or drink no more at such a house, or use such a creature, or come into such a particular company, and so place all their religion in these things; this is but like cutting off the branches when the root remains, or stopping one hole in a leaky or ruinous ship and vessel, when everywhere it is ready to let in water upon us, and to be broken in pieces. Therefore when you rest in those by-matters, without resolving to cleave to God in a course of obedience, it but like mending a hole in the wall of a house when the whole building is on fire, or troubling ourselves with a sore finger when we are languishing of a consumption; it is but stopping this or that particular sin when the whole soul lies under the power and slavery of the kingdom of Satan.

*Object.* But here is a doubt may arise, How can I promise to keep God's law, since it is not in my power to do it exactly? it is impossible.

*Ans.* 1. When David saith, 'I have sworn,' &c., he speaks not from a presumption of his own strength, but only declareth the sense of his duty, and useth his oath as a sanctified means to bind his heart

to God; and therefore it is not to exclude the power of God's grace, or to presume of his own strength: God's assistance is best expected in God's way.

2. Such vows and promises they are always to be interpreted to be made in the sense of the covenant of grace, for no particular voluntary or accessory covenant of ours can take away the general covenant wherein we stand engaged to God, but rather it must be included in it. Therefore when David saith, 'I will keep thy righteous judgments,' he means according to the sense of the covenant of grace, that is, expecting help for duties and pardon for failings.

[1.] As expecting help from God, for so the new covenant gives strength to observe what it requires. *Lex jubet, evangelium juvat*—the law enforceth duty, the covenant of grace helps us to perform the duty required of us. The gospel it is a 'ministration of the Spirit,' 2 Cor. iii. 8, and therefore promissory oaths, according to the sense of the new covenant, are made with a confidence upon the Lord's strength and assistance.

[2.] Seeking pardon for his failings. Infirmities may stand with the covenant of grace, provided we crave mercy and recover ourselves by repentance, and so make no final breach with God; therefore this is a keeping according to the measure of grace received, and as human frailty will permit.

Briefly, then, when are sins to be looked upon as infirmities, and not as perjuries and breach of covenant?

*Ans.* When we would not voluntarily yield to the least sin; but in case of great sin, we grow more watchful, more humble, more holy; when our falls are such as David's when he had fallen foully: Ps. lvi. 6, 'Now thou shalt make me to know wisdom.' When upon our failings we are more ashamed of ourselves, more afraid of our weakness, more earnest to renew our former resolutions, more careful to wait upon God for grace to perform what he hath required of us, more watchful, more circumspect; when we begin to grow wise by our own smarting, in such cases an oath is not broken. Look, as every failing of the wife doth not dissolve the marriage covenant, so every failing on our part doth not dissolve the covenant between God and us; and therefore, though there will be some infirmities, but yet when we are careful to sue out our pardon in the name of Christ Jesus, and you shall by your failings be more watchful, circumspect, then we keep the covenant in a gospel sense.

*Doct.* 3. That when we have sworn obedience to God, we must religiously perform and observe what we have sworn to God.

So Ps. lxxvi. 11, 'Vow and pay unto the Lord.' When we come under the bond of a vow, we must be careful to make payment; it is a binding upon the heart. See how it is expressed, Num. xxx. 2, 'If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word.' When we have bound ourselves with a bond, that is, when we have increased our bonds (for the ingeminat words in the Hebrew doth exceedingly increase the sense). When a man is bound upon a bond he should not play fast and loose with God, but be very careful to perform what he hath sworn. God, on his part, hath sworn to the covenant, and he is con-

stant in all his promises, and he certainly expects the like constancy from us, especially when we are so deeply bound, not only by his laws and obligation of his mercies, but by the solemn consent of our own vows. We have bound ourselves, then, to keep them, whether we will or no. Now, what reasons are there why we must perform?

1. The same motives that inclined us at first to take our oath should persuade us to keep it whatever falls out. After trial we shall see no cause to repent of our resolution, for God is ever the same that he was, and his commands are ever the same in all his righteous judgments, holy, just, good, profitable to the creature. Christians! if we meet with any change in our outward condition, any new impediments, oppositions, and discouragements that we were not aware of when we first entered into our oath, it was our rashness, for we should sit down and count the charges, we should allow for it. The first article of the new covenant was that we should deny ourselves, Mat. xvi. 24; and after vows we should not make inquiry, but before, Prov. xx. 25. When we are bound we must take our lot and hazard, and whatever comes we must perform them to God.

2. Because our oath is a further aggravation of our sin, therefore better never swear than not to keep it: Eccles. v. 5, 'Better it is that thou shouldest not vow, than vow and not pay.' God is mocked by an oath and a covenant when it is not observed. A man that refuseth to be listed doth not meet with the like punishment as he that runs from his colours; so he that never came under the oath of God, doth not sin so much as he that hath sworn to his covenant. That which is but simple fornication in the Gentiles, in Christians it is adultery, breach of vow. Indeed, in things that are absolutely and indispensably necessary to salvation, we are bound to consent. Ay! but when a consent thus solemnly made is broken, it aggravates the sin; but when we shall be like the man in the Gospel that was possessed with the devil, whom no chains could hold fast, when neither the bond of duty, nor the bonds of our own oaths and engagements will hold us, but we break all cords, the greater is our rebellion and disobedience to God.

3. Therefore must we perform the obedience that we have sworn to God, because God hath ever been a severe and just avenger of breach of covenants. By way of argument, *à minori ad majus*, those made with man; and therefore certainly he will avenge his covenant so solemnly made with himself, and everywhere in scripture you will find it is propounded as a sure mark of vengeance. When one man hath sworn to another, and hath called upon the most high God to confirm that covenant that he makes with him, if there be a failure, a trespass, though it be in point of omission, God hath avenged that covenant. An instance for this you have Amos i. 9, 'For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant.' Tyrus and Judah they were in covenant one with another, a mutual league offensive and defensive that were solemnly sworn. Now though God had many causes of his vengeance, and many quarrels with Tyrus because of their idolatries, but chiefly because of breach of covenant, they forgat

the friendship that was between the children of Israel and Judah, and did not assist the people of Judah as they should, and were bound to do, but suffered them to be led into captivity, and spoiled by the Edomites and other nations. So for a sin of commission; it is spoken of as a mark of sore vengeance: Ps. lv. 20, 'He hath put forth his hand against such as be at peace with him; he hath broken his covenant.' In those federal transactions and oaths that pass between man and man, God takes himself to be specially interested, and will see that the breach of them be severely punished. The next step is, not only between equals, but when a covenant hath been made with servants and poor underlings, and would not set them free at the year of jubilee, see how severely God threatens them, Jer. xxxiv. 16-18, for the breach of it; nay a covenant made with enemies, Ezek. xvii. 18, 19. Nay, carry it one gradation higher, though the covenant were extorted by fraud, as the covenant made with the Gibeonites, Josh. ix. 19, 20. They were part of the Canaanites, and God severely enjoined the Israelites that they should cut off all those nations; yet when they craftily got them into covenant, when this people were wronged by Saul, the Lord takes notice of it, 2 Sam. xxi. 1-3. See how God judgeth for them; there were three years' famine and pestilence, which was not appeased until Saul's sons were hanged before the sun. Now the Lord hath ever been such a severe avenger of an oath between man and man, between his people and their servants, between his people and their enemies, and when extorted from them, certainly in such a solemn covenant as he hath made between us and himself, and that in things absolutely necessary, in things enjoined before the covenant was made, it is not safe to break with God. Ananias, when he vowed a thing to the Lord, though he was free before, God strikes him dead. It is not free with us, whether we will obey, yea or nay, what is enjoined upon us; therefore when we will break with God, what shall we expect but that he should avenge the quarrel of his covenant?

---

### SERMON CXV.

*I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.*—VER. 106.

DOCT. 4. I now come to the fourth point, that our oath of obedience to God should be often revived and renewed upon us.

David recognises and takes notice of the oath wherein he was bound to God, and here he renews it again, 'I will perform it.' It should be so:—

1. Because we are apt to forget, and not have such a lively sense of a thing long since done, so that we either break the oath, or perform our duty very negligently. Our old baptismal covenant we are apt to forget it, especially by being under the bond of it in innocency, and dedicated to God by the act of another, viz., our parents. The apostle instanceth in those that were baptized in grown years, 2 Peter i. 9;

he intimates they were apt to 'forget they were purged from their old sins.' I suppose it relates to baptism in that clause, forgotten his baptismal vow and obligation of renouncing his sin, and giving himself to the service of the Lord; and therefore there should be a purpose to revive it upon our heart, and the obligation should ever and anon be made new and fresh to quicken us to our duty.

2. This forgetfulness it will cost us dear, it will be an occasion of many and great troubles. Jacob had forgotten his vows of building an altar at Bethel; God quickens him to his duty by sharp affliction: Gen. xxxv. 1, 'Arise, go up to Bethel,' &c. God was fain to quicken him with a scourge. Samson, when his vow was broken, how many dangers is he thrown into? taken, and bound, and made a sport of by the Philistines. God will rub up the memories of his servants by some sharp and severe dispensations of his providence, when they are not sensible of their vow and faith plighted to God. Never forget your obligation to God: Deut. iv. 23, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God.'

*Quest.* But when should we renew our covenant, or our oath of allegiance to God?

1. Partly when we stand in need of some special favour from God, or when we draw nigh to him in some special duty; as Jacob, when God manifested himself to him, and he had communion with him at Bethel, then he vowed a vow, Gen. xxviii. 21. So Num. xxi. 2, Israel vowed a vow to the Lord when they were in some distress; and Ps. lxxvi. 14, 'I will pay the vows of my distress, which I made when I was in trouble.'

2. Again, after some special mercy, when under some love pang of spiritual rejoicing, and we have a deep sense of God's love to us, or a new pledge of his love to us either in spiritual or temporal benefits, and our soul melted out towards God in acts of spiritual rejoicing: Ps. cxvi. 8, 9, 'For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling: I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.' And when God breaks the force and power of enemies, when he makes the wrath of man turn to his praise, then Ps. lxxvi. 11, 'Vow and pay unto the Lord your God.' Those pagan mariners they made their vows to God when the Lord delivered them from the storm, Jonah i. 16.

3. When all things go to ruin, when the state of religion is collapsed, either in a nation or in our hearts, after some notable breaches of covenant by a people, or by a person, and we have warped from God, seem to have wrested ourselves out of his arms, then to bind ourselves to him again, and to renew our vows; for upon this occasion doth Josiah enter into covenant with God, and 'cause the people to stand to the oath,' 2 Chron. xxxiv.

4. When we are to draw nigh to God in the use of the seals of the new covenant, when a man is to revive his own right in the covenant of grace; so when we are to draw nigh to God in the Lord's Supper, which is the New Testament in Christ's blood, which is the seal of the covenant, then we should solemnly bind ourselves to the duty of it, and swear to the Lord anew.

*Use.* To press you with all earnestness to enter into covenant with

God, and then to keep it and make it good; to be sensible of the vow of God upon you, and to keep firm in the bond of the holy oath.

First, To enter into solemn obligation to God, a purpose of holy and close walking with God. I shall press you hereunto:—

1. God's laws are holy, just, and good, therefore certainly we should not be backward to swear to him; because we cannot bring ourselves seriously to give up ourselves to the Lord, they are righteous judgments. Suppose you could be free, yet subjection to God were to be chosen before liberty; therefore, when Christ invites us to take his yoke upon ourselves, he doth not so much urge his authority, 'All things are given to me of my Father,' therefore come to me; but he urgeth the sweetness of obedience, and the pleasure we may find in coming to him: Mat. xi. 29, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' If a man were free to choose whether he would be for God or no, yet the perfection or well-being of the reasonable nature being so much concerned in obedience to God, you should choose those laws before liberty. What doth the Lord require of you? To be holy, just, temperate, often praying, and praising his name; and are these things hard? A man is not a man if he do not yield to these things, Titus ii. 12. All our duties are comprised in those three adverbs, 'soberly, righteously, godly.' By being sober, a man delights himself; and by being just and righteous, a man delights others: without this, the world would be but like a den of thieves; and by being godly, he doth delight God. If we had only leave to love God and serve him, much more when we have a command to serve him, to be often in communion with him, it is the happiest life in the world. There is a great deal of pleasure, sweetness, and rational contentment doth accompany the exercise of these three graces, sobriety, righteousness, godliness.

2. We are already obliged by God's command, so that whether you resolve or no, you are bound. There are some things that are left free in our own power before the vow passeth upon us; as, Acts v. 4, 'Was it not in thy power?' Ay! but there are other things that are not in our power. God's right over the creature is valid, whether he consent to it or no; as the natural relation doth infer and enforce duty without consent. This is the difference between voluntary and natural relations. Look, as a father is a father, whether the child own him or no in that quality and relation, and without his consent; a father as a father hath a right to command the child. But there are duties that depend upon our consent, as in the choice of a husband or master. So here is a natural relation between God and us, he our creator, we his creatures, he our superior, and we his inferiors, by reason of his authority and eternal right; and God may urge this, 'I am the Lord,' though he do not urge that, 'I am the Lord thy God.' Sometimes, 'I am the Lord,' Lev. xviii. 5, his own sovereignty; sometimes, 'The Lord thy God,' ver. 2; which argues our choice and consent to choose him for our God; therefore thou art not free.

3. Actual consent and resolution on our part is required, that the sense of our duty may be more explicit upon our heart: 2 Chron. xxx. 8, 'Yield yourselves to the Lord.' In the original, Give the Lord the hand; that is, strike hands with him, enter into covenant with him, say, Lord, I will be for thee, and thou for me; choose him for your

portion, and give up yourselves to be the Lord's people: Rom. xii. 1, 'Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' He alludes to the eucharistical sacrifices. All our offerings must not be sin-offerings, but thank-offerings; so present yourselves. Under the law, a man he brought his thank-offering, and laid his hand upon it, 'Lord, I am thine.' It was implied in your baptism, and it is but reason that you should own your baptismal vow when you come to years of discretion. A bargain that is made for an heir during his nonage, it is confirmed by him when he comes to age. You were dedicated to God's service when you were young, and knew not what you did; now when you come to choose your own way, and at years of discretion, you should stand to what was done in your name to God; therefore there must be a serious and solemn consent of your heart.

4. It is for your profit to choose the strictest engagements; not only to approve the ways of God, but purpose; not only purpose, but put it into a promise or declared resolution; and not only resolve, but bind this resolution by an oath. Why? For you have more reason to expect God's assistance this way than any other, because this is the appointed means practised by all the people of God when they expected the grace of the covenant. Surely God's blessing is best expected in his own way, and the greatest engagement to God the more apt to hold us to our duty than a looser engagement.

5. Consider the necessity as well as the profit.

[1.] Laziness is the cause of our backwardness and hanging off from God. We are loath to come to God, are off and on, hang between heaven and hell; we have many loose and wavering thoughts, until we come to a firm purpose and determination; but that engageth the heart—Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is this that engageth his heart to draw nigh to me?'—when you lay a command upon yourselves. We are weak and wavering in our purposes and wishes, but it puts an end to this when we come once to a full and firm purpose: Acts xi. 23, 'He exhorted them all, that, with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord.' Austin, in his *Confessions*, tells us how he would dally with God, and how long he struck<sup>1</sup> in the new birth, until he was resolved, until he bound himself firmly to shake off all his carnal courses, and mind the business of religion.

[2.] Because of our fickleness, and the strength of temptations that will draw us off from God. He that is not resolved cannot be constant: James i. 8, 'The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' Christians! when an unconstant and rebelling heart meets with temptation without, all our wishes and cold purposes will come to nothing, but we shall give out at the first assault, and be unstable in all our ways; but when we are firmly and habitually resolved, then Satan is discouraged. While we are thinking and deliberating what we shall do, the devil hath some hope of us, we lie open to temptation; but when he seeth the bent of the heart is fixed and settled, and we have firmly bound ourselves to God, his hopes are gone. He that is in a wavering condition is easily overborne when temptation comes, but a fixed man is safe. Papers, feathers, and things that lie loose

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'stuck' ?—Ed.



upon the ground, are tossed up and down by every blast and puff of wind, but those things that are fastened to the ground, though the wind blows never so strongly, they remain. Many set out towards the ways of salvation, but are discouraged, and turn back again to a course of sin; but when you solemnly give up yourselves to God, then you will not have so many temptations as before. Look, as Naomi was ever dissuading Ruth that she should not be a companion with her in her sorrows, but go back to her own country; but when she saw she was resolved, and steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her, Ruth i. 18. Or let me take another instance, Acts xxi. 14. The disciples were persuading Paul that he should not go to Jerusalem, though they did even break his heart, they could not break his purpose; but when they saw that he was so set that he went bound in the spirit, then they said, 'The will of the Lord be done.' Thus will tempters be discouraged from importuning and setting upon us to draw us off from God, when once our bent is fixed. By resolution we are quickened to more seriousness and diligence, for when once we come under the bond of the holy oath, the awe of an oath will still be upon us, and quicken us to more diligence and seriousness, to make a business of religion, whereas otherwise we make but a recreation and sport of it, and but a business by the by: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after.' When we have laid firm bonds upon ourselves, this makes us awe-ful, serious, and resolute in a course of obedience.

Thus it directeth us to resolve. For the manner of entering:—

1. It must be a resolution of heart rather than of the tongue: Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is this that engageth his heart to seek the Lord?' Acts xi. 23, 'He exhorted them, that, with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord.' Resolutions are not determined by the tenor of our language so much as by the bent of the heart; therefore empty promises signify nothing, unless they be the result of our very souls, and not only of a natural conscience. Deut. v. 29, the people did not dissemble certainly when the Lord appeared to them by the sound of a trumpet and those mighty earthquakes; but saith the Lord, 'Oh, that there were such a heart in them to fear me always!' That there were a heart, and such a heart; that is, that this were not merely the result of an awakened conscience, but the resolution of a renewed heart. So Ps. lxxviii. 37, 'Their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' Surely they did not dissemble in their distress, but their heart was not right with him; that is, it was not a sanctified heart, it was only the dictate of an awakened conscience for the present.

2. When you thus engage yourselves to God, let it not be a weak, broken, but full resolution; cold wishes are easily overcome by the love of the world and a half purpose: Acts xxvi. 28, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Carnal men, although they are not converted, yet they have a kind of half turn, almost, but not altogether. Upon a lively sermon, or in sickness, they have their purposes and wishes; but it is not a full strong bent of heart, and love must be a serious bent: 1 Chron. xxii. 19, 'Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God.'

3. It must not be a wish, but a serious resolution, such as is advised, all difficulties well weighed. In a fit and pang of devotion men will resolve for God, but it will never hold: Josh. xxiv. 19, 'Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins;' and therefore you must reckon what it is to serve this holy God; you must sit down and count the charges, what it is likely to cost you, that this dedication of yourselves to God may be grounded upon serious consideration. Do you know what lust of the flesh you must renounce, what interest of yours you must lay at his feet?

4. It must be a thorough, absolute, and perfect resolution, whatever it cost, as he that sold all for the pearl of price, Mat. xiii. 46. A marriage even made may be broken off; some will take up religion by way of essay, to try how they like it, as men go to sea for pleasure, but will not launch so far into the deep but that they may be sure easily to get to shore again; but a man for a voyage resolves upon all weathers. So, whatever disappointment, here is my business, thus will I do; and 'though he should kill me, yet will I trust in him,' Job xiii. 15.

5. It must be a resolution for the present, not for the future; for all resolutions for the future are false: Ps. xxvii. 8, 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face;' like a quick echo, 'My heart answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' And we must resolve so to engage presently, for what we do for hereafter it is but a cheat we put upon ourselves, merely to elude the workings of heart, to avoid the present impulse.

6. It must be a resolution according to the covenant of grace, in a sense of our insufficiency and dependence upon Christ, not in a confidence of our own strength. Peter went forth in a confidence of his own resolution, and how soon did he miscarry! Therefore we must resolve in the strength of God: Ps. cxix. 8, 'I will keep thy precepts; O forsake me not utterly.' If God forsake, all will come to nothing. Thus we should solemnly dedicate ourselves to his use and service.

Secondly, Having entered into such a solemn engagement to be the Lord's, keep this covenant and oath made with God. For motives:—

1. From the nature of such a solemn engagement; it hath more in it than a single promise. There is in every solemn dedication or vowing of ourselves to God an attestation or calling upon God to take witness, and there is an imprecation. An attestation, a calling God to witness of our serious intentions to perform, and will you call God to be witness to a lie? And an imprecation, a calling upon God to punish us if we do the contrary; therefore, being entered into the bond of such a holy oath, how should we tremble to break it! For he that renews his oath of allegiance to God, he doth as it were dare God to do his worst, for you thereby wish some heavy plague to fall upon your heads if you do not fulfil the duty of your oath; that is, he that eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ unworthily, he is guilty of damnation, guilty of the Lord's blood, because these solemn rites do not only confirm the promises, but confirm the threatening; and there is implied not only an invocation of blessing, but an imprecation upon ourselves; that is, if you do not fulfil the duty of the covenant, you offer yourselves as it were to God's curse.



2. Consider the tenderness of God's people in case of any oath or solemn promise, though it concerned their duty to man. Josh. ix. 19, 20, it is spoken of the league with the Gibeonites, 'We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swear unto them.' They looked upon it as horrible impiety to break an oath. Now much more doth this hold in our engagements to God. Shall we not look upon it as a horrid impiety to break a solemn oath so solemnly renewed, and our faith so solemnly plighted? Every sin of ours is made the more heinous because of this oath.

3. Remember the great quarrel that God hath against the Christian world and all the professors of his name is about his covenant and oath taken. What is the reason God doth visit Christendom with famines, pestilences, inundations, and wars? Because they do not stand to the oath of God that is upon them. Every professor of the name of Christ, he is supposed to be in covenant with God: Heb. x. 29, 'Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing?' All visible professors of Christianity are under a covenant with God, to take God for their God, and to live as his people; now because of their looseness and profaneness, they do not stand to their engagement, therefore so many plagues are upon them: Lev. xxvi. 25, 'I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant;' that is, because they did not perform the duties sworn to him.