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"MY COVENANT WILL I NOT BREAK."

"My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." – Psa. 89:34.

THESE WORDS of Jehovah God are very comforting and satisfying to his faithful children. As faith becomes a basis for things hoped for, so confidence and experience constitute a basis for faith to rest upon. The unchangeableness of our God is one of the attractive features of his character: his assurance is, "I am the same, I change not." Even when the Lord's word or sentence is against us – as in the case of his pronouncement against sin and sinners – and even though his unchangeableness will not permit him to excuse sin or clear the guilty, this very constancy becomes an assurance to us that as God has been strict and unchangeable in regard to the penalty pronounced, he will be equally strict and equally unchangeable concerning all the good promises and covenants which he has made to us.

As an illustration of this unchangeableness, we note the fact that under the death sentence six thousand years have elapsed, and over 50,000,000,000 of our race have gone into the prisonhouse of death; – yet God has not relented or shown the slightest sign of change. His sentence was a just one, and it could not be revoked. Then came in his love; and without violating his justice he provided a great sin offering, – "a ransom for all." In connection with this manifestation of love, in man's redemption, the Creator gave certain covenants and promises; and as we have learned of his unchangeableness in respect to the [R3108 : page 342] curse, the sentence, we learn proportionately to have confidence in his unchangeableness in respect to the promises he has made our race, based upon the great redemption effected for us.

"O, what comfort it brings,
My soul sweetly sings,
I am safe from all danger

While under his wings."

It is considered worldly wisdom to take for granted that no man will keep a covenant which he subsequently finds to be to his own disadvantage, unless he is bound by some kind of penalty – by the law. And those who have not learned to expect something of this kind of worldly wisdom in connection with their worldly affairs, have oftentimes been sadly disappointed and worsted; and their plans and arrangements based upon the covenants of others have been marred. The tendency of such experiences is to shake our confidence in humanity in general – and alas, sometimes, to shake our confidence even in some who have named the name of Christ and professed to be our brethren. Nevertheless, even such trying experiences have always worked blessings to such of the Lord's children as have accepted them in the proper manner. Such have said to themselves, The more I find of unfaithfulness and injustice in mankind, the more do I appreciate the absolute faithfulness and justice of the Lord, and of such of his people as do prove themselves loyal to principle; and the more earnestly do I determine that my own course in life shall be such as will always acknowledge the principle of justice, and make my positive and finished bargain and engagement like our Lord's – unbreakable, unalterable.

The Lord indicates not only his own estimation of this principle, but his desire to see it in all who aspire to membership in his family. To such he says, "Blessed is the man who voweth to his own hurt and altereth not." The Lord would have us careful how we would make covenants, vows, either to him or to others; but having made them, his will is that we shall consider them sacred, inviolate; even though we should find subsequently that the arrangement was working out unfavorably as respects our temporal interests. There are some limitations in this direction which we will consider later on.

DIVINE COVENANTS AND PROMISES.

There is a difference between conditional and unconditional promises which should not be overlooked. Some of the Lord's covenants are conditional, as for instance, the Law Covenant, which [R3108 : page 343] begins, "If ye obey my laws and keep my statutes," etc., I will do thus and so unto you. The Covenant of the Law, while it did bring to Israel "much advantage every way, chiefly in that to them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1,2), was, nevertheless, a conditional covenant; and since Israel did not and could not keep its side of that covenant, therefore the divine promises attached to it and made conditional upon obedience, passed away so far as the people of Israel were concerned. All of the law's demand were met by our Lord Jesus, and to him and him alone passed all the divine agreements and obligations under that Covenant. The Lord has, however, made unconditional covenants with mankind: the first of these was through our representative, Noah, after the flood. As representing the race, God covenanted with Noah that he would never again destroy the world with a flood of waters; and the pledge of that covenant was the rainbow. It was wholly unconditional – it did not stipulate that no flood would come if Noah and his posterity would be faithful to the Lord, etc.

Another unconditional covenant was that made with Abraham which reads, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3.) There are no conditions or limitations here. It does not say, If you and your seed will be faithful, I will bless all the families of the earth through them; nor does it say, If all the families of the earth will seek me, they shall be blessed through your seed. There are no conditions or limitations whatever. As a matter of fact, God knew from the beginning that the natural seed of Abraham would not be fit to be the channel of blessing. From the very beginning he foreknew Jesus as the seed of Abraham and the Head of the Gospel Church, his body – as unitedly the foreseen and promised "seed of Abraham." He foresaw, even, that many who would be called during

this Gospel age would fail to make their calling and election sure; and from the very beginning he had in mind as the seed of Abraham only the "called and chosen and faithful."

God knew the end from the beginning, he knew that he would find such a class. He has been seeking them throughout this Gospel age, out of every kindred and people and tongue: he has been trying them, as the Apostle Peter says, with "fiery trials;" – proving their love and loyalty, and developing in them fruits and graces of spirit, in harmony with his own, such as will fit and prepare them as a whole, under their Lord and Head, for the great work of blessing the world, when the appointed time shall have fully arrived – during the Millennial age. Nor was it necessary to place limitations upon the blessing of all the families of the earth; because the blessing to be conferred upon all is not an everlasting one, but merely a blessing of knowledge, of opportunity, of assistance – to the intent that so many of mankind as will do so may come to a full knowledge of the truth, into harmony with God, and to full perfection of being. Afterward they will be tested as to their loyalty, and only the worthy will be granted life everlasting – all others being ultimately destroyed in the Second Death. Evidently there was no necessity for putting conditions and limitations upon this covenant. It represents God's good and benevolent purposes toward our race. He knew that his only begotten Son would be glad to become man's Redeemer, for the joy that he would set before him; he knew also that, in the time appointed for it, he could find amongst mankind a sufficient number who would appreciate the privilege of fellowship and joint-heirship with their Redeemer, and gladly and faithfully endure the tests, and acquire the character necessary to this work of blessing which he had purposed in himself.

Another covenant mentioned in the Scriptures as an unconditional one was that made to Israel's king, David – that his throne should be established forever – that of the fruit of his loins he would raise up a great one to sit on his throne in perpetuity. God could

make this covenant without any limitations whatever, because he had already arranged that Jesus, according to the flesh, should be born of the house, of the lineage, of David and that his throne should be forever. David's throne, we are to remember, was the throne of the Lord, as we read, "Solomon sat upon the throne of the Lord in the room of his father David." God never acknowledged any throne in Israel except his own. It was entrusted to David for a time, and after him for a time to his posterity according to the flesh: it has been "overturned" during "the times of the Gentiles," but eventually, "he shall come whose right it is," and the Lord will give it unto him – the throne of the Lord, the throne of David. Indeed, even the name of David was a synonym for Immanuel, since its meaning is "Beloved." Christ is God's beloved Son in whom he is well pleased, and to whom, therefore, he has appointed the honors, dignities and authority of the Kingdom which is to bless all the families of the earth, according to the promises made to Abraham.

Another unconditional promise, or covenant, is called the "New Covenant." This one is also without limitations, without conditions; the divine Word says, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I **[R3108 : page 344]** will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the Land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not [that being a conditional covenant], saith the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." – Heb. 8:8-12.

Nothing can be more clear than that this New Covenant is without a solitary condition, so far as the people to be blessed by it are concerned. It is a covenant or agreement wholly on one side – an unconditional promise on the Lord's part of what he will do for the world. We say for the world advisedly, because we are to remember that in respect to the Day of Atonement sacrifices and the blessings therefrom, Israel is a type of all the world of mankind desiring to come into covenant relationship with the Lord, as the Levites represented the household of faith, and the priesthood was typical of the royal priesthood, the Church, – Jesus the High Priest, and consecrated believers the underpriesthood. – I Pet. 2:9.

What a wealth of blessing God has bound himself to accomplish for our race! How glad we are that there are no human conditions or limitations to hinder the fulfilment of these gracious promises, nor to unsettle our faith and our rejoicing therein! We do not mean to say that man will ultimately have nothing to do toward his own deliverance from sin and death; on the contrary, he will certainly not be delivered against his own will. But the blessings mentioned in these covenants are not the everlasting **[R3109 : page 344]** blessings pertaining to the eternity beyond the Millennium: they relate to the blessings of the Millennial age, which are, in divine providence, arranged to be world-wide – to include "all the families of the earth" for all of whom a blessing of knowledge and assistance and opportunity for return to divine favor has been provided by the Creator.

But how could God do this, may be inquired, – if he is just and will not clear the guilty? How could he promise all these blessings and opportunities to those who are admittedly guilty – sinners? We answer that this part of the divine program and arrangement is specified particularly in the prophecy of Isaiah (42:1-7.) There Jehovah points out his honored servant, the Lord Jesus, through whose faithfulness the entire work of blessing the world shall be accomplished; and the key to the entire matter is found in the statement "I...will appoint thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations." – Vs. 6, Leeser.

Israel's experiences under the Law Covenant prove to us what God knew beforehand; namely, that the fallen race was so out of condition as to be unable to keep any covenant which he could properly make with them. The proposition, therefore, upon which the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant are based, is that God would provide a substitute for Adam in the person of his well beloved Son, who, first demonstrating his own worthiness, would delight in carrying out his Father's plan for the blessing of our race: and with him God would make the covenant for the blessing of the world. As the world's representative, he would appoint or enter into a covenant with him, on behalf of the people. And to this our Lord assents, declaring that his death was "for the sins of the whole world" and that it was "the blood of the New Covenant" that sealed, made binding, made effective, God's New Covenant. The New Covenant is given to Israel and the world only indirectly: the Father's dealings are not with Israel nor with the world under this New Covenant, but with the Mediator of the New Covenant, – the Christ. During this Gospel age he is accepting the Church as the members of the body of this great Mediator, through the merit of the Head. When the entire Mediator shall be complete, the covenant will come into force, become effective to all the families of the earth, – thus constituting the blessing mentioned in the covenant made with Abraham.

The curse of the divine sentence will then end, and divine favor and power will be given the great Mediator who shall then begin his great work of ruling and teaching mankind in righteousness, and administering laws and regulations for their benefit; – for their physical, social, mental and moral uplifting. The whole arrangement shall be in the hands of the Mediator and his work of helping and restoring the race which he purchased with his blood shall progress throughout the Millennial age. At the close of the Millennial age, having accomplished all that can possibly be accomplished for the race, – having brought all to a knowledge of the truth, having given all an opportunity of restoration to divine favor and restitution to perfection, – there will be a final testing on the Father's part, and all

found worthy – all who [R3109 : page 345] shall have learned to appreciate the divine character and the principles of the divine law – will be granted life-everlasting; and all found contrary to this shall be esteemed wicked, and shall be destroyed from amongst the people. – Acts 3:23; Psa. 145:20.

"THAT WE MIGHT HAVE STRONG CONSOLATION, WHO HAVE FLED FOR REFUGE TO LAY HOLD UPON THE HOPE SET BEFORE US: WHICH HOPE WE HAVE AS AN ANCHOR OF THE SOUL, BOTH SURE AND STEADFAST." – HEB. 6:18,19.

The words of our text apply to these exceeding great and precious covenant-promises of the divine Word. They assure us that our God will never break these covenants – yea, more, that he will not even alter, or amend, or change them in any particular. We can rest in hope, assured that he who has begun the good work in us and on behalf of the world, is able not only to complete the work in us, but to accomplish more for the world than it or we can ask or comprehend. Does not this knowledge of the immutability of the divine covenants give us a confidence, a faith in the Lord which brings with it strong consolation for every trial, every difficulty, every disappointment of this present time – assuring us that all of our experiences are working together as parts of a great whole of the divine program, not only for our glory, honor, immortality, but for the blessing of the world of mankind? They surely do! Hallelujah, what a Savior!

If now we allow our minds to gather in to some extent the scope of these promises as expanded and explained by the apostles in the New Testament, we see that they take hold of, not only the life which is to come, but also of that which now is. They give us new joy, new courage, new zeal, new incentive in connection with the common tasks and duties of life, – to our families, to our neighbors, and to ourselves, and above all to our God. And they give us confidence and assurance in all the great and gracious hopes set before us in the gospel – in the Lord's willingness to do for us, and in his power to do exceedingly and abundantly more than we can ask or think.

GODLIKE FAITHFULNESS TO COVENANTS.

In two ways we who are pupils in the school of Christ are instructed. (1) By being shown through the perfect law of liberty our weaknesses and imperfections. (2) By being shown God's greatness and perfection. We need to see that we are not right, that we come far short of the glorious condition in which we (in Adam) were created, and which condition alone God could pronounce or consider "very good." The longer and more intently we look into the perfect law of liberty, the more we will discern our own blemishes, and the less favorably we are likely to think of ourselves; so that we might become discouraged were it not for the Lord's assurance that while he knows our imperfections better than we do, yet he is not regarding these, but covering them – allowing the merit of our dear Redeemer as a robe of righteousness to make us perfect and acceptable before him; – and that this acceptance and covering applies to us as long as we are seeking to walk in the Lord's way – "not after the flesh, but after the spirit." We see the Lord's character portrayed in his law given to Israel; and again in the still higher statement of that law, expressed by Jesus as the perfect law, the comprehensive law, the Law of Love – God's law, necessarily representing his character. Furthermore, God's promises also represent his character, and this double revealing to us of the divine character is with a view to an incitement of our love for those principles of righteousness, goodness, truth.

While seeking to copy the Lord in every particular, and to be fully rounded out in character-likeness to him, let us now have specially in mind as a part of the lesson of this text, God's faithfulness to his engagements; and let us, as his people, resolve that by his assistance and grace we will grow daily in this quality, in his likeness – that we, also, may say of ourselves, concerning our covenants or agreements, as the Lord says of himself, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."

COVENANTS – COMPLETE AND INCOMPLETE.

As there are some who are not sufficiently conscientious in their covenants and engagements – not sufficiently aware of the responsibilities assumed in making a covenant, and who are, therefore, disposed to break them or to alter them, so there are some, on the other hand, who have not their conscience sufficiently balanced by their other reasoning faculties to understand the difference between complete and incomplete agreements. These have need of a word of caution on what constitutes a final and irrevocable covenant, bargain, agreement. Mankind in general has long recognized the difference between the discussion of an agreement and the consummation of the same; hence it is that civil law, in the interest of peace and justice, makes the arrangement that in matters pertaining to the purchase or sale of real estate, a binding agreement or contract shall be in writing, and shall be signed and sealed as final and irrevocable. The conversation respecting the matter may progress for minutes, for hours, for weeks, for **[R3109 : page 346]** months, as the case may be, and one feature after another may be discussed pro and con, and terms may be discussed over and over, – but the bargain is not complete until the matter has been finally stated in writing in a manner acceptable to both parties, and their acceptance of the same indicated by their signatures, and the passing of some money or other consideration. Once such an absolute contract has been made, no child of God should think of breaking it, unless it should develop that he had been the subject of fraud and misrepresentation, and through this had been induced to sign. But the point we wish to make is, that there was a definite time when the covenant was made, after which it must not be broken, and that up to that time either party had the unquestionable right to alter, change, or amend his views respecting it and to act accordingly. The Lord's people should learn, more and more, to exercise the "spirit of a sound mind"; – to think well of what they are about to do, before doing it; – and this implies also that they will seek for divine guidance in what they do. Indeed, having covenanted themselves to the Lord, with all of their interests and affairs, they are

to treat every matter from this standpoint, and to consult the divine will and to follow it to the best of their understanding, leaving all the subsequent consequences and results in the Lord's care.

A matter which sometimes has given rise to considerable [R3110 : page 346] difficulty among the Lord's people, is marriage engagements. There is confusion of thought as to how much obligation goes with an "engagement." Under the Jewish arrangement the betrothal preceded the marriage festivities by about a year, but the betrothal was really the marriage. It was discussed pro and con by the friends of the bride and bridegroom, and all particulars arranged and put into writing and signed. It was so binding that unfaithfulness on the part of the bride to her betrothal vows was punishable under the law. This Jewish custom was evidently arranged purposely to be a type of the betrothal of the Gospel Church to Christ, her heavenly Bridegroom. Our contract of union with the Lord, both on his part and ours, is entered into now, during the Gospel age, but the actual union or "nuptial feast," will not take place until, at his second advent, the entire company of the Bride shall have passed beyond the veil, "changed" – entered into the joys of her Lord. But marriage "engagements," as they are known amongst us to-day, are totally different from Jewish "betrothals."

According to our custom, the marriage covenant is entered into a legal manner either before an officer representing the civil authorities, or by a ceremony performed by a minister of the gospel. This is the marriage covenant; this is binding; this is unalterable; this must not be broken; the pledges here made must be observed, in letter and spirit. But the "engagements," which frequently last for weeks, months, or years preceding the marriage covenant, are not covenants at all – in the strict, proper sense of the word. They are merely *provisional* arrangements between the parties looking forward to a marriage covenant and ceremony as their consummation; – and so much so, that any treating of the "engagement" as a consummated union is declared illegal, unlawful. Of course it might be possible for

two persons to make such vows to each other without the presence of a minister or other ceremony, as to be properly binding and obligatory throughout life; but this is unusual, extremely exceptional, and forbidden by State laws as contrary to general welfare.

The marriage "engagement," therefore, properly understood, is merely a provisional agreement between a man and a woman eligible to marriage, to keep each other's company with a view to marriage – with a view to such an intimate acquaintance with each other's characters, dispositions, affairs, etc., as would give to each reasonable opportunity of judging as to the desirability of consummating a marriage covenant. Of course, this implies equally an opportunity and right to decide not to marry if in his or her judgment it would not be desirable. In breaking any ordinary agreement or "engagement" for marriage there is nothing, therefore, that is dishonorable or covenant breaking, – but everything that is reasonable, right, proper. It is in the interests of both parties that it should be so. If either party is disposed to cancel the "engagement," it would certainly be unwise, as well as unjust, for the other party to selfishly insist on consummating it with a marriage covenant, which would be binding; because a marriage is only for those who are *one*, and if either party feels to the contrary of this, it is the very best reason why both should conclude they are not *one* in their interests, tastes, preferences, etc.

We mention this matter here particularly because it is a question that is frequently referred to us by persons engaged to be married at the time the truth reaches them. They come to see matters in a new light: life comes to have a new meaning for them under the illumination of the truth, and marriage comes to have a new force and weight; a decision respecting a partner in life comes to be a question in which the Lord's will is recognized as paramount. The other party to the engagement generally fails to see the change in conditions, and perhaps admires the [R3110 : page 347] proposed companion all the more, because of the graces which the truth adds to character. The unregenerate may perhaps incline to be insistent, and to urge that it

would be wrong for the Christian to break an "engagement." This is unsound reasoning, wholly sophistical; and those who use it are generally fully aware of this; and yet it is sufficient at times to cause great trouble of conscience to some who are anxious to fulfil their obligations in every particular.

This is our justification for these extended remarks on this phase of the subject.

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