

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A NEW AGREEMENT.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 28TH, 1859 BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

“I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”
Isaiah lv. 3.

THIS word *covenant* has a variety of meanings. Sometimes, especially when taken in the gospel sense, it will mean that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God in the eternal salvation of the souls of men. This word *covenant* is sometimes taken in a testamentary sense, wherein the blessed God has been pleased to will a kingdom, an inheritance, an eternity of glory, to a number that no man can number; and that Christ is the Great Testator as well as the Executor of this will; that as a man cannot alter a will after he dies, so the death of Jesus Christ is set forth as the confirmation of the testamentary will of God.

I shall notice the subject under two main heads; the first will be *the nature of this agreement*, and the second will be *the certainty of its continuation*.

I. I will therefore set THE NATURE OF THIS AGREEMENT before you, and the terms of it, under four main heads; and I hope to speak so plainly that even some of you that know not the Lord may this evening go away with this assurance in your mind, that you are out of the secret; and may that consciousness weigh heavy upon your heart till you are made to pray that you may be brought into this divine agreement, this divine secret. Now in this agreement, (this covenant,) the Lord engages to pay the debts of a poor debtor. Secondly, the Lord in this agreement engages to pardon the sins of a poor sinner; thirdly, the Lord in this agreement engages to make all such persons welcome to a good home; fourthly, the Lord in this agreement engages to put an end, an everlasting termination, to all the troubles of all that are brought into this agreement. First then that the Lord in this agreement engages to pay the debts of a poor debtor. You will therefore see as we go along that no one can appreciate the terms of this divine and eternal agreement but those that are brought to feel their need thereof. Let us look in the first place at the debt. You will recollect a Scripture that is very solemn upon this. I will just quote that Scripture, and then give a definition of it; where the Saviour says, “Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison, verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.” What then are we to understand by this adversary; “Agree with thine adversary.” The adversary is the creditor; the adversary is the law of God. What is the debt that we owe? We owe a two-fold debt; first a preceptive debt, and secondly a penal debt. It was originally our duty to love God with all our heart, with all our
N. 4).

soul, with all our might; but by the fall of man our hearts wandered from God, and we have not paid that debt of love to him which the precepts of his holy law demand; those precepts demand perfection of love, perfection of holiness, perfection of righteousness; this is one part of the debt that we owe. And the second part of the debt we owe as sinners is that of the penalty of the law, the penalty of sin; for not only have we been the subjects of this sin of omission, but also of the sin of commission; so that our sin of commission has lighted up a hell of never-abating despair. Now, then, how are we to agree with the creditor; how are we to settle the matter with the creditor; how are we to keep out of the hands of the stern (but righteous) Judge; how are we to keep out of the prison of hell; for it is declared that the uttermost farthing must be paid; nothing short of the uttermost farthing being paid can release the sinner. But we are not at a loss; it is one of the great purposes of our meeting this evening to point out the delightful truth, the glorious truth, that the Lord Jesus Christ has paid the preceptive debt; he lived not for himself, he obeyed not for himself; and while the sword of justice hung daily over his head, and exacted of him daily labour, daily consistency, and daily perfection, so that he should fail nowhere, be at fault nowhere, he perfectly obeyed God's holy law, and established that law; and he, therefore, thus paying this part of the debt, so far the door sinner is set free. Then he also paid the other part, namely, the penalty; and if you ask what he laid down as the price of our redemption, if you ask what the price was that he paid; if you ask what it was, I must answer you, first, he embodied in his person all the sufferings that we ever could have endured, and more than all, because we never could have reached to the end of our sufferings; but the Lord Jesus Christ did, yea, my hearer,—whether thou canst see it or not—whether thou canst believe it or not,—whether thou canst understand it or not,—whether thou canst receive it or not,—what I am about to say is the truth—that the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, God and man in one person, was the price that was paid for our redemption. He gave HIMSELF; his infinite and eternal self. And therefore this redemption is of necessity eternal, because he gave himself; and he still stands in one sense where he did; he went to the end of the penalty, and he still occupies that position; and if one for whom he died could commit a sin that he did not atone for when he died, that sin would fall not upon the sinner that committed it, but upon the Surety that undertook to pay the whole of the debt. Here then is a part of this agreement. What sayest thou, my hearer; hast thou been brought to see that thou owest a preceptive debt that thou canst never pay; and art thou brought to see that thou owest a penal debt of eternal suffering the end of which thou canst never reach; and art thou brought to see that Jesus Christ came into the world to meet that preceptive and penal debt; that he has paid the same; that Jesus Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; that it was the work of his wondrous self? Here we can agree with our adversary. Does the law come and accuse me? Then I sing with Dr. Watts,

" The best obedience of my hands
Dares not appear before thy throne;
But faith can answer thy demands,
By pleading what my Lord has done."

And then the law will cease to be an adversary; and God will not Judge me by the law; I shall not be cast into the prison of hell; there is nothing to put me there, for the debt is paid, the prisoner is set free, and free for ever. Now, then, canst thou say that thou art willing to come into this

agreement; canst thou agree with it; can you set your seal to it as your act and deed, and say with all your heart, I set my seal to what Jesus hath done? If so, then surely thou art within the bond of the covenant, and it all belongs to thee; "an everlasting covenant, and it all belongs to thee; "An everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David." That then is one part of this covenant. But what a state we are in by nature, are we not? not only to be blind to this, but even when we begin to see it a little, we try to pay off our own debts; we think, well, we can pay some of it well enough; we can make ourselves better. No, that must not be the case; as the poet sings,

" Come guilty, come filthy,
Come just as you are."

Bless the Lord, therefore, Jesus Christ stood as the Surety; he is the pearl of great price, infinite price, by which the prisoner is set free. "I will make an everlasting agreement with you." Well, what do we say this evening? Are we agreed upon this? Are we brought into this agreement? Do we see that there is pardon only through the blood of the everlasting covenant?

The next part of this agreement is that the Lord engages to pardon the sins of a poor sinner; and I am aware that this part is the same thing in substance; but still it is another phase, another aspect; and therefore all tending to increase our acquaintance with the deeps and amplitudes of God's mercy. He engages then to pardon the sins of a poor sinner. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him turn unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Now how many are there here that could hold up their hands to these terms? I will go through the terms, and try to explain them. "Let the wicked forsake his way." This will have special reference to the way of opposition to God; a sinner fighting against God, fighting against everything belonging to God; a sinner that is saying of Christ, "Away with him;" a sinner that is saying of religion, "Away with it;" that is the wicked man. And am I speaking to any man now that has been living thus up to the present moment? Suppose the Lord should be pleased to make you see and feel that this is your state, why, you must not despair; if you are willing to leave off hating the Lord, and willing to leave off hating Jesus Christ, and willing to leave off hating the gospel; if you begin to feel that after all without the friendship of Jesus, and of the blessed God, you are a lost man; and if you have made up your mind that, God having mercy upon you, you will never say a word against him or his people again; that you will never say a word against his gospel again; and if you are spared to another Sabbath, you will certainly go and hear God's word; now, then, you will cease to be a wicked man; the Lord will take hold of you and bring you into this agreement, "Let the wicked forsake his way; and the unrighteous man his thoughts." "Why, say you, I cannot forsake my own thoughts." The forsaking of the thoughts means a change of thought. There are a great many conversions wherein the wicked forsakes one way and goes into another way that is morally better, but spiritually as bad or worse; for while the external is changed, the thoughts are not changed. "Why, say you, what are the thoughts?" Here is the wicked man forsakes his way externally, of fighting against God and opposing the gospel; but he carries with him some thoughts that he must give up; he thinks how good he will be, how holy he will be, and how much he will do for God; and how the Lord will love him because of his doings. But you will find that your deceitful heart will bubble up blasphemies and evils of ever

description ; and it will make you forsake your thoughts. "Why, say you I am not so strong as I thought I was ; I am not so good, nor so righteous as I thought I was ;" you will give up self-righteous thoughts ; and the only thoughts that you will have of yourself when you come to your right mind will be that you are a poor, loathsome, lost, helpless sinner ; and that you can be saved only in the way that the Lord puts the agreement ; namely, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him turn to the Lord ; for he will have mercy upon him." That is the first thing you need, and that is the first thing he will meet you with. And you know, as I observed from my pulpit last Lord's-day evening, it is no use to pardon persons if they go on in the same way afterwards, But the sinner never does when God takes hold of him. Here is a man that hates God ; but when pardoning mercy rolls into his soul, he is like the woman at the Saviours feet ; she loved much because she was forgiven much ; she hated before but now she loved much, Before, if left to her own thoughts and inventions, she would have tried to build her hope upon some comparative goodness she thought she possessed ; for although men may be bad in many respects, there is nobody so bad that they cannot find out something in somebody else that they do not possess or practise themselves. But the woman knew more of herself than old Simon did of himself ; he said, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is, that toucheth him ; for she is a sinner." Well, of course she was a sinner, and knew she was a sinner ; and the Saviour agreed that her sins should be forgiven ; he agreed to forgive her sins purely on the ground of mercy, to forgive them freely, and fully, and eternally ; and the atonement of Jesus Christ was the way by which they were forgiven. "I write unto you," saith John, "little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his names sake." Here then, is the agreement. But mark again ; "Our God will abundantly pardon." The original word there translated "abundantly," is amazingly full ; our translators were at a loss to find an English word that could at all express fully what is meant by the original word there ; hence they have given unto us a marginal as well as a textual reading ; "Our God," they say in the margin, "will multiply pardons." In the text our translators have put. "He will abundantly pardon ;" expressive of the freeness, and fulness, and infinity, and eternity of the delight that God has in pardoning a sinner. The pardon of sin is a demonstration of the perfection of the work of Christ, and clothes the Saviour's name with such eternal honor, that as God delights to glorify his dear Son, he delights to pardon sin. How think you, will the Saviour look you in the face at the last day when he looks at you, and his very look will say, poor soul, I washed thee from all thy sins ; I justified thee from all thy guilt and all thine iniquities ; I have blotted out every iota that stood against thee ; and now here I will present thee with exceeding joy, without spot, without wrinkle, without blemish. Ah, well might the poet say concerning the people of God at the last day.

"Oh, what a sweet, exalted song,
Will rend the vaulted skies,
When shouting grace the blood washed throng,
Shall see the top stone rise."

Here then is an agreement. Why, are we wise men in the spiritual sense if we do not agree to this? What say you, my hearer ; can you agree to this? Can you say with the Publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner?" Can you say with another, "Have mercy upon me, O God ; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." Why,

the Lord engages to do so ; he says he will do so. But then, some say, yes, but then, it is on the ground if the sinner will come ; for it says, let the wicked forsake his way." This is God's imperative mood ; the word let is a command ; it never fell to the ground yet, and never will ; the sinner shall forsake his way. "Let there be light;" means, there shall be light, and there was light ; and the unrighteous man shall forsake his thoughts ; it shall be done ; there is no uncertainty about it. The Lord meets with Saul of Tarsus ; he is a wicked man, he is a bitter enemy to God and godliness ; but he shall forsake his way, he shall forsake thoughts ; a revolution complete shall he undergo, and be brought into the knowledge of the blessed Redeemer ; and look back at the rock of sunken nature, out of which he was hewn, look back at the pit out of which he was digged, and shall glorify God for his mercy. Never did the apostle Paul forget what he was, where he was, what he was brought from, how he was brought, what he was brought to, where he was going to ; which made him feel so indebted to the dear Saviour that when the people wept over him, he said, "What mean ye to weep and break mine heart ; for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Oh, it was pardoning mercy, eternal mercy, that had rolled in upon his soul. "I will make," then, saith God, "an everlasting agreement with you ;" to free you from all your debts, to pardon all your sins, heal all your diseases, redeem you from all destruction, satisfy your mouth with good things, renew your youth like the eagles, and take you home to eternal glory at the last.

The third part of this agreement is having a good home to take these people to. Now children are always afraid of their home all the time they have an idea that there is something against them. Oh, if father has a rod in pickle for me, I shall be afraid to go home ; if mother means to be severe, I shall be afraid to go home ; and they linger about the door, look in at the window, listen perhaps at the key hole, and all sorts of movements ; afraid to go home. But if by their lingering about and being afraid to go, they become almost starved ; well, say they, I must have food, and I must have shelter ; and at any rate I shall not be killed at home ; I may be perhaps thrashed a little, I may have the rod pretty heavily, perhaps I may be made to feel it ; but still I sha'n't be killed ; and perhaps, who knows ; they might be glad to see me ; and I have nowhere else to go ; and so I will arise, and go to my father, and I will begin to confess ; and I should think if I begin to confess, he will begin to have mercy." But the father met him while he was yet a great way off, and would not give him time to confess ; but fell upon his neck, and kissed him, and brought him home ; and you know the treatment the prodigal there met with. And so little further on in this chapter we find the same people who are brought into this agreement this order of things, the same people are spoken of as being wonderfully welcome to that wonderful inheritance which the blessed God has for them. "Ye shall go out with joy ;" that is, out from your debtorship, and out from your sinnership into saintship ; "ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace ; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." The Scriptures are highly poetic in many parts ; the words therefore that I have now quoted must be understood rhetorically, they must be understood to be a figure of speech ; wherein the mountains and the hills are personified, or turned by a license of speech into persons ; wherein the trees also by a license or form of speech, are turned into persons ; and certain actions are attributed to the hills, to the mountains, and to the trees ; and then the idea will be

this; you enter the promised land, and the mountains see you coming; and they are represented as rejoicing, and breaking forth into singing, to shew how welcome you are there. And we almost imagine the mountains speaking, for here is action attributed to the mountains; you may almost hear the mountains saying to these poor sinners, "come along, we have the finest of the wheat for you;" for Moses when he describes the land, describes it as a land of wheat and of barley, and of figs, and of vines, and of pomegranates, and of olive oil, and of honey; and as though the mountains should say, "come along, we know what you want; you are poor starving creatures, we have plenty of wheat for you. plenty of barley for you, plenty of the pure blood of the grape for you; plenty of figs for you, and we have the oil that shall make your faces shine; and we have the honey; and whenever you are in any bitterness we will drop a little drop of honey into your cup; you will have many a bitter cup to drink while you pass through this world; but we, the mountains of the promised land, when we see you with the bitter cup,—the bitter cup spiritually, the bitter cup in the family, the bitter cup of bodily affliction, the bitter cup of losses, and crosses, and persecution; whatever bitter cup you have, we have honey here, and we will drop a little drop of honey into your cup, and that will sweeten things, and make you rejoice that you have entered into such an agreement." That I think is the meaning there intended. But of course it also, by another idea, means that the blessed God, for that is the idea intended, after all, as well as that which I have advanced;—that the blessed God rejoices to receive you. Jesus Christ rejoiced to receive sinners; there was no circumstance under which a sinner stood before God that could make Jesus Christ ashamed to receive him; and although his name in consequence was subjected to shame, yet he despised that, he cared not for that; it mattered not to him whether a Magdalene, a thief on the cross; it mattered not to him whether a Roman centurion; it mattered not to him what their characters were, whether a Zaccheus or a Publican; he rejoiced to receive them—he received sinners. And so it is now; God the Father receives a poor sinner according to the love wherewith he loves that sinner; and God having loved that sinner with an infinite love, receives him with corresponding delight; having loved that sinner with an everlasting love, he receives him with everlasting delight; Christ having loved the sinner with the same love, he receives him with corresponding delight; he delighteth to do the will of God. God having loved the sinner and Christ having loved the sinner with an eternal love, will never cease to delight in the welfare of that poor sinner: the Holy Spirit having loved the sinner in oneness with the Father and with the Saviour, with an eternal love, will be in that man's soul as a fountain of living water, springing up into everlasting life; therefore saith the prophet, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing;" mark the language; "He will joy over thee with singing;" why, the blessed God, to encourage us to come into this agreement, is pleased to speak of himself as singing a kind of anthem of triumph; as though the Father should be singing and saying, I have my children with me; as though the Saviour should be saying, Father, here am I, and all thou hast given me; as though the Holy Spirit should be rejoicing to see that he had raised these dry bones from the valley, formed them into men, that stand upon their feet upon the vantage ground of eternal victory, an exceeding great army; and thus shall grace reign, mercy be glorified, and poor sinners be saved. The very mountains, and hills, and trees of the field, shall clap their hands; every tree, every fruit-bearing tree in the land rejoices to see you

come; as though each tree should say, I am glad you are come to partake of my fruit; I have so much that I should not know what to do with it if I had not a poor needy creature like you to come and take it. "I will make an everlasting agreement with you, even the sure mercies of David." So that, if I may say it without irreverence, the blessed God has provided such a profusion of mercies that he does not know what to do with them, except to bestow them upon just such poor creatures as you and I are; if you are willing to receive them, that is a proof that he is willing to bestow them. It is an everlasting agreement. In the first agreement that God made with man in the garden of Eden, sin came in, and that became the quarrel, and this agreement was broken up; and then the second agreement God made with man, that of the Jewish covenant, sin came in, and that agreement was broken up. But neither of these agreements could be cancelled until the Saviour cancelled them at Calvary's cross; he cancelled the original agreement, for he is the end of the law; he cancelled the Jewish agreement, the Jewish covenant; "blotting out," saith the apostle, "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;" so that these agreements were violated when sin came in, and were cancelled at Calvary's cross. But that agreement spoken of in our text can neither be violated nor cancelled; here it is God has engaged to set you free, and you cannot get into debt again if you would; here God has put your sins away, and you cannot bring them back again if you would; here God has a good home to bring you to, and you cannot run away if you would. You never hear of the prodigal running away again after he got home. There are two sentences in the parable of the prodigal son that I have often very much admired; to the one we find there is an end, but to the other there is no end; and the sentences are these. In the early part of the parable it says, "He began to be in want;" that is a good sign; towards the end of the parable it says, "and they began to be merry;" and that is a good consequence; the one was the consequence of the other. Just so sure as he began to be in want of his father's house, just so sure the time would come when he should begin to be merry; but the time would never arrive when he should cease to be merry.

The last part of this agreement, which I now hastily notice, is that the Lord in this agreement engages to terminate all your troubles. In order to make this part of the agreement clear, I will first just contrast where you are by nature, with where you are by this agreement, this covenant. I have often thought the latter part of the 24th of Proverbs, is very expressive of our awful state by nature, and the terrible consequences thereof. I am aware the words I am about to quote are generally taken in a mere natural and moral sense; nor am I in what I am going to say, going to take away their force in a moral sense; but while they have an instructive lesson in the mere natural sense, they evidently have a spiritual meaning also. The passage is this. The wise man saith, "I went by the field of the slothful." Every man by nature is a sloth in things pertaining to eternity. What cares the natural man for his soul? What cares the natural man for Christ? What cares the natural man for salvation? He is slothful. "And by the vineyard of the man void of understanding;" who knew not that which was essential to keep his field and his vineyard in order. Now, saith the wise man, "It was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down." This is just what we are by nature; we bear thorns and briars, and our defence is departed. And, oh! my hearer, whether you believe me or not, all your works all the time you are not

born of God, all the time you are in a state of nature, all your works are to God as mere thorns, and briars, and brambles; for they that are in the flesh cannot please God; and you set up these thorns, and briars, and brambles, in opposition to God's truth; and the Lord says, "Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them; I would burn them together." "And covered with nettles." I like that idea very much, because it is instructive, as the wise man assures us he felt it to be. Nettles will sting a living man; nettles are very stinging things; and so when a man is born of God, his sins sting him, his corruptions sting him; the thorns and briars of his sins are a burden to him; he sees what a plight he is in, what a state he is in. Now, saith the wise man, "I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet, a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep;" it is but a little moment, and then thou wilt be in hell; thou wilt sleep on in thy death for a little while, the flames of hell will soon reach thee; thy life is but a vapour, that appeareth but a little while, and it is gone. But if thou art brought to see and feel this to be thy state, and art fleeing from it into this agreement, then thou wilt escape the brambles and nettles; thou wilt escape the fire; and come into a state infinitely different. Now, saith the wise man, "Thy poverty shall come as one that travelleth." And who is he that travelleth? Death—that is the traveller who will come to you. "And thy want as an armed man." Who is the armed man? Why, Death—the same person; armed with that scythe that, without mercy, will cut thee down. Such is the misery of man, such is our state. And how can I stand in this Hall, and witness the presence of thousands of precious souls, without feeling solemn and agonising prayer to God that his holy word, weak as the instrument may be, poor and stammering as the speaker may be, may reach the precious souls of the people this evening, convince those that are not convinced, and turn their wandering feet to that glorious gospel by which alone we can be reconciled to God, and escape from the woeful state we are in by nature. But coming back again to this matter—"I will make an everlasting agreement with you," to put an end to all your troubles. Hence, in the close of this chapter, you have these beautiful words, "Instead of the thorn"—that is our sins, our state by nature—"instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree." Not the fir tree that we call such, but a tree bearing edible fruit. "And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree." There shall be no thorn in thy flesh, nor in thy spirit, there shall be no thorn in thy path; there shall be no thorn in thine inheritance; there shall be no thorn between thee and the blessed God; briars and thorns are for ever gone; there is a paradisaical perfection established, and that is to continue for ever; for this paradisaical state, wherein thorns, and nettles, and briars, are for ever gone, is thus marked by the prophet, that "It shall be to the Lord for a NAME;" mark that, "for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." "I will make with you an everlasting agreement."

Let me ask then, what do we know of being brought into this agreement, into this Gospel? Do we feel our need of all the four departments upon which I have dwelt? Do we feel our need of Christ to set us free from legal debt? Do we feel our need of Christ as the way of pardon? Do we feel our need of Christ, who alone can so constitute us righteous as to make us welcome to eternal glory? Do we so feel our need of Christ, as to know that it is by him alone that all the thorns and briars we are the subjects of can be destroyed? By him alone death can be swallowed up in victory; by him alone mountains can be levelled, valleys exalted, crooked things made straight, and rough places made plain. But time is gone, and I must add no more.