

across the table. The one answer to this was, We are not here for the purpose of enriching the English language, but for translating the Greek.

Yet here there was need for that remark; for there are cases in which, by adhering to the same English for the same Greek word, an important gain is made. I refer to the example which Dr. Westcott quotes on the very subject—2 Peter i. 7. In the Authorised Version this is rendered, "To godliness [add] brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." Two objectionable renderings are there, if not three. Why not have used "brotherly love" here, especially as they do not render the next word "love," as they should have done. Then "charity" is most objectionable, because an ambiguous word, for ἀγάπη. But it will be said if they had used "love" it would have seemed little more than a repetition of the same word. Well, but they have thus lost the very idea which the apostle meant to express. The Revised Version translates thus: "In your love of the brethren [supply] love." The one kind of love embraces a narrow but precious circle—that of "the household of faith." But the other word "love" is intended to express what Christians owe

to all mankind.<sup>1</sup> And I think Bishop Westcott has done right in contending that the Revisers did exactly as they ought in their Version. I said there was a third word which the Authorised Version rendered objectionably. Seven things Christians are to "add to" their "faith." Now, when a house is built, one stone is "added to" another. There is only a *mechanical* connection between the stone. But the same rare word used in the Greek means to bring in a supply of one thing to complete another. So that when the apostle bids us in our brotherly love to bring a supply of "love," he means that our "love of the brethren" is *not what he wants us to cultivate, if it stops there*. It must stretch itself out to the whole brotherhood of man. It is an *organic* connection between all the seven things here made to hang upon our "faith"; which alone completes the all-round Christian character.

I fear I have written too much; but I have touched only the threshold of the difficult question, How far the Revised Version of the New Testament has succeeded or failed in what the public had a right to expect from it.

<sup>1</sup> See THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, vol. i. p. 49.

## The Notion of Divine Covenants in the Bible.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR CANDLISH, D.D., GLASGOW.

IN a previous article it was shown that the notion expressed in the Bible by the term covenant as applied to God's dealings with men is that of a disposition, or declaration of the grace which He intends to show them, and of the allegiance which He expects at their hands. The two other questions mentioned at the outset remain to be considered.

### II.

The second question is, Whether Scripture warrants us in applying the name and idea of a covenant, as thus understood, to God's dealing with man at the beginning? There are some theologians who acknowledge the notion of a covenant as a biblical one, and really applicable to God's dealings with Abraham, with Israel, and with believers in Christ, but yet think there is no warrant for speaking of any such thing in the case of our first parents; and as these are all various

forms of the covenant of grace, this amounts to a denial of what has been commonly called the covenant of works or of law. Now, as far as regards express Scripture testimony, they have a plausible case. For there is no place where the word covenant is certainly used of God's dealing with man at first. It is applied to God's promise and precepts to Noah and his sons after the Flood (Gen. ix. 8-17); to those to Abraham (Gen. xv.), repeated and renewed to Isaac and Jacob; to His transaction with Israel after the Exodus (Ex. xix., xxiv., and *passim*); to His promises to Aaron and his sons as the priestly house (Num. xxv. 12, 13; Mal. ii. 3, 5); to those to David and his descendants (Ps. lxxxix. 39); and to His relation to Jesus Christ and those who believe in Him. But when this last is spoken of as a new covenant, the contrast is always with that of Sinai, not with one made with Adam at first. Hosea vi. 7 may con-

tain a reference to a covenant in Paradise, if the rendering "like Adam" be correct; but the translation "like men" is also possible, and perhaps preferable.

Inferentially, however, the application of the term may be justified by the way in which Paul uses the name covenant as synonymous with law, when contrasting the two covenants in Gal. iv. 21, v. 3; for since elsewhere he represents all mankind as under law to God, so as to receive reward for obedience and punishment for sin (Rom. ii. 6-16), we may infer that he would not have thought it improper to call God's original revelation to the ancestors of the human race a covenant. This way of representing it is certainly very ancient, as it is found in Ecclesiasticus xiv. 17, "All flesh waxeth old as a garment, for the covenant from the beginning is, Thou shalt die the death;" and Augustine quotes that passage, and, when discussing Gen. xvii. 14, assumes that God made a covenant with mankind in Adam, and that that is meant there (*de Civitate Dei*, xvii. 27). This shows, at least, that the notion of a covenant with Adam is not the mere invention of the special federal system of theology, but one that naturally suggests itself to readers of Scripture with no special theory to support.

In the narrative in Genesis we find no mention of an express or formal covenant, such as is afterwards recorded to have been made with Abraham and Israel, but there are divine appointments and commands—the Sabbath, marriage, the prohibition of the tree of knowledge, with a threatening of death for the violation of the last. There is, indeed, no mention of what, as has been said, is the distinctive feature of a covenant as more than a mere command, a promise on the part of God. The threatening of death, in the event of disobedience, may no doubt be fairly held to imply that as long as they obeyed they should live; but this is not an additional reward, but merely the continuance of the blessing which they already enjoyed.

There seems, therefore, to be ground for assuming a virtual or tacit covenant made by God with our first parents, though there is no warrant for supposing such an express transaction as Abraham and Israel afterwards entered into. It is quite in accordance with the gradual progress of mankind that God should have made known both His law and His promises by deeds before He revealed

them in words. Theologians have often imagined a much greater explicitness in God's dealing with our first parents than Scripture entitles us to assume; but that it was in substance so far analogous to His later dispensations, that it may properly be called by the same name of a covenant, there appears no reason to deny. The federal theology sometimes carried out the idea into too great minuteness of detail, and so became artificial; yet it has a real foundation in Scripture, and the writings of its best exponents, such as Witsius, are still worthy of careful study.

### III.

In answer to the third question, I think we are entitled to say that the application of the notion of a covenant to the relation between God and man is not a mere figure of speech. Its use in Scripture, in reference to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Christian Dispensations, is so frequent and constant, and is so explicitly sanctioned by our Lord Himself and His apostles, that we cannot regard it as a mere accommodation to customary forms of language; and though it is only indirectly and by inference that the inspired writers lead us to apply the term to God's dealing with the race at first, yet the general notion that we are led by the other uses of it to form, applies equally to what is revealed of that.

This is confirmed by the fact that this notion is closely connected with that of the Kingdom of God, both in its own nature and its use in Scripture. It was by the covenant at Sinai that Israel was made a kingdom of priests (Ex. xix. 3-6); and Jesus, in Luke xxii. 29, speaks of His Father having given Him the kingdom by covenant. A kingdom, according to the truest conception of it, is founded on a covenant between the sovereign and his subjects establishing their mutual obligations. If, then, the Kingdom of God is a reality, and not a mere figure, we can hardly doubt that His covenant is so also, and that this category of theological thought is truly biblical. It is not, indeed, absolutely necessary for the exposition of the essential doctrines of theology. These may be, and have often been, exhibited with great accuracy and fulness by divines who have not made use of the idea of a covenant, considering either that it is an improper expression of the Scripture language, or that it is not of very great importance and use. The substance of what is

meant by it can be well enough expressed in other forms. Sometimes, too, it must be admitted, it has been injudiciously used, especially where the analogy has been pressed too far, and all the accessories of a covenant among men have been looked for, and supposed to be found, in the dealings of God with men. This has created in many quarters a prejudice against this form of theological representation. It is thought by many to be too stiff and formal, and to lead men to conceive of God's relations to men in the unworthy form of a contract or bargain, suggesting low commercial ideas, and excluding those of love and grace. But this objection proceeds upon too limited an idea of what a covenant is, even among men. That word denotes not merely, nor most frequently, hard commercial bargains, but bonds that are marked by the highest possible love and tenderness; bonds of brotherhood and friendship, as between Jonathan and David; nay, also, the nuptial tie between man and wife, to which Christ's union with His people is frequently compared. It is with such relations, and not with mere commercial ones, that God's covenant with man should be associated; and if that is done, it may be saved from the contamination of base and unworthy associations.

The federal form of presenting the relations of God to man, as it is in substance biblical, has many advantages in theology.

Historically, it served an important purpose in correcting a dangerous tendency, to which Calvinistic theology was in danger of giving way, that of making all the development of God's dealings with man flow from His eternal and sovereign purpose. Some of Calvin's followers were disposed to make the decree of God the one controlling principle of all their theology, and to view everything else as just the working out of that. This is one-sided and dangerous, and the idea of the covenant, bringing out the freedom and responsibility of man, was a useful corrective to hyper-Calvinism.

On the other hand, it enables us to bring out more clearly than we could otherwise do the parallel between Adam and Christ, and to trace up the dealings of God with mankind, in law and in grace, as Paul does, to one general principle. While it does not entirely explain, as indeed nothing can do, the mysteries connected with these dealings, it throws some light upon them, and enables us to see that they are all parts of one consistent whole.

This mode of representation also served as the means of introducing in the Reformed Church one of the most important ideas of sound biblical theology, that of the gradual progress of revelation and its different forms in the successive stages of God's dealings with man. When Christian students were concerned mainly with the great truths of religion, which are the same in all ages, they were apt to overlook the fact that these have not always been equally clearly revealed, and so to put into the earlier statements of them a more definite meaning than they will really bear. But the recognition of successive divine covenants, and successive dispensations or economies of these, before the Law, under the Law, and under the Gospel, brought into notice the differences in the various stages of revelation, and prepared the way for the modern study of biblical theology. The covenant theology is not indeed necessary now in order to justify this historical treatment of Scripture; that has been established on wider grounds, and carried out in greater detail in modern times; but the observation of the successive covenants mentioned in the Bible was, in fact, the way in which a dogmatic age was led to a truer historical conception and sounder exegesis than was possible before. Though substantially true, it was not an adequate recognition of the history of revelation; and when rigidly held it presented its course as consisting of abrupt changes rather than of gradual growth; but it was greatly more historical than the systems of those who opposed it.

The idea of the covenant of works in particular enables us to show very clearly how the doctrine of God's moral government of rational creatures, by laws which they are called freely to obey, and for obedience to which a reward is promised, is not inconsistent with His absolute sovereignty and their entire dependence on Him. For it shows that all their hope of reward for obedience rests, not on any inherent or natural right to it, but only on the voluntary condescension and goodness of God. Were God's moral law only made known through conscience, there would not properly be a covenant; but when God makes known, whether by the constitution and course of nature, or by special revelation, that He will reward the obedience of men by blessing, and above all, by the enjoyment of Himself as their portion; then the law is clothed with the form of a covenant. Thus the assertion of an original covenant of works with our

first parents simply means that, besides making known to them His law through their own moral nature, God was graciously pleased, in some way or other, to communicate to them His purpose of rewarding their obedience and punishing their sin.

This mode of viewing the matter affords the clearest answer to the most plausible objection against the doctrine of God's moral government of men. It is said by many, and most explicitly in recent times by Ritschl, that the orthodox view of the moral order of the universe as one of judicial government on the part of God is untrue, because it ascribes to man rights in relation to God, and so is inconsistent with his absolute dependence. But this objection seems to proceed from a misunderstanding of the theory he is criticising. By way of expressing it, he says: "That men have the right to eternal life is deduced from their creation by God, that this right is only realised through the fulfilment of the divine law depends on God as the maintainer of the world's moral order."<sup>1</sup> The former part of this statement is an entire mistake, and this is seen most distinctly from the writings of the federal theologians. Witsius, *e.g.*, who carries the assertion of right here higher than some other Protestant divines, does not go further than to say, that to consign an innocent creature to suffering would be inconsistent with the justice of God, and hardly ventures to deny that it would be just in God to terminate the existence even of an obedient and holy creature, though he suspends his judgment with profound reverence, and begins and ends his whole discussion with earnest and humble prayer.<sup>2</sup> The entire passage shows how jealous the Reformed theologians were, not only for the sovereignty, but for the goodness of God.

The general mode of statement has been, that all rights on the part of the creatures arose from the voluntary condescension and grace of God, and the notion of divine covenants was used to make this plain. So it is put in the Westminster Confession (chap. vii. § 1): "The distance between God and the creatures is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward,

but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant." This application of the notion of divine covenant, which our previous discussion has shown to be quite agreeable to its biblical meaning, makes very plain how the doctrine of God's moral government by rewards and punishments can be defended against what is, perhaps, the most considerable objection to it.

In a similar way, the use of the idea in reference to God's dispensation of grace and salvation in Christ serves valuable religious ends. The preaching of the covenant of grace has been dear to Christians in our country, because it exhibits in a very vivid and impressive way the certainty of God's promise to believers and the ground of that certainty in their union to Christ, who has fulfilled the great work given Him by the Father, and obtained as the reward of that work the salvation of His people. It exhibits these in a way that brings out in harmony various points that, if pressed in isolation, sometimes tend to exclude each other, the love of God and the work of Christ, the freeness of the gospel and the necessity of faith and union to Christ: it gives Christianity a personal character as a mutual transaction between God in Christ and the soul; and it gives a very genuine and natural meaning to the sacraments as seals or pledges of the covenant. It is worthy of notice that the chapter on God's covenants with men in the Westminster Confession (chap. vii.) is that which contains the only statement in that document of the free offer of salvation to sinners, a statement to which the "Marrow men," in the last century, justly attached great importance, and which the Seceders emphasised and enlarged in their acts and testimonies on the doctrines of grace. The Westminster divines have shown their wisdom in not casting their symbolical books entirely into the forms of the federal theology, and also in avoiding the needless and confusing distinctions between a Covenant of Redemption and a Covenant of Grace, and between the Covenant and the Testament, as a form of administering it. They are substantially correct in treating the name "testament" as simply another designation of the "covenant," which can hardly be denied to occur in Scripture, though how frequently may be a doubtful exegetical question.

<sup>1</sup> Ritschl, *Rechtfertigung u. Versöhnung*, iii. p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> *On the Covenants*, Bk. I., c. iv. §§ 10-23.