THE COVENANT PLEADED

NO. 1451B

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"Have respect unto the covenant."
Psalm 74:20

HE will succeed in prayer who understands the science of pleading with God. "Put me in remembrance: let us plead together," is a divine command. "Come now, let us reason together" is a sacred invitation. "Bring forth your strong reasons, saith the LORD," is a condescending direction as to the way of becoming victorious in supplication.

Pleading is wrestling—arguments are the grips, the strategies, the throes, the struggles with which we hold and vanquish the covenant angel. The humble statement of our wants is not without its value, but to be able to give reasons and arguments why God should hear us is to offer potent, prevalent prayer.

Among all the arguments that can be used in pleading with God perhaps there is none stronger than this—"Have respect unto the covenant." Like Goliath's sword, we may say of it, "There is none like it." If we have God's Word for a thing, we may well pray, "Do as thou hast said," for as a good man only needs to be reminded of his own word in order to be brought to keep them, even so is it with our faithful God—He only needs that for these things we put Him in remembrance to do them for us.

If He has given us more than His Word, namely, His covenant, His solemn compact, we may then with the greatest composure of spirit, cry to Him, "Have respect unto the covenant," and then we may both hope and quietly wait for His salvation.

I need not tell you, for you are, I trust, well-grounded in that matter, that the covenant here spoken of is the covenant of grace. There is a covenant which we could not plead in prayer, the covenant of works, a covenant which destroys us, for we have broken it.

Our first father sinned, and the covenant was broken. We have continued in his perverseness, and that covenant condemns us. By the covenant of works none of us is justified, for we continue still to break our portion of it, and to bring upon ourselves wrath to the uttermost.

The Lord has made a new covenant with the second Adam, our federal head, Jesus Christ our Lord—a covenant without conditions, except such conditions as Christ has already fulfilled, a covenant ordered in all things and sure, which now consists of promises only—which run after this fashion—"I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."

"A new heart also will I give them, and a right spirit will I put within them." "From all their transgressions will I cleanse them"—a covenant, I say, which once had conditions in it, all of which our Lord Jesus fulfilled when He finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. And now the covenant is all of promise, and consists of infallible and eternal shalls and wills, which shall abide the same forever.

We shall talk of the text thus—*What is meant by the plea before us*, "Have respect unto the covenant"? Then we will think a little *of whence it derives its force*. Thirdly, we will consider *how and when we may plead it.* And we will close by noticing *what are the practical inferences from it.*

I. Let us begin by this—WHAT IS MEANT BY THE PLEA, "Have respect unto the covenant"?

It means this, does it not? "*Fulfill Your covenant*, O God. Let it not be a dead letter. You have said this and that, now do as You have said. You have been pleased by solemn sanction of oath and blood to make this covenant with Your people. Now be pleased to keep it. Have You said, and will You not do it? We are persuaded of Your faithfulness, let our eyes behold Your covenant engagements fulfilled."

It means, again, "*Fulfill all the promises of Your covenant*," for indeed all the promises are now in the covenant. They are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, to the glory of God by us. And I may say without being unscriptural that the covenant contains within its sacred charter every gracious word that has come from the Most High, either by the mouth of prophets or apostles, or by the lips of Jesus Christ Himself.

The meaning in this case would be—"Lord keep Your promises concerning Your people. We are in want. Now, O Lord, fulfill Your promise that we shall not want any good thing. Here is another of Your promises—'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee.' We are in rivers of trouble. Be with us now. Redeem Your promises to Your servants.

"Let them not stand on the book as letters that mock us, but prove that You meant what you did write and say, and let us see that You have power to make every jot and tittle good of all You have spoken. For have You not said, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away'? Oh, then have respect unto the promises of thy covenant."

In the connection of our text, there is no doubt that the suppliant meant, "O Lord, prevent anything from turning aside Your promises." The church was then in a very terrible state. The temple was burnt, and the assemblage broken up. The worship of God had ceased, and idolatrous emblems stood in the holy place where once the glory of God shone forth.

The plea is, "Do not suffer the power of the enemy to be so great as to frustrate Your purposes, or to make Your promises void." So may we pray—"O Lord, do not suffer me to endure such temptation that I shall fall. Do not suffer such affliction to come upon me that I shall be destroyed, for have You not promised that no temptation shall happen to me but such as I am able to bear, and that with the temptation there shall be a way of escape? Now have respect unto Your covenant, and so order your providence that nothing shall happen to me contrary to that divine agreement."

And it means also, "So order everything around us that the covenant may be fulfilled. Is Your church low? Raise up again in her midst men who preach the Gospel with power, who shall be the means of her uplifting. Creator of men, Master of human hearts, You who can circumcise human lips to speak Your Word with power, do this, and let Your covenant with Your church, that You will never leave her, be fulfilled.

"The kings of the earth are in Your hand. All events are controlled by You. You order all things, from the minute to the immense. Nothing, however small, is too small for Your purposes. Nothing, however great, is too great for Your rule. Manage everything so that in the end each promise of Your covenant shall be fulfilled to all Your chosen people."

That, I think, is the meaning of the plea, "Have respect unto the covenant." Keep it and see it kept. Fulfill the promises, and prevent Your foes from doing evil to Your children. Precious plea, assuredly.

II. And now let us see FROM WHERE IT DERIVES ITS FORCE. "Have respect unto the covenant."

It derives its force, first, from *the veracity of God.* If it be a covenant of man's making, we expect a man to keep it—and a man who does not keep his covenant is not esteemed among his fellows. If a man has given his word, that word is his bond. If a thing be solemnly signed and sealed, it becomes even more binding, and he that would run back from a covenant would be thought to have forfeited his character among men.

God forbid that we should ever think the Most High could be false to His word. It is not possible. He can do all things except this—He cannot lie—it is not possible that He should ever be untrue. He cannot even change—the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. He will not alter the thing that has gone out of His lips.

When then we come before God in prayer for a covenant mercy, we have His truthfulness to support us. "O God, You must do this. You are a Sovereign—You can do as you will, but You have bound Yourself by bonds that hold Your majesty. You have said it, and it is not possible that You should go back from Your own word."

How strong our faith ought to be when we have God's truth to lean upon. What dishonor we do to our God by our weak faith, for it is virtually a suspicion of the fidelity of our covenant God.

Next, to support us in using this plea, we have God's sacred *jealousy for His honor*. He has told us Himself that He is a jealous God. His name is jealousy—He has great respect unto His honor among the sons of men. Hence this was Moses' plea—"What will the enemy say? And what wilt thou do unto thy great name?"

Now, if God's covenant could be trifled with, and if it could be proven that He had not kept the promise that He made to His creatures, it would not only be a dreadful thing for us, but it would bring grievous dishonor upon His name—and that shall never be. God is too pure and holy, and He is withal too honorable ever to run back from the word that He has given to His servants.

If I feel that my feet have almost gone, I may still be assured that He will not suffer me wholly to perish, else were His honor stained, for He has said, "They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."

He might give me up to my enemies so far as my deserts are concerned, for I deserve to be destroyed by them—but then His honor is engaged to save the meanest of His people, and He has said, "I give unto them eternal life." He will not, therefore, for His honor's sake, suffer me to be the prey of the adversary, but will preserve me, even me, unto the day of His appearing. Here is a good foothold for faith.

The next reflection that should greatly strengthen us is *the venerable character of the covenant*. This covenant was no transaction of yesterday—or ever the earth was, this covenant was made. We may not speak of first or last with God, but speaking after the manner of men, the covenant of grace is God's first thought. Though we usually put the covenant of works first in order of time as revealed, yet in very deed the covenant of grace is the older of the two.

God's people were not chosen yesterday, but before the foundations of the world. And the Lamb slain to ratify that covenant, though slain eighteen hundred years ago, was in the divine purpose slain from before the foundations of the world. It is an ancient covenant—there is nothing so ancient. It is to God a covenant which He holds in high esteem.

It is not one of His light thoughts—not one of those thoughts which lead Him to create the morning dew that melts ere the day has run its course, or to make the clouds that light up the setting sun with glory but which soon have lost their radiance. But it is one of His great thoughts—yea, it is His eternal thought, the thought out of His own inmost soul—this covenant of grace.

And because it is so ancient, and to God a matter so important, when we come to Him with this plea in our mouths we must not think of being staggered by unbelief, but may open our mouths wide, for He will assuredly fill them. Here is Your covenant, O God, which of Your own spontaneous sovereign will You did ordain of old, a covenant in which Your very heart is laid bare, and Your love which is Yourself is manifested. O God, have respect unto it, and do as You have said, and fulfill Your promise to Your people.

Nor is this all. It is but the beginning. In one sermon I should not have time to show you all the reasons that give force to the plea—but here is one. The covenant has upon it *a solemn endorsement*. There was the stamp of God's own word—that is enough. The very word that created the universe is the word that spoke the covenant.

But as if that were not sufficient, seeing we are unbelieving, God has added to it His oath. And because He could swear by no greater, He has sworn by Himself. It were blasphemy to dream that the Eternal could be perjured, and He has set His oath to His covenant, in order that, by two immutable things wherein it is impossible for God to lie, He might give to the heirs of grace strong consolation.

But more, that venerable covenant thus confirmed by oath was *sealed with blood*. Jesus died to ratify it. His heart's blood bedewed that Magna Charta of the grace of God to His people. It is a covenant which God the just *must* keep. Jesus has fulfilled our side of it—has executed to the letter all the demands of God upon man.

Our Surety and our Substitute has at once kept the law and suffered all that was due by His people on account of their breach of it. And now shall not the Lord be true and the everlasting Father be faithful to His own Son? How can He refuse to His Son the joy which He set before Him, and the reward which He promised Him? "He shall see his seed: he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied."

My soul, the faithfulness of God to His covenant is not so much a matter between you and God as between Christ and God, for now it so stands—Christ as our representative puts in His claim before the throne of infinite justice for the salvation of every soul for whom He shed His blood, and He must have what He has purchased. Oh what confidence is here! The rights of the Son, blended with the love and the veracity of the Father, makes the covenant to be ordered in all things and sure.

Moreover, remember, and I will not detain you much longer with this, that up till now nothing in the covenant has ever failed. The Lord has been tried by ten thousand times ten thousand of His people, and they have been in trying emergencies and serious difficulties—but it has never been reported in the gates of Zion that the promise has become naught—neither have any said that the covenant is null and void.

Ask you those before you who passed through deeper waters than yourselves. Ask the martyrs who gave their lives for their Master, "Was He with them to the end?" The placid smiles upon their countenances while enduring the most painful death were evident testimonies that God is true. Their joyous songs, the clapping of their hands amidst the fire, and their exultation even on the rack, or when rotting in some loathsome dungeon—all these have proven how faithful the Lord has been.

And have you not heard with your own ears the testimony of God's dying people? They were in conditions in which they could not have been sustained by mere imagination, nor buoyed up by frenzy, and yet they have been as joyful as if their dying day had been their wedding day. Death is too solemn a matter for a man to play a masquerade there.

But what did your wife say in death? Or your mother, now with God? Or what of your child who had learnt the Savior's love? Can you not recall their testimonies even now? I think I hear some of them, and amongst the things of earth that are like to the joys of heaven, I think this is one of the foremost—the joy of departed saints when they already hear the voices of angels hovering near, and turn round and tell us in broken language of the joys that are bursting in upon them—their sight blinded by the excess of brightness, and their hearts ravished with the bliss that floods them. Oh it has been sweet to see the saints depart!

I mention these things now, not merely to refresh your memories, but to establish your faith in God. He has been true so many times and false never—and shall we now experience any difficulty in resting on His covenant? No, by all these many years in which the faithfulness of God has been put to the test, and has never failed, let us be confident that He will still regard us, and let us pray boldly—"Have respect unto the covenant."

For, mark you, as it has been in the beginning, it is now, and ever shall be, world without end. It shall be to the last saint as it was with the first. The testimony of the last soldier of the host shall be, "Not one good thing hath failed of all that the Lord God has promised."

Only one more reflection here. Our God has taught many of us to trust in His name. We were long in learning the lesson, and nothing but omnipotence could have made us willing to walk by faith, and not by sight. With much patience the Lord has brought us at last to have no reliance but on Himself, and now we are depending on His faithfulness and His truth.

Is that your case, brother? What then? Think you that God has given you this faith to mock you? Do Believe you that He has taught you to trust in His name, and thus far has brought you to put you to shame? Has His Holy Spirit given you confidence in a lie? And has He wrought in you faith in a fiction? God forbid!

Our God is no demon who would delight in the misery which a groundless confidence would be sure to bring to us. If, then, you have faith, He gave it to you, and He that gave it to you knows His own gift, and will honor it. He was never false yet, even to the feeblest faith, and if your faith is great, you shall find Him greater than your faith, even when your faith is at its greatest.

Therefore be of good cheer. The fact that you believe should encourage you to say, "Now, O Lord, that I have come to rest upon You, can You fail me? I, a poor worm, know no confidence but Your dear name—will You forsake me? I have no refuge but Your wounds, O Jesus, no hope but in Your atoning sacrifice, no light but in Your light—can You cast me off?"

It is not possible that the Lord should cast off one who thus trusts Him. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Can any of us forget our children when they fondly trust us in the days of their weakness? No, the Lord is no monster. He is tender and full of compassion, faithful and true—and Jesus is a friend which sticks closer than a brother. The very fact that He has given us faith in His covenant should help us to plead—"Have respect unto the covenant."

III. Having thus shown you, dear friends, the meaning of the plea, and whence it derives its force, we will now pause a minute and observe HOW AND WHEN THAT COVENANT MAY BE PLEADED.

First, it may be pleaded *under a sense of sin*—when the soul feels its guiltiness. Let me read to you the words of our apostle, in the eighth chapter of Hebrews, where he is speaking of this covenant at the tenth verse. "For 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 neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for all shall 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."

Now, dear hearer, suppose that you are under a sense of sin. Something has revived in you a recollection of past guilt, or it may be that you have sadly stumbled this very day, and Satan whispers, "You will surely be destroyed, for you have sinned."

Now go to the great Father, and open this page, putting your finger on that twelfth verse and say, "Lord, You have in infinite, boundless, inconceivable mercy entered into covenant with me, a poor sinner, seeing I believe in the name of Jesus. And now I beseech You have respect unto Your covenant. You have said, '*I will be merciful to their unrighteousness*'—O God be merciful to mine. You have said, '*Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more*'—Lord, remember no more my sins. Forget forever my iniquity."

That is the way to use the covenant. When under a sense of sin, run to that clause which meets your case.

But suppose, beloved brother or sister, *you are laboring to overcome inward corruption*, with intense desire that holiness should be wrought in you? Then read the covenant again as you find it in the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah at the thirty-third verse. It is the same covenant, only we are reading another version of it.

"This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." Now, can you not plead that and say, "Lord, Your commandments upon stone are holy, but I forget them and break them. But O my God, write them on the fleshy tablets of my heart. Come now and make me holy. Transform me. Write Your will upon my very soul that I may live it out, and from the warm impulses of my heart serve You as You would be served. Have respect unto Your covenant and sanctify Your servant."

Or suppose you desire to be *upheld under strong temptation*, lest you should go back and return to your old ways. Take the covenant as you find it in Jeremiah at the thirty-second chapter at the fortieth verse. Note these verses and learn them by heart, for they may be a great help to you one of these days.

Read the fortieth verse of the thirty-second chapter of Jeremiah. "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

Go and say, "O Lord, I am almost gone, and they tell me I shall finally fall, but O my Lord and Master, there stands Your word. Put Your fear in my heart, and fulfill Your promise that I shall not depart from You." This is the sure road to final perseverance.

Thus I might take you through all the various needs of God's people, and show that in seeking to have them supplied they may fitly cry, "Have respect unto the covenant." For instance, suppose you were in great distress of mind and needed comfort? You could go to Him with that covenant promise, "As a mother comforteth her children, even so will I comfort thee—out of Zion will I comfort thee."

Go to Him with that and say, "Lord, comfort Your servant." Or if there should happen to be a trouble upon us, not for yourselves, but for the church—how sweet it is to go to the Lord and say, "Your covenant runs thus—'The gates of hell shall not prevail against her.' O Lord, it seems as though they would prevail. Interpose Your strength and save Your church."

If it ever should happen that you are looking for the conversion of the ungodly, and desiring to see sinners saved, but the world seems so dark, look at our text again—the whole verse. "Have respect unto the covenant, for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty"—to which you may add, "But You have said that Your glory shall cover the earth, and that all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Lord, have respect unto Your covenant. Help our missionaries, speed Your Gospel, bid the mighty angel fly through the midst of heaven to preach the everlasting Gospel to every creature. Why, it is a grand missionary prayer, "Have respect unto the covenant." Beloved, it is a two-edged sword to be used in all conditions of strife, and it is a holy balm of Gilead that will heal in all conditions of suffering.

IV. And so I close with this last question, WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM ALL THIS?

"Have respect unto the covenant." Why, that if we ask God to have respect unto it, *we* ought to have respect unto it ourselves, and in this way.

Have a grateful respect for it. Bless the Lord that He even condescended to enter into covenant with you. What could He see in you even to give you a promise, much more to make a covenant with you? Blessed be His dear name, this is the sweet theme of our hymns on earth, and shall be the subject of our songs in heaven.

Next, *have a believing respect for it.* If it is God's covenant, do not dishonor it. It stands sure. Why do you stagger at it through unbelief?

"His every work of grace is strong
As that which built the skies;
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises."

Next, *have a joyful respect for it*. Wake your harps, and join in praise with David—"Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant." Here is enough to make a heaven in our hearts while yet we are below—the Lord has entered into a covenant of grace and peace with us, and He will bless us forever.

Then have a jealous respect for it. Never suffer the covenant of works to be mixed with it. Hate that preaching—I say not less than that—hate that preaching which does not discriminate between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, for it is deadly preaching and damning preaching.

You must always have a straight, clear line, here between what is of man and what is of God, for cursed is he that trusts in man and makes flesh his arm. And if you have begun with the Spirit under this covenant, do not think of being made perfect in the flesh under another covenant. Be you holy under the precepts of the heavenly Father, but be you not legal under the taskmaster's lash. Return not to the bondage of the law, for you are not under law, but under grace.

Lastly, *have a practical respect for it*. Let all see that the covenant of grace, while it is your reliance, is also your delight. Be ready to speak of it to others. Be ready to show that the effect of its grace upon you is one that is worthy of God, since it has a purifying effect upon your life. He that has this hope in Him purifies himself even as He is pure.

Have respect unto the covenant by walking as such people should who can say that God is to them a God, and they are to Him a people. The covenant says, "From all their idols will I cleanse them." Don't love idols then.

The covenant says, "I will sprinkle pure water upon them, and they shall be clean." Be you clean then, you covenanted ones, and may the Lord preserve you, and make His covenant to be your boast on earth, and your song forever in heaven.

Oh that the Lord may bring us into the bonds of His covenant, and give us a simple faith in His dear Son—for that is the mark of the covenanted ones. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 74

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK."—237, 228, 742

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.