

James Durham – Sermon 2 on Jeremiah 50:4,5

This is the second of five sermons preached about the time of a communion; the first four within a very few days before it, the fifth after it. The text was Jeremiah 50:4,5:

In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.

Covenanting with God, if it be real, well-grounded and sure, is a business of incomparably greatest concern and advantage to sinners. But when it is otherwise, and only imagined, without any solid ground, it is attended with the greatest disappointment and prejudice imaginable. A man in that case fancies himself to be in a state of friendship and favour with God, while in the meantime he is an enemy to God and God an enemy to him. And is there any disappointment or disadvantage in the world comparable to that?

It is one great end and design of all ordinances that strangers to God by nature may be engaged to him and made to become his covenanted people. It was for this end that Christ came into the world and laid down his life and shed his precious blood, even to bring sinners into a covenant of reconciliation and friendship with God. And therefore the ordinance that is now approaching is called the *New Covenant* or *New Testament in his blood*.

The words have in them a short and sweet sum and compend of the gracious frame of a people turning home to God, to get a broken covenant made up. Israel and Judah, having deeply declined from the blessed state and condition wherein God had once graciously put them, their return and repentance is here both prophesied of and promised. And this is the great thing which they design in their returning, even to get the knot, to say so, of the covenant between God and them made fast and sure, so as they may never any more be separated from him.

We shall at this time shortly name some general *observations* from the words.

First observation. The first whereof is this, *That there is nothing that a people, who have any convictions of their sin and of their distance*

from God, should more singly aim at and seriously seek after, than to be firmly joined to the Lord in covenant, or to be in good terms with him according to his covenant.

For these come to the same amount: to *be in good terms* with God, to be *reconciled* to God, and to be in *covenant* with God. By the one we come to the other. This, we say, should be aimed at and sought after by all that are naturally born enemies to God, *aliens and strangers to the covenant of promise, without hope and without God in the world*, Ephesians 2:12 compared with verses 1 to 3, where to be *dead in sins and trespasses* is expounded to be *without the covenant*. But more especially those who are touched with the sense of their sin should have this for their aim, design and endeavour, as we see in these spoken of here, who, when they come to any sense of their sin, this is clearly their great design and work very seriously and closely pursued by them.

To clear and confirm it, take these *three* words: 1. What state and condition man naturally is in. 2. What God is to man in reference to that estate. And 3. What covenanting with God is. And we will find that there is nothing which he should more seriously design and seek after.

First, man is naturally an enemy to God and in respect of his malicious desperate inclination given to thwart with God, whereby God stands as an enemy to him. He is liable to the curse of God, and God is an armed man against him, as Job speaks; and he is like an unarmed child running on to the bosses of his buckler.

Secondly, consider that God is not only an enemy, but stands stated as such with his curse against sinners, according to that word: *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them*. And this curse is like the flaming sword in the hand of the cherubims, which with terror separates between God and the sinner, so that there is no access for him to God. And if he have any thoughts of God, he is troubled with them. And all the creatures are armed against him, so that he can expect nothing but enmity from every stone of the field.

Thirdly, consider that covenanting with God is that whereby a man who is naturally at enmity with God comes to be in friendship with him, and has the face of everything altered. The meditation of God is sweet to him; the creatures are in league with him; the angels become ministering spirits to him; all God's dispensations become lovely and work together for his good, even those that are in themselves most terrible; death and the grave become servants to him; and being in covenant with God he

can triumph over them and all troubles and persecutions, and say that he is more than conqueror in them all, as it is in Romans 8.

And, says the Apostle to such, in 1 Corinthians 3, All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, things present or things to come, are all yours, and ye are Christ's. Is it any wonder then that a poor soul, touched with the sense of sin, is desirous and solicitous to be in covenant with God? And therefore, whether we look upon it as a duty, or as an evidence of a person truly humbled for sin, it is very desirable and should be seriously sought after.

The *use* serves to show, *That the great scope which you should now have before you is to have a broken covenant made up with God.* It should be your main design to put this grand business to a point, that there may be no war, but a standing league between God and you. And therefore, whoever they be that satisfy themselves with going about the ordinances and mistake this, they certainly mistake the mark. The great matter is not to come to the communion, neither is it to win at somewhat of heart-softness or to a little sense (which are good), but it is really to be in covenant with God, to be able to say on good ground, *The Lord is my God; my Beloved is mine, and I am his;* and when he says, *Return, backsliding children,* to be in case to answer from the heart, *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.* This is indeed a desirable thing, and he is an unhappy man who does not, who will not, heartily desire and seek after it.

Second observation. From their very great seriousness in going and weeping, in going to seek the Lord, asking the way to Zion, and from their encouraging one another to join in covenant with the Lord, observe, ***That where there is a sincerity or begun work of grace, it shows itself in nothing sooner than in an impulse to be at covenanting with God, and to have some clearness there in.***

For, only to be in covenant and not to have the knowledge of it, cannot give that peace and comfort which a present sad exercise calls for. Therefore, say they, while they are going and weeping, *Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten.* So then, we say, that a sincere and gracious work of God appears in nothing sooner than in this impulse to have the covenant of God fixed and put out of doubt. To have this at a point is their great design here, and they are very serious in it.

So in Isaiah 44, where in verse 3 there is a promise of the work of the

Spirit in sanctifying. And how is this work of the Spirit proved? Or wherein does it appear? Even thus, verse 5: *One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.* The work of God's Spirit, when he comes to sanctify and save, is such as makes a man run and devote himself to God with hand, heart and mouth. You never saw people more quickly and with better will come to the Church at the most solemn occasion, than, when this work is begun or there is any kindly exercise about it, serious souls will be ready to run with their heart to subscribe to God's covenant, when the terms of it are laid out before them.

Only advert to these two things in this observation:

(1) When I speak of entering in covenant with God, I mean of the heart's closing with him by faith, according as he offers himself in this gospel. When he says, *Quit and renounce your own righteousness, and take mine; quit and abandon your lusts and idols, and give yourselves to me, and I will be your God, and be forth coming to you in all things that concern your happiness here and hereafter;* the heart yields and says, *Content, Lord, the offer is good and I accept of it.*

As wives were wont (as it is yet the custom) to surname themselves by their husbands, so does the soul, upon the matter, in this covenant subscribe, *I am God's.* This is called a *yielding to God*, or the *giving of the hand to him*, 2 Chronicles 30:8. And in Romans 10:3, it is called a *submitting to the righteousness of God.*

(2) When we speak of this impulse towards, or desire of covenanting with God, it is not to be understood of every raw wish, such as Balaam had, to be in heaven; but it is a seriously urging impulse, an earnest hunger and thirst, and an ardent longing to have this at a point. It is such a thirsting desire as all the world beside will not be able to quench. It makes the soul eager in the pursuit of the thing, even to meet and close with God in the covenant. It is in effect that which in Matthew 5:6 is called a *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*, because it has in it a fixed longing with holy pain, which in Song of Solomon 5:8 is called a being *sick of love*. It is such a desire as makes the heart even faint and sick for the want of the thing desired, which can be satisfied with nothing else, no more than a hungry man can be satisfied if handfuls of gold were offered to him; it is meat he must have.

In this respect (which will be the *reason* of the doctrine) Christ Jesus is

called the food of the soul, and the covenant is like the pap, whereby Christ's fullness is communicated and conveyed to us. For we have no access to Christ but by the covenant. Therefore in Ephesians 2:12, these two are put together: being *without Christ* and being *without the covenant*. And in Isaiah 66:11,12, converts are said to *suck and be satisfied with the breasts of the church's consolation*, and to be *dandled on her knees*.

Believers are like new-born babes, whom nothing can satisfy or do good to, but the breasts. And the ordinances are, as it were, the breasts at which they suck, and which are so many pipes to convey to them spiritual nourishment; to which the Apostle alludes in 1 Peter 2:2, when he says, *As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious*. And then follows, *To whom coming as unto a living stone*, etc. Jesus Christ is the milk and the word the pap that conveys him. And as the first thing that evidences life to be in a new-born baby is hunger after the breast, so it is here, the covenant satisfies the new-born *new creature*.

The *Use* of the point serves to put you to look back and to consider whether ever you have in your experience known this, wherein spiritual life shows itself, even to be holily fond on the pap. The regenerate soul cannot endure to be kept back from sucking the breasts of these consolations that are in the covenant.

Now, it is very probable that many will catch at this as a very comfortable mark of regeneration to themselves, and will be ready to say, Why, have we not this desire to be in covenant with God? and, if that will be proof of a work of grace, we want it not. And these Jews, here spoken of, before their coming to be in this blessed frame, were ready to boast that they were Abraham's children, and that they had a desire to be in covenant with God. But it will be another sort of desire and eagerness which they will have, when *the Redeemer comes out of Zion, to turn away iniquity from Jacob*.

But, that you may know what this desired impulse that we speak of is, and if indeed you have it, consider these evidences of it:

1. That it is an ardent and vehement desire, a pressingly urgent impulse. Not such as you have had all your days, but it is an effect of the Spirit's outpouring, as that parallel place with this, Zechariah 12:10, clears: *I will (saith the Lord) pour upon the house of David the Spirit of grace*, etc. Away with that grace, with that faith and love, which are as old as

yourselves.

2. This desire and impulse has such a vehemence with it, as puts the man to his feet, to go and pray, and to go weeping. It stirs him then so, as he must needs go, though he been much in the dark, and knows not so well and distinctly whither he is going; because love to be in covenant with God will in a manner make a fool go right to God, though there is reason that he should seek after help to his infirmity. The desires of many are like the sluggard's desire, who lies still on his bed, and his ease slays him. This desire makes some holy stir, and rouses to diligence in the use of means.

3. This desire is such as never dies out till the person be thorough in the point of covenanting with God. And therefore, though he should be put as it were to dig wells in the wilderness, and to go from strength to strength, yet he will adventure on it, and hold on his way. The Apostle in Philippians 3, speaks of it as his *one thing*. And when persons are suitably serious in this, it is their one thing; and not a piece of work only on the by. And if they may come to it in all their lifetime, they think (s they have reason to do) that they make a good bargain and have gained a noble prize. Never did a man on horseback in a race spur faster than they do, that by any means they may attain it.

4. The principle of desire after covenanting with God holds them constantly in an estimation of, and sucking at it as the means of their life. As the babe cannot live without the breasts, so they cannot live without the covenant; they cannot rest but in it. I speak not now what believers are in their declinings. But when they are in a right frame, they have no being but in this covenant. They must needs have milk flowing through the breasts of it for their nourishment.

That is a cursed life, or rather death, of persons who come to the word and care not whether it be made lively or not; and come to the communion, and care not whether they get by it any life and comfort or not. And a cursed faith, that keeps souls from making use of Christ; and such is the faith of many hearers of the gospel. Now, covenanting is the believer's earnest, and they are thereby made to forget their father's house, in hope to be admitted to dwell with Christ for evermore.

Third observation. *Observe, That a well qualified desire of covenanting with God is a good token of conversion; or, A rightly biassed desire of being in covenant with God is the language of persons coming home to God: Come (say they) and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual*

covenant.

The Lord sets down this as their commendation and as an evidence of his begun gracious work in them. They, no doubt, had words of covenanting before, but wanted this right impulse and desire, and therefore sat still. But now they are much affected, stirred, and put to their feet, it being an effect of the poured-out Spirit on them. We say, this is a good token of a begun work of grace, and of persons coming home to God, because this impulse towards and desire of covenanting with God speaks out these *three*:

(1) the sense of their need of him, and that they cannot live without him; and the stopping of their mouth with holy shame and confusion before God.

(2) A high estimation that they have of him; a judging that they have no happiness but in him.

(3) It speaks out faith, in their actual betaking of themselves to him for the upmaking of what they want and stand in need of.

There is somewhat of all these in the prodigal, who, when he came to himself, reckons thus with himself: 1. *I perish for hunger*; this points at the sense of his need. 2. *There is bread enough in my Father's house and to spare*; which shows his believing esteem of the fullness of God for the supply of his need and for making him, a poor miserable perishing wretch, completely happy. 3. His resolution is, *I will go and say, Father*, etc; this holds out his actual purpose of covenanting with God, which has always faith in it. It is the same on the matter with this, *Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant*.

The *Use* of it serves to show what a serious or well-qualified desire after covenanting with God is, and wherein it consists. And those things that are marks of it may also serve for directions how to go about it a right.

First, **This well qualified or serious desire of covenanting with God flows from a twofold conviction:**

1. From a conviction of people's sin and breach of covenant formerly, and of their distance from God, whereof we spoke somewhat the last day. We are afraid that many of you think you desire, when yet you never knew aright your guilt in breaking covenant, nor took up aright the distance between God and you. It is one sort of desire that the whole man

has to speak with the physician, and another that a sick man has. It is of the latter that we mean here.

2. From a conviction of the want of God's company. These here know now, though they be Abraham's seed, that yet they are nevertheless naturally enemies to God and Christ, and without both. And therefore they seek him and to make a covenant with him.

There are some that pretend to be seeking God and Christ, and yet they have him, they think, always in their hearts. But speak soberly: did you ever want or miss him? It may be, at the one word you will say, *We hope not*; and at the next word perhaps, *Too often*. And it is still but a guessing at the best. When the prodigal came to himself, he saw that he had been, to speak so. in the wrong close

Secondly, **This well-qualified desire has a kindly heart-softness with it**, which is a good, though a very rare, thing. *They go here weeping*. And when they are saying these words, *Come and let us join to the Lord in covenant*, their tears are trickling down. It is a good and hopeful desire which is expressed with the tear in the eye, proceeding from a suitably affected heart. There are, alas! many of our desires that do not kindly affect, neither do they make any change. The heart remains dead, stiff and hard under them.

Thirdly, **This well-qualified desire puts on to diligence, and is not like the sluggard desire**. Therefore they *go and seek the Lord*; they are eager and earnest in the matter, and they are taken up with it. this is how I will make the man sometimes *forget to eat his bread*, and it may be to *pray seven times a day* (what if I had said twice seven times?) and very oft to withdraw from all company, at least, that is not edifying and profitable, and to retire to the fields or to the chamber, quietly to lay, as it were, a chase by the pursuit of faith to the finding out of God's company. It will make him and her go to the poorest body in all the town or village, that is gracious, to *ask the way to Zion*. This is also a very rare thing. You all know the way to heaven, as you think, and this makes you foolishly confident, till you run yourselves into the mire and into the pit at last, if grace by making a saving change prevent not.

Fourthly, **This well-qualified desire is a humbling desire**. There is no pleading here with God of the privilege of their relation they have to Abraham and to the covenant made with him. They cannot find in their hearts, nor have they confidence, to do that. They judge themselves to be very unlike him, and they carry humbly towards one another, glad to ask

the way at, and to get some knowledge of it from one another, how they may win forward. They are like the spouse who says to the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Solomon, chapter 5, *If ye see my Beloved, tell him that I am sick of love*. Take my commendations (as if she had said) to him, and lay out my case before him. Such serious and humble souls will be glad to take help in the way from any body that can give it; which says that they are diligent and painful.

Fifthly, **This desire, as it may, is always setting forward.** They are *going* and *asking the way*. And though they have a strong tide as it were against them, yet the wind of their own desire and impulse steers them through, and makes them stem the port. And though they make but slow progress, yet it is always towards Zion.

Sixthly, **This desire is a peremptory and, to say so, an unlimited desire,** and that in a twofold respect:

1. In respect of coming at God. It must have him, and will not submit to the want of him; communion with him it must have.
2. In this respect, that it makes no condition with God of its own, but is heartily well content to take him on his own terms. This indeed is a notably good mark of a well-qualified desire, when a soul desires not so much to be at heaven as to be at God; and when it is, as I just now said, content to take him on his own terms.

Many will desire God and heaven, but with some such secret reservation as this, that they get leave to brook their lusts and idols, that they may have liberty to tittle and trifle away their time, to take their fill of the world, to be in credit and reputation, and to pursue after some one thing or other in the world, or at least they must be allowed to go about the establishing of their own righteousness. But this desire is waited with the abandoning of all idols, without any allowed exception or reservation, and with renouncing of self-righteousness also in the point of justification. And therefore it is called, *submitting to the righteousness of God*. It says not a word against the terms of the covenant, but holds all.

These things were good to be seriously thought on and sought after, in our approaching to the table of the Lord, to renew our covenant with him. And where they are not in some measure, our desire will not be found to be of the right kind. It were therefore very suitable for you to think how you may get your hearts quickened and warmed with vehement and unquenchable desires after this covenanting with God, and after the water

of life.

Oh, do you know anything of this? There are some who found it in experience and who can represent it better to themselves than we can express it. You who have had *your hearts panting for God, for the living God*, as David says his heart did in Psalm 42, can tell what raw wishes were before, and that the grace of God works such desires as have another sort of edge on them, and have a holy disquieting and restless hunger for the breasts of God's covenant, and cannot rest nor be satisfied, yea, nor live without them.

Fourth observation. Observe, *That a people or person may have some sincere desires after covenant with God, and yet have much weakness, many infirmities and fears in the accomplishing of that their design.*

Many poor puzzled and perplexed souls may have this honest desire, and yet not know well how to put the thing in practice; even like unto these mentioned here, who are *going* toward Zion to join themselves to the Lord in covenant, and yet are *asking* the way. They have covenanting with God in their eye as the great scope, but are ignorant in a considerable measure of the way. Yet they sit not still till they get the way (as it were) described on a card to them, but they rise and make forward as they may.

I nothing doubt, the truth of this doctrine is known in experience by some serious, though much tossed and puzzled souls, who have some honest and earnest longings after him, and after covenant with him; who yet know not well how to win at him or how to make this covenanting practicable. Thus the honest well-meaning daughters of Jerusalem ask the spouse, in Song of Solomon 6, *Whither is thy beloved gone, that we may seek him with thee?* There was a sincere desire after him, and a fixed purpose to be at him, and to decline no labour nor pains in order to coming by him; yet they know not well whither to go for finding of him.

Even like honest Mary who in John 21 would fain have Christ and comes to the grave to seek him and, missing him, weeps. And when the angels speak to her to comfort her, that will not do it. She continues still weeping, and tells the cause: *They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.* It was an evidence of the honesty of her desire, that though she knew not where he was, yet she could not be diverted by anything from a mournful, restless and diligent pursuit after his presence.

1. This may proceed partly, in the *first* place, *from believers' infirmity and their not being thorough in the knowledge of gospel-mysteries*; from their ignorance of the parties and conditions of the covenant, of the nature, properties and promises of it. If they knew how kind and condescending the Lord is, how near he brings his word, how little he will take of their hand, how solid the covenant is, how sure the Cautioner is, and how their part of the end of the covenant is undertaken for, as well as God's, they would not have such doubts and fears. Hence in Romans 14, they who are weak in knowledge are said to be *weak in faith*, because through their ignorance they have many doubts.

This makes me to think that if many of you had sincerity and seriousness in the great concern of your salvation, you would be much and almost inexplicably puzzled how to rid yourselves in many things you would meet with in your condition. Because of the abounding of your ignorance, you cannot, alas!, tell what repentance is, what closing with Christ in the covenant is, what Christ's offices are, and what use should be made of them. And therefore, if you were put into any strait or dump through the sense of sin, it needed be no great wonder that you should be in much confusion, and did not know what to do to get out of it.

It were good, therefore, that you studied the knowledge of God, and of the covenant; that, if ever God do you good, you may have some clearness and distinctness in the way of the remedy of your evils, and of the extricating you out of your difficulties. But that which keeps many quiet is, alas!, their own presumption grown to a great height and the devil's rocking them fast asleep in the cradle of security. It is a wonder to see so many very confident of peace with God, who yet know not how it is come at. When God touches your conscience, you will be put to cry, *What shall we do?* because of your ignorance.

2. Secondly, it proceeds partly *from want of experience*. Hence, though some, it may be, have light and knowledge, yet, wanting experience of the thing, they are at a stand, and know not what to do in this or that case. Just as if a man were to go to London, and were informed of all the towns and posts in the way, yet when he comes to advance in his journey, not having gone the way before, is often in doubt whether he be right. So it is with many, who from literal knowledge can tell what faith and repentance is; but when their spirits are jumbled (to speak so), confused and put through other, the matter looks otherwise upon them. And they are like a man who coming to a shallow and safe ford of a river that is mudded, yet fears to take it because he is not ridden it before; whereas another that has gone through it can confidently hazard on it. And indeed

it is no marvel to see much of this even amongst believers.

3. A third cause or ground whereby this may proceed is *prejudices at the way of God, and of persons at themselves*. Men have naturally a sort of gospel of their own, that they cannot give up, till some way they be constrained. And, when God puts them to it, they are at a stand.

As, for instance, there is this prejudice in some, that they think none can go and warrantably take hold of God's covenant, till they be so and so humbled; that they cannot go with convictions or challenges till they get some more deep heart work, or be in a better and more tender frame. Hence Peter says to Christ in Luke 5 very unreasonably, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord*. Whereas David reasoned otherwise and much more pertinently in Psalm 25, when he says, *Pardon my iniquity, for it is great*.

And hence the question arises, *What shall we do?* and, when they are bidden *Believe*, they object, *Ah! we are sinners and have evil and hard hearts, and are unhumbled*. Look what passed between Peter and his hearers in Acts 2. He lays out before them their horrid guilt in *crucifying Christ; they are pricked in their hearts*, and cry, *What shall we do?* He bids them *Repent and be baptised*, which takes in faith. And in verse 41 it is said that such as were kindly touched, *gladly received the word*. Now, I pray, what if they objected, Can we, that have even now, or a very little since, had our wicked hands imbrued in the precious blood of Christ, believe on him? Come away (says he on the matter) for there is no other way to pardon and peace with God.

There was much of this in the primitive times among the Christian Romans, Corinthians, Galatians and Hebrews, many prejudices at and wrong conceptions of the gospel and covenant of grace. And therefore they would have patched up a gospel of grace and of works. They would have brought in the ceremonies of the law and established a self-righteousness.

And this in particular is one great prejudice that the devil labours deeply to possess the minds of awakened sinners with, even to make them think that it is presumption for them, though they would fain do it, to come to Christ and by faith to close with him, unless they be so and so qualified. As long as they are secure, he makes some take their presumption for faith; but the next day, when they are awakened and exhorted to take themselves to Christ by faith, he calls that also presumption.

And indeed, as it is Satan's manner to drive sinners on extreme, so it is our way to run into extremes. That which made us call our presumption faith is the same which makes us call our faith presumption; because we lay it for a ground, that it is our honesty or good disposition and so and so qualified frame, that must commend us to God. And therefore, while conceive that we have that, it is the ground of our presumption; and when the conscience is wakened, and we find that we want that, we cannot believe.

4. A fourth cause or ground whence this, in some, may proceed, who would fain believe, is not so much their darkness and ignorance of the way, as *the backwardness, frowardness, and deceit of their heart*, that will not, for them, come up to it. Such are puzzled and perplexed what to do, because they cannot get it well done and as they would.

Such are like a good archer that can shoot well, but has a deceitful bow, which, when he has put his arrow on the string and has drawn it to the very head, starts aside and makes him quite miss the mark. The fault and defect is not in the man's skill, but in the bow. We the rather make use of this comparison, that the Holy Ghost does so in the Scripture, resembling our heart to a *deceitful bow, that turns aside*. So that they who are acquainted with their own hearts know not what to do with them, how to guide them, and bring them up unto, or hold them at anything that is good.

And though, it may be, they could to good purpose give directions to others in such a case, yet they find their own hearts very untractable to admit of them, as if they did not suit or meet with their own case. This is indeed a very puzzling difficulty, yet to such perplexed souls there is no new direction to be given, but the renewed exercise of faith, and to put the directions which they know in practice. And when one shot (to speak so) misgives, to essay another; not to seek (as it were) a new string, but to cast a new knot on it; and if two knots should slip, to cast a third, improving more that grace of the covenant to make them hold better. Therefore, in Acts 2, when those pricked in their hearts ask what they shall do, Peter bids them repent. They were begun to do so, and he bid them be doing and go on.

You then that are indeed serious, and to whom your shortcomings are really your souls' burden, would not think it any uncouth, strange or extraordinary thing, to find desire and affection running far ahead of your light and practice, (though you would endeavour to have them foot-side) a Christian's desire may be a day's journey (as it were) ahead of himself

as to his attainment.

And indeed in some respect it would not be good if it were otherwise, for it is no good sign of progress in God's way, when the desires of persons go no further length than their practice, or when their practice falls nothing short of their desires. Both in that case are to be much suspected, for even eminently holy Paul sees himself to be behind in Philippians 3, when he says, *I think not myself perfect, but one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forth to those things that are before, I press towards the mark.* When he came one post in his attainment, his desire was ten, in a manner, before him. And so it is with those people here spoken of, *Come (say they) let us join ourselves to the Lord.* They find themselves to be behind, and endeavour to work themselves up, and to draw themselves and one another forward.

We must now draw to a close and shall therefore but touch the following observations and pass them in a word.

Fifth observation. Observe, *That in people's covenanting with God, their desires and designs will be much sooner proposed and laid down, than they will be got accomplished and put in execution, or than they will win to satisfy themselves therein.*

Although a union be between Christ and them, yet they are not satisfied until they be somewhat clear and distinct about it. they are like the prodigal, who being in another and strange country says first, *I will go,* then he arises; and, *I will say to my Father,* before he actually speaks to his father himself, calling him *Father.* Some real acting of faith precedes his more distinct satisfying acting of it. There is a faith in resolving to believe, before there be a resting of faith or stayed believing. And yet it is faith that begets that same resolution. If the prodigal had not had some faith of *enough in his Father's house,* and his Father's affection, he would not have resolved to go home. Ad these people mentioned here would not have set their faces towards Zion, if they had not had some begun stirrings of faith.

Sixth observation. Observe, *That it is a good token to be asking seriously the way to heaven, though the askers be not so clear in it.*

There is some ground to think that such persons are in the way; and if they hold on, and follow the directions of the word, they may come thither. It is far better to be dissatisfied, and to ask the way; than not to ask, and yet to be satisfied with our own knowledge of the way.

Seventh observation. Observe, *That person is may fall very far short of their desire, and have much infirmity, and may meet with many puzzling difficulties how to accomplish what they would be at; yet, where a serious and longing desire is wakened after covenanting with God, they should go forward and follow it forth.*

This people are short of what they desired, and yet they go. And they know not (as it were) where to set down the next foot till they ask the way, yet they go on still asking. There is no disputing here, but forward we should go. I suppose, these here spoken of might have had several difficulties started, and several obstructions laid in their way, yet on they go.

As, *first* this, that they were covenant breakers. Yet they, taking seriously with it, step over that and say notwithstanding, *Come let us join ourselves to the Lord in a covenant.*

Secondly, they might have thought that it was a very long journey and that they would never be able to go through to the end of it; besides that, they were under the dominion of strange kings, who were heathens.

So it may be said on the matter, and is often said to serious souls that would fain believe, Can you believe? It will not be with you. Are you not under the feet of many tyrannous lusts, and how will you win free from them? Yet they resolve and must, yea, dare not but resolve to go forward. And the reason is, because they resolve to take with their guilt, and to make use of the covenant for answering and silencing of challenges; and they resolve also, if the journey be long, to make use of the covenant for strength to make them hold on and hold out in it.

The weak believer, when such doubts are started, should make use of the promises of the covenant such as these: *Faithful is he who has called you, who also will do it*, 1 Thessalonians 5:24; *Return, backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding, saith the Lord;* and then follows, *Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God*, Jeremiah 3:22. They yield themselves to the Lord.

Thirdly. A third difficulty is their ignorance. They might have said, We know not the way, and how can we think to come when we desire and design to be? As some will be ready to say, We can tell some words of the *Catechism*, but alas! we know not what it is to believe. Yet they sit not still for all this, but, as one remedy of their ignorance, *they ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.*

And if you ask here, How can their faces be thitherward when they are asking the way? and at whom do they ask the way? The Gentiles amongst whom they live know it not, and they have no other to ask at. I answer, they are hanging on God, and taking their marks and directions of the way as he gives them from his word. And there is a most sweet word for such, Isaiah 35:8, where the Lord speaking of this way, and calling it the *way of holiness*, he says, *The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.* it is the heartsomest way that can be; oh but it be safe for the wayfaring sinner, for the seriously seeking soul, to have the face toward God, for making up of peace with him.

Upon the one hand, the Lord hedges up such persons' way with thorns, that they should not find their lovers; and, upon the other, he can constrains them to go right forward. *He leads the blind in a way that they know not, and makes darkness light before them.* Are they not several of you brought far through this way, and you know not well how? He brought you to faith very insensibly, and trained you on piece and piece, and yet you cannot tell well how. But you know certainly that it was he that did it.

And in this case, oh but it be good, singly to be given up to God's leading and guiding, who *leads his flock like a shepherd, who gathers his lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom, and gently leads them that are with young,* as it is in Isaiah 40:11. The lambs would run wild and ruin themselves, if left on the hills; but they are under the good Shepherd's oversight and tutory (to speak so) who brings home the lost sheep on his shoulders, and (as it was even now said) gathers the lambs with his arm, and gently leads them that are with young; which not only says that he drives not hard, less they cast the young, but that, as the nurse leads the little child (otherwise than ladies used to be led by a gentle touch of their hand or arm) by the arm-holes or by the tugs, when the child knows not how to go and cannot stand on its own feet, even so he leads such. *I taught* (says the Lord in Hosea 11) *Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms.*

When a poor body has Christ a-forming in the heart, he will gently lead such a one, and deal wonderfully tenderly with the person. You who come honestly to him, may confidently yield and give up yourselves to be his, and guided by him, though you be both weak and know not the way well; if you can but cast a look to him (to speak so) or be sweetly silent before him, allowing him to be doing, and to take his own way with you; if you lay yourselves humbly in the dust, and wait what he will do to you, he will account that believing. *The Lord is good to them that*

wait for him, to the soul that seeks him, says Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:25.

To wait on God's leisure is a saying much abused, but it is very good and commendable here. *It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord*. Be not afraid, sincere and exercised souls. I say, be not afraid, when he is as it were pouring you from vessel to vessel and putting you, for his own holy and wise ends, in some confusion, so that you know not well what to do, or to what hand to turn you. He is wondrous tender of you in that case, and will have a special care that you miscarry not. This is a very sweet subject if we could speak suitably of it. Himself bless it to you.