

CHAPTER III.

Directions about the Christian Covenant with God, and Baptism.

THOUGH the first Part of this book is little more than an explication of the Christian covenant with God, yet being here to speak of baptism as a part of God's worship, it is needful that I briefly speak also of the covenant itself.

Direct. 1. 'It is a matter of great importance that you well understand the nature of the Christian covenant, what it is.' I shall therefore here briefly open the nature of it, and then speak of the reasons of it: and then of the solemnizing it by baptism, and next of our renewing it, and lastly of our keeping it.

The Christian covenant is a contract between God and man, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, for the return and reconciliation of sinners unto God, and their justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification by him, to his glory.

Here we must first consider, who are the parties in the covenant. 2. What is the matter of the covenant on God's part. 3. What is the matter on man's part. 4. What are the terms of it propounded on God's part. 5. Where and how he doth express it. 6. What are the necessary qualifications on man's part. 7. And what are the ends and benefits of it.

1. The parties are God and man: God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost on the one part, and repenting, believing sinners on the other part. Man is the party that needeth it; but God is the party that first offereth it: here note, 1. That God's part of the covenant is made universally and conditionally with all mankind, (as to the tenor enacted,) and so is in being before we were born. 2. That it is not the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost considered simply as persons in the Godhead; but as related to man for the ends of the covenant. 3. That it is only sinners that this covenant is made with, because the use of it is for the restoration of those that broke a former covenant in Adam. It is a covenant of reconciliation, and therefore supposeth an enmity

antecedent. 4. When I say that it is repenting and believing sinners that are the party, I mean, (1.) That taking the covenant in its first act, it is repentance and faith themselves that are that act, and are our very covenanting. (2.) But taking the covenant in its external expression, so it is a repenting, believing sinner that must take it, it being but the expression of his repentance and faith, by an explicit contract with God. 5. Note, that though God's covenant be by one universal act, (of which more anon,) yet man's is to be made by the several acts of the individual persons each one for himself, and not by the acts of societies only.

II. The matter of the covenant on God's part is in general, that He will be our God: more particularly, that God the Father will be our Reconciled God and Father in Jesus Christ; that God the Son will be our Saviour; and God the Holy Ghost will be our Sanctifier. And the relation of a God to us essentially containeth these three parts: 1. That as on the title of Creation and Redemption he is our Owner, so he doth take us as his own peculiar people. 2. That as he hath title to be our absolute King or Governor, so he doth take us as his subjects. 3. That he will be our grand Benefactor and felicity, or our most loving Father (which compriseth all the rest). And as he will be thus related to us, so he will do for us all that these relations do import. As, 1. He will do all that belongeth to a Creator for his creature, in our preservation and supplies. 2. He will save us from our sins, and from his wrath and hell. 3. And he will sanctify us to a perfect conformity to our Head. Also, 1. He will use us and defend us as his own peculiar ones. 2. He will govern us by a law of grace and righteousness. 3. He will make us fully happy in his love for ever.

III. The matter on man's part of the covenant is, 1. In respect of the 'Terminus à quo,' that we will forsake the flesh, the world, and the devil as they are adverse to our relations and duties to God. 2. In regard of the 'Terminus ad quem,' that we will take the Lord for our God: and more particularly, 1. That we do take God the Father for our Reconciled Father in Jesus Christ, and do give up ourselves to him, as creatures to their Maker. 2. That we do take Jesus Christ for our Redeemer, Saviour, and Mediator,

as our High Priest, and Prophet, and King, and do give up ourselves to him as his redeemed ones to be reconciled to God, and saved by him. 3. That we do take the Holy Ghost for our Regenerator and Sanctifier, and do give up ourselves to be perfectly renewed and sanctified by him, and by his operations carried on to God in his holy service. Also, 1. That we do take God for our absolute Lord or Owner, and do give up ourselves to him as his own. 2. That we take him for our universal, sovereign Governor, and do give up ourselves unto him as his subjects. 3. That we do take him for our most bountiful Benefactor, and loving Father, and felicity, and do give up ourselves to him as his children, to seek him, and please him, and perfectly to love him, delight in him, and enjoy him for ever in heaven as our ultimate end. And in consenting to these relations, we covenant to do the duties of them in sincerity.

IV. The terms or conditions which God requireth of man in his covenant are, consent, and fidelity or performance: he first consenteth conditionally, if we will consent: and he consenteth to be actually our God, when we consent to be his people: so that as bare consent, without any performance doth found the relation between husband and wife, master and servant, prince and people; but the sincere performance of the duties of the relation which we consent to, are needful afterward to continue the relation, and attain the benefits and ends; so is it also between God and man. We are his children in covenant as soon as we consent; but we shall not be glorified but on condition of sincere performance and obedience.

V. God's covenant with man is nothing else but the universal promise in the Gospel; and (to the solemnization,) the declaration, and application, and solemn investiture or delivery by his authorized ministers. 1. The Gospel as it relateth the matters of fact in and about the work of our redemption, is a sacred history. 2. As it containeth the terms on which God will be served, and commandeth us to obey them for our salvation, it is called the law of Christ or grace. 3. As it containeth the promise of life and salvation conditionally offered, it is called God's promise, and covenant, (viz. on his part, as it is proposed only). 4. When by our consent the condition is so far perform

ed, or the covenant accepted, then God's conditional, universal promise or covenant, becometh actual and particular as to the effect; and so the covenant becometh mutual between God and man: as if a king made an act or law of pardon and oblivion to a nation of rebels, saying, 'Whoever cometh in by such a day, and confesseth his fault, and sueth out his pardon, and promiseth fidelity for the future shall be pardoned.' This act is a law in one respect, and it is an universal, conditional pardon of all those rebels; or a promise of pardon; and an offer of pardon to all that it is revealed to: but it is an actual pardon to those that come in, and conferreth on them the benefits of the act as if they were named in it, and is their very title to their pardon, of which their consent is the condition; and the condition being performed, the pardon or collation of the benefit becometh particular and actual, without any new act; it being the sense of the law itself, or conditional grant, that so it should do. So as to the reality of the internal covenant-interest and benefits, justification and adoption, it is ours by virtue of this universal conditional covenant, when we perform the condition. But as to our title 'in foro Ecclesiæ,' and the due solemnization and investiture, it is made ours when God's minister applieth it to us in baptism by his commission. As the rebel that was fundamentally pardoned by the act of oblivion, must yet have his personal pardon delivered him by the Lord Chancellor under the Great Seal. In this sense ministers are the instruments of God, not only in declaring us to be pardoned, but in delivering to us the pardon of our sins, and solemnly investing us therein: as an attorney delivereth possession to one that before had his fundamental title. Thus God entereth into covenant with man.

VI. The qualifications of absolute necessity to the validity of our covenant with God 'in foro interiori' are these, 1. That we understand what we do as to all the essentials of the covenant: for 'ignorantis non est consensus.' 2. That it be our own act, performed by our natural, or legal selves, that is, some one that hath power so far to dispose of us (as parents have of their children). 3. That it be deliberate, sober, and rational, done by one that is 'compos mentis,' in his wits, and not in drunkenness, madness, or

incogitancy*. 4. That it be seriously done with a real intention of doing the thing, and not histrionically, ludicrously, or in jest. 5. That it be done entirely as to all essential parts; for if we leave out any essential part of the covenant, it is no sufficient consent: (as to consent that Christ shall be our Justifier, but not the Holy Ghost our Sanctifier). 6. That it be a present consent to be presently in covenant with God: for to consent that you will be his servants to morrow or hereafter, but not yet, is but to purpose to be in covenant with him hereafter, and is no present covenanting with him. 7. Lastly, it must be a resolved and absolute consent without any open or secret exceptions or reserves.

VII. The fruits of the covenant which God reapeth (though he need nothing) is the pleasing of his good and gracious will, in the exercise of his love and mercy, and the praise and glory of his grace, in his people's love and happiness for ever. The fruits or benefits which accrue to man are unspeakable, and would require a volume competently to open them: especially that God is our God, and Christ our Saviour, Head, Intercessor, and Teacher, and the Holy Ghost is our Sanctifier; and that God will regard us as his own, and will protect us, preserve us, and provide for us, and will govern us, and be our God and joy for ever: that he will pardon us, justify, and adopt us, and glorify us with his Son in heaven.

Direct. 11. 'When you thus understand well the nature of the covenant, labour to understand the special reasons of it.' The reasons of the matter of the covenant you may see in the fruits and benefits now mentioned. But I now speak of the reason of it as a covenant 'in genere,' and such a covenant 'in specie.' 1. In general, God will have man to receive life or death as an acceptor and keeper,

* Quis vero non doleat baptismo plerosque adultos initio passim et nostro tempore non raro ante perfundi quam Christianam catechesin vel mediocriter teneant, neque an flagitiosæ et superstitiosæ vitæ pœnitentia tangantur, neque vero id ipsum quod accipiunt, an velint accipere, satis constet. Acosta lib. vi. c. 2. p. 520. Nisi petant et instent, Christianæ vitæ professione donandi non sunt. Idem p. 521. And again, While ignorant or wicked men do hasten any how, by right or wrong, by guile or force, to make the barbarous people Christians, they do nothing else but make the Gospel a scorn, and certainly destroy the deserters of a rashly undertaken faith. Id. *ibid.* p. 522.

or a refuser or breaker of his covenant, because he will do it not only as a Benefactor, or absolute Lord, but also as a Governor, and will make his covenant to be also his law, and his promise and benefits to promote obedience. And because he will deal with man as with a free agent, and not as with a brute that hath no choosing and refusing power conducted by reason: man's life and death shall be in his own hands, and still depend upon his own will; though God will secure his own dominion, interest, and ends, and put nothing out of his own power by putting it into man's; nor have ever the less his own will, by leaving man to his own will. God will at last as a righteous Judge, determine all the world to their final joy or punishment, according to their own choice while they were in the flesh, and according to what they have done in the body whether it be good or evil^b. Therefore he will deal with us on covenant terms.

2. And he hath chosen to rule and judge men according to a covenant of grace, by a Redeemer, and not according to a rigorous law of works, that his goodness and mercy may be the more fully manifested to the sons of men; and that it may be easier for men to love him, when they have so wonderful demonstrations of his love: and so that their service here, and their work and happiness hereafter, may consist of love, to the glory of his goodness, and the pleasure of his love for ever.

Direct. 111. 'Next understand rightly the nature, use, and end of baptism.' Baptism is to the mutual covenant between God and man, what the solemnization of marriage is to them that do before consent; or what the listing a soldier by giving him colours, and writing his name, is to one that consented before to be a soldier^c. In my "Universal Concord," pp. 29, 30., I have thus described it: 'Baptism is a holy sacrament instituted by Christ, in which a person professing the Christian faith (or the infant of such) is baptized in water into the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost, in signification and solemnization of the holy covenant, in which as a penitent believer (or the seed of such) he giveth up himself (or is by the parent given up) to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, forsaking the devil, the world, and the flesh, and is solemnly entered

^b Matt. xxv.

^c See the "Reformed Liturgy," p. 68.

a visible member of Christ and his church, a pardoned, regenerate child of God, and an heir of heaven.'

As the word 'baptism' is taken for mere administration or external ordinance, so the internal covenanting or faith and repentance of the (adult) person to be baptized, is no essential part of it, nor requisite to the being of it; but only the profession of such a faith and repentance, and the external entering of the covenant. But as 'baptism' is taken for the ordinance as performed in all its essential parts, according to the true intent of Christ in his institution; (that is, in the first and proper meaning of the word;) so the internal covenanting of a penitent, sincere believer is necessary to the being of it. And indeed the word 'baptism,' is taken but equivocally or analogically at most, when it is taken for the mere external administration and action: for God doth not institute worship-ordinances for bodily motion only; when he speaketh to man and requireth worship of man, he speaketh to him as to a man, and requireth human actions from him, even the work of the soul, and not the words of a parrot, or the motion of a puppet. Therefore the word 'baptism,' in the first and proper signification, doth take in the inward actions of the heart, as well as the outward profession and actions. And in this proper sense 'Baptism is the mutual covenant between God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and a penitent, believing sinner, solemnized by the washing of water, in which as a sacrament of his own appointment, God doth engage himself to be the God and reconciled Father, the Saviour and Sanctifier of the believer, and taketh him for his reconciled child in Christ, and delivereth to him, by solemn investiture, the pardon of all his sins, and title to the mercies of this life and of that which is to come.' What I say in this description of a penitent believer, is also to be understood of the children of such, that are dedicated by them in baptism to God, who thereupon have their portion in the same covenant of grace.

The word 'baptism' is taken in the first sense, when Simon Magus is said to be baptized^d; and when we speak of it only in the ecclesiastic sense, as it is true baptism 'in foro ecclesiæ.' But it is taken in the latter sense, when it is

^d Acts viii.

spoken of as the complete ordinance of God, in the sense of the institution, and as respecting the proper ends of baptism, as pardon of sin and life eternal, and 'in foro cœli.'

In this full and proper sense it is taken by Christ when he saith, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"; that is, he that believeth, and is by baptism entered into the covenant of God. And in this sense the ancients took it, when they affirmed that all that were baptized were regenerate, pardoned, and made the children of God. And in this sense it is most true, that he that is baptized (that is, is a sincere covenanter,) shall be saved if he die in that condition that he is then in^e. All that the minister warrantably baptizeth are sacramentally regenerate, and are 'in foro ecclesiæ' members of Christ, and children of God, and heirs of heaven: but it is only those that are sincerely delivered up in covenant to God in Christ, that are spiritually and really regenerate, and are such as shall be owned for members of Christ and children of God 'in foro cœli.' Therefore it is not unfit that the minister call the baptized, regenerate and pardoned members of Christ, and children of God, and heirs of heaven, supposing that 'in foro ecclesiæ' they were the due subjects of baptism. But if the persons be such as ought not to be baptized, the sin then is not in calling baptized persons regenerate, but in baptizing those that ought not to have been baptized, and to whom the seal of the covenant was not due.

None ought to be baptized but those that either personally deliver up themselves in covenant to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, professing a true repentance, and faith, and consent to the covenant; or else are thus delivered up, and dedicated, and entered into covenant in their infancy, by those that being Christians themselves have so much interest in them and power of them, that their act may be esteemed as the infant's act, and legally imputed to them as if themselves had done it. If any others are unduly baptized, they have thereby no title to the pardon of sin or life eternal, nor are they taken by God to be in covenant, as having no way consented to it.

^e Mark xvi. 16.

^f Read the Propositions of the Synod in New England, and the Defence of them against Mr. Davenport, about the subject of Baptism.

Direct. iv. 'When you enter a child into the Christian covenant with God, address yourselves to it as to one of the greatest works in the world: as those that know the greatness of the benefit, of the duty, and of the danger.' The benefit to them that are sincere in the covenant, is no less than to have the pardon of all our sins, and to have God himself to be our God and Father, and Christ our Saviour, and the Holy Ghost our Sanctifier, and to have title to the blessings of this life and of that to come. And for the duty, how great a work is it for a sinner to enter into so solemn a covenant with the God of heaven, for reconciliation and newness of life, and for salvation? And therefore if any should abuse God by hypocrisy, and take on them to consent to the terms of the covenant, (for themselves, or their children,) when indeed they do not, the danger of such profaneness and abuse of God must needs be great. Do it therefore with that due preparation, reverence, and seriousness, as beseebeth those that are transacting a business of such unspeakable importance with God Almighty.

Direct. v. 'Having been entered in your infancy into the covenant of God by your parents, you must, at years of discretion, review the covenant which by them you made, and renew it personally yourselves; and this with as great seriousness, and resolution, as if you were now first to enter and subscribe it, and as if your everlasting life or death, were to depend on the sincerity of your consent, and performance.' For your infant baptismal covenanting will save none of you that live to years of discretion, and do not as heartily own it in their own persons, as if they had been now to be baptized. But this I pass by, having said so much of it in my "Book of Confirmation."

Direct. vi. 'Your covenant thus, 1. Made; 2. Solemnized by baptism; 3. And owned at age; must, 4. Be frequently renewed through the whole course of your lives.' As, (1.) Your first consent must be habitually continued all your days; for if that ceaseth, your grace and title to the benefits of God's covenant ceaseth. (2.) This covenant is virtually renewed in every act of worship to God: for you speak to him as your God in covenant, and offer yourselves to him as his covenanted people. (3.) This covenant should be actually renewed frequently in prayer and meditation,

and other such acts of communion with God. (4.) Especially when after a fall we beg the pardon of our sins, and the mercies of the covenant, and on days of humiliation and thanksgiving, and in great distresses, or exhilarating mercies. (5.) And the Lord's supper is an ordinance instituted to this very end. It is no small part of our Christian diligence and watchfulness, to keep up and renew our covenant-consent.

Direct. VII. 'And as careful must you be to keep or perform your covenant, as to enter it, and renew it: which is done, 1. By continuing our consent; 2. By sincere obedience; 3. And by perseverance.' We do not (nor dare not) promise to obey perfectly, nor promise to be as obedient as the higher and better sort of Christians, though we desire both: but to obey sincerely we must needs promise, because we must needs perform it.

Obedience is sincere, 1. When the radical consent or subjection of the heart to God in Christ is habitually and heartily continued. 2. When God's interest in us is most predominant, and his authority and law can do more with us, than any fleshly lust or wordly interest, or than the authority, word, or persuasions of any man whatsoever. 3. When we unfeignedly desire to be perfect, and habitually and ordinarily have a predominant love to all that is good, and a hatred to that which is evil; and had rather do our duty than be excused from it, and rather be saved from our sin than keep it.

Direct. VIII. 'While you sincerely consent unto the covenant, live by faith upon the promised benefits of it, believing that God will make good on his part all that he hath promised. Take it for your title to pardon, sonship, and eternal life. O think what a mercy it is to have God in covenant with you to be your God, your Father, Saviour, and Sanctifier and felicity! And in this continually rejoice.