

affectionate one to another, (says the apostle), with brotherly love,' Rom. xii. 10. 'Let brotherly love continue,' Heb. xiii. 1. Such love is a sure and infallible sign of your being the friends and followers of Christ. 'By this (says our Lord), shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love to one another.' Be at peace then among yourselves, and shew that ye are subjects of the Prince of peace, and heirs of the legacy of peace which he has left you.

THE PREFACE TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

EXOD. XX. 2.—*I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

SOME take these words, which are the first of that speech spoken immediately by God himself, to be a part of the first commandment, shewing who is the true God, that is to be our God. Our Catechism determines them to be a preface to all the commandments; and though they have a particular relation to the first command, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me,' viz. *The Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;* yet, seeing the first commandment has a common relation to all of them, and is interwoven with all the rest, and the words natively enforce obedience to the whole, they are set here as a preface to all the commands, like a magnificent entry into a palace, decorated with the arms of the owner. In the words consider,

1. The Speaker and Giver of these commandments. It is *the Lord*, particularly Jesus Christ, who gave this law in the name of the Trinity. This is plain from the scripture, Acts vii. 38. Heb. xii. 24.—26. It was he that brought the people out of Egypt, and that appeared in the bush that burned with fire, and yet was not consumed, giving commission to Moses for their deliverance, Exod. iii. 2.—8.

2. The speech itself, wherein we have a description of the true God, bearing three reasons for the keeping his commands. (1.) From his sovereignty; he is *the Lord*. (2.) From his covenant-relation to his people, *thy God*. (3.) From the great benefit of redemption, and deliverance wrought for them.

DOCT. 'The preface to the ten commandments teacheth us, That because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.'

But it may be asked, Why does the Lord make use of arguments to induce us to obedience? *Ans.* Because he loves to work on man, as a rational creature, according to the principles of his nature. Hence he says, Hos. xi. 4. 'I drew them with the cords of a man, with bands of love;' and because he delights in no obedience but what is unconstrained and cheerful. It is truly matter of wonder, that the infinitely glorious God should be at so great pains to incline man to pursue his own happiness.

Here I shall consider the several reasons of obedience mentioned in the text and doctrine, and then draw some inferences for application.

First, As for the first reason for obedience to these commandments, it is in these words, *I am the Lord*, or *JEHOVAH*; that is, an eternal, unchangeable one, having his being of himself, and from whom all being is derived; Exod. iii. 14. *I AM THAT I AM*. This is a very significant name, and denotes, (1.) The unity of the Godhead, that he is one true God, having no partner, equal, or rival. (2.) The reality and certainty of his being. Idols are nothing; all their divinity is only in the fancies and opinions of men: but God is a real and true being. (3.) The necessity, eternity, and unchangeableness of his being. All other things which have a being were once without being; they had no existence till he gave it them: and if he please, they shall be no more, but be reduced into their primitive nothing; and all their being was derived from, and wholly depends upon him. But he was from all eternity an independent and self-existent being. (4.) The constancy and perpetuity of his nature and will; *I am that I am*; i. e. I am the same that ever I was, and will be the same, without all mutability in my nature, will, and purposes. This name includes these four reasons for our obeying his commandments.

1. The infinite excellency and perfection of his nature, whereby he is the natural Lord of all his creatures, Jer. x. 7. He is infinitely above us, and so glorious in his supereminent perfections, that the view of them must natively cause us poor worms to fall down at his feet, and receive his commands; and makes our rebellions monstrous, more than if a glow-worm should contend with the sun in its meridian brightness.

2. He is Lord Creator to us, that gave us our being, and we are the workmanship of his hands, and are therefore to be at his disposal, as the pots are at that of the potter, Psal. c. 2, 3. Whatever we have, tongue, hands, soul, body, &c. all is from him; how can we then decline his government.

3. He is Lord Rector, supreme Governor and Lawgiver to us,

whose will is our law, James iv. 12. 'There is one Lawgiver.' This he is as Jehovah, the fountain of all being, which gives him an absolute and unlimited dominion over us. So that disobedience to his commands is the highest injustice we are capable of.

4. He is Lord Conservator of us, the Preserver of men, Rev. iv. 11. Every moment we have a continued creation from him, without which we could no more subsist than the beams of the sun without the sun itself, but would immediately dwindle into nothing. Being then thus upheld wholly in our being by him, should we not wholly be for him?

Secondly, The second reason is from his covenant-relation to us, *thy God*, The word denotes a plurality; and so shews, that one God in three persons to be the true God, and that all the three are the covenanted God of his people, Isa. liv. 5. 'Thy Makers is thine husband;' for the word is plural in the Hebrew. Here I shall shew,

1. What this covenant is.

2. How this covenant bindeth to the obedience of the commandments.

1. What covenant is this? It is the covenant whereby he was Israel's God before the giving of the law on Sinai; for this plainly relates to a former relation betwixt them, by virtue of which they were brought out of Egypt. This was then no other but the covenant with Abraham and his seed, Gen. xvii. 7. and xv. 18. and by virtue of the covenant-promise to Abraham, it was, that they were delivered out of Egypt, Gen. xv. 13, 14, &c. That was not the covenant of works, for it is still opposed to the law, Rom. iv. therefore it is the covenant of grace.

Under this covenant with Abraham all Israel according to the flesh were in an external manner, whereby God had a more special right over them than the rest of the world; and so is it with all who are within the visible church at this day. But Israel according to the Spirit, the elect of God, and believers, the spiritual seed of Abraham, were and are most properly under this covenant, and that in a saving manner. Rom. iv. 11, 12, 13. So that this reason is not general to all the world, but peculiar to the church.

2. I shall shew how this covenant bindeth to obedience to the commandments. Not as if obedience to the commands were conditions of that covenant; that is the nature of the covenant of works. For mark, God tells them he is their God before ever he proposes one commandment to them; and for God to be the God of a people in the sense of the promise made to Abraham, includes the assurance of their complete salvation, Mat. xxii. 32. But,

1. The consent to the covenant binds to the obedience of all the

commands. The covenant is, 'I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people,' Heb. viii. 10. So consenting that God shall be our God, we take on us the yoke of all his commands, to be for him only, wholly, and for ever, 2 Cor. viii. 5. Isa. xlv. 5.

2. The honour of the covenant. Thereby sinners are advanced into a near relation to God. They become his servants, whose honour it is to serve him; his friends, whose honour it is to advance his interest in the world; his spouse, whose honour it is to be for him, and obey him; his members, whose honour it is to serve himself of them.

3. The privileges of the covenant, Luke i. 74, 75. Such are regeneration, whereby a new nature is given, to be a principle of new life, 2 Cor. v. 17. Justification, whereby the curse is taken off the tree, that it may be no more barren. Sanctification, whereby they die unto sin, and live unto righteousness; even as the curing of the lame and palsied man obliges him to bestir himself.

4. The great end of the covenant, which is no other but to restore fallen man to his primitive integrity, and to bring him to a state of perfect assimilation to God, Cant. iii. 9, 10. The holiness required in the ten commandments is the kingdom and the throne, from which the devil had expelled and pulled man down. This covenant is entered into for restoring him again to that kingdom, and so binds to endeavours that way.

Thirdly, The last reason is drawn from the redemption and deliverances wrought for his people. The history is well known, and some of the leading circumstances of it will be mentioned anon. Here I will shew,

1. Why this deliverance is commemorated here.

2. What reason for obedience there is in it.

1. I shall shew why this deliverance is commemorated here.

(1.) To shew the faithfulness of God to his promise and covenant with Abraham, Gen. xv. 13—16. And so he shews himself to be Jehovah by ocular demonstration, Exod. vi. 3.

(2.) The strangeness of that deliverance. When the Israelites were groaning under their taskmasters in Egypt, and had no prospect of relief, the Lord raises up Moses to be a deliverer unto them. He sent him in before Pharaoh, to work wonders in his sight. The Lord delivered his people with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. He sent plague after plague upon Pharaoh, till he sent Israel away, blasting the fruits of the earth, killing the beasts of the field, the fishes in the rivers, and all the first-born in the land of Egypt; and when Israel went out of Egypt, God made the waters of the sea to

part, and become a wall unto them; they marched on dry ground in the midst of the sea; it was a safe passage to the Israelites, but a grave to the Egyptians, Pharaoh and his host being overthrown in the midst of the sea. Now, this was a strange and miraculous deliverance, a mercy never to be forgotten; and therefore it is commemorated here, to bind them to obedience.

(3.) Because it was the greatest and most memorable benefit. They were delivered from cruel tyranny. They were slaves to the Egyptians who made them to serve with rigour. They had cruel taskmasters set over them, who put them to hard labour. All their male children were appointed to be killed, or drowned in the river Nile, their affliction and bondage was so great that they were made to sigh and groan, and their cry went up to heaven. Hence Egypt is called 'the iron furnace,' Deut. iv. 20; and here it is called *the house of bondage*. Again, they were delivered from Egypt, a place overwhelmed with pollutions and abominations. The Egyptians were gross idolaters, having 'changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to a corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things,' Rom. i. 23. They worshipped birds, and beasts, and creeping things; as the hawk, the ox, the crocodile; yea, they worshipped onions and garlic. Now considering how prone the Jews were to idolatry, it was a great mercy to be delivered from an idolatrous land. This was a signal and memorable favour. Joshua reckons it among the chief and most memorable mercies of God to Abraham, that he brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, where his ancestors served strange gods. And may not this deliverance from Egypt be justly reckoned among the choice mercies of God to Abraham's posterity.

(4.) It was a late and fresh instance of God's kindness to them. Which leaves an imputation of forgetfulness of old mercies on man's nature for which God stirs them up, by the newest and latest, to obedience.

(5.) Because it was a type of the spiritual deliverance by Jesus Christ from sin, Satan, and hell. [1.] It was typical of the deliverance from the bondage of sin. Now, of all servitudes sin is the worst; for it enslaves the soul. Before conversion, says Augustine, I was held, not with an iron chain, but with the obstinacy of my own will. In this slavery the soul is distorted and drawn asunder as it were by the powerful cravings of contrary lusts and passions. [2.] Of their deliverance from Satan. Thus all men by nature are in the house of bondage. They are enslaved to the devil, who is called the god of this world and is said to rule in the children of disobedience. Sinners are under his command, and he exerciseth an

absolute jurisdiction over them. He blinds their minds with ignorance and error; rules in their memories, making them to remember that which is evil, and forget that which is good; in their wills, drawing them to the love and practice of sin, &c. [3.] Of their deliverance from hell. All men by nature are children of wrath, and liable to condemnation in hell for ever. Now the Lord Jesus, by price and power, delivers his elect from the state of bondage to sin and Satan, Heb. ii. 15; and from the wrath that is to come, 1 Thess. i. 10. And this is done, not for all men, but only for the spiritual Israel of God, who were typified by the Israelites.

2. I shall shew what reason for obedience there is in this deliverance here commemorated. There is great reason.

(1.) Benefits received are most powerful engagements to duty, Rom. ii. 4. and the greatest benefits are the strongest engagements. And no greater benefit are men capable of than that deliverance from the spiritual bondage which the godly Israelites had as well as the other, and which agrees to us New-Testament saints, Col. i. 13. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

(2.) This deliverance is wrought for that end, and by that deliverance men are put in a capacity to serve the Lord, which otherwise they were not, Luke i. 74, 75. While they were in their hard bondage in Egypt, Pharaoh would not suffer them to go serve the Lord, but now they had nothing to hinder them from it. So when men are under the bondage of the covenant of works, they are withheld by the rigour thereof, from serving the Lord in an acceptable manner; but when once they are delivered by Christ from that rigorous bondage, they are made free men, and can serve the Lord in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of their life, having none to hinder them.

Fourthly, I shall conclude this subject with a few practical inferences.

Inf. 1. The ten commandments were not given to the Israelites as a covenant of works, but in the way of the covenant of grace, and under that covert. Ye saw it was Jesus the Mediator that spoke these, Heb. xii. 24, 26.—Amongst all the reasons there is not one of terror; but the sweet savour of gospel-grace*.

2. The true way to attain to the obedience of these commandments, is first to believe that God is our God in Christ, and then to set about the performance of them; first to believe, then to do. The attempting it the contrary way, placing obedience first before

* See the Author's Notes on the Marrow of Modern Divinity.

faith, is entirely contrary to the Lord's method. Thus to believe, strengthens the soul for obedience.

3. All true obedience to the ten commandments now must run in the channel of the covenant of grace, being directed to God as our God in that covenant, Deut. xxviii. 58. This is to fear that glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD. And so legal obedience is no obedience at all. This obedience is performed not for righteousness, but to testify our love to the Lord our Righteousness; not in our own strength, but in that of our Lord God and Redeemer; not to be accepted for its own worth, but for the sake of a Redeemer's merits; not out of fear of hell, or hope to purchase heaven, but out of love and gratitude to him who has delivered us from hell, and purchased heaven and everlasting happiness for us.

4. All men are obliged to keep these commandments, for God is Lord of all: but the saints especially; for besides being their Lord, he is their God and Redeemer too. So far is the state of the saints from being a state of sinful liberty, that there are none so strongly bound to obedience as they, and that by the strongest of all bonds, those of love and gratitude, arising from the amazing and wonderful obedience and satisfaction which he has performed for them. So that the love of Christ will sweetly and powerfully constrain them to run the way of his commandments; for his commandments are not grievous, and in the keeping of them is a great reward. They will love him, because he has first loved them; and his love has flowed out to them in the crimson streams of their dear Redeemer's blood, by which their sins are expiated, and their guilt atoned. And those to whom much is forgiven, will certainly love much.

5. Holiness is the most reasonable course that men can take, and the breaking over the bonds of religion is breaking over the bonds of reason. God might have required of us obedience by his mere will, without giving any other reason; and in that case, men had been bound to give it at their peril. But how much sweeter is the command, and agreeable what he demands, when he enforces the requirement he makes by such engaging motives, as that he is the Lord, a being possessed of all possible perfection, of every glorious attribute and excellency, the author of all other beings, and all the amiable qualities and attracting excellencies of which they are possessed; that he is our God, related to us by a covenant, which he hath made with his own Son as our Surety and Saviour, and which is brought near to us in the gospel, that we may enter into the bond thereof, and the righteousness of which is brought near unto us, who are stout-hearted and far from righteousness, that we may accept thereof, and so be delivered from condemnation and wrath? How

agreeable and ravishing is it to reflect, that he incites and prompts us to obedience, not by the authority of his absolute sovereignty over us, and undoubted propriety in us, but by the inviting and attracting consideration of the great deliverance he has wrought for us, of which the deliverance from the Egyptian bondage was a bright type! Can we reflect on the great salvation wrought for us by Jesus Christ, by which we were saved from all the horrors of sin and hell, rescued from the power of Satan, and delivered from the present evil world, and the pollutions thereof; can we reflect on these great and glorious benefits, which afford astonishment to men and angels, and our hearts not glow with the warmest fire of love and gratitude to him who hath done such excellent things for us? Can we hesitate a moment to say, good is thy will, O God, just and holy are thy laws, and we will cheerfully obey what thou commandest us?

Lastly, The more favours any have received from the Lord, the more they owe obedience to him. Repeated favours conferred, are new calls to gratitude and cheerful obedience to the will of God. Every mercy that we receive, every favour conferred upon us by God, is a fresh call to double our diligence, and to labour with our utmost might, to do the will of our gracious Benefactor and Friend. And a continued neglect of the favours and benefits which the Lord bestows on men, will make their sins the greater, and their punishment the sorer. O! that we may lay these things to heart, and fear the glorious and fearful name of the Lord our God!