

THE DEMAND OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.*

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.—1 PET. III. 21.

THE dependence of these words upon the former is this. The blessed apostle had spoken before of those that were before the flood, and of Noah's saving in the ark, whereupon he mentions baptism: 'The like figure whereunto is baptism, which also saveth us.' 'Christ was yesterday, to-day, and the same for ever,' Heb. xiii. 8. He was the same unto them before his incarnation, and the same unto them that lived in his time, and to us that shall be for ever. All were saved by Christ, and all had several sacrifices that were types of Christ. As there were two cities of the world from the beginning of the world figured out in Cain and Abel, the beginners of both, so God hath carried himself differently to the citizens of both. He always had a care to save his Noahs in the midst of destruction; he had an ark alway for his Noahs. 'God knoweth how to deliver his,' saith the apostle Peter, 2 Pet. ii. 9. It is a work that he hath practised a long time, since the beginning of the world; and for the other that are not his, that are of Cain's posterity, God carries himself in a contrary way to them; he destroys them. But to come to the words, 'The like figure whereunto even baptism doth now save us,' &c. The saving of Noah in the ark was a correspondent answerable type to baptism; for as baptism figures Christ, so did the saving of Noah in the ark. They are correspondent in many things.

1. As all that were *without the ark perished*, so all that are without Christ, that are not engrafted into Christ by faith, whereof baptism was a seal, they perish.

2. And as the same water in the flood *preserved Noah in the ark, and destroyed all the old world*, so the same blood and death of Christ, and his sufferings, it kills all our spiritual enemies. They are all drowned in the

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Red Sea of Christ's blood, but [it] preserves his children. There were three main waters and deluges, which did all typify out Christ: the flood, that drowned the old world; the passing through the Red Sea; and the waters of Jordan. In all these God's people were saved, and the enemies of God's church destroyed, whereunto Micah the prophet alludes when he saith, 'He shall drown our sins in the bottom of the sea,' chap. vii. 19. He alludes to Pharaoh and his host drowned in the bottom of the sea. They sunk as lead; so all our sins, which are our enemies, if we be in Christ, they sink as lead.

3. As Noah, when he went to make the ark and to get into it, *was mocked of the wretched world*, so all that labour to get into Christ and to be saved, they are derided.

Yet notwithstanding, Noah was thought a wise man when the flood came; so when destruction comes, then they are wise that get into the ark, that get into Christ before. Many such resemblances there be. I name but a few, because I go on.

'The like figure whereunto baptism also saveth us,' &c.

Here, first of all, in a word, is a description of the means of salvation, how we are saved: 'baptism saveth us.'

Then there is a prevention of an objection, 'not the putting away of the filth of the flesh,' the outward part of baptism.

Then he sets down how baptism saves us, but 'the answer of a good conscience.'

And then the ground of it, 'by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'

The former I pass over, that I may come to that which I specially intend. I come, therefore, to the prevention* of the objection, which I will not speak much of, but somewhat, because it is a useful point. When he said that baptism saves us, he saith, not that baptism which is a putting away 'the filth of the flesh;' insinuating this, that baptism hath two parts. There is a double baptism: the outward, which is the washing of the body; the inward, which is the washing of the soul; the outward doth not save without the inward. Therefore he prevents them, lest they should think that all are saved by Christ that are baptized, that have their bodies washed outwardly with water. The apostle knew this, that people are naturally prone to give too much to outward things. The devil in people is in extremes; he labours to bring people to extremes, to make the sacraments idols or idle, to make the outward sacrament a mere idol, to give all to that, or to make them idle signs. The devil hath what he would in both. The apostle knew the disease of the times, especially in his time, they attributed too much to outward things. St Paul, writing to the Galatians, he is fain twice to repeat it, 'Neither circumcision availeth anything, or uncircumcision, but a new creature,' Gal. v. 6. You stand too much on outward things. That that God requires especially is the 'new creature.'

So in the Old Testament, when God prescribed both outward and inward worship, they attributed too much to the outward, and let the inward alone. As in Ps. l. 16, God complains how they served him; therefore, saith he, 'What hast thou to do to take my covenant into thy mouth, and hatest to be reformed?' And so in Isa. i. 13, and Isa. lxvi. 3, we see God's peremptory dealing with them: 'I will none of your new moons, I abhor your offerings.' And in Isa. lxvi. 3, 'It was as the cutting off of a dog's neck, the offering of sacrifice;' and yet they were sacrifices appointed by God himself. What was the reason of this? They

* That is, 'anticipation.'—G.

played the hypocrites with God, and gave him only the shell; they brought him outward performances, they attributed too much to that, and left the spiritual part that God most esteems. So our Saviour Christ to the Pharisees, we see how he takes them up: 'Say not with yourselves, We have Abraham to our father,' Mat. iii. 9. They boasted too much of their outward privileges. You see through the current of the Scriptures, those especially that belong not to God, they are apt to attribute too much to outward things. It were well if they would join the inward too, which they neglect. There are two parts of God's service, outward and inward, that is harsh to flesh and blood. As in baptism there are two parts, outward and inward washing; and in hearing the word, is the outward man and inward soul, when it bows to hear what God saith; so in the Lord's Supper, there is outward receiving of bread and wine, and inward making of a covenant with God. Now people give too much to the outward, and think that God is beholding to them for it; but now for the inward, because they are conscious of their lust, they care not for that.

But more particularly, the reason is in corrupt nature.

First, Because the outward part is *easy and glorious to the eye of the world*. Every one can see the sacrament administered, every one can see when one comes and attends, and hears the word of God. They are easy and glorious in the eye of the world.

Second, And then again, people rest in them, because somewhat is done by it to *daub conscience*, that would clamour if they should do nothing, if they were direct atheists. Therefore, say they, we will hear the word, and perform outward things, and being loath to search into the bottom of their conscience, rest in outward things, and satisfy conscience by it. These and the like reasons there are.

Use. Let us take notice of it, and take heed of the corruption of nature in it; let us know that God regards not the outward without the inward, nay, he abhors it. He abhors his own worship that he hath appointed himself, if the inward be not there, much more devices and ceremonies of men's own devising. Popery is but an outside of religion. They labour to put off God with the work done. They have an opinion fit to corrupt nature; that is, that the sacrament administered confers grace, without any disposing of the party. One of the chief of them, a great scholar, he will have the water itself to be elevated above its own nature to confer grace, as if grace had any communion with a dead element (*a*). And thus they speak, to make people doat too much upon outward things. I will not stand to confute this opinion. This very text sheweth that the outward part of baptism, without the inward, is nothing; not the washing of the body, but 'the answer of a good conscience,' saith St Peter.

Let us labour, therefore, in all our services of God, to bring especially the spiritual part. The prophet Hosea finds fault with Ephraim: 'They loved to tread out the corn, but not to wear the yoke,' Hosea x. 11. Now the ox that wears no yoke, it is no trouble to tread out the corn; they fed upon the corn as they trod it. 'Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn,' Deut. xxv. 4. So Christians are like Ephraim. They are content to take the easy part of religion, but to take the yoke, that which is hard, that they love not. Now we must labour to bear the yoke of religion. What the heart doth is done in religion; what the heart doth not, is not done; and there is a kind of divinity, a divine power in all the parts of God's worship that is requisite besides the bringing of the outward man. As in hearing there is required a divine power to

make a man hear as he ought to do, to bow the neck of the inward man of the soul. And so to receive the sacrament, more is required than the outward man. There is a form and power in all the parts of religion. Let us not rest in the form, but labour for the power. There is a power in hearing of the word to transform us into the obedience of it, and a power in the sacrament to renew our covenants with God for a new life, and to cast ourselves altogether upon God's mercy in Jesus Christ—besides the outward elements—to have further communion with Christ.

We see what kind of persons those were in 2 Tim. iii. 5, that practised 'a form of religion, without the power.' He names a catalogue of sins there: 'they were lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.' Yet these people will have a form of religion notwithstanding, but they deny the power of it. But I hasten to that that I will more dwell on.

Use 2. The ministers likewise are to learn their duty hence, to observe the dispositions of people, and what bars they lay to their own salvation. If we see them superstitious, that they swell in outward performances, and so are deluded by Satan in an ill state, and feed themselves with husks, then we are to take away such objections as much as we can, as St Peter here, when he had said that baptism answers to the flood. Both shew the deliverance of God's people by the blood of Christ. Ay, saith he, not the outward baptism, the washing of the body, but 'the answer of a good conscience.'

So Christ takes away a secret objection. Say not with yourselves, 'We have Abraham to our father,' Mat. iii 9. And to feed people in their ill humours, this is not the way, but to labour to make them spiritual, for God is a Spirit, and he loves that part of his worship that is spiritual and inward. We shall have no man damned in the church if there were not an inward spiritual part of God's worship, for the worst men of all will be busiest in outward performances, and glory most in it of any other. It is a delusion that brings thousands to hell; and that made me a little dwell upon it. But I go on. 'Not the washing away the filth of the body,'

'But the answer of a good conscience.'

Upon the preventing of an objection and removing their false confidence, he positively sets down what that is that doth save in baptism. Saith he, it is 'the answer of a good conscience.' The scope of the words should have moved the holy apostle to have said thus, 'not the putting off the filth of the body, but the putting off the filth of the soul.' But instead of that he sets down the act of the soul, which is an 'answer of a good conscience to God,' by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Where, first of all, you must know this for a ground. Indeed, it is a hard place of Scripture. I will only take that that I think fittest, and raise what observations I think fit for you, that out of that you must know for a ground that—

There is a covenant of grace.

Since God and man brake in the creation, there is a covenant which we call a 'covenant of grace.' God hath stooped so low, he hath condescended to enter into terms of covenant with us. Now, the foundation of this covenant is, that God will be our God, and give us grace and glory, and all good in Christ, the mediator of the new covenant. Christ is the foundation of the covenant, the mediator of the covenant, a friend to both: to God as God, to man as man, God and man in himself and by office; such is his office, as to procure love and agreement between God and man. He

being the foundation of the covenant, there must be agreement in him. Now Christ is the foundation of the covenant, by satisfying God's justice, else God and we could never have come to good terms, nor conscience could ever have been satisfied; for God must be satisfied before conscience be satisfied. Conscience else would think God is angry, and he hath not received full satisfaction; and conscience will never be satisfied but with that that God is satisfied with. God is satisfied with the death of the mediator; so conscience being sprinkled with the blood of Christ, applying the death of Christ, conscience is satisfied too. Now, what doth shew that the death of the Mediator is a sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction? The resurrection of Christ; for Christ our surety should have lain in the grave to this day, if our sins had not been fully satisfied for.

Christ is the foundation of the covenant of grace, by his humiliation and by his exaltation, whereof the resurrection was the first degree. Now, in this as in other covenants, there is the party promising, making the covenant, and the parties that answer in the covenant. God promises life everlasting, forgiveness of sins, through the death of Christ, the mediator. We answer by faith, that we rely upon God's mercy in Christ; this is the answer of conscience. Now, this sound answer of conscience, it doth save us, because it doth lay hold on Christ that doth save us. Christ properly saveth us, by his death and passion. An argument of the sufficiency of his salvation was his resurrection. He is now in heaven triumphing; but because there is somewhat in us that must lay hold of this salvation, it is attributed to that that is the instrument of salvation, that is, to the answer of a good conscience. Now, this answer of a good conscience doth afford us this observation, that

There must be something in us before we can make use of what good is in God or Christ.

In a covenant, both parties must agree. There must be somewhat wrought in us that must answer, or else we cannot claim any good by the promises in Christ, or by any good that Christ hath wrought: that is the answer of a good conscience. Or else Christ should save all, if there were not the answer of a good conscience required, that only God's elect children have. But to shew the reasons of this, that there must on our part be this answer.

Reason 1. The reason is partly from the nature of the covenant. There must be consent on both sides, or else the covenant cannot hold; there are indentures drawn up between God and us. God promiseth all good, if we believe and rest on Christ; we again rest upon Christ, and so have interest in all that is good. There is a mutual engagement then in the covenant. God engageth himself to us, and we engage ourselves to God in Christ; and where this mutual engagement is, there the covenant is perfect; as here, there is 'the answer of a good conscience.' That is the first reason, then, from the nature of the covenant, there must be this answer.

Reason 2. The second reason, that there must be somewhat in us, is because *when two agree, there must be a like disposition.* Now, there must be a sanctifying of our nature, from whence this blessed answer comes, before that God and we can agree. There must be a correspondency of disposition. Of necessity this must be, for we enter into terms of friendship with God in the covenant of grace. Now, friends must have the same mind; there must be an answering. Now, this answer is especially faith, when we believe, and from faith, sanctified obedience. That is called the restipulation or engagement of a good conscience to God.

When the promise is made, we engage ourselves to believe, and to live as Christians.

Use. Now from this, that there must be an answer in us, an engagement on our part, I beseech you, let us in general therefore know that we must *search our own hearts for the evidence of our good estate in religion.* Let us not so much search what Christ hath done, but search our own hearts how we have engaged ourselves to God in Christ, that we believe and witness our believing, that we lead a life answerable to our faith, renounce all but Christ. This mutual engagement is in the form in baptism, that was used by the apostles and by the ancient church; for we know that in the ancient church that they that were baptized, they were questioned, Do you believe? I do believe. Do you renounce the flesh, and the world, and devil? I do renounce them. These two questions were made. Now, when they answered this question from a good conscience, truly, faithfully, and sincerely, then they had right in all the good things by Christ. Something alway therefore in the church was required on our part. Not that we answer by our own strength, for it is the covenant of *grace.* Why is it a covenant of grace? Not only because the things promised are promised of grace, but because our part is of grace likewise. We believe of grace, and live holily of grace; every good thought is from grace; it is by grace that we are that we are. All is of grace in the new covenant, merely of grace. God requires not any answering by our strength, for then he should require light of darkness and life of death. There is nothing good in us. He requires obedience, that he may work it when he requires it. For his commands in the covenant of grace, they are operative and working. When he commands us to believe and obey, he gives us grace to believe and obey. It is ourselves that answer, but not from ourselves, but from grace. Yet notwithstanding let us make this use of it, let us search ourselves, though it be not from ourselves, that we answer God's promise by faith and his command by obedience; yet we must have this obedience, though from him, before we can challenge anything at God's hands. It is arrogant presumption to hope for heaven and salvation before we have grace to answer all God's promises and commands, by a good conscience.

To come more particularly to the words, some will have it, 'the questioning,' 'the demand' of a good conscience, but that follows the other; for when we answer truly the interrogatories in baptism, when we believe and renounce, then we may from a good conscience demand of God all the good in Christ. We may call upon him, and pray unto him, Hath not Christ died, and made peace between thee and us? And may we not triumph against all enemies when there is the answer of good conscience? If Satan lay anything to our charge, Christ died, and rose, and sits at the right hand of God: 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's people?' Rom. viii. 33. We may, with a heart sprinkled with the blood of Christ now ascended into heaven, answer all objections, and triumph against all enemies. We may go boldly to God, and demand the performance of his promises.

Hence comes all the spirit of boldness in prayer from the answer of a good conscience, for that draws all other after it. Now, to come more particularly to the words, 'the answer of a good conscience.' It would take up all the time to speak of conscience in general, and it were not to much purpose. I will take it as it serves my purpose at this time. A good conscience, in this place, is a conscience peaceable and gracious.

Peace and purity make up a good conscience. To make this clearer, there be three degrees of a good conscience, though the last be here meant especially. There is, first, a good conscience that is troubled, a troubled good conscience; and then a pacified good conscience, and then a gracious good conscience.

1. *A troubled good conscience* is when the Spirit by conviction opens to us what we are in ourselves. He opens our sins, and the danger and foulness of our sins, whereupon our conscience is terrified and affrighted. Therefore this good conscience, whereby we are convinced of our estate by nature, in itself it is a good conscience, and tends to good; for it tends to drive us to Christ. There is a good conscience therefore that hath terror with it.

2. The second degree of a good conscience is that that comes from the other; when we are convinced of sin, and of the misery that comes by sin, then that good conscience *speaks peace to us*. When God shines upon the conscience by his Spirit, from whence there is peace, that is a peaceable good conscience, for God takes this course. After he hath terrified conscience by his Spirit and word, then he offers in the gospel; and not only offers, but commands, us to believe. He offers all good in Christ, and commands us; and not only so, but invites us: 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary,' &c., Mat. xi. 28. Nay, he beseecheth us: 'We beseech you to be reconciled,' 2 Cor. v. 20. He takes all courses. Now, his Spirit going with these entreaties, he persuades the soul that he is our gracious Father in Christ Jesus. Christ hath suffered such great things; and he is God and man, he is willing and able to save us. Considering he is anointed of God for this purpose, hereupon conscience is satisfied, and doth willingly yield to these gracious promises. It yields to this command of believing, to these sweet invitings. This is a peaceable good conscience.

3. Hereupon comes, in the third place, *a gracious good conscience*, which is a conscience, after we have believed, that resolves to please God in all things; as the apostle saith, Heb. xiii. 18, 'We have a good conscience, studying to please God in all things.' We have a good conscience toward God and toward men. When the conscience is appeased and quieted, then it is fit to serve God, as an instrument that is in tune. An instrument out of tune yields nothing but harsh music; so when the soul and conscience is distempered, and not set at peace, it is not gracious. So now you see the order: there is a troubled good conscience, and a peaceable good conscience, and then a gracious heart; for while conscience is not at peace by the blood and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by considering him, and by application of him, there is no grace nor service of God with that heart; but the heart shuns God, it hates God, and murmurs against God. Men think, why should they do good deeds when they believe not? When they cast not themselves upon Christ, and when conscience is not sprinkled with the blood of Christ, they are able to do nothing out of the love of God; and 'whatsoever is not of faith and love, it is sin,' Rom. xiv. 23. The heart cannot but be afraid of God, and wish there were no God, and murmur and repine till it be pacified. That is the reason why the apostles, in the latter part of their epistles, they press conscience of good duties when they had taught Christians before and stablished them in Christ, because all duties issue from faith; if they come not thence, they are nothing. If there be first faith in Christ, then there will be a good conscience in our lives and conversations.

And from the gracious conscience comes the increase of a peaceable conscience. There must be peace before we can graciously renew our covenants to please God; but when we have both these, faith in Christ and a resolution to please God in all things, there comes an increase of peace; for then there is an argument to satisfy conscience, when first of all conscience goes to Christ, to the foundation. I have answered God's command; I have believed, and cast myself upon Christ; I have answered God's promise. He hath promised, if I do so, he will give me Christ with all his benefits; I have yielded the obedience of faith. Hereupon comes some comforts; here is the foundation of this obedience. But then when conscience likewise from this resolves to please God in all things, in the duties to God and man, hereupon comes another increase of peace, when I look to the life of grace in my own heart. For a working, careful Christian hath a double ground of comfort: one, in the command to believe, and in the promise, whether he hath evidences of grace or no; but when he hath power by the Spirit to lead a godly life, and to keep a good conscience in all things, then he hath comfort from the evidence of grace in his own heart, from whence an increase of peace comes. You see what a good conscience is here in this place: 'the answer of a good conscience.' I will not speak largely of it. To come a little further to the point.

Quest. How know we that a man hath a good conscience, a peaceable good conscience, when it is troubled? For here is the difficulty, a conscience is never so peaceable and gracious but there is a principle of rebellion in us, the flesh, that casts in doubtings, and stirs up objections, as indeed our flesh is full of objections against God's divine truth. There be seeds of infidelity to every promise, and of rebellion to every command in the word. How shall a man know that he hath a peaceable good conscience in the midst of this rebellion?

Ans. 1. Let him look *if the conscience answer God in the midst of opposition and rebellion.* My flesh and blood saith thus, My sins are great, and Satan lays it hard to my charge; yet notwithstanding, because God hath promised and commanded, I cast myself upon God. Let us ask our own hearts and consciences what they say to God, what is the answer to God. We see what Job saith: 'Though he kill me, yet I will trust in him,' Job xiii. 15; flesh and blood would have shewed its part in Job, as if God had neither respected nor loved him; yet when Job recovered himself, 'Though he kill me, I will trust in him.' So a man may know, though conscience be somewhat troubled; yet it is a gracious peaceable conscience if peace get the upper hand, and grace subdue corruption, when the conscience, so far as it is enlarged by God's Spirit, can check itself. 'Why art thou disquieted, O my soul?' Ps. xlii. 5. Why art thou troubled? Trust in God. Trust in God reconciled now in Christ. When conscience can lay a charge upon itself, and check itself thus, it is a sign that conscience hath made this gracious answer.

2. Again, one may know, though conscience be troubled somewhat, yet it is a gracious peaceable conscience *when it always allows of the truth of God in the inward man.* Whatsoever the flesh say, the word is good, the commandment is good, the promise is good; as St Paul saith, 'I allow the law of God in my inward man,' Rom. vii. 22. By this a man may know, though his peace be somewhat troubled, that yet, notwithstanding, there is the answer of a good conscience.

3. Again, *when a man can break out of trouble, and such an estate as the*

devil weakens our faith by; for he useth the troubles of the church, and our own troubles, to shake our faith, as if God did not regard us: now when conscience can rise out of this, as in Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Yet God is good to Israel; yet, my soul, keep silence to the Lord.' Though things seem to go contrary to a man, as if God were not reconciled, as if he had not part in Christ, 'yet, my soul, keep silence, and God is good to Israel.' This conflict shews that there is a gracious part in the soul, and that conscience is a gracious conscience. It is said here, it is 'the answer of a good conscience towards God.'

For conscience, indeed, hath reference to God, and that will answer another question; for conscience, as it performs holy duties, as it is a gracious conscience, it looks to God.

Quest. Whether may a man know, or how shall he know, that he doth things of conscience? whether he be in the state of grace, and doth things graciously?

Ans. He may; for why is conscience set in man but to tell him what he doth, with what mind he doth it, in what state he is? This is a power of the soul which conscience shews. A man may know what estate he is in, and whether he perform things graciously or no.

Quest. Now how shall a man know whether he doth things of conscience or no?

(1.) First, *Whatsoever the answer of conscience is, it is towards God.* If a man do things from reasons of religion, if a man be charitable to his neighbour, if he be just and good, if it be from reasons of religion, because God commands him, this is a good conscience. A good conscience respects God and his command. What we do for company or for custom is not from a good conscience. A good conscience doth things from God, with reasons from God, because he commands it. It is God's deputy in our hearts.

(2.) Again, what we do from a good conscience we do *from the inward man*, from an inward principle, from the inward judgment, because we think it is so, and from an inward affection. When we have not a right judgment of what we do, and do it not out of love, and from the inward man, we do it not out of a good conscience. What is done out of conscience is done from the inner man. Therefore in all our performances let us examine ourselves, not what we do, but upon what ground we do it, in conscience to God, to obey him in all things. I cannot dwell upon these things.

The answer of a good conscience, that saves us, together with baptism; when there is the answer of a good conscience, then baptism seals salvation. To come more near to the answer of a good conscience in baptism.

Obj. You will object, If the answer of a good conscience in baptism do all, and not the outward washing of the body, why are children baptized then; they cannot make the answer of a good conscience?

Ans. I answer, The place must be understood of those of years of discretion. For infants that die in their infancy we have a double ground of comfort concerning them. First, they are within the covenant. Have they not received the seal of the covenant, which is baptism? And however they actually answer not the covenant of grace by actual believing, yet they have the seed of believing, the Spirit of God in them, and God doth comprehend them by his mercy, being not able to comprehend him. Nay, we that are at years of discretion are saved by God's comprehending and embracing us. We are comprehended of him, as the child is of the

nurse or of the mother. The child holds the nurse, and the nurse the child. The child is more safe from falling by the nurse and the mother's holding of it, than by its holding of them. Those that are at years must clasp and grasp about Christ, but Christ holds and comprehends them; much more doth God comprehend those that are children, that are not able to comprehend him. For those that live to years of discretion, their baptism is an engagement and obligation to them to believe, because they have undertaken, by those that answered for them, to believe when they come to years; and if, when they come to years, they answer not the covenant of grace and the answer of a good conscience, if they do not believe, and renounce Satan, all is frustrate. Their baptism doth them no good, if they make not good their covenant by believing and renouncing. It is spoken, therefore, of those that are of years of discretion. We leave infants to the mercy of God. Those, therefore, that are at years of discretion must have grace to answer the covenant of grace by believing and renouncing. To come, therefore, to ourselves.

We that will answer to the covenant made in baptism must perform it, especially that that we then covenanted. What was that? We answered that we would believe. Dost thou believe? I believe every article of the faith. And do you renounce the devil and all his works? I do. Therefore, unless now we believe in Christ, and renounce the devil, we renounce our baptism. It doth us no good. There are divers kinds of people that overthrow their own baptism.

Those that live in sins against conscience, they do renounce their baptism in some sort, those that feed their corruptions; for in baptism we are consecrated in soul and body to God, we are given up to him, 'we are not our own,' 1 Cor. vi. 20; his name is called on us; we are called Christians. Therefore our eyes are not our own, our hands are not our own, our thoughts and affections are not our own. There must be a renouncing and a denial of all sin, as far as it is contrary to Christ's spirit. Those, therefore, that labour to feed their corruptions, what do they else so far but renounce their baptism, and under the livery of Christ serve the enemy of Christ, the devil, that they should renounce? Those that feed their eyes with seeing of vanity, and their ears with filthy discourse; those that suffer their feet to carry them to places where they infect their souls; those that, instead of renouncing their corruptions, feed them, and their hearts tell them they cherish those corruptions they should renounce by baptism: what shall we think of these? And yet they think to be saved by Christ; 'God is merciful,' and 'Christ died,' when they live in a continual renouncing of baptism.

For a use therefore of exhortation, if so be that this be the effectual baptism, the chief thing that we ought to stand on, this answer of a good conscience, then I beseech you let us all labour for this echo, for this answer: when God saith, 'Seek ye my face,' to answer, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek,' Ps. xxvii. 8; when he saith, 'I will be your God,' to answer, 'We will be thy people.' When he saith in the ministry, 'Believe,' to answer, 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief,' Mark ix. 24. Let us labour to echo: this holy echo is the answer in the covenant of grace.

This answer of our faith is set down in Scripture alway when it speaks of the estate of those that are in the covenant of grace. It is mentioned on our part that we take God for our God, and Christ for our Christ: 'My beloved is mine, and I am my beloved's,' Cant. ii. 16, and vi. 3. There is a mutual owning of both sides. Therefore, if we would answer

the covenant of grace, let us work our hearts to answer. When we hear in the ministry, and in the covenant of grace, answer, Lord, I desire to believe this; and when there is anything commanded, let our hearts answer, and desire God to bow our inward man to obedience, that we may be pliable. Let us labour to have that free spirit that holy David prays for, Ps. li. 12. That was stopped by reason of his sin; for when we renew sins against conscience, we stop the mouth of our prayers, that we cannot go to God; we stop the mouth of conscience, that we cannot go boldly to God; therefore he had then lost that freedom of spirit. Let us labour to be pliable to the Spirit, ready to answer God in all that we are exhorted to, and to yield the obedience of faith to all the promises. That is the state of those that are in the covenant of grace; there is the answer of a good conscience. Therefore let us resolve to take this course, if we would attain the answer of a good conscience.

First of all, labour *that our consciences may be convinced of the ill that is in us*, that we may have a good troubled conscience: first, that we may know thoroughly what our estate by nature is; and then labour, in the second place, *to have peace*, and then raise and renew our purpose to serve God in all things; and to try the truth of this, let us put interrogatories to ourselves; let us ask ourselves, Do I believe? do I not daub with my heart? do I obey? do I willingly cast myself into the mould of God's word, and willingly obey all that I hear? do I not deceive myself? Let us propound these interrogatories: 'God is greater than our conscience,' 1 John iii. 20. If we answer God with reservations, I will answer God in this, and not in this,—I will yield to religion as far as it may stand with my own lusts and advantage;—this is not the answer of a good conscience. What is done to God must be done all; what is done zealously and religiously, hath respect to all God's commandments and promises, to one thing as well as another. If our hearts tell us there are reservations from false grounds, here is not 'the answer of a good conscience.' Therefore let us search ourselves, and propound questions to ourselves, whether we believe and obey or no, and from what ground we do it.

And let us make use of our baptism upon all occasions, as thus,

1. *Satan hath two ways of tempting. One is, he tempts to sin, and then he tempts for sin*, to accuse our consciences to make a breach between God and us, that we dare not look upon God. When he tempts us, or our corruptions move us, or the world by allurements would draw us to any sin, let us think of our baptism, and the answer we have made there, and make use of it. Is this agreeable to the promise I made? Surely I have renounced this. Shall I overthrow my own promise? I make conscience to make good my promise to men, and shall I break with God? I have promised to God to renounce the flesh, the world, and the devil; to renounce all these corruptions. Let us have these thoughts when we are solicited to sin, when proud nature would have us set up the banner of pride. I have renounced these proud affections; I shall overthrow my baptism if I yield. And so for the enlarging of our estates, or for getting up to honour to please men's humours, to break the peace of my conscience. These things we have renounced, the world and the vanities of it in our baptism.

The life of many is nothing but a breach of their vow and covenant in baptism. How will they look at the hour of death, and the day of judgment, that God should keep his promise with them to give them life everlasting, when they never had grace to keep touch* with him, notwithstanding

* Qu. 'troth'?—ED.

ing their engagements in baptism and their so often repeating it at the communion, and their renewing of their vows when they have been sick? How can we look for performance on God's part, when we have not had grace to perform our part, but our whole life hath been a satisfying of our base lusts! Let us make that use in temptations to sin; let us fetch arguments against sin from our baptism, from the answer that we made then; for we must make good now that that was made then, or else it is in vain.

2. Again, *when we are solicited by Satan to be discouraged*, let us consider that we are baptized 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;' and consider that the promise is made whensoever we repent, without any exception of time, nay, though we have broke with God,—for Satan will use that as a chief weapon, 'Thou hast fallen, thou hast fallen,'—yet as it is Jeremiah iii. 1, *seq.* Though a man will not take his wife after a breach, yet God transcends us; he is God, and not man. Therefore, after breaches, if we yet answer his command and his promise,—for the command of believing is upon us while we live,—if we believe, and 'confess our sins, we shall have mercy,' if we come and cast ourselves upon Christ. Therefore, after relapses, let not Satan abuse them to make us despair. Baptism is a seal of our faith, and faith is enjoined us all the days of our life. All this time of life is a time of grace, and we are commanded to repent and believe. Let not Satan therefore discourage us after sin; let us go to our baptism. It is a seal to us of faith and repentance whensoever we believe and repent.

3. When we are solicited *to distrust in God for the things of this life any way*, as if God cared not for us, let us consider that we have answered, that 'we believe in God the Father Almighty;' therefore he is our Father, he knows what is good for us, and he loves us. He is an almighty God. It is an article of our faith that we have answered to: let us make it good upon all temptations in that kind. Doth not God care for us? He had an ark for Noah in the worst times, when the flood overwhelmed the whole world. So if there be the answer of a good conscience, he will have an ark for his Noahs, to save, and protect, and defend us; he is a Father Almighty. Let us know the grounds of our religion, the articles of our faith, the grounds and foundation of our faith. Let us consider the good things promised there, and consider withal that we have all engaged ourselves to believe those things, and to make use of our faith upon all occasions. Those that cannot read, if they have no other, let them look on these two books, the book of their baptism and the book of conscience. They would be sufficient to instruct them. Some people pretend ignorance. Consider what thou art baptized to: the grounds of religion; consider there what thou hast renounced; consider in particular whether this thing that thou art moved to be God's or the devil's command, and answer Satan and thy lusts by not answering of them; give them their answer, and tell them a good conscience must answer God's command and promise. But they must have their answer by denial, by this answer of a good conscience. Those that cannot read, and are not learned, let them make use of the learning of their baptism. There is a world of instruction and comfort, a treasury of it in baptism. I dare be bold to say, if any Christian, when he is tempted to any sin, to despair or discouragement, if he consider what a solemn promise he hath made to God in baptism, it would be a means to strengthen his faith, and to arm him against all temptations. There is no man sins, but there is a breach with God first in wronging the

promise he hath engaged himself to in baptism. We all that are here have been baptized, let us learn to make more conscience of this blessed sacrament than we have done, and let us labour to have the answer of a good conscience at all times.

What a comfort is it when our hearts and consciences makes a gracious answer to God in believing and obeying, and in renouncing all God's and our enemies! What a comfort is such a conscience! It will uphold us in sickness, in death, and at the day of judgment, in all ill times in this life. A conscience that hath answered God by believing his promises, and hath renewed the covenant to obey God in all things, what a wondrous peace hath it! Let the devil object what he can; let our unbelieving hearts object what they can, yet notwithstanding, if it be a renewed sanctified conscience, it can out of the privacy of its own act say, I have believed; I have cast myself upon God's mercy in Christ; I have renounced these motions, and suggestions, and courses, and though I be overcome with temptations, yet I heartily hate them. What a comfort is this!

Conscience, it is either the greatest friend or the greatest enemy in the world. It is the chiefest friend when it is privy to itself of this resolute answer, that it hath obeyed God in all things. Then conscience is our friend, it speaks to God for us at all times. Then again at the hour of death, what a comfort it is that we have this answer of a good conscience, especially at the day of judgment, when we can look God in the face. A sincere heart, a conscience that hath laboured to obey the gospel, and to keep covenant with God, it can look God in the face. For what in the covenant of grace goes for perfect obedience, but sincerity and truth? God requires that. When the heart can say with Hezekiah, 'Lord, thou knowest that I have walked perfectly before thee,' Isa. xxxviii. 3; Lord, I have believed, and laboured to express it in my life and conversation, though with much weakness, yet in truth; this sincerity will make us look God in the face, in the hour of death, and at the day of judgment, and in all troubles in this life.

A Christian that hath the answer of a good conscience, he hath Christ to be his ark in all deluges (*b*). Christ saves us not only from hell and damnation, but in all the miseries of this life. If anything come upon us for the breach of God's covenant,—as God threateneth, Lev. xxvi. 21, *seq.* 'to send war and famine,' &c., for the breach of his covenant,—what a comfort is it then for such as have kept the covenant! For then God hath an ark for such in ill times; for every deliverance in evil times, it comes from the same ground as the deliverance from hell doth. Why doth God deliver me from hell and damnation? Because he loves me in Christ, and that moves him to deliver me in evil times, if I keep a good conscience; and that love that gives me heaven, gives me the comforts of this life. If I labour to have this answer the apostle speaks of, what a comfort is this in the worst times?

Those that live in rebellion, and make no conscience of their vows and covenants to God, that they have made and repeated oftentimes, and renewed in taking of the Lord's supper, but go on still in their sins, alas! what comfort can such as these have! How can they look for an answer from God of any promise that he hath made, when their lives are rebellious. Their conscience tells them that their lives do not witness for God in keeping covenant with him, but they rebel against him. Their hearts tell them they cannot look to heaven for comfort. They carry a hell in their bosom, a guilty conscience; they do not labour to be purged by the blood of Christ, nor

labour for the Spirit of God to sanctify them, in renewing them to holy obedience to God. Those that have their conscience thus stained, especially that purpose to live in sin, they can look for nothing but vengeance from God. It is not known now who are the wisest people. In the times of trouble, and at the hour of death, at such times it will be known that they are the wisest people that have made conscience of keeping their covenant with God, of renewing their covenant with God, first, in all things that would serve him better, and then when they have renewed their covenant with God, as we have cause now indeed, if ever, to renew them, when we are warned by public dangers; or when we have cause to take occasion to renew our covenants that we made with God in baptism, to bind our consciences to closer obedience; and those that have renewed their covenant, and have grace to keep it, those are wise people. We see in the current of Scripture, in dangerous times there was still renewing of their covenants with God. And those that God delights in, he puts his Spirit into them, that they shall be able, by the help of his Spirit, to keep their covenant in some comfortable measure; and those God will choose and mark out in the worst times.

 NOTES.

(a) P. 480.—‘One of the chief of them, a great scholar, he will have the water itself to be elevated,’ &c. Query, Bellarmine? It is, however, a commonplace of the Baptismal controversy.

(b) P. 490.—‘He hath Christ to be his ark in all deluges.’ This recalls the title of one of Brooks’s most searching and valuable books, viz., his ‘Ark for all God’s Noahs in a Gloomy Stormy Day,’ 1662. G.