

# MEMORIAL VOLUME.

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## COVENANT RENOVATION

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“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.” Jer. 50: 5.

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## HUMILIATION FOR SIN A PREPARATION FOR ENJOYING DIVINE FAVOR.

BY REV. JAMES KENNEDY.

PSALM 106 : 6. "We have sinned with our fathers."

WHATEVER may be thought of the theory of Hengstenberg, that the 105th and the 106th psalms form two members of a trilogy, of which the 104th is the first, it is plain that these two psalms are most intimately connected, and relate to the same subject. Perhaps it would be more natural to regard them as a double psalm—a morning and evening hymn—having the same subject—God's ways with man, as set forth in his dealings with the nation of Israel. The 105th presents this subject from the divine stand-point, the 106th, from the human. The former is replete with the infinite condescension, wisdom, goodness, long-suffering, faithfulness and grace of Jehovah—the latter with the ingratitude, folly, waywardness, and inexcusable wickedness and rebellion of man; and together they bring the lights and shades of the divine government into clearer manifestation by their vivid contrasts. As the artist places behind the object to be photographed a screen, on which, as a background, the lights and shades of his pictures may be more distinctly visible, so here human wickedness is spread out, that on its darkness the glory of divine wisdom, faithfulness and longsuffering may have a more glorious manifestation. As a few tons of water are raised from earth, and spread out as a dark canvas, on which to

paint the glories of the bow, and every drop in that weeping cloud has prismatic power to exhibit more distinctly the colors in the sun's rays—so in the story of Israel here, there is raised up and spread out before our view, a dark mass of humanity, and on all its various aspects and workings are to be seen, reflected in brighter colors, the glories of the divine character and government. At the same time the ingratitude and inexcusable wickedness of man, and the horrid character of his deep depravity, become more strikingly manifest, when contemplated in the light of the divine glory shining on them.

The practical application of these great principles to ourselves in our present circumstances, is easily made. We realize and enjoy more of God at any time, the deeper, clearer and more impressive the views we have of our own sinfulness ; and to labor after and diligently seek such humbling views of ourselves, is, at any time, the best preparation for more enlarged manifestations and gracious experience and enjoyment of God. As has been beautifully said, “ All gracious experience of God is like the rainbow, beams from heaven in drops from earth.”

How seasonable, then, the exercise for which we meet ! We are hoping and expecting enlarged manifestations of divine favor in connection with a season of covenanting and renewed communion. Can anything be more suitable, then, than that we follow the example of the godly, who in past times have gone before us in such work, and meditate deeply and frequently on our own exceeding sinfulness, and its enormous aggravations, that our hearts may be duly affected, and from a realizing sense of our

own criminality before God we may confess, "We have sinned with our fathers?"

Consider here, I. The Confession.

The confession has regard to three things: sin, sin which we feel *we* have committed, and, sin aggravated by its having been "with our fathers."

1. It regards sin.

There are many terms employed in Scripture to denote what is morally evil or wrong, before God, in its different degrees and shades of guilt. Sin is one of these, and like other terms employed, as, iniquity, transgression, trespass, error, wickedness, etc., has always reference to a standard of obedience. "For sin is the transgression of the law." Without correct views, therefore, of the law, there can be no just idea of the sinfulness of sin. It is from knowing that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, just and good," and being able to say, "For we know that the law is spiritual," that we come to add, "but I am carnal and sold under sin." Besides, however, a knowledge of the absolute perfection and universal extent of the law, it helps us to clearer views of sin to know exactly the *form* of law against which our sin has been committed. Law may exist in one of three forms. First, law absolute, or the will of the Creator absolutely enjoining or impressing upon the creature, as a sovereign, a rule of obedience. Law in this aspect, consists of two elements, a precept and a penalty. Secondly, law economic, or law in a covenant form. This form of law differs from the absolute in two respects. First, it is proposed to the subject and receives his assent, and, secondly, a promise is added to

the precept and penalty to encourage obedience. Under this form of law we know the human family was originally placed, and from certain hints contained in the Scriptures, it is highly probable that this was the form under which angels were also placed at their creation. That the laws, under which they were to serve, had their assent, seems implied in what is predicated of their obedience, "that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word," and that they serve under a promise, is deducible from the fact that they shall be judged, and if judged, of course, rewarded. "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" The God-man judge, with acclamations of assent from the justified throng of redeemed saints, shall, no doubt, on the great day of assize, decree and proclaim a reward of increased honor and happiness to holy angels for the diligence wherewith they have labored to promote all the ends contemplated in the covenant of grace, as well as sentence to punishment those fallen spirits who have labored to frustrate God's gracious purpose. Now this form of law, the economic, violated and taking effect, just constitutes man's present moral standing and condition. Its precept broken, and ability longer to obey it on his part gone—its penalty incurred and in part inflicted—its promise lost—whilst from having had, and still having, a measure of assent, on his part, that it is good, his mouth is stopped, and he is brought in guilty before God, and nothing remains to him but a "fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation."

As, however, the confession before us is made by God's people in a new relation, that of children in Christ,

there must be another form of law against which their sins are committed. This is law mediatorial. "Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ." Whilst unbelievers still remain under law, with precept violated, penalty incurred, and promise lost, in the economy of grace, through the work of Christ, believers are brought into a new relationship to law. In Christ they are under law with its precept fulfilled by perfect and accepted obedience, its penalty borne, and its promise made sure. It may be asked in their case, "Wherefore then serveth the law?" It was added as the rule of the Mediator's government, that by it we may render obedience to Christ, and attain sanctification of nature and life. The sins of a believer, therefore, after conversion, are transgressions of this new form of law—law mediatorial. They do not and cannot destroy his state of justification, for that is founded on the perfect obedience of his surety, and "there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." They do not endanger his safety, for in Christ he is not in a state of probation, but "has passed from death unto life." They do not make void the promise, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God, by us." But they strike against the authority of God as put forth through the mediatorial government; against our new relationship to him in the covenant of grace; against his purpose, love and grace in our salvation; against the ends of Christ's sufferings and government; against the work and presence of the Spirit within us; and against our holy calling and our manifold obligations to obey and honor our Saviour and

Lord The sins of believers, then, though not condemning, are awfully aggravated ; indeed, more aggravated than sins against any other form of law, being not only in direct opposition to God's authority, but to his whole object and design in the plan of redemption and its mediatorial administration.

2. The confession regards sin which we feel *we* have committed. In morals, as in physics, it is sometimes difficult to realize the connection between general principles and facts. The boy who has been taught in his class-room that the law of gravitation is always holding him down to the planetary centre, little realizes the power of such a law in his leaps, gambols and gymnastic efforts during his hours of play. In like manner the mind may assent to the formula, "that action and reaction are equal and contrary," yet can hardly credit the fact that the result of that law is, that whatever we touch acts back on us as strongly as we act on it ; that in every footfall, for example, the earth strikes back upon the walker a blow with the same force as that wherewith itself is struck. This arises from our ignorance of the manner in which physical laws apply and operate. So also it is in morals. We are quite ready, in a general way, to admit the existence of law, and that we have transgressed it, and thereby become sinners. But when we come to facts and particulars, to specific sins, alas ! it often turns out that we have no proper sense of sin at all. If questioned, men will readily admit "O yes, we are sinners, great sinners." But ask, well, what have you done? What so grievous sins have you committed? What is wrong in your life? Are you drunk



ards, Sabbath-breakers, dishonest, liars? They will probably answer with righteous indignation, no, no! and perhaps regard themselves as grossly insulted. They are willing to admit sin in the abstract, so long as you do not come to particulars, and most devoutly repeat, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint," while they neither feel nor will admit one symptom of the moral malady. Now, there is no proper confession of sin, without feeling wherein *we* have transgressed, "*We* have sinned with our fathers."

Applying these principles to our present circumstances, should not we, about to enter into covenant with God, ministers, elders and members of the church, seek out and confess those sins more particularly connected with the position we occupy, and the performance of the duties to which we have engaged?

And first, in respect to the sins of ministers. Among many things that might be noticed, the following are suggested for consideration, of course without personal knowledge or personal reference: Should it not be to us a most humbling consideration and a special sin to be confessed, how little we have really felt the value of perishing souls, and how little we have been in earnest for their salvation; how much self-seeking in an office which we have declared that we have been moved to undertake, not from any selfish motive, but for "the glory of God and the edification of the church;" how little close walking with God, too, in the duties of our office, and how little habitual spirituality, and earnest devotedness of end, aim and pursuit, in doing our work! In rising from the perusal of the biographies of such

men as Payson, or McCheyne, or of such books as James' "Earnest Ministry," how often we have been ready to exclaim, have we been living as ministers of Christ at all! Can Christ recognize us at all! Again, in prosecuting our studies so as to keep up with the attainments of the age, and be able to refute the errors that are constantly being propagated in the regions of theology, philosophy, literature and science, as well as to have always something new, as well as old, out of the treasury, and thus always maintain that forward position in relation to the people, that will enable us to be really teachers, how imperfectly we have performed our duty! Yielding up ourselves to slothful indolence, or wasting time in unprofitable pursuits, or engrossed with wordly interests, and neglecting the aid of the vast mass of biblical literature, that in our day is courting us to the investigation of every Scripture question, how often have we been very imperfect in our attempts to feed the flock of Christ according to the requirements of the times! In reading the discourses of some of our persecuted fathers, prepared under circumstances so unfavorable as theirs must have been, we have often felt, in this respect, our great shortcomings. Take up, for example, the sermons of the youthful martyr Renwick, and consider under what circumstances, discourses that yet please and thrill as well as edify, were produced. When hiding in some mountain refuge with nothing but the shelter of a rock, or burrowing in some natural cavern, or artificial retreat excavated in the earth, with furniture no better than a couch of heath from the hillside; without books, or study, or help, save like the dreamer

in Bedford jail, his Bible, he produced sermons which for matter, arrangement, and copiousness of illustration, would not only compare favorably with the best specimens of our own day, but which put to shame many of our lame attempts, notwithstanding all our unprecedented facilities. Again, how satisfied we have been with the mere routine, and often the very perfunctory performance of ministerial duty, without either watering our sowing with our tears, or cherishing it into success by our loving labors and prayers, and so little concerned as scarcely to look back for results! And as we continue our search, how much wasted time and opportunities of doing good, neglected and lost, come up to reprove and humble us! How often we may feel as once did the noble Chalmers, who, having spent a most agreeable evening in general conversation with a British officer of high rank, in the house of a friend, was shocked, next morning, to learn that his pleasant companion of the previous evening had, during the intervening night, passed away into the eternal state, and gave utterance to his feelings to this effect: "We are enjoined to 'be instant in season and out of season.' A wise precept; for who can tell what is really most seasonable? If I had pressed on my friend last evening his eternal interests, it might have been thought unseasonable, but how seasonable it would appear now, when, alas! it is too late." And how often, likewise, have we all lost precious opportunities by false modesty, sinful delicacy, or careless indifference, and often, when God has set before us an open door of usefulness, we have failed to enter in till too late.

In holiness and consistency of conversation and de-

meanor, too, before our people, and before the world, we have much for which to be humbled. How unlike Jesus, our Master, have we been as we have mingled with society, and entered into the enjoyments of social life! How unlike him whose language never once bordered on levity, who never uttered a jest, whose whole bearing was ever in keeping with his mission, and every scrap of whose conversation, however casual, embodied some glorious thought, or had some spiritual aim, and lofty moral, and in whose whole recorded life you cannot find one element low, trifling or carnal, but all pure, grand and ennobling! In all these and in many other respects, fathers and brethren, may we not realize a sense of sin as we confess "we have sinned with our fathers?"

In the same way, may not ruling elders feel that connected with the manner in which the duties of their office have often been performed, there is much for which to be humbled? Paul says of elders in relation to Christ's flock: "Over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers," and speaks of the performance of their duty thus, "for they watch for your souls as they who must give an account." Yet, alas! what oversight; what watching, in many cases, has there been? What account can many of our elders render of the spiritual state of the flock? How often elders cannot tell whether those committed to their care have been in the pasture at all, or in attendance upon ordinances! Perhaps they have not been in attendance themselves, or have not had a sufficient sense of their responsibility to Christ, to look after his sheep. How few elders make conscience

of statedly visiting those under their charge, to inquire into their spiritual condition, to press upon them the claims of religion, to deal with the young, to quicken the careless, to encourage the weak and timid, and really to do the duty of their office! Many, you would imagine, regard the office of ruling elder in the church rather as a sort of honorary distinction, or ornamental appendage, than a vital element, having vital and highly important functions to fulfil, in the spiritual body. Nor should elders in their confession forget how frequently the spirit of emulation, wrath and strife has been at work, and how they have often been "carnal, and walked as men," and how these things have, through their bickerings, marred the peace of the church, hampered the pastor in his work, and kept back efforts to do good. Instead of sustaining their pastor, elders sometimes have discouraged his heart, and when, perhaps, burdened and tempted, he has come to his public work, have met him, not with the soothing anodyne, but the corrosive caustic, and by bitter strife or hostile criticism, have marred, rather than promoted the success of his labors. Moreover, with means, talents, and time, and every facility for doing good, how many elders seem never to have comprehended that there is any obligation upon them to attempt any evangelical labor in the world, or that Christian usefulness is among the responsibilities of their office!

And have not both ministers and elders much sin to confess in connection with the manner in which the work of the Lord has been conducted in church courts? How often have they imported into the courts of the

Lord's house their own quarrels and disputes, their likes and dislikes, and by party spirit and faction made, what would otherwise have been, according to promise, a "quiet habitation," a sort of bear-garden, where men have fought in personal encounters, or in organized parties sought to achieve miserable victories, as if they had been foes! One would suppose that in a church such as ours, with a creed so explicit, and discipline and order so well defined, it would be almost impossible for much difference of opinion to exist, or disputes to arise. But the fact is, in all churches where they have existed, these lamentable strifes have invariably originated outside, in some misunderstanding or unkindly feeling, confined perhaps at first to a few, but which, like the snow-ball, by a little rolling, attains to dimensions and develops into a party, and then some technicality or shibboleth, becomes an ostensible *casus belli*, and church courts are turned into a battle-field, whilst all the time "the war and the fighting come from the lusts that war in the members." How sad in "the house of God, which is the church of the living God," to hear such expressions as frequently meet us in reading reports of ecclesiastical proceedings, such as, "our side of the house," and "your side of the house!" "those acting with us," and "those acting with you!" "our party" and "your party," etc., suggesting the question, "is Christ divided?" And sadder still that even judicial deliverances and decisions have sometimes been the result of personal feeling, or of maddened passions, and men have been judging after the lusts of their own hearts, when using the great and dreadful name of the church's Head.

And, perhaps, it may not be out of place here, before many of the members of the church, who may be following us in this work, to say to them, you also should endeavor to feel that you are not without sin that should be remembered in the confessions uttered to day. One aspect alone, however, we would notice, of the sin of our members calling for humiliation, viz., wherein they may have failed fully and consistently to maintain their position as members in the Reformed Presbyterian Church. We are aware that generally our members have a very high idea of the superior excellency of our position, and are delighted to hear it, in public, defined and defended. They like, they often say, to hear our ministers always preach like Covenanters, and not fail to let the world know who we are and what we are. A little testimony-bearing in fact. Well, sympathizing deeply with such a feeling, we would only ask our members, Have you been practically carrying out the principle?

In the first place, have you been living your testimony? Is your life a testimony? It has been said truly that men will argue, and dispute, and fight, and die for religion, and do every thing but live for it. Again, have you, according to your means and opportunities, been sustaining the church, and co-operating with her, as you should, in her efforts to diffuse and extend the principles of her testimony? Again, have you been acting toward your fellow members as companions and brethren in tribulation and in the testimony of Jesus Christ? The want of the spirit of brotherly kindness and charity, is one of the most glaring defects in our covenanted Zion. How little warmth of affection, care for each other, in-

terest in each others welfare, and readiness to make sacrifices for each other, do we manifest, though John declares we ought "to lay down our lives for the brethren!" With all our professions we fall immeasurably short in brotherly kindness, affection for each other, mutual forbearance and a forgiving spirit, and readiness to assist and relieve each other, of the attainments in many religious communities with a less orthodox creed than our own. And again, how is your testimony brought to bear upon your families? Are your children trained in our principles and usages? Are they acquainted with our standards and familiar with our literature, or do they know Tennyson and Longfellow better than the Confession and Testimony, and the contents of the last sensation in the world of fiction better than the "Scots Worthies" and the "Cloud of Witnesses?" In how many such practical inconsistencies may we all find enough for which to be humbled!

3. The confession regards sin as aggravated by having been committed "with our fathers."

Into the economic arrangement, originally made for the government of the human family, the principle of representative responsibility largely entered. Adam, the natural head of the race, was constituted its representative head, and hence not only made responsible to God for the good behavior of all his descendants, but these descendants were made liable to suffer for any error or mistake he might commit as their representative governor. This principle underlies all government. It is recognized everywhere as just—the ruler responsible for the behavior of his subjects, and the subjects liable to suffer



for the mistakes and governmental errors of the ruler. It follows of course that all Adam's descendants would thus have been responsible to him, not only in their individual capacity, but in all the relations and connections they might form, all of which, whether natural or contracted, he would have made subservient to the ends of his government. When Adam's failure involved the race in guilt and misery, it pleased God to renew the same form of government over men, on the same principle, in the "last Adam," so that the whole human family is now "under the law to Christ." This was shadowed forth in the theocracy established in Israel. The supreme rule was God's. A divinely appointed judge or ruler was to represent God, to whom the tribes were under law as to God's representative, whilst in the arrangement of tribes, families, rulers of thousands, of hundreds, and of tens, all responsible to the judge, the system was graded so as to reach the humblest member of the commonwealth. Under Christ's government, therefore, as well as under Adam's, representative responsibility includes *natural* representation, the result of natural relation. Hence parents are responsible for the education and moral training of their children, and one generation covenants, contracts, and acts representatively for the generations following, whilst remote generations enjoy the fruits of their ancestors' obedience, are credited with their well-doing, or punished for their transgressions. Thus Abraham covenanted for posterity ; Israel, at Sinai, engaged for following generations ; Levi was credited with tithes paid by Abraham, and the generation in our Lord's day made to suffer for the blood shed by many

preceding generations. Besides, the government of the second Adam being not only over individuals, but over corporate bodies, as churches and nations, which have a continuous identity from age to age, notwithstanding the changes going on continually in their constituent elements, he may deal with such bodies at any one period, for all time past or all time to come. Hence such corporate entities are often spoken of not by the historic *they* of the past, but the *we* of continuous present being, and what has occurred in the past or shall occur in the future is thus identified with their whole existence. Thus in Psalm 66, the passage of the Red Sea is connected with the generation in the time of David. "There did *we* rejoice in him." So Hosca says of the transaction with Jacob in Bethel that it was a dealing with the race. "He found him in Bethel, and there he spake with *us*," 12 : 4. And Paul, though he knew that "the day of the Lord was not at hand," connects it with his own generation, "*we* which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord."

It is easy to see on this principle, how the obligation of moral covenants descends on posterity, and how breaches of covenant may be visited on generations following. Also that when our fathers' sins are approved and copied, their mistakes perpetuated, and their courses of defection approved and followed, it is a righteous thing for God to "visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." To have sinned with our fathers, then, increases our danger, renders sin thus perpetuated more difficult to break off, and intensifies the influence of our example for evil on posterity, and is such a frightful

aggravation of our own sin, that we should seek repentance for it to-day in the sight of God.

II. Our adopting the confession practically implies,

1. The judging of ourselves before God that we may not be judged. When Daniel sought mercy from God in Israel's restoration, and Nehemiah led the returned captives to renew their relationship to God, both made historical confession of sin. "O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee." Such a confession is intended, as it were, to take home judgment to ourselves, that divine judgments may be stayed from off the penitent, and is the only way of realizing the language of Phinehas, "Now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord." "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."

2. Such confession vindicates the character and government of God in exercising toward us his clemency and grace. In it we take home to ourselves the whole blame of sin and its consequent misery, saying, "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel."

3. Such confession, apprehending the provisions of the covenant of grace and realizing pardon, gives boldness in claiming all the benefits of renewed relationship to God. God, for sin, "drove out the man," and placed a minister of justice and a sword of justice, as emblems that he could not return to God and life by the broken covenant of works. That sword being now quenched in the blood of our surety, we know that "if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Therefore "we have access with boldness into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

4. Such confession promotes a suitable frame in which to covenant with God. In the new covenant into which God promises to take us, Heb. 8: 10-12, there are four elements: the law put into our hearts, the subject matter of the covenant; a new relation to God, its privilege; knowledge, its frame; and a proviso of pardon, our security for the future. Now our confession has a bearing on each of these. It works a frame of humility and dependence so that we accept all of free grace. It owns and accepts the law and truth of God as holy and good, and conforms us thereto. It renounces our connection with the covenant of works and accepts God in the better covenant. It teaches the true view to take of God and ourselves in the transaction, and it apprehends God as a contracting party, as one with whom "there is forgiveness," thus preventing us from attempting to frame anew with God, as many do, a covenant of works, but, rejoicing in the ample security we have in God's covenant for the future, it brings home to us, in all its comfort, his own divine assurance, "For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."