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Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel, Brighton on 7th June 1995

"Have respect unto the covenant..." Psalm 74:20

This prayer of the Psalmist Asaph is a prayer of faith indeed, indited in his heart by the Holy Spirit. It is most peculiarly sweet, suitable and precious in the times and conditions that are spoken of in this Psalm. It was indeed a time of very great and deep distress to God's little remnant. Everyone who is taught by the Spirit well knows and feels that they stand in a state of complete and utter unworthiness of the least notice of the God of heaven. There is nothing in us that would call forth God's respect toward us; we are sinners. But He can and does have respect unto His people, as they are in Christ their covenant Head.

Here we find a people in very deep distress, oppression, darkness and difficulty; their foes and enemies were destroying all that was dear to the remnant of God. Although there was confession of their own sinnership, they needed ground upon which to plead with God, distinct from anything that could be found in themselves.

We will attempt to look at these few words uttered by the Psalmist: 'Have respect unto the covenant.' First to notice what covenant it is, unto which God has respect; secondly to notice a little of what we are to understand by God having respect unto the covenant. Lastly, what will be the happy lot and portion of that person who, being enabled to plead with God upon this ground is given hope that he will receive help from a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God of Israel. 'Have respect unto the covenant.'

This certainly and surely is that covenant of grace which was drawn up between the Eternal Three, before ever the earth was. It is those settlements and precious agreements, that were unalterably settled by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit on the account of, and for the benefit of the election of grace. This wonderful covenant is an eternal covenant that had no beginning and shall have no ending. Every particle of it – the agreement, the things agreed upon, the conditions, and the blessed benefits of this covenant – is suitable to and is blessedly settled upon the election of grace. One hymnwriter expresses a little of this wonderful matter when he says:

*All is settled,
And my soul approves it well. (582)*

It is a wonderful thing when we are truly brought to approve and plead, trust and hope, in the covenant God of Israel – He whose precious word may be pleaded, and whose character may be trusted in, at all times of deepest distress, and under the sense of greatest unworthiness. What can we bring, what can we say, what can we plead, in regard to ourselves, to move this good and gracious God toward us mercifully, graciously and kindly? *Nothing* in ourselves. It is the name of Jesus alone. It is that which He has done for His people, according to the precious conditions and the promises of His covenant of grace. What do we understand by grace? What is the character and nature of grace? It is the undeserved and unmerited favour of God. Just simply explained – God's free and sovereign favour bestowed upon the worst of sinners.

Now it is indeed a blessed and wonderful truth that God does, and always will, have respect unto the covenant of grace. He cannot, He will not forget this precious thing. But what a difference there is between the mere doctrine, fact and truth of the matter, and being favoured and blessed to feel our personal interest in the benefit of it – to feel that God will have respect unto the covenant regarding *us* personally. To feel that He will freely and all-sufficiently bestow upon us such salvation and grace

to help in time of need; such light in our darkness; such a sweet sense and realisation of God's glory, as displayed in the covenant of grace.

It is in respect to the covenant of grace that God first begins to save His people. But that covenant of grace is not at first revealed to them. We come first, in our measure, under the covenant of works and we learn a little of what that is and what that means – that there is not the slightest vestige of hope for us in that covenant.

Let us try to look a little at God's having respect unto this covenant, and what it is therein that He does have respect unto. The first and the most important thing is this: He has respect unto the Mediator of this covenant, Jesus Christ. He who took our nature, and came into this world that He might secure all the benefits of this covenant, by fulfilling the terms of it perfectly and completely, on the behalf and account of His own people. He is that blessed and glorious Daysman Mediator, who stands between God and sinners, sinners and God. It was this that Job, in his deep trouble, darkness and distress, desired to know something of. I suppose there is none to equal Job in the depths of trouble, in soul, body, circumstances, losses, difficulties, oppressions and distresses, and he says in one place: "Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both." (Job 9:33) Well friends, God in His infinite goodness and unspeakable lovingkindness has provided in the covenant of His grace a Mediator. What a plea for a sinner – 'Have regard unto Thy covenant. Have regard unto the Mediator, regard to Jesus Christ who has fulfilled the law for His people, who has died for their sins, who has gained an absolute victory over sins, death, hell, devil, world and every enemy and oppressor! 'Ah, look upon Thy Son, do look upon Thy anointed. I am nothing but a poor hell-deserving wretch, but O I would plead, I would seek help to plead the worthiness of Jesus. O look upon Thy Son and have respect unto the Mediator of this covenant and His perfect, flawless work.' He has brought in an everlasting righteousness and has wrought out a way of unailing and unchanging salvation.

Secondly – Have respect unto the *blood* of Thy covenant – that precious blood, the blood of Christ, infinite in its value and its worth, that by which He has been pleased to seal and ratify this covenant, so that it is binding and unailing and unchanging. That is a precious word in one of the prophets: "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." (Zechariah 9:11-12)

Now what a plea this is for a poor sinner, what a prevailing plea when the Holy Spirit enables us, by faith, to trust in and plead the precious blood of Christ and all that comes to us through that blessed channel. O how many times perhaps you have repeated the prayer of the hymnwriter, not vain repetition, but from the depths of the heart in felt need:

*Mercy, through blood, I make my plea;
O God, be merciful to me! (385)*

That is for God to have respect to the covenant, in regard to the value, preciousness and blessedness of the blood of Jesus, the blood of the covenant, the work of the covenant.

Thirdly, 'Have respect unto the covenant' in the manifestation and demonstration of the eternal, unchanging and unailing *faithfulness* of God regarding it. O what a word, what a foundation, is the immutable faithfulness of God, as a covenant-making God and a covenant-keeping God! O, this cannot fail; what a foundation it is for a poor sinner to rest upon. One simple illustration: we may esteem a person a faithful character – that he is as good as his word and that he will punctually fulfil that which he says he will do, so that we do not suspect his character. But it is when he is pleased to

do as he has engaged to do, that we have we evident proof and manifestation of that person's faithfulness.

How much more is this the case where God is concerned. He has made a covenant and He is pleased to demonstrate His faithfulness in keeping that covenant in every jot, tittle and iota thereof. There will be times in our experience, if we are interested in this, when we shall need and desire to call upon God, that He would demonstrate His goodness to us personally according to His covenant.

Now a few things in regard to this covenant. God is pleased to have respect unto it: 'Have respect unto the covenant.' Covenant mercy – O, what a necessary, vital thing; that which will make the heart of a sinner glad; that which will overwhelm him with a sense of God's goodness, faithfulness and kindness to him. The benefits of this covenant are secured, and the channel opened, by the finished work of Christ, He who has kept the terms and conditions of it for the benefit of His people. The benefits are bestowed in harmony with the conditions spoken of therein.

Covenant mercy; this can never be spoken of too much and we can never seek it too much, for if we are in any degree, in the spiritual aspect of it, in the solemn and grievous condition spoken of in this Psalm, and know very well that we are unworthy of God's notice or His help or His goodness, then mercy will suit our case and condition. Sovereign, free, super-abounding, unfailling, oft-repeated covenant mercy. Now for God to have respect unto the covenant is for Him to be merciful unto us personally, upon our earnest petition and cry unto Him for His help, though we do indeed deserve hell. On a number of occasions in my experience I have been brought to this point very keenly – to know that upon the ground of my deserts and of God's justice, hell is my deserved portion. But now upon the ground of covenant mercy a poor sinner may plead for God's favour, and plead that He will bring him to heaven at last. And he obtains the thing he has petitioned for, upon the ground of mercy and mercy alone, *covenant mercy*. There can be no hindrance whatsoever, to God freely showing and manifesting His mercy upon the terms of this covenant, for Jesus Christ has opened the channel, and mercy flows newly down to poor, wretched, ruined man.

The Psalmist David had a sweet experience of this, he needed it every day; *we do*, but do we feel it? It is a wonderful mercy if we *do* feel our need of it, and like the Psalmist, prove that God's mercy is continually bestowed upon us, both in soul and circumstance. The good man proved by experience that His mercy, God's mercy, endureth for ever. O, it is never-failing mercy, because it is covenant mercy; and after he was restored from his woeful fall, he rejoiced in the judgment and mercy of God. May we be enabled then, to see and to plead this precious matter: 'Have respect unto the covenant,' have respect unto Thy covenant of mercy - and that toward me.

Have respect unto the *righteousness* of the covenant. Covenant righteousness, that which is so flawless, so perfect, so glorious, so acceptable to God Himself, and which is to be freely bestowed upon poor, guilty, ungodly, unrighteous, fallen, ruined sinners. What a favour! *What* a favour to feel to be clothed in that glorious robe – without seam, without spot – Christ's righteousness. And how provided? Why, He kept the law. He kept it without slip or fall or deficiency; He has honoured it, magnified it and made it honourable, and this was one of the conditions of the covenant, that He should so do.

Now what a difference there is in us, wretched sinners, seeking to rest upon our own obedience! and when God the Spirit is pleased to deal with us and to teach us, to cause us and enable us to rest upon the obedience of Christ, and to plead with God. Yes, and to say indeed, feelingly and without reserve; 'I am unrighteous, ungodly, but I plead an interest in the obedience of Christ.' What plea have we? What have we, to come before God with? What have we to move Him to deal with us

mercifully, kindly and graciously? Well, *nothing!* Our safe and only way, is to plead the name of Jesus:

*Here's my claim, and here alone;
None a Saviour more can need;
Deeds of righteousness I've none;
No, not one good work to plead;
Not a glimpse of hope for me,
Only in Gethsemane. (802)*

'Have respect unto the covenant.'

Now another precious consideration regarding this covenant is all the benefits secured by Jesus and promised by the God of Israel, the covenant God of Israel. O how sweet, how pleadable, how precious are God's covenant promises! They are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, not one shall fail, not one can fail. You say, I believe it, but has God promised me anything? Am I within the bounds of this blessed covenant of grace? Do the promises belong to me? Has God been pleased to grant me at any time, to feel that He has given me ground for expectation and hope, on account of His promise made over to me?

There is a sense in which a poor sinner may still plead with God, to have respect unto the promises of the covenant, as they are addressed to particular *characters*. They are not general promises, they are not promiscuous, they are not for all and sundry, they are special and particular; they are spoken to characters. Is it not a wonderful thing to be encouraged, in regard to God's Word, when the Holy Spirit is pleased to grant His light and some sweet measure of sealing relative to it, and as we read God's Word, it describes us better than we can ourselves? And we can honestly say, that is me! – why, that verse exactly sets forth my feelings, that is just where I am! And we see that God has spoken comfortable words to that character, and this encourages us to plead with Him, that He would confirm us concerning that promise, and do for us personally what He has promised to do for people in our condition. For we cannot rest upon generalities. We cannot take things on trust, we want a better experience, not an experience of deductions. We want God to speak to our hearts and say 'I have loved *thee*, I have redeemed *thee*, I promise thee that thou shalt see my glory at last.' Now if we have got a promise indelibly impressed upon our poor hearts, if that has been sealed there by the blessed Spirit of God, who is the earnest of the inheritance until the time of the redemption of the purchased possession, will God reprove us for pleading that promise? No, He will not if He has given it. He will not reprove us for waiting upon Him and pleading that He will fulfil it all our journey through; for, my friends, if we have a promise – and that is the important thing – if we have a promise, then that is for eternity. God does not change His mind, He does not say one thing one day and something different another: God stands to His own word and will fulfil His promise to His own glory. He is an unalterable God and the covenant is unalterable. It is an everlasting covenant, from eternity to eternity.

Now we have plenty of seasons in our experience, if we are among God's people, when we shall call upon God to have respect unto the covenant, to remember His covenant promises, covenant mercies, and covenant undertakings. We shall have to plead that He will save to the end and to the uttermost; that He will uphold us; that He will keep us from falling; that He will forgive us our sins for Jesus' sake; that He will receive us graciously according to His covenant promise and engagement. O, this word suits a sinner well. It suits unworthy, poor sinners well. It suits one in trouble very well – one who is caused to come before God and fall down before Him and acknowledge and confess that

he has sinned and done evil in His sight, and is no more worthy to be called His son, and more unworthy than ever that he should receive of His bounty.

I would say to any who may be secretly nurturing the thought that the day will come when they will be worthy of some demonstration of God's goodness to them: O, what hopeless ground! Sinner, when do you think you will ever be worthy of God's favour? Why, the answer is never, no never! The only worthiness, the only merit, the only standing ground, and the only hope is in Jesus Christ the covenant Head, the glorious Mediator, the precious Saviour. In Him who, by His perfect and glorious work, has settled for ever the benefits of this covenant upon the election of grace. It cannot fail because it does not rest in the least degree whatsoever upon man or flesh; no, it depends wholly and solely upon Jesus Christ and "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth" (Isaiah 42:4) and have brought forth judgment unto truth. O then may we be truly privileged and favoured, to enter sweetly into this blessed covenant of God's grace in experience and feeling, and be enabled to plead it.

Lastly the thief who found God's favour was in this covenant, and his name had been in this covenant from all eternity. It was therefore utterly impossible that he should fail of receiving its benefits, or that he should do anything, or sin so basely as to make his interest void; no, that was not possible. No matter how great a sinner we may be, if our names are in the Lamb's book of life, if we are in the covenant, then all is settled. May God be pleased to demonstrate and make known feelingly in our poor hearts His goodness, His faithfulness, His immutability, His graciousness and His glory. May He give us to prove again and again that He will not lie unto Israel, that His words are words of truth. He is the God of truth and what He says will stand, and what He says He will do, that He will perform. This is shown over and over again in the Holy Scriptures, for the comfort and the strength of every poor, struggling, burdened, oppressed, downcast, guilty, wretched, destitute sinner. 'Have respect unto the covenant.'

The Lord do it for us and cause us to rejoice in His mercy.

Amen.

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