

THE STABILITY OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

THE SUPPORT OF A BELIEVER UNDER OUTWARD AND INWARD TROUBLES

(2Sa 23:5) Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.

THE preceding verses have already been considered; an introduction, therefore, to the present discourse, is unnecessary: suffice it to say, our text contains part of the last words of David; in which we may observe,

I. A concession, or something that is granted, that things were not altogether right, or so with David as he desired and wished. Although my house be not so with God.

II. A strong expression of his faith in God, as his covenant God; yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant.

III. The nature and excellency of this covenant described, 1. As an everlasting one. 2. Ordered in all things; and, 3. sure.

I. Here is a concession, or something granted, that things were not altogether right, or so with David as he desired and wished: Although my house be not so with God.

1. By his house, may be meant his kingdom and government. In this sense we find the word used in [2Sa 7](#); where the Lord, by Nathan, assures David that he would make him a house. Though he does not allow him to build the Temple, which he was desirous of; yet, says he, [2Sa 7:11](#), the Lord telleth thee, that he will make thee a house: that is, that he would establish a kingdom under him, and in his posterity, as it is explained in the next verse ([2Sa 7:12](#)): and when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. That is what is meant by making him a house; and this is still further explained in [2Sa 7:16](#), where it is said, and thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee. Thine house and thy kingdom: the last clause explains the former, and plainly shows what is meant by his house. In this sense we may understand it here; for a kingdom is as a house, or family to a king, and the subjects are as his children, and a good prince is the father of them: such a one was David.

Now David was sensible that the kingdom which was in his hands, which he had the government of, was not like the kingdom and government of the Ruler, ruling in the fear of God, before described. Mine house is not so with God: so bright, so splendid, so glorious as the kingdom and government of this great and illustrious person, whom I have been speaking of, who is like the light of the morning, even a morning without clouds, when the sun riseth; like the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain: but so it is not with me, with my kingdom and government. "Nevertheless, he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, though it is not so." Or, it may be read thus, Although my house, or kingdom, be not firm and stable: so some cause to render the words. "Though it is in some respects tottering;" it has been so in various instances; yet he hath made me an everlasting covenant.

When he was first set upon the throne, Abner set up Ishbosheth over the ten tribes, in opposition to him. When that difficulty was over, and David was made king over all Israel, in process of time, a son out of his own bowels, Absalom, rebelled against him; and caused him not only to flee from Jerusalem, but even to pass over Jordan's river, to be in safety from this rebellious son. When this rebellion was quashed, there was an insurrection made by Sheba, who blew his trumpet, and said, We have no part in David; neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel: [{2Sa 20:1}](#) and all Israel it is said followed after him; only Judah clave to David. And after this, just before his death, (and it may be immediately before he uttered these his last words), Adonijah usurped the throne, and got himself proclaimed instead of Solomon. Now with respect to all this, he might say, "Although my house, my kingdom, is not stable and firm, but in a tottering condition; yet God hath made with me an everlasting covenant." In which he may have respect either to the covenant of royalty, that there should not want one to sit upon his throne; and which in some sense may be said to be an everlasting covenant; for so it is represented in [Jer 33:20-21](#); If (says the Lord) ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night; and that there should not be day and night in their season: then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne. Now David may have respect to this covenant of royalty. Though his kingdom had been tottering, yet the covenant that God had made with him would be firm and sure. Indeed some writers, especially Jewish ones, understand this in a quite different sense. Not as expressing any disorder in David's kingdom and government; but the reverse; they understand it thus, "Although my house be not so with God, so tottering, so unstable, and uncertain as the things before mentioned." The morning is

sometimes a morning without clouds, as expressed in the preceding verse; and the sun rises with great brightness and clearness: at other times it is a morning with clouds; the heavens are covered with darkness, and all is gloomy, and every thing uncomfortable. Sometimes it is fine weather, at other times foul; sometimes the sun shines, at other times it is in a cloud; but my house, my kingdom is not so uncertain and unstable. But then this must be understood with respect to his more remote and glorious offspring, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ; whose throne is for ever and ever, and of whose government, and the peace thereof, there shall be no end: whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; and who reigns over the house of Jacob, and upon the throne of David, for ever and ever.

2. By his house may be meant his family. Although my house, my family is not so with God; some choose to render it, "though my house or my family is not, with God, mean, low, and despicable," as it had been in comparison with some families in Israel, (as he himself intimates when he says), Who am I, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? {[2Sa 7:18](#)} That is, what am I, a poor creature of mean extraction, and what my family that I sprung from, that thou shouldst raise me to so much dignity? Jesse his father was a mean person, comparatively speaking: his family small in Israel, and Bethlehem his native town and place of residence, one of the least of the thousands of Judah, Now with respect to this he might say, "although my house, my family is comparatively small; nothing in it for which any particular and special favour should be bestowed upon me, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant." Or this may have respect to the disorders in his family, to the many evils committed by one and another therein. They were guilty of some of the grossest crimes. Ammon committed incest with his sister. Absalom rebelled against his father. Adonijah usurped the throne: all which pressed hard, no doubt, upon this good man; and therefore he might say, "although my house, my family, be not right with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant."

These things prove that grace does not run in a carnal line, comes not by natural descent. Good men are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. There is nothing in carnal descent, or nothing to be depended upon on that account. This however must be a sensible affliction to this great and good man, to observe such disorder in his family, such sins committed by his children; but still this did not affect his covenant interest: although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant.

The afflictions of God's people, whether personal or domestic, do not affect their covenant interest. That remains always the same; David's afflictions were many; remember David and all his afflictions. {[Ps 132:1](#)} The phrase denotes his afflictions were not few, but many, very many. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; {[Ps 34:19](#)} but these do not at all affect their covenant interest, that remains unshaken notwithstanding all their afflictions, trials and exercises. The love of God towards them is the same, his affection for them is the same, he has the same special regard unto them: and takes the same special notice of them. He never withdraws his covenant mercy from his people. Covenant interest continues notwithstanding all these things. It is said the covenant of peace shall never be removed: {[Isa 54:10](#)} and it follows in the very next verse, O thou afflicted, tossed with tempests, and not comforted. Of the very same persons this character is given, "afflicted, tossed with tempests, and not comforted;" concerning whom God had that very moment said, "my loving kindness shall not depart from thee; neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." So that covenant interest continues firm and unshaken, notwithstanding all afflictions. These are never to be considered as arguments against covenant interest; no, they are rather to be considered as evidences of it. For such whom the Lord loves he rebukes and chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives; whom he receives into covenant, and into covenant as a son of his. He often afflicts them; but then it is when it is necessary he should deal with them. Afflictions are fruits of the covenant of grace. This is what is said in covenant, if his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments: if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him; nor suffer my faithfulness to fail: my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out from my lips. {[Ps 89:30,34](#)} The afflictions of God's people make for their good. They work together for good; sometimes for their temporal good; as in the case of Joseph. For their spiritual good, the exercise of their graces; and that they may be made more and more partakers of his holiness. And for their eternal good; for these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us afar more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. {[2Co 4:17](#)}

3. By his house, he may mean himself; or, at least it is applicable to himself, his own heart; although my soul, my heart, be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. Our Lord compares the man that hears his words, and acts according to them, to a wise man that builds his house upon a rock; and one that does not, to a foolish

man, that builds his house upon the sand; [{Mt 7:24,27}](#) that is, that builds himself, his faith, his hope, and his eternal affairs and concerns upon the one, or upon the other. So this phrase here is applicable to David, or any other good man's self, his own heart or soul, although that is not so with God; not so right as he could wish and desire: nevertheless, covenant interest remains.

1. Though there be a great deal of sin, as there is in all good men: a great many failings and infirmities in their lives and conversation, as there are in the best men upon earth: nevertheless, interest in the covenant of grace continues. David was very sensible he had a great deal of sin in him, and that sin had been committed by him: O how does he bewail and lament himself under a sense of his sin. Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities are more than the hairs of my head: therefore I cannot look up, [{Ps 40:12}](#) with delight, boldness, and pleasure, as I had used to do. Again he says, mine iniquities are gone over my head as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. There is no soundness in my flesh, because of my sin. [{Ps 38:3-4}](#) It is so with every good man, more or less. It was so with the apostle of the Gentiles. In me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. [{Ro 7:18}](#) I see a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. [{Ro 7:23}](#) And yet covenant interest remains. Though a man finds many workings of corruption in his heart, and breakings forth of it in his life; nevertheless covenant interest continues. Original and actual sin, were no bar to the admittance of God's people into the everlasting covenant of grace. He knew very well what they would be. He knew that they would be transgressors from the womb: that their neck would be as an iron sinew, and their brow as brass. He saw all this, and yet this was no hindrance, obstruction, or objection at all to his admitting them into his everlasting covenant of grace. Indeed, he is sometimes represented after the manner of men, as if he were struggling in his mind; expostulating with himself what he should do in this case: How shall I put thee among the children? [{Jer 3:19}](#) Take thee into the everlasting covenant, and bestow blessings of grace upon thee; and give thee a goodly heritage of the host of nations; an eternal inheritance. How shall I do it when thou art, or wilt be so vile a creature? But grace overcomes all these struggles and difficulties, as they are, humanly speaking: hence it is said, I will be their Father, and they shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. [{2Co 6:18}](#)

Sin, in the whole compass of it, in its blackest colors, was foreseen, and yet no bar to the admission of these persons into the everlasting covenant of grace.

All the impurity of their nature, and the whole course of sin, during a state of unregeneracy, did not hinder covenant grace taking place in effectual vocation. Notwithstanding all that impurity of nature, in which the Lord's people are brought forth into the world, and in which they continue; and notwithstanding they go on fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; they being, by nature, children of wrath, even as others; yet such is the great love wherewith the Lord has loved them, that he quickened them when dead in trespasses and sins. Though they are like the wretched infant cast out into the open field, to the loathing of their persons in the day they were born, lying in all the impurity of nature, and act agreeable to their nature; yet this did not prevent the Lord from looking upon them with a look of love; or hinder him from casting his skirt over them, and entering into covenant with them: that is, manifesting his covenant to them, and they openly becoming his. Notwithstanding all their trespasses, original and actual, through the blood of this covenant, (so the blood of Jesus is called; [Heb 13:20](#)), they are delivered out of the pit wherein is no water: and are encouraged to turn to the strong hold, as prisoners of hope. And they are, by this blood, cleansed from all sin. So covenant interest continues. "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure."

2. Though it may be with the people of God, as it was with David; that they are guilty of many backslidings after conversion, after they are called by divine grace; nevertheless covenant interest continues. David was sensible he had been guilty of many backslidings; particularly in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah; and he continued a long time without a sense of the evil he had fallen into; but covenant interest still remained. In virtue of this, Nathan the prophet was sent to him, to convince him of his evil, bring him to a sense of it, to own and acknowledge it before God; and at the same time to inform him that he should not die, because his iniquity was put away: though at the same time, he is also told, that evil should spring out of his house; God would chastise him for the evil he had been guilty of; nevertheless his loving-kindness he would not utterly take from him, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. So it is with the people of God, more or less. What is said of literal Israel, may be said of spiritual Israel, My people are bent on backsliding from me: [{Ho 11:7}](#) and, as the same prophet says, "Israel slideth back, as a backsliding heifer." [{Ho 4:16}](#) As an heifer that cares not to be under the yoke; so the Lord's spiritual Israel are guilty of great departures from the Lord. O what sad departures do they sometimes make from the living God, through the power of unbelief in their hearts, therefore they are called upon to "remember

from whence they are fallen, and repent, and do their first works." [{Re 2:5}](#) Yet, notwithstanding all, this covenant of grace still continues: covenant love is still the same. I will heal all their backslidings, and will love them freely. Notwithstanding their backslidings I will make it appear that I still love them, that my love is a free love: not depending upon any conditions in them. And I will make it known by forgiving their iniquities, for that is meant; or by making fresh applications of pardoning grace. In what a light is this set, in the forty-third chapter of the Prophecy of Isaiah: they made him to serve with their sins, they wearied him with their iniquities: by which is to be understood, that they were guilty of sins of omission and commission. Yet, says the Lord, I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own name's sake, and will not remember thy sins [{Isa 43:25}](#) Covenant grace was still the same.

Covenant relation, therefore, is not broken off by these backslidings and apostasies from God. No; this is most clear from what is said in [Jer 3:14](#). "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." Turn, O backsliding children: what strange things, what wonders in grace are here! children, and yet backsliders! backsliders, and yet, children! children of God still. Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you: the relation of husband and spouse still continues. The marriage relation still subsists notwithstanding all your sins. So again in [Jer 3:22](#); Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings: and the answer is, behold we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God. Faith gets strength by such declarations of grace, and, notwithstanding all these backslidings, says, thou art the Lord our God.. Thou art our covenant God.

3. The dear children of God are liable to various temptations of Satan; and sometimes are prevailed upon to do those things that are disagreeable to their heavenly Father: yet covenant interest remains. "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an ever lasting covenant." David had his temptations. We have mention made of a very sore one; Satan stirred him up to number the people of Israel. [{1Ch 21:1}](#) He fell in the temptation, he suffered much, and his people too, through it, but still covenant interest remained. The best of men are liable to temptations. Peter was. Simon, Simon (says our Lord), Satan hath desired to have thee; to have thee in his hands; to do with thee as he would; to harass, distress, and confound thee, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. The great apostle of the Gentiles, had a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him: and extremely distressed he was with it. He besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him; so it is with all

the people of God at one time or another. Those very persons, the Corinthians, whom the apostle describes as being washed, justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God; he intimates, in the following verses, that they were liable to the temptations of Satan. Thus the best of men experience his temptations. Nay, even the Son of God himself did, he was in all points tempted as we are; [{Heb 4:15}](#) and that as violently as ever any of the people of God were; for what greater temptations can they be harassed with, than those with which he was assaulted? But, notwithstanding all the temptations of God's people, yet covenant interest remains. Our Lord has a sympathizing spirit with them, and rebukes the tempter. He says, the Lord hath chosen Jerusalem to rebuke thee. "Is not this one that I have chosen? is not this one that I have called by my grace: snatched as a brand out of the burning, and saved from everlasting ruin? and shall this dear child of mine fall by thy hand? the Lord rebuke thee Satan! What hast thou to do with him? he is one of mine." The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, he knows the fittest time to do it, and he does do it: for though he suffers the enemy to go about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, yet he does not suffer him to destroy any of his own children. What is the reason of all this? Covenant interest continues. Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant.

4. They may be, and often are in great darkness of soul, and under great distress on that account; yet covenant interest remains. David knew what darkness and distress of soul was; hence those warm and fervent breathings of his. Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? why hidest thyself in times of trouble? Again, Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled. This has been the case of the best of men in all ages. The man that obeys the voice of the servants of the Lord, may walk in darkness and see no light. It is said, even of the church in general, that he hides his face from her; yet she expresses her confidence. When I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me; [{Mic 7:8}](#) she was satisfied covenant interest still continued. Indeed unbelief prevails frequently in such dark and distressing circumstances; and the people of God are brought into such reasonings and doubts, in their own minds, about their covenant interest, as to say, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me, [{Isa 49:14}](#) when it is impossible he should; for they are engraven on the palms of his hands, and their walls are continually before him. And though he does hide his face from them for a moment, yet with everlasting kindness will he gather them; for as he has sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth; so hath he sworn that he will no more be wrath with them, or rebuke them. Even though the mountains may

depart and the hills be removed; yet his loving-kindness shall never depart, nor the covenant of his peace be removed. So that darkness of soul, the hidings of God's face, divine desertions, are no arguments against covenant interest.

5. The people of God are subject to great coldness, indifference, sleepiness, sluggishness, and slothfulness; it often attends them, as it did the Church when she said, I sleep but my heart waketh; [{Song 5:2}](#) but still we find she was recovered out of this frame of soul, and brought to the exercise of strong faith in the Lord: this is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. [{Song 5:16}](#) All the virgins, wise and foolish, slumbered and slept.. This may befall the best of men, and yet notwithstanding that, their covenant interest remains.

6. Faith, hope, love, and other graces may not be in lively exercise. Faith is sometimes very low. All that a believer can say at most, is, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief; but that does not affect covenant interest; it does not depend upon the lively exercise of grace. Though we believe not, yet he abides faithful: He is faithful to his promises, let it be with us as it will. Hope is sometimes in a very poor plight; almost gone. The church says, the Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him: [{La 3:24}](#) even the very same that before had said, my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord. [{La 3:18}](#) Yea, the same may be said of other graces; though low and upon the decline, covenant interest still remains. All this is supposed in the phrase, although my house be not so with God.

II. Here is a strong expression of covenant interest; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant. What is this covenant that God had made with David? and with whom made? It cannot be the covenant of works made with Adam. A covenant was made with him consisting of these terms, that if he acted according to it, he should live; if not, he should die. And Adam was the federal head of all his offspring, and a type of him that was to come, our Lord Jesus Christ. [{Ro 5:14}](#) But now this covenant is broken; this is no everlasting covenant. They have transgressed my covenant as Adam. [{Ho 6:7}](#) This is not a covenant ordered in all things and sure; far from it: hence the covenant of grace is said to be, a better covenant, established upon better promises. [{Heb 8:6}](#) Here is no provision made in this covenant for the pardon of sin; no provision made for a justifying righteousness; no provision made for life and salvation, This, therefore, can never be the covenant meant; for David says, this is all my salvation: but there is no salvation by the covenant of works. As

no justification, so no salvation from thence. David is speaking of a covenant, from whence he derived abundance of comfort under the most distressing circumstances he could be in; but there is no such comfort to be derived from the covenant of works. By the law is the knowledge of sin; but not of a Saviour from sin. That law convinces men of sin, and curses every transgressor; dooms them to everlasting destruction, and so brings upon them a spirit of bondage. This, therefore, cannot be the covenant.

Nor yet the covenant of circumcision (as it is called) made with Abraham: that is done away, being a yoke that neither the Jews nor their forefathers could bear. This was so far from being ordered in all things and sure, that the apostle declares, to those who complied with it, Christ is become of no effect unto you. Whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace. [{Ga 5:4}](#)

Nor is this the Sinai covenant; for that was not an everlasting one. It is abolished and done away. Not ordered in all things and sure, for it gave way; otherwise there would have been no need for a second, as the apostle argues. [{Heb 8:7}](#)

The covenant which the sweet Psalmist of Israel, in his last dying words, has respect unto, is the covenant of grace: founded on grace; filled with the blessings of grace. It is called the covenant of peace, [{Isa 54:10}](#) because a grand article of it is peace and reconciliation with God, by Jesus Christ. He was sent to be our peace; to make peace for us by the blood of his cross. It is called a covenant of life, [{Mal 2:5}](#) because a grand article in this covenant is life, and it secures everlasting life to his people; for this is one grand promise of it, that God hath promised unto us, eternal life. [{1Jo 2:25}](#)

Now this covenant is said to be made with David: made with his son and antitype, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, who bears his name. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant. [{Ps 89:3}](#) A covenant projected by God the Father: it was proposed by him to his Son Christ Jesus, who agreed unto it. A mere creature cannot make a covenant with God; for what has man to give to God, to agree upon with God? What terms can he propose, or have proposed, that he is capable of performing? None at all. When, therefore, God is said to make a covenant with men; the meaning is, he manifests his covenant made with Jesus Christ from all eternity. Therefore, when David says, he hath made with me an everlasting covenant; the meaning is, he hath made it manifest to me, that I

have an interest in his everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. This is the meaning of, Hearken unto me, and thou shalt live, and I will make with thee an everlasting covenant. [{Isa 55:3}](#) Can any suppose, that when one, under the influence of grace, hearkens to God, then God begins to make a covenant with him? no, the meaning is, God will manifest his covenant love and grace; shew them their interest in the blessings and promises thereof, so that their faith shall lay hold on this covenant, as David did under all those distressing circumstances he was in. Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant: I clearly see my interest in it, and by faith lay hold upon it, and upon the blessings and promises of it.

I should now have considered the nature of this covenant that David saw his interest in. That it is an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; but I must defer these things, with what follows, to another discourse.