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**SERMONS AND TRACTS OF JOHN GILL
GOD'S EVERLASTING COVENANT**

Covenant Interest In God

1 SAMUEL 30:6

by John Gill

(London: Wm. Hardcastle, 1814)

*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth*

— Psalm 60:4

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SERMON 12

COVENANT INTEREST IN GOD

And A View Of What Is In Him, As A Covenant-God A Sufficient Encouragement To His People, In The Worst Of Times.

1 SAMUEL 30:6. LAST CLAUSE.

But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God. ~~30:6~~

DAVID was at this time in as great distress, if not greater, than ever he was in all his life. He had been persecuted from place to place by Saul, and his life often in imminent danger; but then he had friends along with him, to comfort and encourage him, to protect and defend him to the utmost of their power; but now it was otherwise: yet he encouraged himself in the Lord his God. Ziklag, the place where he and his men had dwelt for some time, the Amalekites taking *the* advantage of his absence, came and burnt and destroyed it; carried captives the wives and concubines of his men, and his own wives also. This occasioned a general discontent, and even a mutiny among the people; so that David's people, his own friends, spoke of stoning him: but notwithstanding all this, David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

At this time of distress, he was at the eve of his outward grandeur and glory: for much about this time, very likely at the very time, that battle, from whence he was providentially withdrawn, was fought between Saul and the Philistines, in which Saul and his Sons were slain; which paved the way for David to ascend the throne of Israel. So sometimes it is, that when God is about to work salvation for his people, to bestow upon them great favors whether in a way of providence or grace, he suffers them to be brought into the greatest straits; that his power, wisdom, and goodness may be the more visible.

But David knew nothing of this for the present; his state was very distressing, hopeless, and helpless, as to human appearance: nevertheless he encouraged himself in the Lord his God. He encouraged *himself*, for he had none to encourage him; they all spake of stoning him. He encouraged

himself, not by virtue of any power of his own, but through the influence of the divine Spirit; which impressed his mind, directed him to God, and enabled him to exercise faith upon him: he encouraged himself in *the Lord his God*. In the Lord; not absolutely considered, for God is a consuming fire; but he strengthened, he encouraged himself in the Lord his God, his covenant God and Father.

The observation I make upon this, is, that covenant interest in God, and a view of what is in God, as Covenant Lord, are a sufficient encouragement to his people, in their greatest distresses and, in enlarging on this observation, I shall consider,

I. That the people of God have their times of trouble and distress.

II. That God is their covenant God; and this is a source of support and comfort to them under their troubles. And,

III. That a view of what is in God, is enough to encourage the saints in the worst of times. David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

I. The people of God have their times of trouble and distress. The apostle Paul seems to distinguish between trouble and distress, when he says,

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed
(~~2~~2 Corinthians 4:8).

Troubled on every side, from every quarter, all around; look which way we will, there is nothing but trouble, and yet not distressed: that is, not so distressed as to be reduced to despair, as is afterwards explained; or to be brought to ruin and destruction; for it follows, *perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*

The people of God, in all ages and periods of time, have been poor, and afflicted with divers sorts of afflictions, temporal and spiritual; but this is the favor bestowed upon them, that they shall trust: they are enabled to trust, they do trust in the name of the Lord their God. Their afflictions and troubles are partly outward, and partly inward: some are outward afflictions; such as affect their bodies, their families, and estates; or arise from the world, and the men of it, their reproaches and persecutions; and these come not by chance, but are by divine appointment. They are appointed to these afflictions, and these afflictions are appointed for them; these are a legacy their great Lord and Master hath bequeathed them,

In the world ye shall have tribulation (⁴⁸John 16:33).

There are many tribulations through which the saints enter the kingdom, they attend them all the way, more or less, to the heavenly glory. They follow them to their entrance into the kingdom; then they leave them, and not till then. These troubles and afflictions are all in love, and are directed by the hand of a tender Father; yet, nevertheless, no affliction is joyous, but grievous to the flesh.

There are other troubles, trials, and exercises which are internal, and more especially affect the soul, or the spiritual state of God's people; I mean, their comfortable spiritual state. Nothing can affect, so as to destroy, their state and standing in Christ; but there are many things which distress them, with respect to their spiritual frames, and comfortable spiritual state. Sometimes they are under the hidings of God's face and, as his presence gives them the greatest pleasure; so his absence, the greatest pain and uneasiness. When he hideth his face, their souls are troubled; and upon this follows darkness, and sometimes such darkness, that they can see no light. This being the case of good men, that they walk in darkness, and have no light (²⁵Isaiah 50:10); no joy, comfort, and peace in a sensible manner; hence follows many doubts and fears in them, relative to their case. They are ready to fear that a work of grace was never begun in them, or that they shall never hold on and out unto the end, but fall short of heaven at last: without are fightings, and within are fears. Unbelief sometimes prevails to a very great degree, and their language is like that of the Psalmist,

Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? (⁴⁷Psalm 77:8, 9).

Unbelief reads all this in the affirmative. You may well imagine God's people are in distress, when this is their case. Sometimes their distresses arise from the temptations of Satan: who is a very busy adversary, and goes about, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; though he cannot do this, with respect to the people of God, yet he can, and is, often suffered to distress them. Yea, he is said to desire to winnow one as wheat, as Peter; and he buffets another, as in the case of Paul, he throws his fiery darts thick and fast, and these give a great deal of pain and uneasiness. To all these may be added, the corruptions of their nature, which are suffered sometimes to prevail very much in them: they find a law in their members,

warring against the law of their minds, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin and death; which makes them say, “Oh! wretched men, that we are.” These old Canaanites left in the land, are as pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides, that give them great distress.

II. God is the covenant God of his people, and that is a source of support and comfort to them under all their troubles and distresses. David says, “Fear was on every side; but I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, thou art my God” (^{48B}Psalm 31:13, 14). God is the God of his people, not only in a general sense, as he is the God of the spirits of all flesh; not in a national sense, as he is the God of the Jews. He avouched them to be his people, and they avouched him to be their God; but he is the God, the covenant God of his people, in a more special sense, in the covenant of grace, ordered in all things, and sure; the tenor of which runs thus, “They shall be my people, and I will be their God” (^{28B}Jeremiah 32:28). This covenant interest is made manifest in effectual vocation, when God calls his covenant ones effectually by his grace; which makes it clearly appear that they are his covenant ones. Then, they who are not a people, that is, who were not known to be a people of God, either by themselves or others, openly appear to be his people; for the application of covenant blessings unto them is an undeniable proof of their interest; for, to whomsoever covenant blessings are applied, such must be most certainly interested in the covenant of grace.

Now this covenant interest always continues, it never can be dissolved, let the saint come into what condition he will, let him be in what trouble or distress he may, covenant interest always abides. Afflictions that are laid upon him, of one kind or another, are no arguments at all disproving his covenant interest; rather are proofs of the same; for, in the covenant it is provided, that when the Lord’s children forsake his law, and walk not in his statutes, he will visit their transgression with a rod and their iniquity with stripes; nevertheless his loving-kindness he will not utterly take from them, not suffer his faithfulness to fail. His covenant he will not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips (^{48B}Psalm 89:30, 34). Even the sins and corruptions of God’s people, the temptations of Satan, and the snares of this world, do not, cannot dissolve covenant interest; for Jehovah knew beforehand, when he took his people into this covenant, what they would be; that they would be called transgressors from the womb; that their neck would be as an iron sinew, and their brow as brass; and yet this did not hinder their admission into this covenant; and consequently cannot

be a reason for dismissing them from it: besides, in this covenant of grace there is provision made for the forgiveness of the sins of God's people. One principal promise runs thus, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (²⁸³Jeremiah 31:34). That darkness and desertion, those doubts and fears, and unbelief, which attend God's people, cannot destroy their covenant interest: that still continues the same, whether they are in the light or in the dark, whether in comfortable or uncomfortable frames, covenant interest is always invariably the same. As it was with the head, so it is with the members; as it was with our head, Christ Jesus, when suffering, and God withdrew his presence from him, and he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Forsaken he was; but God was his God still: so it is with the members, they may be forsaken, God may hide his face from them, they may be in darkness, and in the deeps; yet they may say my *God* still. So says the church,

My God will hear me; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto me: he will bring me to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness (³¹⁷Micah 7:7, 8, 9).

Covenant interest always abides; and is the source of comfort to the saints in all their distresses; for he, that is their covenant God, will be their God and their guide unto death (⁴⁸⁸Psalm 48:14).

III. There are such things in God, as are a sufficient encouragement to his his people in the worst of times and they may, through the strength of divine grace, as David did, encourage themselves in the Lord their God. Thus, for instance,

1. *There are the Mercy, Grace, and Love of our heavenly Father, of our covenant God.* He has proclaimed his name,

the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin (⁴²⁶Exodus 34:6, 7).

Upon this declaration of grace, David might dwell, and so every believer also, with the greatest assurance, affirm,

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful (⁴¹⁶Psalm 116:5).

Now this yields relief to the people of God, when first awakened to a sight and sense of their state and condition by nature. This relieves them in their

first soul trouble: namely, the declarations of the grace, mercy, and love of God. As Benhadad's servants argued with their master,

We have heard, that the kings of the house of Israel, are merciful kings; let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; peradventure he will save thy life (⁻¹⁰⁸⁻1 Kings 20:31).

So poor sinners, when they are first awakened to a sight and sense of their vileness, the just demerit of their sins, and time consequences of them, having heard, through the report of the gospel, that the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, is gracious and merciful; they are encouraged to go and throw themselves upon his grace and mercy, and say, as the publican did, *God be merciful to me a sinner*. Not that they cast themselves upon the absolute mercy of God; but upon the mercy of God, as it streams through the blood and righteousness of Christ; which is the sense of that request of the publican, "God be merciful to me," through the propitiatory sacrifice of thy Son. It is a view of this that encourages sinners in their first distress of soul, to go to God, and venture their souls upon his mercy.

Let Israel (and so let every sensible sinner) hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy; and with him there is plenteous redemption (⁻¹⁰⁹⁻Psalm 130:7):

that is, there is mercy streaming through that plenteous redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a declaration of the grace and mercy of God, that is a relief to poor sensible souls, under the first workings of the Spirit of God upon their hearts: whereby they are encouraged to hope for pardoning grace, and to obtain it, as the apostle says he did,

I, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy (⁻¹¹⁰⁻1 Timothy 1:13).

So likewise it is a relief unto them, after having fallen into sin, and when brought again to repentance: when they stand in need of fresh discoveries of forgiving love. In affliction the Lord is pleased to reveal himself unto them in this manner, and apply his pardoning grace unto them: they find him to be a kind, merciful, and tender-hearted Father to them:

like as a father pitieth his children: so the Lord pitieth them that fear him (⁻¹¹¹⁻Psalm 103:13).

He sympathizes with them in all their troubles; in all their afflictions he is afflicted; his bowels yearn towards them when they are in distress; and though he may seem sometimes to frown upon them in his providence, yet he changes his dispensations towards them, in love, saying, *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?* verily he is, for *since I spake against him, in a providential way, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.*

God, the covenant God of his people, is full of mercy, grace, love, kindness, and tenderness unto them at all times; and this is an encouragement unto them to trust in him. In a view of this, they may do as David did, *encourage themselves in the Lord their God*; and the rather, in as much as this mercy, grace, and love always continue the same. The mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him: his love to his people is an everlasting love: his loving-kindness never departs from them: nor can any thing separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus their Lord.

Well then, let the saint be in what trouble and distress he will, if he can but be directed and is but enabled to look unto the grace and mercy of God, as a covenant God, always the same; it will yield him relief in the worst of times.

2. *There is the Power of God, which is great and unlimited.* “Twice have I heard this, (says the Psalmist) that power belongs to God.” There are not only one, or two, but there are many instances of the almighty power of God: he, who is almighty, is able to save his people, when in the greatest distress. His hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear. When they cry unto him in their distress, pray to him for deliverance, they pray to a God that can save them to the uttermost; save them out of all their troubles. *This poor man cried* (says David, and it may be, he means himself particularly), *and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.* So this poor man, and the other poor man, and thousands of poor saints, in all ages, have cried unto the Lord in their distress, and he has saved them out of all their troubles.

He has power and ability to fulfill all the promises which he has made unto his people; and they are many, exceeding great and precious. Abraham had a special promise made to him, and the fulfillment of it was attended with many difficulties, insurmountable to carnal reason; yet he staggered not at

the promise, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. And what was it kept up his faith in the view of those difficulties that attended the accomplishment of the thing promised? Why, it was this, he was persuaded that God *was able also to perform* (~~4:21~~Romans 4:21). God, the covenant God of his people, is of such power, that he is able to supply all their wants, let them be what they will; to supply all their need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus, he is able to support them under their greatest trials, and he has promised to do it. He has said, “Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God; I will help thee; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee, with the right-hand of my righteousness.” And when he puts underneath everlasting arms, they are a sufficient support. He is able to protect and defend them from all enemies. They that trust in him, as their covenant God, are as mount Sion, that can never be removed; for as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord round about his people, from this time forth, even for evermore. He is a wall of fire round about them, to preserve them, and to annoy their enemies: he is a glory in the midst of them. They are kept, as in a garrison, by his power through faith unto salvation; he is able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all them that are sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus. He is able to keep them from falling, from a total and final falling away, and present them faultless before the throne of his majesty: and he will exert his power in the preservation of them safe to his everlasting kingdom and glory. Now a view of this power in God, of his ability to do these things, and much more, is a sufficient encouragement to saints in the worst of times.

3. *There is the Unchangeableness of God; which also, when believers have a view of it, relieves them under the greatest distresses.* He is the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning, not the least appearance of a change in him. He is the Lord, that changeth not; and therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed: they cannot be consumed; they cannot be destroyed who are interested in an unchangeable God. He is unchangeable in his *love* to them: he never varies in that, let them be in what condition they will, or let his appearance to them be what it may, in the external dispensation of things, his love is always the same. If he chides them, if he chastises them, in a providential way, on account of their sins, yet his loving-kindness he doth not take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. If he hide his face from them, to rebuke them, on one account or another, because of some misbehavior of theirs; yet still he

loves them: his loving-kindness does not depart from them; having loved them, he loves them to the end. His love is everlasting; as it commenced in eternity, it will continue to all eternity; invariably and unchangeably the same. There may be different dispensations towards them, as I have suggested; they may be in different frames of soul, and not always have the like apprehensions of the love of God *yet* that in itself is the same.

He is unchangeable in his *counsels* and *decrees*; particularly in that relative to the everlasting salvation of his people. This is a foundation of solid comfort, even of everlasting consolation; so says the apostle, "Wherein God, to shew the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things (his counsel, which is immutable; and his oath annexed to it, which is likewise so) in which it was impossible for God to lie; we might have strong consolation, who have fled, for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us" (~~301~~ Hebrews 6:17, 18).

God is unchangeable in his *promises*, which he hath made to his people. He is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent, or change his mind. What he hath said, he will do; what he hath proposed, he will most certainly fulfill. Not one of the good things he hath promised, in covenant, has ever fallen to the ground, or ever shall. For all his promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, to the glory of God by us.

He is unchangeable in the *blessings of his grace*. These are the sure mercies of David; sure to David's son, and sure to all his seed. They are irreversible ones. Upon whomsoever they are bestowed, they remain; they are never revoked; God never repents of them. His Son also is as unchangeable as himself. The eternal Word. The Chaldee paraphrase upon the text respects this, and reads it thus; "And David strengthened himself in the Word of the Lord his God." In that eternal Logos, that Word which was in the beginning with God, and was God. *Strengthened himself* in Him; or, to use the apostolic language, he became strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, who is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever; unchangeable in his nature, person, offices, and grace. He hath, particularly, an unchangeable priesthood; an unchangeable virtue in his righteousness, to justify from all sin; in his blood to cleanse from it; and in his sacrifice, to make expiation for it. A view of this unchangeableness in God, and Christ, is a sufficient encouragement to the saints under all their distresses, be they what they may.

4. *The Faithfulness of God.* This is a wonderful attribute. *Who is like unto thee*, says the Psalmist, *or to thy faithfulness round about thee?* (^{498B}Psalm 89:8). God is faithful to himself; faithful to his promises and counsels. His counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. All true, and faithfully fulfilled. He is faithful to every promise of his. Hence the apostle describes him as faithful who hath promised, who also will do it. He is faithful to his covenant. He will not break his covenant upon any account whatsoever, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. He is faithful to his Son. As Christ is faithful to him that appointed him, even his divine Father; so Jehovah the Father is faithful to his Son with respect to all the promises he made to him, concerning his own glory as Mediator, and the good of his covenant people. And he is faithful to his covenant people, notwithstanding their unfaithfulness and unbelief; for though we believe not, says the apostle, he abides faithful.

Now a consideration of this perfection of our covenant God, is sufficient to support and encourage us under the greatest distresses in life. The same may be observed indeed of every perfection of his; as, his omniscience, omnipresence, and the like. **5. *He is Omniscient.*** *He knows all persons and things; and the knowledge he has of his people is special and particular.* It is not merely a general knowledge, as he knows all his creatures; but is joined with the greatest affection to them. In this sense we are to understand it, when he is said to *know them that are his*. He knows all the world, and all the men in it; but not in the sense in which he knows his covenant ones. His knowledge, being connected with the greatest affection to them, his eyes are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cries, in a different manner from what they are upon, and to others. Indeed the eye of his providence is particular. “He is the Saviour” of all men, especially of those “that believe” (^{500B}1 Timothy 4:10): and the eyes of the Lord, run to and fro, to shew himself strong in a remarkable manner, on the behalf of those whose hearts are upright towards him. He knows their persons, and their wants. Their desires are before him, and their groanings are not hid from him. This is a great encouragement to them.

6. *So the Omnipresence of God.* *He is a God at hand, and not a God afar off.* He is nigh to all them that call upon him in truth. It was the peculiar privilege of Israel of old, that they had God so nigh unto them in all things they called upon him for (^{502B}Deuteronomy 4:7): so have all the saints and people of God. He is the eternal God, from everlasting to everlasting: He which was, and is, and is to come; and he has been, and is, the dwelling

place of his people in all generations. He is the ever-living God, to protect, preserve, and bring them safe to the everlasting enjoyment of himself. Thus, a view of what God is, in himself, and of what is in our covenant God and Father, are a sufficient encouragement in the worst of times. David *encouraged himself in the Lord his God*.

But I must draw to a conclusion. You may be directed from hence where to go, and to whom to apply in times of trouble: not to the creature, or an arm of flesh; but to the Lord as your covenant God. When refuge *fails* you, and no man cares for your soul, then say, as David did,

Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living
(⁻¹⁴³Psalm 143:5).

This doctrine may serve to support the people of God under all the vicissitudes that attend them in this life, in body, soul, or estate. This may be a relief to them, that they have to do with, and are interested in a covenant God; whose love and covenant are unchangeable, and therefore the sons of Jacob shall not be consumed. What may not such persons expect, who have Jehovah for their covenant God? They may say, as Jacob did, they have all things; they have enough. The Lord is their shepherd; he is their shield, and their exceeding great reward. They have nothing to fear from their enemies, spiritual or temporal. They may say, as David did,

The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?
(⁻²⁷Psalm 27:1).

If God be for them, if he is on their side, if he is their covenant God and Father, who shall be against them? or what does it signify who are against them? Happy that people whose God is the Lord! they may expect every blessing of grace here, and eternal glory hereafter. His grace will be sufficient to carry them through all the trials of fire, and bring them safe to glory. He, who is their God, is a sun and shield; he gives grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.