

## S E R M O N.

### ISAIAH XXVIII, 8.

AND YOUR COVENANT WITH DEATH SHALL BE DISANNULLED, AND YOUR  
 AGREEMENT WITH HELL SHALL NOT STAND.

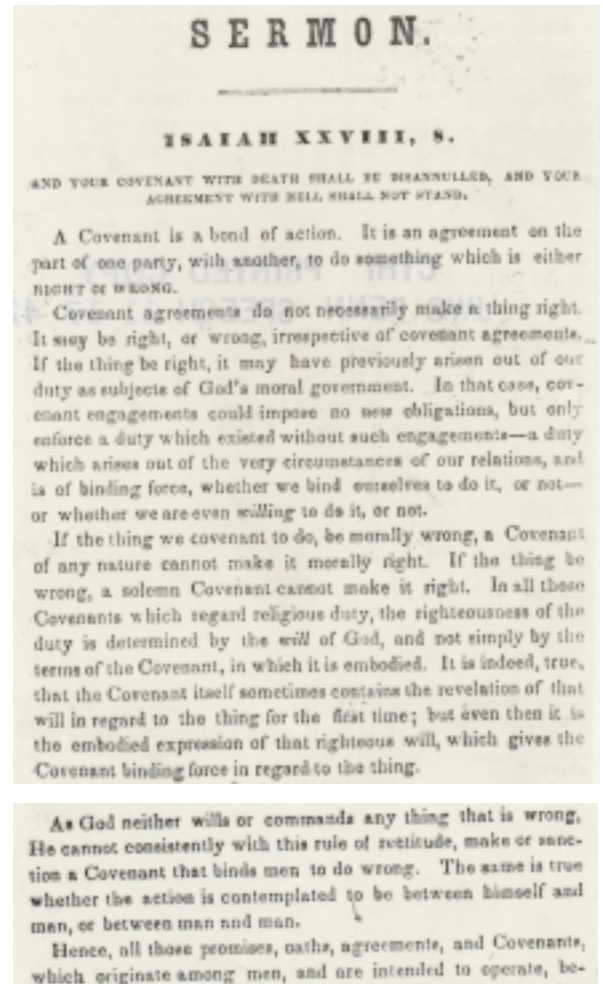
A Covenant is a bond of action. It is agreement on the part of one party, with another, to do something which is either RIGHT or WRONG.

Covenant agreements do not necessarily make a thing right. It *may* be right; or wrong, irrespective of covenant agreements. If the thing be right, it may have previously arisen out of our duty as subjects of God's moral government. In that case, covenant engagements could impose no *new* obligations, but only enforce a duty which existed without such engagements—a duty which arises out of the very circumstances of our relations, and is of binding force, whether we bind ourselves to do it, or not—or whether we are even *willing* to do it, or not.

If the thing we covenant to do, be morally wrong, a Covenant of any nature cannot make it morally right. If the thing be wrong, a solemn Covenant cannot make it right. In all those Covenants which regard religious duty, the righteousness of the duty is determined by the *will* of God, and not simply by the terms of the Covenant, in which it is embodied. It is indeed, true, that the Covenant itself sometimes contains the revelation of that will in regard to the thing for the first time; but even then it is the embodied expression of that righteous will, which gives the Covenant binding force in regard to the thing.

As God neither wills or commands any thing that is wrong, He cannot consistently with this rule of rectitude, make or sanction a Covenant that binds men to do wrong. The same is true whether the action is contemplated to be between himself and man, or between man and man.

Hence, all those promises, oaths, agreements, and Covenants, which originate among men, and are intended to operate, be-



tween man and man, to have binding force, must have regard to right. No law, Covenant, or agreement, can legalize wrong in such a sense, as to give it the character of moral rectitude.

And we are ready to stake our virtue, piety, and total all upon the simple and broad truth, that *nothing, absolutely nothing*, can in any sense or degree, be binding upon any man, whosoever, if it, the thing assumed to be binding, is morally wrong. Any agreement, Covenant, or compact, which assumes to legalize and bind men to do moral wrong, is *positively*, by virtue of its conflict with the will of God *null and void*.

A very strong *evidence* of this is brought to view in the text. Those to whom the text was addressed, had in their wickedness made a solemn Covenant with death, and a strong agreement with hell. But, God declares that the one shall be disannulled, and that the other shall not stand. Why? *Evidently*, because the thing aimed at in the Covenant, was wrong without the Covenant, and of course wicked with it.

In the light of these remarks, how many of the laws, oaths, promises, compacts, agreements, usages, and ordinances among men, having high sanction; consecrated with great veneration, and baptised with as much solemnity, will be swept away? Such are the laws and compacts, designed to legalize a system of human bondage.

In our further discourse on this Thanksgiving day, I design to bring to the test of this reasoning, the agreement contained in the federal Constitution, on the part of the Northern States of the Union, to deliver over to his claimant, the fugitive. We quote the clause:

"No person held to service or labor in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor; but shall be delivered upon claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due."

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This is the constitutional compact, so often an solemnly appealed to, as establishing the duty to hand over the fugitive to his claimant. Let us show:

- I. What this agreement involves.
- II. That the thing enjoined is a moral wrong.
- III. That it has in the sight of God no obligation.
- I. I am to show WHAT THIS AGREEMENT INVOLVES.

It is an agreement to do WHAT? It is an agreement to aid in taking away the liberty of human beings, and to give them galling chains in the stead. The declaration which preceded the Constitution some years, happened to settle some important things, just here, which the Constitution, though it clashes with them, cannot unsettle. Among other things that every man is born free and *endowed* with LIBERTY. This, we hesitate not to say, is not the doctrine of the Declaration of Independence, only. It is not a mere rhetorical flourish, nor is it a truth which may, at certain events, pass as political truth under certain circumstances; but it is a truth which has its foundation in the nature of God, of man, and also of things. Now the compact in question, involves a perfect conflict with the truth, and is designed to deny what this affirms; that man is free,—and to take away what it confirms, that man, all men are possessed of liberty.

Let us look more closely at the point. Here comes a man from the state of Maryland. He is a stranger, but we see that he is a man; one of those whom truth declares to be born free, and possessed of liberty. Why should any one doubt that he is free? Perhaps no one would think of doubting it, under ordinary circumstances, but here arrives another man from Maryland, and this LAYS CLAIM to that other man!

The compact comes in here as the umpire, and says this claimant shall have that his claim; no man shall interfere; but it shall be the duty of all to respect his claim, and to abstain from throwing any impediment in the way of his enforcing it; in

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The compact comes in here as the umpire, and says this claimant shall have that his claim; no man shall interfere; but it shall be the duty of all to respect his claim, and to abstain from throwing any impediment in the way of his enforcing it; in

other words, to deliver up the claimed to the claimant. This clause, viewed from any point, is a Covenant to DO THIS THING. Three points are assumed; one may claim, another may be claimed, and a third must deliver the claimed to the claimant. Does it not involve just what the text points out, a "Covenant with death," etc?

II. I am to show that THE THING HERE INVOLVED IS A MORAL WRONG.

We are often told that this "is a political question." Granted. But what next? Does that place it out of the range of morals? I hope not. I deprecate the idea that politics have nothing to do with morals. Though this is then a political question in its relations, it is moral in its nature, and must be tried by a moral test.

1. It is a SIN TO HOLD A MAN IN SLAVERY. If you enslave a man, you do not only rob him of his own dear liberty and happiness, but you rob God of his right as Creator and Redeemer of that man. And what does this lack to constitute it a sin? (Note 1.)

2. It is WRONG TO ADMIT THE RIGHT OF PROPERTY IN MAN. Will you tell a man that it is wrong to steal, and then turn about and tell him that he has a right to do it under such circumstances?

Admit the right of property in man! What is it but admitting that a man does not belong either to himself or to his God, but to another man! If a man owns a piece of property, and holds an EXCLUSIVE, good and proper title. And if it is wrong to take that man's property for the very reason that he held an EXCLUSIVE title, can it be right to ADMIT the validity of any other title?

But this is what the compact before us does. It goes to admit that one man may be the property of another, God's title to him,

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Admit the right of property in man! What is it but admitting that a man does not belong either to himself or to his God, but to another man! If a man owns a piece of property, and holds an EXCLUSIVE, good and proper title to it, there can be no other ownership admitted until he gives up his title. And if it is wrong to take that man's property for the very reason that he held an EXCLUSIVE title, can it be right to ADMIT the validity of any other title?

But this is what the compact before us does. It goes to admit that one man may be the property of another, God's title to him,



and his own title to himself, to the contrary, notwithstanding.

(Note 2.)

3. It is not right to aid in ESTABLISHING the right of property in man. Establish the RIGHT? It cannot be done! A thief may successfully carry off another man's goods, but that does not ESTABLISH his right. So much right as he has, he *steals* along with the property. I will rather say then, that it is wrong to help to attempt to establish the right of this property.

Now, these last two, are what the Northern States of the Union have covenanted to do, and it is *wrong*, morally *wrong*. The Southern States have done the first; namely, they have committed the SIN of holding man in bondage, and the Northern States have covenanted to admit, and to aid in establishing their right of property in man. Morally wrong! There is not a man of sound morals, in all New England, whose feeling would not recoil at the idea of putting forth his hand to aid in giving up a fugitive slave. (Note 3.)

II. I am prepared to take the ground, and to show accordingly, that this Covenant, involving a moral wrong, IS NOT BINDING UPON THE AIDING PARTY.

The difficulty presented is this, that the agreement is interwoven in the Constitution, and that it cannot be broken without breaking the Constitution, and this is treason. Now, we are Constitutionalists. We do not want to break the Constitution, but we want to *mend* it; for we contend that just at this clause, there *is* no Constitution, as applied to slavery. There is a breach here which is only filled with dead letters. What is the Constitution? Is it a sovereign over the will and the power of the people? No, it is the creature of that will and power. Now the will and power of the people is supreme in all matters, where they have the right to exercise will and power. But, we state here as a position, that in this clause there is an assumption of power which the framers of the Constitution never had lodged in

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hands. Let us suppose that they had placed a clause in that Constitution to this effect: that every British traveller that came within the American jurisdiction, should be retained. What right, it would be asked, have they to detain British travellers? But it might be answered then, as now, it is in the Constitution; hence the question of right, they would say, has long since been settled. It was simply by framing and adopting the clause! What would John Bull say to that? He would appeal, and that in such a way, as to make but little ceremony with the Constitution. Against this clause we appeal.

1, To the Declaration of Independence. That Declaration places personal liberty among the inalienable rights of all men. If personal liberty be thus the inalienable right of every man, then *no* power on earth can alienate it— not even the Constitution which is twelve years younger than the Declaration. And we must need assume that the Declaration was written, adopted, and signed, under circumstances far better calculated to secure a correct decision upon the matter in hand, than those under which the Constitution was brought into being.

2, I appeal to the occasion of the Declaration of Independence. What was the situation of the thirteen States at the time that the Declaration was moved by Richard Henry Lee, of Virginia? They were in allegiance to Great Britain. They were a part of the British empire. And the things which they complained of as tyrannical, and which they claimed to be a justification of their act in *dissolving* that allegiance, were acts of the British king with the concurrence of his parliament, and therefore *constitutional*. But the States took the ground that a sovereign had no right to exercise power in subversion of his legitimate authority, and consequently that all such acts were null and void—*of no binding force*. And for the justness of the

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sentiment, they appealed to the judgement of the civilized world; and to the JUDGE OF ALL, that *doeth right*.

The events of Providence, the sense of the world, and leading minds in Britain, have joined to attest that the sentiment was correct. Well, what do we gain by this fact? We fairly gain the position that this is a practical application of a practical principle; that it is a principle for no one age exclusive, or to guard the rights of no one people *only*. But it will apply any where, and at any time.

Our views may be summed up in the following form:

To deliver up a fugitive from bondage, is to commit a moral wrong, in taking away a man's liberty and reducing him to slavery. But, nothing is binding that is morally wrong. Therefore, to deliver a fugitive is not binding.

To go out into the street and catch that man and bind him hand and foot, and send him into Maryland slavery, must be absolutely right or absolutely wrong. It cannot be right and wrong at the same time, either in part or in whole. If it is absolutely wrong, (which we claim,) it cannot for any time being be right.

But we shall be told that since we have sworn to do it, we must do on until the oath be filled out?

We answer, that the only thing which concerns us here, is the rectitude of the act. If its performance is not right, morally right, no oath or covenant can bind it upon the conscience for one moment. Is a man bound to steal, or murder, because he has taken an oath to do it? Will the "two wrongs make one right?"

3, As evidence that this clause *is not* obligatory, we allege that *it is in conflict with the total design, scope, and spirit of the Constitution itself*.

In the preface to this document, some six specifications are made by way of setting the ground-work: the people giving their reasons for framing and adopting it as follows:

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In the preface to this document, some six specifications are made by way of setting forth the ground-work: the people giving their reasons for framing and adopting it as follows:

- (1) "In order to form a more perfect union."
- (2) "To establish justice."
- (3) "Ensure domestic tranquility."
- (4) "Provide the general welfare."
- (5) "Promote the general welfare."
- (6) "And secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

Here is the spirit of the Constitution, and a noble spirit it is.

But in order to convince my hearers that the clause in question is in direct and palpable conflict with this spirit, I have only to ask, what one of those objects *are not absolutely hindered by this clause?*

4, I allege against the obligation of this clause, the example of good men required by government to do wrong.— Daniel, and his companions—they went into a burning fiery furnace—Daniel into the lion's den—sooner than comply with the rules and regulations of government requiring them to do wrong. The apostles and primitive believers took the same course.

5, Against the force of this clause, I allege the authority of *right reason*.

There is not a man under the sun who might even be disposed to aid in handing over the fugitive to his claimant, that can show any rational motive for it. At the very moment he might be enraged in the act, his reason would revolt and he would feel as guilty as if he had laid his hand on the SON OF GOD, TO LEAD HIM TO THE CROSS! And for my own conscience's sake, I should as soon do *this as the other*. I am sure I say this advisedly. Yes, if my Saviour were again to be on earth, I should as soon go to Jerusalem, and there in obedience to the mandate of Jewish prejudice, betray him for thirty pieces of silver, as to be an agent in delivering on demand a poor fugitive from bondage.

6, Against the force of this clause, I allege the *palpable duplicity which it involves*.

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*Covenants Involving Moral Wrongs are not Obligatory Upon Man*  
*Presscopy – Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford – Anti-Slavery Pamphlets*

If the language of the clause be interpreted strictly and legally, it means no more than to give the master power to reclaim his apprentice, and the employer the hireling, in a case where he had contracted for a year and drawn half his wages, and then absconded. This is what it would mean, if there was not a slave in the land. If it were used for this, we should have no quarrel with it. But political tradition says that it would not have been there at all, but for slavery. Now this is duplicity.

If they intended it to mean slaves, why not say so?

7, In the showing of the clause, there is a palpable falsehood.

How long since the slaves *owed* service or labor? And who will help the slaveholder to make his account so as to bring the slave in debt?

8, Against the power of this clause, I allege the direct command of God: Isaiah xvi, 3,4. Here we are commanded to make a shadow to hide the outcasts.

What kind of a "shadow" does this clause propose to make? What outcasts does it hide? Where does it permit them to dwell? In our jails!!

9, Finally, I allege our text.

Does any one doubt the modesty of calling this a "covenant with death and an arrangement with hell," as it is intended to affect the slaves? Let him think of the bleeding hearts and the mangled limbs; the nakedness, the starvation, the darkness of mind, the premature death, and all the LOSS OF THE IMMORTAL SOUL, to which it is accessory: and say, is it not a "Covenant with death and an agreement with hell!"—what God pronounces a nullity?

And now dear hearers, just consider for a moment, that while we are giving thanks for liberty, and while North Carolina and

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the premature death, and the loss of the immortal soul, to which it is accessory: and say, is it not a "Covenant with death and an agreement with hell!"—what God pronounces a nullity? And now, dear hearers, just consider for a moment, that while we are giving thanks for liberty, and while North Carolina and

Maryland are doing the same, \*GEORGE LATIMER, a colored man, is under this clause shut up in Boston jail, on claim of J.B. Gray, without the benefit of the ministry! Yes, mark it,—while we are giving thanks, this man is denied the common humanity extended to even criminals! Ministers are not allowed to visit him on the subject of the salvation of his immortal soul! But where is this scene? In Virginia? No! But in Massachusetts!— Oh! speak that lowly; don't let Charles Dickens hear that, lest he write another volume of *Notes on America*.”

This James B. Gray is now waiting the decision of the Court, to take his victim back as he says to Virginia, where he has avowed his determination to “*kill him up by inches*.”

The clause authorizes these things to be done in sight of Bunker Hill Monument. Shades of Warren and Putnam, revive, and shed us another breath of your immortal fire, to purge the shrine of freedom!

God of Liberty, save us from this clause, and thanks shall be thine forever! AMEN.

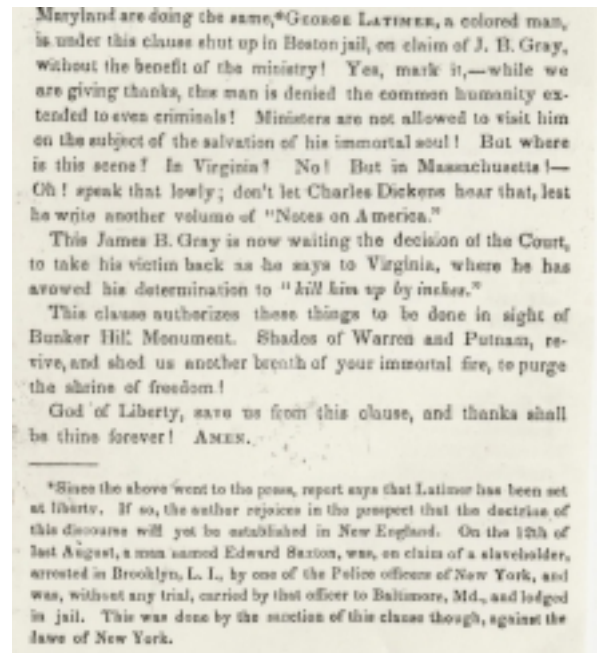
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\*Since the above went to the press, report says that Latimer has been set at liberty. If so, the author rejoices in the prospect that the doctrine of this discourse will yet be established in New England. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of last August, a man named Edward Saxton, was on claim of a slaveholder, arrested in Brooklyn, L.I., by one of the Police officers of New York, and was, without any trial, carried by that officer to Baltimore, Md., and lodged in jail. This was done by the sanction of this clause though, against the laws of New York.

## NOTES

### NOTE 1.

Slavery is the antipode of liberty. No two things can be more directly opposed. Now, if it is a “self-evident truth,” that men are born free, there is intuitive evidence that it is *right* for man to be free. For, if men are born free, nature makes them free, and what nature does, is done by the hand of God: and we are sure that what GOD does is right. hence, what must be the *character* of that act, which



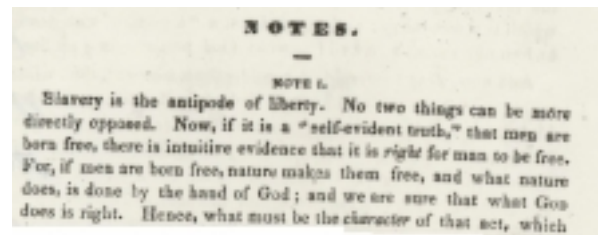
Maryland are doing the same,\*GEORGE LATIMER, a colored man, is under this clause shut up in Boston jail, on claim of J. B. Gray, without the benefit of the ministry! Yes, mark it,—while we are giving thanks, this man is denied the common humanity extended to even criminals! Ministers are not allowed to visit him on the subject of the salvation of his immortal soul! But where is this scene? In Virginia? No! But in Massachusetts!— Oh! speak that lowly; don't let Charles Dickens hear that, lest he write another volume of *Notes on America*.”

This James B. Gray is now waiting the decision of the Court, to take his victim back as he says to Virginia, where he has avowed his determination to “*kill him up by inches*.”

This clause authorizes these things to be done in sight of Bunker Hill Monument. Shades of Warren and Putnam, revive, and shed us another breath of your immortal fire, to purge the shrine of freedom!

God of Liberty, save us from this clause, and thanks shall be thine forever! AMEN.

\*Since the above went to the press, report says that Latimer has been set at liberty. If so, the author rejoices in the prospect that the doctrine of this discourse will yet be established in New England. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of last August, a man named Edward Saxton, was, on claim of a slaveholder, arrested in Brooklyn, L. I., by one of the Police officers of New York, and was, without any trial, carried by that officer to Baltimore, Md., and lodged in jail. This was done by the sanction of this clause though, against the laws of New York.



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uproots the hallowed Constitution of Nature, opposes the hand of GOD,  
and prostitutes His divine ordinance—but *sinful*?

NOTE II.

The truth is abused by false opinions. Every opinion which is held in opposition to the truth, on any given point, is a *heresy*. admitting the right of property in man, comes to this point. It is wrong and heretical opinion, because it is held in the face, of a universal *truth to the contrary*.

NOTE III.

And yet against the voice of conscience, and the better feelings of humanity, they urge the compact. They say, we feel that the thing is horrible to think of, much less to do: but the *Compact* enjoins it, therefore we must do the deed! Ah, so it goes! *aid* in shedding blood, though it is innocent. So *did* Judas. He had agreed to do it, and he did it accordingly.

