

The Covenant of Grace



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The Plan of Salvation is a Covenant

The plan of salvation is presented under the form of a covenant. This is evident, —

First, from the constant use of the words *berit* and *diatheke* in reference to it. With regard to the former of these words, although it is sometimes used for a law, disposition, or arrangement in general, where the elements of a covenant strictly speaking are absent, yet there can be no doubt that according to its prevailing usage in the Old Testament, it means a mutual contract between two or more parties. It is very often used of compacts between individuals, and especially between kings and rulers. Abraham and Abimelech made a covenant. (Gen. 21.27) Joshua made a covenant With the people. (Josh. 24.25.) Jonathan and David. made a covenant. (1Sam. 18.3) Jonathan made a covenant with the house

of David. (1 Sam. 20.16.) Ahab made a covenant with Benhadad, (1 Kings 20.34.) So we find it constantly. There is therefore no room to doubt that the word *berit* when use of transactions between man and man means a mutual compact. We have no right to give it any other sense when used of transactions between God and man. Repeated mention is made of the covenant of God with Abraham, as in Gen. 15.8; 17.13, and afterwards with Isaac and Jacob. Then with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The Old Testament is founded on this idea of a covenant relation between God and the theocratic people.

The meaning of the word *diatheke* in the Greek Scriptures is just as certain and uniform. It is derived from the verb *diatithemi* to *arrange*, and, therefore, in ordinary Greek is used for any arrangement, or disposition. In the Scriptures it is almost uniformly used in the sense of a covenant. In the Septuagint it is the translation of *berit* in all the cases above referred to. It is the term always used in the New Testament to designate the covenant with Abraham, with the Israelites, and with believers. The old covenant and the new are presented in contrast. Both were covenants. If the word has this meaning when applied to the transaction with Abraham and with the Hebrews, it must have the same meaning when applied to the plan of salvation revealed in the gospel.

Secondly, that the plan of salvation is presented in the Bible under the form of a covenant is proved not only from the signification and usage of the words above mentioned, but also and more decisively from the fact that the elements of a covenant are included in this plan. There are parties, mutual promises or stipulations, and conditions. So that it is in fact a covenant, whatever it may be called. As this is the Scriptural mode of representation, it is of great importance that it should be retained in theology. Our only security for retaining the truths of the Bible, is to adhere to the Scriptures as closely as possible in our mode of presenting the doctrines therein revealed.

Different Views of the Nature of this Covenant

It is assumed by many that the parties to the covenant of grace are God and fallen man. Man by his apostasy having forfeited the favour of God, lost the divine image, and involved himself in sin and misery, must have perished in this state, had not God provided a plan of salvation. Moved by compassion for his fallen creatures, God determined to send his Son into the world, to assume their nature, and to do and suffer whatever was requisite for their salvation. On the ground of this redeeming work of Christ, God promises salvation to all who will comply with the terms on which it is offered. This general statement embraces forms of opinion which differ very much one from the others.

1. It includes even the Pelagian view of the plan of salvation, which assumes that there is no difference between the covenant of works under which Adam was placed, and the covenant of grace, under which men are now, except as to the extent of the obedience required. God promised life to Adam on the condition of perfect obedience, because he was in a condition to render such obedience. He promises salvation to men now on the condition of such obedience as they are able to render, whether Jews, Pagans, or Christians. According to this view the parties to the covenant are God and man; the promise is life; the condition is obedience, such as man in the use of his natural powers is able to render.
2. The Remonstrant system does not differ essentially from the Pelagian, so far as the parties, the promise and the condition of the covenant are concerned. The Remonstrants also make God and man the parties, life the promise, and obedience the condition. But they regard fallen men as in a state of sin by nature, as needing supernatural grace which is furnished to all, and the obedience required is the obedience of faith, or *fides obsequiosa* faith as including and securing evangelical obedience. Salvation under the gospel is as truly by works as under the law; but the obedience required is not the perfect righteousness demanded of Adam, but such as fallen man, by the aid of the Spirit, is now able to perform.

3. Wesleyan Arminianism greatly exalts the work of Christ, the importance of the Spirit's influence, and the grace of the gospel above the standard adopted by the Remonstrants. The two systems, however, are essentially the same. The work of Christ has equal reference to all men. It secures for all the promise of salvation on the condition of evangelical obedience; and it obtains for all, Jews and Gentiles, enough measures of divine grace to render such obedience practicable. The salvation of each individual man depends on the use which he makes of this sufficient grace.
4. The Lutherans also hold that God had the serious purpose to save all men; that Christ died equally for all; that salvation is offered to all who hear the gospel, on the condition, not of works or of evangelical obedience, but of faith alone; faith, however, is the gift of God; men have not the power to believe, but they have the power of effectual resistance; and those, and those only, under the gospel, who willfully resist, perish, and for that reason. According to all these views, which were more fully stated in the preceding chapter, the covenant of grace is a compact between God and fallen man, in which God promises salvation on condition of a compliance with the demands of the gospel. What those demands are, as we have seen, is differently explained. The essential distinctions between the above-mentioned views of the plan of salvation, or covenant of grace, and the Augustinian system, are,
 1. That, according to the former, its provisions have equal reference to all mankind, whereas according to the latter they have special reference to that portion of our race who are actually saved; and
 2. That Augustinianism says that it is God and not man who determines who are to be saved. As has been already frequently remarked, the question which of these systems is true is not to be decided by ascertaining which is the more agreeable to our feelings or the more plausible to our understanding, but which is consistent with the doctrines of the Bible and the facts of experience.

This point has already been discussed. Our present object is simply to state what Augustinians mean by the covenant of grace.

The word grace is used in Scripture and in ordinary religious writings in three senses.

1. For unmerited love; i. e., love exercised towards the undeserving.
2. For any unmerited favour, especially for spiritual blessings. Hence, all the fruits of the Spirit in believers are called graces, or unmerited gifts of God.
3. The word grace often means the supernatural influence of the Holy Ghost. This is preeminently grace, being the great gift secured by the work of Christ, and without which his redemption would not avail to our salvation.

In all these senses of the word the plan of salvation is properly called a covenant of grace. It is of grace because it originated in the mysterious love of God for sinners who deserved only his wrath and curse. Secondly, because it promises salvation, not on the condition of works or anything meritorious on our part, but as an unmerited gift. And, thirdly, because its benefits are secured and applied not in the course of nature, or in the exercise of the natural powers of the sinner, but by the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit, granted to him as an unmerited gift.

Parties to the Covenant

At first view there appears to be some confusion in the statements of the Scriptures as to the parties to this covenant. Sometimes Christ is presented as one of the parties; at others He is represented not as a party, but as the mediator and surety of the covenant; while the parties are represented to be God and his people. As the old covenant was made between God and the Hebrews, and Moses acted as mediator, so the new covenant is commonly represented in the Bible as formed between God and his people, Christ acting as mediator. He is, therefore, called the mediator of a better covenant founded on better promises.

Some theologians propose to reconcile these modes of representation by saying that as the covenant of works was formed with Adam as the

representative of his race, and therefore in him with all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation; so the covenant of grace was formed with Christ as the head and Representative of his people, and in Him with all those given to Him by the Father. This simplifies the matter, and agrees with the parallel which the Apostle traces between Adam and Christ in Rom 5.12-21, and 1 Cor. 15.21, 22, 47-49. Still it does not remove the incongruity of Christ's being represented as at once a party and a mediator of the same covenant. There are in fact two covenants relating to the salvation of fallen man, the one between God and Christ, the other between God and his people. These covenants differ not only in their parties, but also in their promises and conditions. Both are so clearly presented in the Bible that they should not be confounded. The latter, the covenant of grace, is founded on the former, the covenant of redemption. Of the one Christ is the mediator and surety; of the other He is one of the contracting parties.

This is a matter which concerns only perspicuity of statement. There is no doctrinal difference between those who prefer the one statement and those who prefer the other; between those who comprise all the facts of Scripture relating to the subject under one covenant between God and Christ as the representative of his people, and those who distribute them under two. The Westminster standards seem to adopt sometimes the one and sometimes the other mode of representation. In the Confession of Faith Chap. 7 section 3) it is said, 'Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant [by the covenant of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.' Here the implication is that God and his people are the parties; for in a covenant the promises are made to one of the parties, and here it is said that life and salvation are promised to sinners, and that faith is demanded of them. The same view is presented in the Shorter Catechism, according to the natural interpretation of the answer to the twentieth question. It is there said, 'God having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and

misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer. In the Larger Catechism, however, the other view is expressly adopted. In the answer to the question, ‘With whom was the covenant of grace made?’ it is said, ‘The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect as his seed’ (Q. 31).

Two Covenants to be Distinguished

This confusion is avoided by distinguishing between the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son, and the covenant of grace between God and his people. The latter supposes the former, and is founded upon it. The two, however, ought not to be confounded, as both are clearly revealed in Scripture, and moreover they differ as to the parties, as to the promises, and as to the conditions.

The Covenant of Redemption

By this is meant the covenant between the Father and the Son in reference to the salvation of man. This is a subject which, from its nature, is entirely beyond our comprehension. We must receive the teachings of the Scriptures in relation to it without presuming to penetrate the mystery which naturally belongs to it. There is only one God, one divine Being, to whom all the attributes of divinity belong. But in the Godhead there are three persons, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory. It lies in the nature of personality, that one person is objective to another. If, therefore, the Father and the Son are distinct persons the one may be the object of the acts of the other. The one may love, address, and commune with the other. The Father may send the Son, may give Him a work to do, and promise Him a recompense. All this is indeed incomprehensible to us, but being clearly taught in Scripture, it must enter into the Christian’s faith.

In order to prove that there is a covenant between the Father and the Son, formed in eternity, and revealed in time, it is not necessary that we should adduce passages of the Scriptures in which this truth is expressly

asserted. There are indeed passages which are equivalent to such direct assertions. This is implied in the frequently recurring statements of the Scripture that the plan of God respecting the salvation of men was of the nature of a covenant, and was formed in eternity. Paul says that it was hidden for ages in the divine mind; that it was before the foundation of the world. Christ speaks of promises made to Him before his advent; and that He came into the world in execution of a commission which He had received from the Father. The parallel so distinctly drawn between Adam and Christ is also a proof of the point in question (Rom.5.12-21). As Adam was the head and representative of his posterity, so Christ is the head and representative of his people. And as God entered into covenant with Adam so He entered into covenant with Christ. This, in Rom. 5.12-21, is set forth as the fundamental idea of all God's dealings with men, both in their fall and in their redemption.

The proof of the doctrine has, however, a much wider foundation. When one person assigns a stipulated work to another person with the promise of a reward upon the condition of the performance of that work, there is a covenant. Nothing can be plainer than that all this is true in relation to the Father and the Son. The Father gave the Son a work to do; He sent Him into the world to perform it, and promised Him a great reward when the work was accomplished. Such is the constant representation of the Scriptures. We have, therefore, the contracting parties, the promise, and the condition. These are the essential elements of a covenant. Such being the representation of Scripture, such must be the truth to which we are bound to adhere. It is not a mere figure, but a real transaction, and should be regarded and treated as such if we would understand aright the plan of salvation. In Psalm 40, expounded by the Apostle as referring to the Messiah, it is said, 'Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will,' i.e., to execute thy purpose, to carry out thy plan. 'By the which will,' says the Apostle (Heb.10.10), "we are sanctified (i. e., cleansed from the guilt of sin), through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.' Christ came, therefore, in execution of a purpose of God, to fulfil a work which had been assigned Him. He, therefore, in John 17.4, says, 'I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.' This was said at the close of his earthly course. At its beginning, when yet a child, He said to his parents, 'Wist ye not that I

must be about my Father's business?' (Luke 2.49.) Our lord speaks of Himself, and is spoken of as sent into the world. He says that as the Father had sent Him into the world, even so had He sent his disciples into the world. (John 17.18). 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman.' (Gal. 4.4). 'God sent his only begotten Son into the world.' (1 John 4.9). God 'sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' (Verse 10.)

It is plain, therefore, that Christ came to execute a work, that He was sent of the Father to fulfil a plan, or preconceived design. It is no less plain that special promises were made by the Father to the Son, suspended upon the accomplishment of the work assigned Him. This may appear as an anthropological mode of representing a transaction between the persons of the adorable Trinity. But it must be received as substantial truth. The Father did give the Son a work to do, and He did promise to Him a reward upon its accomplishment. The transaction was, therefore, of the nature of a covenant. An obligation was assumed by the Son to accomplish the work assigned Him; and an obligation was assumed by the Father to grant Him the stipulated reward. The infinitude of God does not prevent these things being possible.

As the exhibition of the work of Christ in the redemption of man constitutes a large part of the task of the theologian, all that is proper in this place is a simple reference to the Scriptural statements on the subject.

The work assigned to the Redeemer

1. He was to assume our nature, humbling Himself to be born of a woman, and to be found in fashion as a man. This was to be a real incarnation, not a mere theophany such as occurred repeatedly under the old dispensation. He was to become flesh; to take part of flesh and body; to be bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, made in all things like unto his brethren, yet without sin, that He might be touched with a sense of our infirmities, and able to sympathize with those who are tempted, being Himself also tempted.
2. He was to be made under the law, voluntarily undertaking to fulfil all righteousness by obeying the law of God perfectly in all the forms in

which it had been made obligatory on man.

3. He was to bear our sins, to be a curse for us, offering Himself as a sacrifice, or propitiation to God in expiation of the sins of men. This involved his whole life of humiliation, sorrow, and suffering, and his ignominious death upon the cross under the hiding of his Father's countenance. What He was to do after this pertains to his exaltation and reward.

The Promises made to the Redeemer

Such, in general terms, was the work which the Son of God undertook to perform. The promises of the Father to the Son conditioned on the accomplishment of that work, were,

1. That He would prepare Him a body, fit up a tabernacle for Him, formed as was the body of Adam by the immediate agency of God, uncontaminated and without spot or blemish.
2. That He would give the Spirit to Him without measure, that his whole human nature should be replenished with grace and strength, and so adorned with the beauty of holiness that He should be altogether lovely.
3. That He would be ever at his right hand to support and comfort Him in the darkest hours of his conflict with the powers of darkness, and that He would ultimately bruise Satan under his feet.
4. That He would deliver Him from the power of death, and exalt Him to his own right hand in heaven; and that all power in heaven and earth should be committed to Him.
5. That He, as the Theanthropos and head of the Church, should have the Holy Spirit to send to whom He willed, to renew their hearts, to satisfy and comfort them, and to qualify them for his service and kingdom.
6. That all given to Him by the Father should come to Him, and be kept by Him, so that none of them should be lost.
7. That a multitude whom no man can number should thus be made partakers of his redemption, and that ultimately the kingdom of the Messiah should embrace all the nations of the earth.
8. That through Christ, in Him, and in his ransomed Church, there should be made the highest manifestation of the divine perfections to

all orders of holy intelligences throughout eternity. The Son of God was thus to see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

The Covenant of Grace

In virtue of what the Son of God covenanted to perform, and what in the fulness of time He actually accomplished, agreeably to the stipulations of the compact with the Father, two things follow. First, salvation is offered to all men on the condition of faith in Christ. Our Lord commanded his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The gospel, however, is the offer of salvation upon the conditions of the covenant of grace. In this sense, the covenant of grace is formed with all mankind. And, therefore, the Westminster Confession says, 'Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant [namely, by the covenant of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein He freely offereth unto sinners [and all sinners] life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them able and willing to believe.' If this, therefore, were all that is meant by those who make the parties to the covenant of grace, God and mankind in general and all mankind equally, there would be no objection to the doctrine. For it is undoubtedly true that God offers to all and every man eternal life on condition of faith in Jesus Christ. But as it is no less true that the whole scheme of redemption has special reference to those given by the Father to the Son, and of whom our Lord says, 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out' (John 6.37), it follows, secondly, from the nature of the covenant between the Father and the Son, that the covenant of grace has also special reference to the elect. To them God has promised to give his Spirit in order that they may believe; and to them alone all the promises made to believers belong. Those who ignore the distinction between the covenants of redemption and of grace, merging the latter in the former, of course

represent the parties to the covenant to be God and Christ as the head and representative of his own people. And therefore mankind, as such, are in no sense parties. All that is important is, that we should adopt such a mode of representation as will comprehend the various facts recognized in the Scriptures. It is one of those facts that salvation is offered to all men on the condition of faith in Christ. And therefore to that extent, or, in a sense which accounts for that fact, the covenant of grace is made with all men. The great sin of those who hear the gospel is that they refuse to accept of that covenant, and therefore place themselves without its pale.

Christ as Mediator of the Covenant

As Christ is a party to the covenant of redemption, so He is constantly represented as the mediator of the covenant of grace; not only in the sense of an *internunciatus Mesites*, but also *Egguos* (Heb. 7.22), a sponsor, or surety . By fulfilling the conditions on which the promises of the covenant of redemption were suspended, the veracity and justice of God are pledged to secure the salvation of his people; and this secures the fidelity of his people. So that Christ answers both for God and man. His work renders certain the gifts of God's grace, and the perseverance of his people in faith and obedience. He is therefore, in every sense, our salvation.

The Conditions of the Covenant

The condition of the covenant of grace, so far as adults are concerned, is faith in Christ. That is, in order to partake of the benefits of this covenant we must receive the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God in whom and for whose sake its blessings are vouchsafe to the children of men. Until we thus believe we are aliens and strangers from the covenant of promise, without God and without Christ. We must acquiesce in this covenant, renouncing all other methods of salvation, and consenting to be saved on the terms which it proposes, before we are made partakers of its benefits. The word *condition*, however, is used in two senses. Sometimes it means the meritorious consideration on the ground of which certain benefits are bestowed. In this sense perfect obedience was the condition of the covenant originally made with Adam. Had he retained his integrity he would have merited the promised blessing. For to him that worketh the

reward is not of grace but of debt. In the same sense the work of Christ is the condition of the covenant of redemption. It was the meritorious ground, laying a foundation in justice for the fulfilment of the promises made to Him by the Father. But in other cases, by condition we merely mean a *sine qua non*. A blessing may be promised on condition that it is asked for; or that there is a willingness to receive it. There is no merit in the asking or in the willingness, which is the ground of the gift. It remains a gratuitous favour; but it is, nevertheless, suspended upon the act of asking. It is in this last sense only that faith is the condition of the covenant of grace. There is no merit in believing. It is only the act of receiving a proffered favour. In either case the necessity is equally absolute. Without the work of Christ there would be no salvation; and without faith there is no salvation. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. He that believeth not, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

The Promises of the Covenant

The promises of this covenant are all included in the comprehensive formula, so often occurring in the Scriptures, ‘I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.’ This involves the *complete restoration of our normal relation to God*. All ground of alienation, every bar to fellowship is removed. He communicates Himself in his fulness to his people; and they become his by entire conformity to his will and devotion to his service, and are the special objects of his favour.

God is said to be our God, not only because He is the God whom we acknowledge and profess to worship and obey, as He was the God of the Hebrews in distinction from the Gentiles who did not acknowledge his existence or profess to be his worshipers; but He is our God, –our infinite portion; the source to us of all that God is to those who are the objects of his love. His perfections are revealed to us as the highest knowledge; they are all pledged for our protection, blessedness, and glory. His being our God implies also that He assures us of his love, and admits us to communion with Himself. As his favour is life, and his loving kindness better than life; as the vision of God, the enjoyment of his love and fellowship with Him secure the highest possible exaltation and beatification of his creatures, it is plain that the promise to be our God, in

the Scriptural sense of the term, includes all conceivable and all possible good.

When it is said that we are to be his people it means,

1. That we are his peculiar possession. His delights are with the children of men. From the various orders of rational creatures He has chosen man to be the special object of his favour, and the special medium through which and by which to manifest his glory. And from the mass of fallen men He has, of his own good pleasure, chosen an innumerable multitude to be his portion, as He condescends to call them; on whom He lavishes the plenitude of his grace, and in whom He reveals his glory to the admiration of all holy intelligences.
2. That being thus selected for the special love of God and for the highest manifestation of his glory, they are in all things fitted for this high destiny. They are justified, sanctified, and glorified. They are rendered perfectly conformed to his image, devoted to his service, and obedient to his will.

The Identity of the Covenant of Grace under all Dispensations

By this is meant that the plan of salvation has, under all dispensations, the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian, been the same. On this subject much diversity of opinion, and still more of mode of statement has prevailed. Socinians say that under the old economy, there was no promise of eternal life; and that the condition of salvation was not faith in Christ. The Remonstrants admitted that the patriarchs were saved, and that they were saved through Christ, i. e., in virtue of the work which the Redeemer was to accomplish; but they also questioned whether any direct promise of eternal life was given in the Old Testament, or whether faith in the Redeemer was the condition of acceptance with God.

The Baptists, especially those of the time of the Reformation, do not hold the common doctrine on this subject. The Anabaptists not only spoke in very disparaging terms of the old economy and of the state of the Jews under that dispensation, but it was necessary to their peculiar system, that they should deny that the covenant made with Abraham included the covenant of grace. Baptists hold that infants cannot be church members, and that the sign of such membership cannot properly be administered to any who have not knowledge and faith. But it cannot be denied that infants were included in the covenant made with Abraham, and that they received circumcision, its appointed seal and sign. It is therefore essential to their theory that the Abrahamic covenant should be regarded as a merely national covenant entirely distinct from the covenant of grace.

The Romanists assuming that saving grace is communicated through the sacraments, and seeing that the mass of the ancient Israelites, on many occasions at least, were rejected of God, notwithstanding their participation of the sacraments then ordained, were driven to assume a radical difference between the sacraments of the Old Testament and those of the New. The former only signified grace, the latter actually conveyed it. From this it follows that those living before the institution of the Christian sacraments were not actually saved. Their sins were not remitted, but pretermitted, passed over. At death they were not admitted into heaven, but passed into a place and state called the *limbus patrum*, where they remained in a negative condition until the coming of Christ, who after his death descended to hell, *sheol*, for their deliverance.

In opposition to these different views the common doctrine of the Church has ever been, that the plan of salvation has been the same from the beginning. There is the same promise of deliverance from the evils of the apostasy, the same redeemer, the same condition required for participation in the blessings of redemption, and the same complete salvation for all who embrace the offer of divine mercy.

In determining the degree of knowledge possessed by the ancient people of God, we are not to be governed by our own capacity of discovering from the Old Testament Scriptures the doctrines of grace. What amount of supplementary instruction the people received from the prophets, or what degree of divine illumination was granted to them we cannot tell. It

is, however, clear from the writings of the New Testament, that the knowledge of the plan of salvation current among the Jews at the time of the advent, was much greater than we should deem possible from the mere perusal of the Old Testament. They not only generally and confidently expected the Messiah, who was to be a teacher as well as a deliverer, but the devout Jews waited for the salvation of Israel. They spoke as familiarly of the Holy Spirit and of the baptism which He was to effect, as Christians now do. It is, principally, from the assertions of the New Testament writers and from their expositions of the ancient Scriptures, that we learn the amount of truth revealed to those who lived before the coming of Christ.

From the Scriptures, therefore, as a whole, from the New Testament, and from the Old as interpreted by infallible authority in the New, we learn that the plan of salvation has always been one and the same; having the same promise, the same Savior, the same condition, and the same salvation.

The Promise of Eternal Life made before the Advent

That the promise was the same to those who lived before the advent that it is to us, is plain. Immediately after the fall God gave to Adam the promise of redemption. That promise was contained in the prediction that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. In this Passage it is clear that the serpent is Satan. He was the tempter, and on him the curse pronounced was designed to fall. Bruising his head implies fatal injury or overthrow. The prince of darkness who had triumphed over our first parents, was to be cast down, and despoiled of his victory. This overthrow was to be accomplished by the seed of the woman. This phrase might mean the posterity of the woman, and in this sense would convey an important truth; man was to triumph over Satan. But it evidently had a more specific reference. It refers to one individual, who in a sense peculiar to himself, was to be the seed of the woman. This is clear from the analogy of prophecy. When it was promised to Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed; it would be very natural to understand by seed his posterity, the Hebrew people. But we know certainly, from the direct assertion of the Apostle (Gal. 3.9), that one individual, namely, Christ, was intended. So when Isaiah predicts

that the ‘servant of the Lord ‘ was to suffer, to triumph, and to be the source of blessings to all people, many understood, and many still understand him to speak of the Jewish nation, as God so often speaks of his servant Israel. Yet the servant intended was the Messiah, and the people were no further included in the prediction than when it is said that ‘salvation is of the Jews.’ In all these and similar cases we have two guides as to the real meaning of the Spirit. The one is found in subsequent and explanatory declarations of the Scriptures, the other is in the fulfilment of the predictions. We know from the event who the seed of the woman; who the seed of Abraham; who the Shiloh; who the Son of David; who the servant of the Lord were; for in Christ and by Him was fulfilled all that was predicted of them. The seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent’s head. But it was Christ, and Christ alone, who came into the world to destroy the works of the Devil. This he declared to be the purpose of his mission. Satan was the strong man armed whom Christ came to dispossess and to deliver from him those who were led captive by him at his will. We have, then, the promise of redemption made to our first parents immediately after the fall, to be by them communicated to their descendants to be kept in perpetual remembrance. This promise was repeated and amplified from time to time, until the Redeemer actually came. In these additional and fuller predictions, the nature of this redemption was set forth with ever increasing clearness. This general promise included many specific promises. Thus we find God promising to his faithful people the forgiveness of their sins, restoration to his favour, the renewing of their hearts, and the gift of his Spirit. No higher blessings than these are offered under the Christian dispensation. And for these blessings the ancient people of God earnestly longed and prayed. The Old Testament, and especially the Psalms and other devotional parts of the early Scriptures, are filled with the record of such prayers and longings. Nothing can be plainer than that pardon and the favour of God were promised to holy men before the coming of Christ, and these are the blessings which are now promised to us.

The Apostle in Heb. 11. teaches that the hopes of the patriarchs were not confined to the present life, but were fixed on a future state of existence. Such a state, therefore, must have been revealed to them, and eternal life must have been promised to them. Thus he says (chapter xi. 10), that

Abraham 'looked for the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' That this was heaven is plain from verse 16, where it is said, 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city.' He tells us that these ancient worthies gladly sacrificed all earthly good, and even life itself, 'not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.' That this was the common faith of the Jews long before the coming of Christ appears from 2 Mace. 7.9, where the dying martyr says to his tormentor, 'Thou like a fury takest us out of this present life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for his laws, unto everlasting life.' Our Lord teaches us that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive; and that where Abraham is, is heaven. His bosom was the resting place of the faithful.

Christ, the Redeemer, under both Dispensations

This is a very imperfect exhibition of the evidence which the Scriptures afford that the promise of redemption, and of all that redemption includes, pardon, sanctification, the favour of God, and eternal life, was made to the people of God from the beginning. It is no less clear that the Redeemer is the same under all dispensations. He who was predicted as the seed of the woman, as the seed of Abraham, the Son of David, the Branch, the Servant of the Lord, the Prince of Peace, is our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God manifest in the flesh. He, therefore, from the beginning has been held up as the hope of the world, the *Salvator Hominum*. He was set forth in all his offices, as Prophet, Priest, and King. His work was described as a sacrifice, as well as a redemption. All this is so obvious, and so generally admitted, as to render the citation of proof texts unnecessary. It is enough to refer to the general declarations of the New Testament on this subject. Our Lord commanded the Jews to search their Scriptures, because they testified of Him. He said that Moses and the prophets wrote of Him. Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to the disciples in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. The Apostles when they began to preach the gospel, not only everywhere proved from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, but they referred to them continually in support of everything which they taught concerning his person and his work. It is from the Old Testament

they prove his divinity; his incarnation; the sacrificial nature of his death; that He was truly a Priest to make reconciliation for the people, as well as a Prophet and a King; and that He was to die, to rise again on the third day, to ascend into heaven, and to be invested with absolute authority over all the earth, and over all orders of created beings. There is not a doctrine concerning Christ, taught in the New Testament, which the Apostles do not affirm to have been revealed under former dispensations. They therefore distinctly assert that it was through Him and the efficacy of his death that men were saved before, as well as after his advent. The Apostle Paul says (Rom. 3.25), that Christ was set forth as a propitiation for the remission of sins committed before the present time, during the forbearance of God. And in Heb. 9.15, it is still more explicitly asserted that He died for the forgiveness of sin under the first covenant. He was, therefore, as said in Rev. 13.8, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. This is at least the common and most natural interpretation of that passage.

Such a revelation of the Messiah was undoubtedly made in the Old Testament as to turn the eyes of the whole Jewish nation in hope and faith. What the two disciples on the way to Emmaus said, 'We trusted it had been He who should have redeemed Israel,' reveals what was the general expectation and desire of the people. Paul repeatedly speaks of the Messiah as the hope of Israel. The promise of redemption through Christ, he declared to be the great object, of the people's hope. When arraigned before the tribunals of the Jews, and before Agrippa, he uniformly de- dared that in preaching Christ and the resurrection, he had not departed from the religion of the fathers, but adhered to it, while his enemies had deserted it. 'Now I stand, and am judged,' he says, 'for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.' (Acts 26.6.) Again he said to the Jews in Rome, Acts 28.20, 'For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.' See, also, 23.6; 24.15 xxiii. In Acts 13.27, he says the rulers of the Jews rejected Christ because they knew not 'the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day,' which they 'fulfilled in condemning Him.' In Him was 'the promise which was made unto the fathers,' he tells us (verses 32, 33), of which he says, 'God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up (or brought into view) Jesus,' the long-expected Savior. It is needless to dwell upon

this point, because the doctrine of a personal Messiah who was to redeem the people of God, not only pervades the Old Testament, but is everywhere in the New Testament declared to be the great promise which is fulfilled in the advent and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith the Condition of Salvation from the Beginning

As the same promise was made to those who lived before the advent which is now made to us in the gospel, as the same Redeemer was revealed to them who is presented as the object of faith to us, it of necessity follows that the condition, or terms of salvation, was the same then as now. It was not mere faith or trust in God, or simply piety, which was required, but faith in the promised Redeemer, or faith in the promise of redemption through the Messiah.

This is plain not only from the considerations just mentioned, but also further, (1.) From the fact that the Apostle teaches that faith, not works, was before as well as after Christ the condition of salvation. This, in his Epistle to the Romans, he not only asserts, but proves. He argues that from the nature of the case the justification of sinners by works is a contradiction. If sinners, they are under condemnation for their works, and therefore cannot be justified by them. Moreover he proves that the Old Testament everywhere speaks of gratuitous forgiveness and acceptance of men with God; but if gratuitous, it cannot be meritorious. He further argues from the case of Abraham, who, according to the express declaration of the Scriptures, was justified by faith; and he quotes from the old prophets the great principle, true then as now, that the 'just shall live by faith.' (2.) In the second place, he proves that the faith intended was faith in a promise and not merely general piety or confidence toward God. Abraham, he says, 'staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform.' (Rom. iv. 20, 21.) (3.) The Apostle proves that the specific promise which was the object of the faith of the patriarch was the promise of redemption through Christ. That promise they were required to believe; and that the true people of God did believe. The mass of the people mistook the nature of the redemption promised; but even in their case it was the promise of redemption which was the object of their faith.

Those taught by the Spirit knew that it was a redemption from the guilt and power of sin and from the consequent alienation from God. In Gal. iii. 14, the Apostle therefore says that the blessing promised to Abraham has come upon the Gentiles. That blessing, therefore, was that which through the gospel is now offered to all men.

Not only, therefore, from these explicit declarations that faith in the promised Redeemer was required from the beginning, but from the admitted fact that the Old Testament is full of the doctrine of redemption by the Messiah, it follows that those who received the religion of the Old Testament received that doctrine, and exercised faith in the promise of God concerning his Son. The Epistle to the Hebrews is designed in great part to show that the whole of the Old dispensation was an adumbration of the New, and that it loses all its value and import if its reference to Christ be ignored. To deny, therefore, that the faith of the Old Testament saints was a faith in the Messiah and his redemption, is to deny that they had any knowledge of the import of the revelations and promises of which they were the recipients.

Paul, in Rom. 3.21, says that the method of salvation revealed in the gospel had been already revealed in the law and the prophets; and his definite object, in Gal. 3.13-28, is to prove that the covenant under which we live and according to the terms of which we are to be saved, is the identical covenant made with Abraham, in which the promise of redemption was made on the condition of faith in Him in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. This is a covenant anterior to the Mosaic law, and which that law could not set aside or invalidate.

The covenant of grace, or plan of salvation, being the same in all its elements from the beginning, it follows, first, in opposition to the Anabaptists, that the people of God before Christ constituted a Church, and that the Church has been one and the same under all dispensations. It has always had the same promise, the same Redeemer, and the same condition of membership, namely, faith in the Son of God as the Savior of the world.

It follows from the same premises, in opposition to the Romanists, that the salvation of the people of God who died before the coming of Christ,

was complete. They were truly pardoned, sanctified, and, at death, admitted to that state into which those dying in the Christian faith are now received. This is confirmed by what our Lord and the Apostles teach. The salvation promised us is that on which the Old Testament saints have already entered. The Gentile believers are to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The bosom of Abraham was the place of rest for all the faithful. All that Paul claims for believers under the gospel is, that they are the sons of Abraham, and partakers of his inheritance. If this is so, then the whole ritual theory which assumes that grace and salvation are communicated only through Christian sacraments must be false.

Different Dispensations

Although the covenant of grace has always been the same, the dispensations of that covenant have changed. The first dispensation extended from Adam to Abraham. Of this period we have so few records, that we cannot determine how far the truth was revealed, or what measures were adopted for its preservation. All we know is, that the original promises concerning the seed of the woman, as the Redeemer of our race, had been given; and that the worship of God by sacrifices had been instituted. That sacrifices were a divine institution, and designed to teach the method of salvation, may be inferred,

1. From the fact that it is the method which the common consciousness of men has everywhere led them to adopt. It is that which their relation to God as sinners demanded. It is the dictate of conscience that guilt requires expiation; and that expiation is made by the shedding of blood. Sacrifices, therefore, not being an arbitrary institution, but one having its foundation in our real relation to God as sinners, we may infer that it was by his command, direct or indirect, that such sacrifices were offered.
2. This may also be inferred from God's approving them, adopting them, and incorporating them in the religious observances

subsequently enjoined.

3. The fact that man was to be saved by the sacrifice of Christ, and that this was the great event to which the institutions of the earlier dispensations refer, renders it clear that this reference was designed, and that it was founded upon the institution of God.

The Second Dispensation

The second dispensation extended from Abraham to Moses. This was distinguished from the former,

1. By the selection of the descendants of Abraham to be the peculiar people of God. They were chosen in order to preserve the knowledge of the true religion in the midst of the general apostasy of mankind. To this end special revelations were made to them, and God entered into a covenant with them, promising that He would be their God, and that they should be his people.
2. Besides thus gathering his Church out of the world, and making its members a peculiar people, distinguished by circumcision from the Gentiles around them, the promise of redemption was made more definite. The Redeemer was to be of the seed of Abraham. He was to be one person. The salvation He was to effect should pertain to all nations.
3. Subsequently it was made known that the Deliverer was to be of the tribe of Judah.

Third Dispensation

The third dispensation of this covenant was from Moses to Christ. All that belonged to the previous periods was taken up and included in this. A multitude of new ordinances of polity, worship, and religion were enjoined. A priesthood and a complicated system of sacrifices were introduced. The promises were rendered more definite, setting forth more clearly by the instructions of the prophets the person and work of the coming Redeemer as the prophet, priest, and king of his people. The nature of the redemption He was to effect and the nature of the kingdom He was to establish were thus more and more clearly revealed. We have the direct authority of the New Testament for believing that the covenant

of grace, or plan of salvation, thus underlay the whole of the institutions of the Mosaic period, and that their principal design was to teach through types and symbols what is now taught in explicit terms in the gospel. Moses, we are told (Heb. 3.5), was faithful as a servant to testify concerning the things which were to be spoken after.

Besides this evangelical character which unquestionably belongs to the Mosaic covenant, it is presented in two other aspects in the Word of God. First, it was a national covenant with the Hebrew people. In this view the parties were God and the people of Israel; the promise was national security land prosperity; the condition was the obedience of the people as a nation to the Mosaic law; and the mediator was Moses. In this aspect it was a legal covenant. It said, 'Do this and live.' Secondly, it contained, as does also the New Testament, a renewed proclamation of the original covenant of works. It is as true now as in the days of Adam, it always has been and always must be true, that rational creatures who perfectly obey the law of God are blessed in the enjoyment of his favour; and that those who sin are subject to his wrath and curse. Our Lord assured the young man who came to Him for instruction that if he kept the commandments he should live. And Paul says (Rom. ii. 6) that God will render to every man according to his deeds; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and peace to every man who worketh good. This arises from the relation of intelligent creatures to God. It is in fact nothing but a declaration of the eternal and immutable principles of justice. If a man rejects or neglects the gospel, these are the principles, as Paul teaches in the opening chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, according to which he will be judged. If he will not be under grace, if he will not accede to the method of salvation by grace, he is of necessity under the law.

These different aspects under which the Mosaic economy is presented account for the apparently inconsistent way in which it is spoken of in the New Testament.

1. When viewed in relation to the people of God before the advent, it is represented as divine and obligatory.
2. When viewed in relation to the state of the Church after the advent, it is declared to be obsolete. It is represented as the lifeless husk from

which the living kernel and germ have been extracted, a body from which the soul has departed.

3. When viewed according to its true import and design as a preparatory dispensation of the covenant of grace, it is spoken of as teaching the same gospel, the same method of salvation as that which the Apostles themselves preached.
4. When viewed, in the light in which it was regarded by those who rejected the gospel, as a mere legal system, it was declared to be a ministration of death and condemnation. (2 Cor 3.6-18.)
5. And when contrasted with the new or Christian economy, as a different mode of revealing the same covenant, it is spoken of as a state of tutelage and bondage, far different from the freedom and filial spirit of the dispensation under which we now live.

The Gospel Dispensation

The gospel dispensation is called new in reference to the Mosaic economy, which was old, and about to vanish away. It is distinguished from the old economy,

1. In being catholic, confined to no one people, but designed and adapted to all nations and to all classes of men.
2. It is more spiritual, not only in that the types and ceremonies of the Old Testament are done away, but also in that the revelation itself is more inward and spiritual. What was then made known objectively, is now, to a greater extent, written on the heart. (Heb. 8.8-11.) It is incomparably more clear and explicit in its teachings.
3. It is more purely evangelical. Even the New Testament, as we have seen, contains a legal element, it reveals the law still as a covenant of works binding on those who reject the gospel; but in the New Testament the gospel greatly predominates over the law. Whereas, under the Old Testament, the law predominated over the gospel.
4. The Christian economy is specially the dispensation of the Spirit. The great blessing promised of old, as consequent on the coming of Christ, was the effusion of the Spirit on all flesh, I. e., on all nations and on all classes of men. This was so distinguishing a characteristic of the Messianic period that the evangelist says, 'The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.' (John 7.39.)

Our Lord promised that after his death and ascension He would send the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, to abide with his people, to guide them into the knowledge of the truth, and to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. He charged the Apostles to remain at Jerusalem until they had received this power from on high. And in explanation of the events of the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter said, 'This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.' (Acts 2.32, 33.)

5. The old dispensation was temporary and preparatory; the new is permanent and final. In sending forth his disciples to preach the gospel, and in promising them the gift of the Spirit, He assured them that He would be with them in that work unto the end of the world. This dispensation is, therefore, the last before the restoration of all things; the last, that is, designed for the conversion of men and the ingathering of the elect. Afterwards comes the end; the resurrection and the final judgment. In the Old Testament there are frequent intimations of another and a better economy, to which the Mosaic institutions were merely preparatory. But we have no intimation in Scripture that the dispensation of the Spirit is to give way for a new and better dispensation for the conversion of the nations. When the gospel is fully preached, then comes the end.