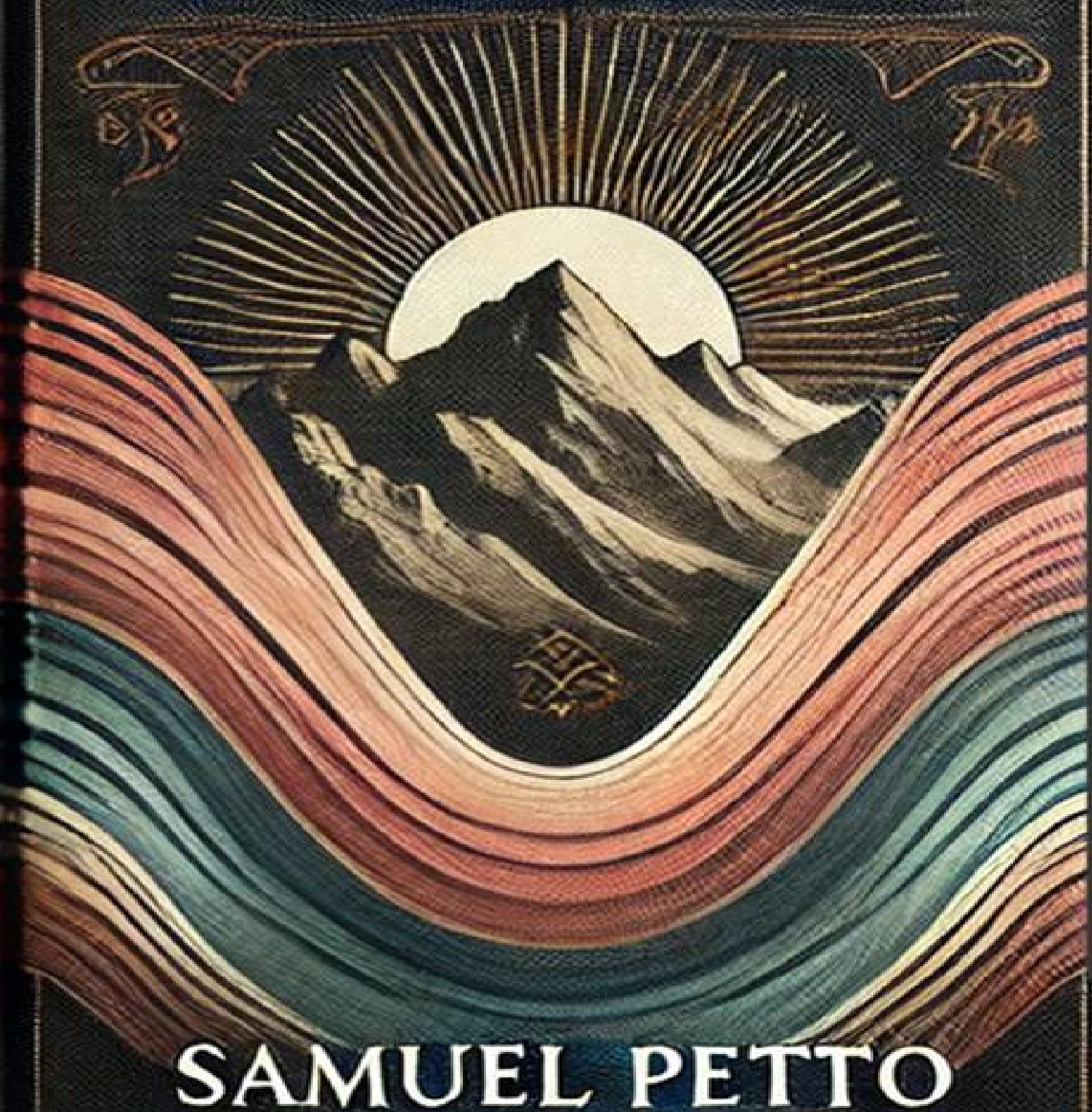
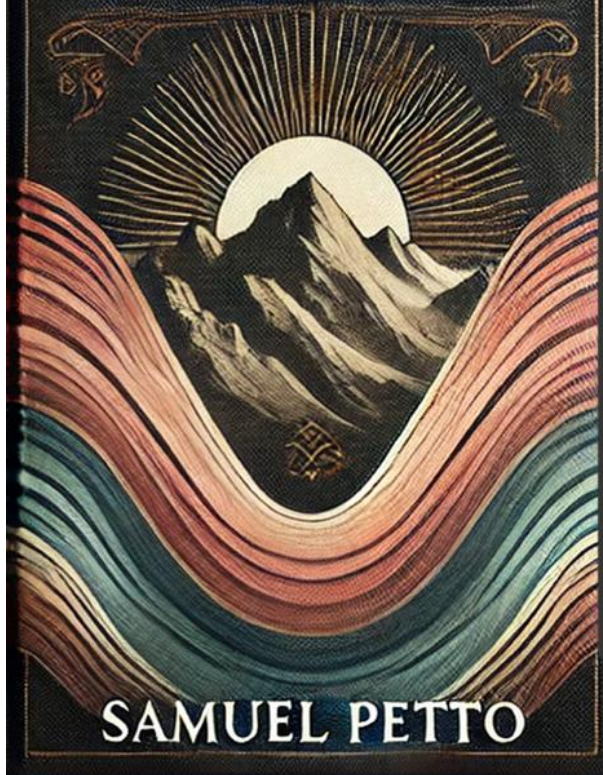


THE  
**GREAT MYSTERY**  
OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE



**SAMUEL PETTO**

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# **THE GREAT MYSTERY OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE**

**The Difference Between the Old and New  
Covenant Stated and Explained: With An  
Exposition of the Covenant of Grace in  
the Principal Aspects of it.**

By SAMUEL PETTO, Minister of the Gospel.

*"Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure  
mercies of David." — Isaiah 55:3*

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## **TO THE READER**

It is a matter of highest concern for the souls of men to have a special acquaintance with the Covenant of Grace—the great charter by which all spiritual and eternal blessings are held, and the way and means through which they are conveyed or derived to them.

There are many useful treatises already in existence on this subject; yet there remain some weighty points concerning it, particularly regarding its relation to Jesus Christ, and especially with reference to the Old Mount Sinai Covenant and the New, which require further clarification. This is necessary for the unfolding of many Scriptures, the strengthening of faith, and the promotion of the comfort of Christians. If my present undertaking may contribute anything in this regard, or give light into these glorious mysteries so that God may be honored thereby, I shall have achieved my aim.

In order to further explain some matters discussed in this treatise, I shall add the following.

As the Covenant of Works was made with the first Adam and all his seed in him, promising preservation in life upon condition of man's perfect obedience to the will of God (Gen. 2:17),

So the Covenant of Grace was made with Jesus Christ—not merely as God, but as one appointed to be incarnate and serve as Mediator—as a second Adam, and with a Gospel seed in him, promising all spiritual blessings, even eternal life and salvation, upon the condition or consideration of his undergoing the curse and rendering perfect obedience to the Law on their behalf (Isa. 53:10-11; Rom. 5:6 to the end).

In this broad sense, it includes that agreement between the Father and the Son for our redemption, which was full of grace and flowed from the free favor of God toward poor sinners (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2), as well as the covenant with us—namely, the New Covenant—for the application of what was promised therein. Some speak as if this alone were the Covenant of Grace.

Thus, its constitution was from eternity (Titus 1:2), though its revelation was given in time to Adam, Abraham, David, and others (Gen. 3:15; Gen. 12, etc.).

Now, since the condition of the Covenant of Grace requires that the righteousness of the Law be fulfilled or that all its demands regarding duty and penalty be satisfied by Jesus Christ, it was necessary that some means be established for his coming under our very obligation. To this end, the Lord, in infinite wisdom, renewed or repeated the Covenant of Works as to its substance (though with a new intent) in the Covenant at Mount Sinai. This Covenant was expressed in terms of “Do and Live” (Gal. 3:10,12)—not so that Israel might attain eternal life by their own doing, but so that Jesus Christ

might be born under the very Law to which we were bound (Gal. 4:4).

It was not merely that he might render a valuable satisfaction by something in place of it (for his taking on human nature, his intercession, or other works of his—being of infinite merit and value—might otherwise have sufficed without his sufferings). Rather, as that word in Gen. 2:17 required, he had to endure the very curse and fulfill the righteousness of the Law in our stead, which he accordingly did. Herein especially consists our redemption (Gal. 3:12; Gal. 4:4-5).

Fulfilling the Old and confirming the New Covenant were the immediate effects of his death. In this, he stood as the Mediator not of the Old, but of the New Testament (Heb. 9:15). Therefore, he did not die merely to procure a New Covenant, or to enable God to deal with men upon new terms, but to establish and fulfill the terms or conditions of the New.

The Mount Sinai Covenant (with reference to its substance) may be said to express the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace, to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ—even as the New Covenant sets forth the blessings promised to us, upon the completion of that condition by him. These are matters so distinct that I hope none will take offense when I (as I have explained myself) speak of the Old and New as two distinct Covenants when compared with each other, as in Gal. 4:24 and Heb. 8.

Seeing that I do not assert the Sinai Covenant to be a Covenant of Works promising eternal life to Israel based on their obedience—as some would have it—rather, its reference is wholly to that of grace, though it does not comprise the whole of it.

Neither do I assert two distinct Covenants of Grace or separate ways of salvation in substance. But whereas it is commonly held that the Old and the New are one and the same, differing only in certain circumstances and external aspects (such as the rigorous demand for duty through fear and terror, etc.), I, on the other hand, believe that spiritual blessings were dispensed through the Covenant with Abraham. Though Israel's obedience to the Moral Law was, on one account, a fruit of holiness and sanctification, yet as that same obedience related to the Mount Sinai Covenant, it ushered in only temporal blessings. Even as a child owes obedience to his father by natural obligation, if the father should promise an inheritance upon certain acts of obedience, then the same actions would carry a double respect or use—so it was here.

With the Mount Sinai Covenant thus opened, many Scriptures will be explained, and it will be made clear what those works of the Law are by which we are so often denied justification—namely, all works performed by ourselves as constituting even the least part of a righteousness unto justification (or, which amounts to the same thing, as a condition giving us right and title to salvation) (Acts 15:1; Rom. 9:30-32; Phil. 3:9). It is only the obedience of Jesus Christ to the Law that avails for these ends.

The Apostle diligently proves that men do not obtain such eternal mercies by their own works—whether moral or ceremonial, whether apart from or in conjunction with Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:20; Rom. 9:3; Gal. 3:11,21; Gal. 5:4). The pursuit of justification or salvation through works stands opposed to true sanctification. This is why discussions of sanctification are frequently interwoven in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians.



It is true that the works of the Law of Moses are most particularly opposed, because the controversy of that time concerned the Jews and those who, professing Christianity, sought to impose these laws. Yet if men ascribe the same place and office to any other works—acting upon a legal foundation—then such works become equivalent to the works of the Law, and the Apostle’s arguments remain equally forceful against them.

For he thus reasons: That cannot be a justifying righteousness in our present fallen estate,

1. Which is not perfect, for the least sin is enough to condemn (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10).

Nor,

2. Which is our own, of our own working out (Rom. 10:3,5).

Nor,

3. Which leaves any place for boasting (Eph. 2:9; Rom. 4:2).

Nor,

4. Which is opposed to grace (Rom. 4:4).

And upon these accounts, all Evangelical Works are excluded from Justification, for they are imperfect, they are our own subjectively, and they would leave room for some boasting if acceptance unto life were upon these—seeing it should be by our giving unto God. Moreover, the way would be opposed to grace, for if the condition were never so small, yet being performed, the reward might be claimed upon our act, and so would be of debt, not of Gospel grace (Rom. 4:4).

The works of Abraham and David after conversion are excluded from justification (verses 2, 3, 6), which argues that although Evangelical obedience, when kept in its due place, does not detract from the grace of God, yet it does, and is opposed to it, if introduced into justification.

Thus, Gospel grace does not consist in a mere relaxation of the rigor of the Law, nor in making a bargain with us (for Christ's sake) to accept our faith, repentance, and sincere obedience in place of that which is perfect; but it stands in excusing us from a personal performance of that righteousness which is the condition of life and admitting Jesus Christ to satisfy the Law in our stead.

For the grand difference between the Law and the Gospel is this: The one justifies by our own righteousness; the other by another's righteousness. If man himself is the doer for life, that is the righteousness of the Law, which says (Rom. 10:5), *The man that does them shall live in them*. In opposition to this, that of the Gospel is called *the righteousness of faith* (verse 6) and *the righteousness of God* (verse 3), because it is to be sought outside of ourselves, in another, in the free promise. That which we are the subjects of is to be disclaimed here (Phil. 3:9; Rom. 10:3).

Asserting justification by any of our personal performances places them in the very role of works in the Covenant of Works, which is anti-evangelical and introduces some merit, just as perfect works would have done. Being enabled by grace to perform them does not prevent merit, any more than (as one has said) my furnishing a man with tools to work with hinders his deserving a reward. All ability that Adam had in his state of innocence was from the favor of God, and what he was required to do was duty.

Faith itself is not the least part of that righteousness; it is an act of obedience. But as such, it is not said to justify, nor as it works by love, though it does so work (Gal. 5:6), nor as a condition of life (as I have demonstrated elsewhere), but only as a means of applying Christ and his righteousness. Much less can any of our works be a part thereof.

The new creature avails for being crucified to the world (Gal. 6:14-15), *i.e.*, as a means, but it is never said to avail for justification.

To justify is to declare a person righteous; the true God cannot pass a false sentence. Therefore, we cannot have justification without having a righteousness. This cannot consist in any act of ours, such as faith, repentance, or obedience, as has already been shown; therefore, it must be of another's working—the very righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 1:30).

And if his obedience (being to the Law) may be called a legal righteousness, yet as the same is applied by faith, it is to us an evangelical righteousness.

The only question then is whether evangelical works are of the same use in justification as faith is. Do they hold the same place and office in it as faith does?

I answer negatively: they do not. For often we read of *the righteousness of faith*, but never of *the righteousness of love* in that matter.

We are said to be justified by faith, but not (in the same sense) by love or works.

It is true that Evangelical works are necessary to testify to our faith, obedience, and thankfulness to God, but they are required not as conditions, but as effects and declarations of our justification.

Things are said to be done when they are manifested (Rom. 3:7; 4:15). *A tree is known by its fruit.* In this way, not only open acts but also secret ones (when regular) have the ability to evidence faith, and that a person is justified—even when they are not actually seen.

Paul speaks of being justified before God by receiving or applying the righteousness of Jesus Christ in the free promise—this is only by faith. James speaks of being justified by manifesting to oneself or to others that it is applied—this is by Evangelical works, and not by faith alone.

Thus, in offering up Isaac, Abraham was declaratively justified—it showed his faith to be true (verse 18; Gen. 22:12). Yet it was not his working, but his believing, that was *imputed to righteousness* (James 2:23).

If this were justification in Paul's sense, yet it is still by faith, and *he was called the friend of God.*

There is a justification declared by works, as God acted kindly toward him, so he acted in a friendly way toward God.

A man is vain who contents himself with a faith that consists in a mere assent to some truths without their power upon his heart (verses 14, 19, 20).

That is a dead faith—one that does not profit, is not accompanied by salvation, and remains without works (verses 17, 20, 26).

Thus, it is not the same true faith by which any are justified, but another thing entirely. That unfruitful faith, which is here condemned, was certainly as far from justifying them as it was from saving them. Therefore, it is not the faith that Paul insists upon, for by that faith men were justified—and that in order before works, for works cannot be performed in an instant, though they certainly follow. But the justification and faith to which men are called and which they are commanded to declare by works—these are of a Gospel nature.

The Lord Jesus, having fully performed the Law as the condition of the New Testament, has thus made it absolute to us.

If, improperly speaking, a duty, a way, or a means to the enjoyment of some blessings of it is called a condition, I do not object.

But a condition, properly speaking, is more than merely a *causa sine qua non*—it is a cause that has a moral efficiency in it.

For the fulfillment of it is that which gives right and by which a man has a title to what is promised—and without it, none; and so it is a moral efficient cause of the enjoyment of the good promised in a covenant.

Faith and repentance are great duties; but nothing performed by us can be such a cause or condition in the New Covenant.

There is Absoluteness,

1. In the form of the New Covenant.
2. In the actual admission into it.

3. In the freedom of those under it from the curse of the Old, and in their participation in the blessings of the New.
4. Wherever the form of the New Testament is given forth, it is in an absolute way—"*I will, and ye shall*" (Heb. 10:16,17; Heb. 8:8 to the end). He insists upon it that *now* (Jer. 31:31-32) is made good, and this, purposely to draw the Hebrews away from the Old Covenant, which they were too much engaged in, and to direct them toward the New.

Other Scriptures may reveal our duty before and after being actually interested in its blessings, but the nature of the Covenant is most fully expressed here in these texts, which speak of the great matters or promises contained in it, of the Mediator, and the subjects of it. The terms thereof must be derived from these places where the Covenant is explicitly treated, rather than from others where only one promise is named and where the Covenant itself is not even mentioned.

Here, it is not called a purpose or prophecy, but a Covenant—or rather, a Testament—and is presented in such an absolute manner that God undertakes all. He promises as certainly that they shall be his people as that he will be their God. He promises not only that he will remember their sins and iniquities no more, but also that he will write his laws in their hearts, *i.e.*, that he will give them a frame of faith and new obedience. These are as absolutely promised here as any other matters, and therefore believing and obeying cannot properly be causes or conditions, but are the fruits and effects of the Covenant, by its being fulfilled upon them. Their duty is necessarily implied, yet, as it stands here in the Covenant, the design of it is plainly to express the work of God—what he will do for them, how he will furnish and equip them to discharge their duty toward him.

2. The actual admission of all whom Jesus Christ stood for into the New Covenant, or their being brought under it, is absolutely determined. He had an absolute assurance that his undertaking should take effect on all those whom he had designed therein (Isa. 53:10-11). *He shall see his seed*—all whom he travailed for—and therefore they must be effectually brought into Covenant with him.

There was no condition upon which his obedience depended, nor upon which it was to be accepted for such souls, or otherwise not. He did not suffer under any such uncertainty, but for those who were assuredly to become the heirs of promise.

Indeed, making a Covenant with us is claimed by the Lord as his own work (Isa. 53:3; 61:8). *I will make or cut an everlasting Covenant with you* (Jer. 31:31-32; 32:40; Ezek. 16:8; Heb. 8:10).

God has undertaken to bring men under the promise and to apply it to them. Attendance upon means is duty, but it is never said that men make the Covenant with God or bring themselves into it by an act of their own; rather, it is God who makes it with them. They only *take hold* of God's Covenant (Isa. 56:4,6).

The will of God is not determined by any act of man. *When God will work, who shall let him?* What he undertakes shall be absolutely accomplished. Hence, just as those under the Old Covenant who were to be redeemed are represented under the name of Israel, so also are those under the New, to whom all is applied—the same are the subjects of both.

3. Those who are actually in Covenant have an absolute freedom from the curse of the Old, and an equal promise of the blessings of the New. Jesus Christ has not only suspended, but has

*redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).*

Hence, we are said *not to be under the Law* and *to be dead to it* (Rom. 6:14; 7:4; Gal. 2:19).

Christians, then, have not only a conditional freedom from the curse of the Law in this life, but such freedom as is absolute; and if they should believe themselves to be under it, they would believe a lie (Rom. 8:1).

Yet divine threatenings are of great use, not only to the unregenerate but even to believers—to strike them with a filial fear, so as to deter them from sin, which has such punishment attached to it. And this fear arises even when they see themselves secured from such punishment, just as an honorable child will be afraid upon hearing his father threaten another for a fault and will take care not to commit it.

The non-elect are formally under the curse of the Law and the judgment of vindictive justice. The elect, before conversion, are not only materially under it, but the Law's sentence of condemnation stands against them.

Believers, however, are so freed from it that their sicknesses, death, etc., are only materially the same as those mentioned in the curse, but they are turned into blessings for them.

Likewise, all the promises of the New Covenant are absolute to all who are under it (Heb. 8:6, etc.). No act of ours places an obligation upon God to grant salvation to us.



That great blessing of the Covenant—Justification—is said to be *by faith*, but never *by faith as a condition*. The same may be said of other blessings of the Covenant; yet, I do not deny that figuratively that may be ascribed to faith which properly belongs to Jesus Christ alone.

The absoluteness of the Covenant does not lead to the conclusion that man is at liberty while God is not. For those who are still outside the Covenant, or who lack a personal interest in its blessings—indeed, all men—are under a divine law and an obligation to obedience. Otherwise, they could not be charged with sin, as they are (Rom. 3:23; 5:12).

For *where there is no Law, there is no transgression* (1 John 3:4). *Sin is the transgression of the Law*.

Thus, the obligation to duty does not arise merely from entering into Covenant, nor does coming into Covenant remove that obligation; rather, it strengthens it. No man, whether in or out of the Covenant, is at liberty from his duty.

**As to the way of the Lord's entering into Covenant with men, it is thus:**

By his Spirit in the Gospel, he reveals and gives Jesus Christ (for he is the first saving gift), and all the promises are granted in and with him (Col. 2:6; 1 John 5:12; Rom. 8:32; Eph. 3:6; 2 Cor. 1:30; 2 Pet. 1:4). The same New Covenant or Testament has various effects.

As the Spirit works effectually by the promise of it upon the souls of men, it is a Covenant of life and grace to them. It is by the New Testament that the Lord says to any soul, *Live*, and that the first grace is wrought in them (Ezek. 16:8; 36:26; Heb. 8:10; 2 Cor. 3:6).

As the Lord, by giving and proclaiming the promises, binds himself by engagement to fulfill them for men, it is thus a Covenant *to* or *with* them—because they obtain a personal interest in it, such that they have grounds to claim many of its privileges. In this manner, the Covenant was often renewed with Abraham after he was already in it.

As by the same Covenant or promise, the Lord obligates himself to all acts of communion and expressions of love and kindness, suitable to or expected in a conjugal relation, so it is a *Marriage Covenant* with them. In the same moment that they are enabled to consent by faith (Heb. 8:10; John 1:12), they receive and enjoy the blessings promised as a necessary fruit and effect of the Covenant.

It is promised therein that they *shall be his people*, and that they *shall resign themselves unto the Lord*. He has undertaken that each one (i.e., one by one) *shall say, I am the Lord's* (Isa. 44:3,5). A consent is promised by the Lord as well as any other matter.

Thus, our engaging ourselves to God (or *Covenanting* with him) is not what constitutes the Covenant of Grace, but rather, it is *executive*—that which is produced in the execution of it and may often be repeated or renewed by distinct acts of engagement.

God, in dealing with men as reasonable creatures who act out of judgment and their own choice, urges duty (such as believing, repenting, etc.) by arguments drawn from both the advantage of yielding to it—[*All that believe shall be saved*]—and the danger of neglecting it—[*Such shall be damned*] (Mark 16:16; Rom. 10:9; Rev. 3:20).

Such general propositions do not express the full terms of the Covenant, but rather serve as means toward its execution. For the invitations extend to *all nations* (Matt. 28:19; Mark. 16:15)—since

the death of Christ, but not before (Ps. 147:19-20)—whereas the Covenant itself is only with *the Israel of God* (Heb. 8:8).

I shall add no more at present to this, except to state that my design in all of this is to rightly define evangelical duty and to affirm the doctrine of free grace—which, as it is the most Christ-exalting, so it is also the most sin-mortifying, soul-humbling, self-abasing, and self-emptying doctrine.

It is *not* the Law of works, but the Law of faith that excludes boasting (Col. 1:18-19; Rom. 6:1,14; Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 3:27).

[Reader, the following treatise has been prepared over several years, and not one leaf has been added to it since October 1672, which I mention for a special reason.]

My desire is that all I have written, in seeking to clarify the mind and will of God in this great matter, may be weighed in the balance of the Sanctuary and received only as it holds weight there.

And may thy sharing in the blessings of the everlasting Covenant be furthered by this work—this shall be the prayer of him who is,

Thy Servant in the work of the Gospel,  
S. P.

Mon. 4, day 20, 1673.

**Christian Reader,**

The ensuing discourse contains a sober endeavor to declare and rightly state the nature and difference of the two Covenants—of Works and of Grace. This is a subject which, by reason of its weight and importance in the whole matter of religious obedience, has been undertaken by many. Yet, due to its difficulty, combined with personal prejudices, not a few have erred in their handling of it. Neither do I know of any who have yet treated it with such fullness and clarity as to preclude further diligent inquiry into the truth, or to render labor in the same kind either unnecessary or superfluous.

The storehouses of heavenly wisdom, grace, and truth that are laid up in the divine revelations concerning God's covenants are far from being exhausted or fully drawn forth by the labors of any, though many have already brought to light excellent and useful instruction regarding the mind of God and the duty of those who believe. Yet the subject itself is so excellent, its mystery so great, and its declaration in Scripture so extensive—pervading the whole body of divine revelation from beginning to end—as well as so deeply concerning the entire course of our faith and obedience, that there remains just cause to justify renewed inquiry into the mind of God as revealed in his Word.

There is no doubt that the greatest manifestation of divine grace, goodness, and condescension—next to the sending of the only Son of God to take our nature upon him, along with the direct effects and consequences thereof—is his entering into covenant with the children of men. Nor has anything a greater tendency to the advancement of his own glory.

God might have dealt with mankind in a way of sovereignty or mere dominion, as he does with the remainder of the creatures here below. Yet it must be acknowledged that, had he done so, there would not

have been such an evident demonstration of his divine excellencies—his goodness, righteousness, and faithfulness—as follows upon his condescension in taking mankind into covenant with himself. Hence, he has never treated with any of Adam's race in any other way or upon any other terms.

Wherefore, when the first covenant was broken by the entrance of sin, God had no other relation to mankind than that of supreme Ruler and Judge, to reward them according to the penalty threatened and established in the covenant. But as for any advantage in a way of love, peace, or goodness, none remained until he made and established a new covenant for that very purpose. This fully reveals how great a concern of the glory of God is bound up in the covenant he has made with us and sets before us, seeing that he has never declared or intimated any other way of gracious and acceptable intercourse with him. The effects of it extend into eternity.

Moreover, this dispensation of God, in making a covenant with our first parents, was the greatest evidence of the preeminence of human nature in time and the only demonstration of our capacity to be brought into the eternal enjoyment of God. In admitting us to an intercourse with himself, according to a declared rule of his own goodness and faithfulness, he manifested that we were capable of the eternal rewards he proposed to us in himself.

These considerations make the investigation of the true nature of the covenant first made with Adam, and the terms upon which it was established, both necessary and profitable. For although that covenant ceased, as to any spiritual or eternal benefit unto us, by the entrance of sin, yet as it is revealed, it remains instructive—declaring the wisdom and goodness of God, the excellency of the state and condition in which we were created, and the honor bestowed upon

human nature. From this, we may derive proper directions for our understanding of both God and ourselves.

But as for the new covenant, which is in and with us through Christ, and thus comprises the whole work of his mediation, it alone is the instrument of our present relation to God. It is by this covenant that God communicates himself to us in grace, love, and mercy; it is by this that we fix our faith, trust, and confidence in him; it is by this that we yield obedience to him, and it is by this that our souls are brought into the eternal enjoyment of him. The knowledge of this covenant, therefore, is necessary for everyone who deems it necessary to seek acquaintance with God or Christ, or to understand the present state and future condition of his own soul.

It is, therefore, without question, a labor worthy of acceptance in any whom God has given light in this mystery of his wisdom and grace, along with ability for its declaration, to endeavor to direct and instruct others in the truth and doctrine of it. For upon this depends all our faith, obedience, present comfort, and future happiness.

But beyond these two solemn and stated covenants—the one suited for the preservation of the integrity in which we were created, and the other for the restoration of the image of God in us through Jesus Christ, which was lost by sin—there is mention in Scripture of various particular, intervening covenants that God made with his Church or with specific persons at different times. Yet, because they all partake of the general nature of a divine covenant, they are but *emanations from* and *particular expressions or limitations* of one or the other of these two principal covenants.

For an absolutely distinct covenant—one not related to either of these two—God has never made with mankind. Yet under the Old Testament, while the wisdom of God was veiled in its own mysteries

and not clearly brought into the light, there was such a mixed dispensation—revealing, for certain ends, the sense and power of the first covenant while preparing for the introduction of the full revelation of the second by Jesus Christ (who in all things was to have the preeminence)—that it is not always easy to discern and distinguish what pertains to the one and what to the other, or from which of them they are to be denominated.

Here, then, is a blessed field of sacred truth, wherein humble, sober, and judicious persons may exercise themselves to the great benefit and advantage of the Church of God.

To rightly define the nature of a divine covenant in general, with its essential properties, which must be in every true covenant; to distinguish the first and second covenants—both in their nature and their effects and ends; to explain what doctrines, properties, and purposes of the first covenant (the Covenant of Works) and what of the second covenant (the Covenant of Grace) were revealed and mingled together under the Old Testament; to show how the whole power and sanction of the first covenant was transferred upon Christ and in him fulfilled and ended—these are labors deserving the most diligent study of those who are called to teach the mysteries of the Gospel.

And in these things, with many other matters of equal importance, this worthy author has labored—if I am not much mistaken—to good effect. His design is to disentangle things that seem perplexed, to bring clarity to the whole doctrine of the covenants by demonstrating their proper order and relation to one another, so that the grace of God in the Covenant of Grace may be exalted, and his faithfulness and holiness in the Covenant of Works may be magnified—both in

and through Jesus Christ, who is the end of the one and the life of the other.

Thus, I trust that the reader will find such satisfaction in these great and deep inquiries as will cause him to return praise and thanksgiving unto God.

**John Owen**

## **CHAP. I.**

Of a Covenant in general, and the distribution of the Covenant into that of Works and of Grace.

The all-wise God, that he might magnify his loving-kindness toward miserable man in granting him fellowship and communion with himself in all ages, has had this admirable design of dealing with him, not in the way of prerogative, but in the way of covenant. When man was in a state of innocence, there was a covenant of works, wherein he placed himself under obligation to continue man in life, provided he remained steadfast and obedient. And when man fell into a state of sin, God still chose to deal with him by way of a covenant—not as made with the first Adam, but with Jesus Christ as the second Adam, and with all his seed in him.

Many Scriptures give clear indications of such a federal transaction between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son, in order to the recovery and everlasting salvation of sinners, even where we do not find the explicit term covenant. Thus, in Isa. 53:10-12, there is a



mutual agreement: something to be undertaken by Jesus Christ—he is to make his soul an offering for sin—and something promised to him in return—he shall see his seed. Likewise, in Isa. 42:6, the parties entering into covenant are the Father and the Son. Not men, but I the Lord, who cannot err in my appointments, who am faithful and almighty— I have called thee (i.e., Jesus Christ) and will give thee. The speech is here directed to Christ, the only beloved Son.

Here is the Father's designation and sealing of him (John 6:27) to the mediatorial office, promising him great things upon his undertaking it, and his acceptance of this office and voluntary submission to the Father's will in it—Lo, I come to do thy will (Heb. 5:4-5; Ps. 40:7-8; John 10:17-18). These things together amount to, or constitute, a covenant between them, for what more is required for a covenant to exist?

Here we have the terms of the covenant: all that is necessary for the accomplishment of salvation. Was man estranged from God? Behold, it is promised, I will give thee for a covenant—for there was no possible way for this great breach to be healed but by a covenant. And since the covenant of works was broken and man could no longer be trusted, Jesus Christ, as the surety, undertook all that was necessary to reconcile sinners and restore his seed into divine favor forever.

Thus, he himself is the covenant of the people, for all the conditions of life required of them are found in him. Yea, he has undertaken the removal of all internal obstacles that would hinder their reception of covenant mercy— he is given for a light to the Gentiles—removing the blindness that is in them. No sinfulness or unworthiness should discourage them, for behold, all is in a way of free grace— I will give thee. Christ himself, the fountain of all grace, is freely given, and the

Father is firmly determined to bring all to fulfillment— I will give thee.

Furthermore, many promises are made to Jesus Christ of divine assistance and all things necessary for the accomplishment of this great work— I will hold thy hand, meaning, I will assist and uphold thee (Isa. 41:13). Many promises of success and victory over all his enemies, and of possessing the heathen as his inheritance, are also given (Ps. 2:8-9; Zech. 9:10; Ps. 72:8; Dan. 7:14), all conditioned upon his obedience. These plainly demonstrate a covenant between the Father and the Son.

This is further implied in the fact that redemption is ascribed to Christ's work. For the very concept of redemption requires an agreement between two parties: the Father promises that upon the payment of such a price by his Son, such souls shall be ransomed and set free; Jesus Christ consents and pays it, thereby becoming their Redeemer. This constitutes a covenant.

## **The Nature and Division of a Covenant**

To further clarify this matter, I shall first consider the nature of a covenant in general, then its division into that of works and grace, the role of Jesus Christ in the latter, and finally, its establishment or date.

The word covenant in Hebrew (בְּרִית - Berith) is used in two ways:

1. Properly, for a mutual contract or agreement between two parties. This distinguishes it from a law, which places no obligation on the lawgiver, and from a single promise, which lacks stipulation from the recipient. In this sense, the covenant

of grace between the Father and the Son is indeed a proper covenant, as it includes mutual obligation.

2. Figuratively, in various ways throughout Scripture:

- For a bare divine promise, as in Gen. 9:9-10, where God's covenant with every living creature includes many that were incapable of contracting with God or making any stipulation.
- For a mere sign or seal of a covenant, as in Gen. 17:10, where circumcision is called the covenant, though it is only a token of it.
- For a part of a covenant, as in Exod. 34:28 and Deut. 9:9, 11, 15, where the moral law, which was only one part of the old covenant, is itself called the covenant.

Thus, covenant and promise may sometimes be used interchangeably, a part being taken for the whole (Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:17-19). In this sense, Jesus Christ himself is called the covenant (Isa. 42:6).

## **The Covenant of God on Behalf of Man is Twofold, and is Thus Distinguished**

### **The Covenant**

1. **Of Works** – with the first Adam and his seed.

2. **Of Grace**

1. With Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, for all his, from eternity.
2. With his people, in and with him, in time, considered in its:
  1. **Legal condition**, typical manifestation, and servile, temporary administration at Mount Sinai.

2. **Evangelical disposition** as to matter and form, namely: spiritual promises, free and lasting dispensation.

And all this considered in its:

1. **Primary revelation**, and renewal with the fathers—Abraham, David, etc.—before the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:14, 16, 17), under the Old Testament, when the Messiah was promised, and privileges were given in him.
2. **Ratification, consummation, or perfection**, after the incarnation of Christ, under the New Covenant or Testament (Heb. 8 and 9), wherein the Mediator is revealed, and privileges, both present and to come, are applied absolutely by him and more clearly enumerated.

Or thus:

## **The Covenant of God on Behalf of Man is Twofold, and is Thus Distinguished**

### **The Covenant**

1. **Of Works** – with the first Adam and his seed in him.
2. **Of Grace**, in its:
  1. **Constitution** with Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, and his seed in him, from eternity—consisting of promises and agreements for their (i.e., his seed's) recovery from a state of sin and death to a state of righteousness and life, in and by him.
  2. **Declaration and manifestation** as with us, in and with Christ in time. And thus, it is considered in its:

1. **More private dispensation**, while the Church was domestic, or in families, as to its:
  1. **Primary revelation and promulgation** to Adam (Gen. 3:15).
  2. **Subsequent renewal, execution, and application** to the patriarchs, such as Abraham (Gen. 12; 15; 17).
2. **More public dispensation**, when the Church became congregational, as to its:
  1. **Legal condition**, and administration in the Mount Sinai covenant (Exod. 19; 20).
  2. **Evangelical disposition**, namely, absolute promises and unchangeable administration in the New Covenant (Heb. 8:8-11).

**The first part of this division is *Generis in Species*, namely, the division into the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.**

The second part, that is, the division or distribution of the Covenant of Grace, is threefold:

1. *Accidentis in Subjecta*, namely, with Christ as principal and with us in him.
2. *Effecti in suas causas*, both extrinsical and intrinsical, namely, legal condition and evangelical disposition.
3. *Accidentis in accidentia*, namely, primary revelation and ratification.

4. There was a Law or Covenant of Works made with the first Adam and his seed before the fall. In that state, man was to seek eternal life in the way of his own obedience. Then God dealt with man upon these terms: *Do and live*. For the divine threat of death in Genesis 2:17, *In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die*, strongly implies a promise of enjoying life if he remained obedient. Otherwise, Adam might have reasoned, *Whether I eat or eat not, it is all one, for I am still liable to death*.

Doubtless, as the threatened death was intended as a deterrent from eating, so also the hope of life was given as a persuasive motive for forbearance.

Indeed, the tree of life confirms this. Man was made an exile, cast out of Paradise (Gen. 3:22), *lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever*. Such an act of banishment would have been unnecessary for prevention if the tree of life had never been intended to establish man in life, had he remained steadfast. Some divine law or covenant must, therefore, have been established in this way.

Some may doubt whether this was a Covenant of Works because here there is only a threat of death upon eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:17), upon disobedience to that one positive law or command. Perfect obedience to all moral commands is not explicitly mentioned, nor is death threatened for the failure to keep them.

I answer: Man, in his first creation, was under a natural obligation to full compliance with the will of God. *God hath made man upright* (Eccles. 7:29). This rectitude of nature implies an exact conformity to the divine will. It is here opposed to all those inventions—evil devices, new tricks, vain and crooked counsels—that were the inlets

to all iniquity. He was created *in the image of God* (Gen. 1:27), which did not consist merely in the faculties of the soul—such as understanding and will—but in gifts of illumination, righteousness, and holiness (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). There was an inscription of the divine law upon Adam's heart. Indeed, even the Gentiles *show the work of the law written in their hearts* (Rom. 2:14-15). Though this has been greatly defaced and obliterated by the fall, it has not been wholly erased or extinguished.

Now, since man possessed such original righteousness, and since a law of nature bound him (from the moment of his creation) to moral obedience, it was unnecessary for the Lord, in entering into covenant with him, to make a repetition of that law, which was already antecedently written in his heart in lively characters with a deep impression.

All, therefore, that was needed to constitute this a Covenant of Works was the addition of some positive law or command as a test or trial of obedience to the whole. This we find in the superadded command forbidding the eating of the tree of knowledge (Gen. 2:17), under the highest penalty of death in case of disobedience. This is all the more evident because this positive precept was of such a nature and so intertwined with the moral law that Adam could not transgress it—by eating the forbidden fruit—without violating all the moral commandments and thereby involving himself in all sin and iniquity.

Christ himself, in summarizing the law, declares it to be comprehended in these two commandments: due love to God and to one's neighbor (Matt. 22:37-39). Now, love is proven by obedience: *If ye love me, keep my commandments* (John 14:21, 24). By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam transgressed God's command (Gen. 2:17) and thereby demonstrated his lack of love to God. Furthermore, he failed

in love to his neighbor, for by his sin, he brought death upon not only himself but upon all his posterity.

Although this may have seemed a small and indifferent thing in itself, yet in that first transgression was contained the sum of all sin, which the apostle John comprehends in three categories: *All that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life* (1 John 2:16). This is evident in Genesis 3:6: *The woman saw that the tree was good for food—in this, gratifying a carnal appetite, was the lust of the flesh; and that it was pleasant to the eyes—here was the indulgence of inordinate desire, the lust of the eyes; and a tree to be desired to make one wise—or, as the serpent suggested (verse 5), Ye shall be as gods. This was ambition, or the pride of life.*

It might be shown how all or most of the commandments were broken by this act. Here was infidelity, not believing the word of God and seeking to deify himself, against the first commandment. Adam's preferring the voice of his wife—yea, of the serpent—before the word of God, against the second. Conferencing with God's enemy about his word (a part of his name) without due zeal for his glory, against the third. A failure to rest from his own work, against the fourth. Eve acting out of her place in eating without her husband's advice and consent, against the fifth. A willful choice to come under a divine sentence of death upon many thousands—yea, millions—of men, against the sixth. A yielding to an inordinate sensual appetite in eating the forbidden fruit, against the seventh. A taking of what was not his own, being reserved by God, against the eighth. A reception of a false accusation against God (Gen. 3:5), against the ninth. And discontentment with the state and condition in which God had placed him, aspiring to be higher than he saw was fitting, against the tenth commandment.



Thus, there was a universal disobedience in Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit. There is the seed of all sin in original sin; and therefore, such exact obedience to the moral or natural law, as well as to the positive law, was required there as rendered it a law or covenant of works.

But man can no longer obtain happiness and salvation by his own works, according to that covenant, for it is said in Ephesians 2:9, *Not of works, lest any man should boast*. Jesus Christ, therefore, is not given to renew that old covenant of works with us again as the way to eternal life. Yet, the matter of that covenant is drawn into the covenant of grace, to be fulfilled by him for us, as may be further shown later.

2. There is a covenant of grace, provided for the recovery of some by Jesus Christ from a state of sin and death unto a state of righteousness and eternal life. All that contributes to salvation is of grace. *By grace ye are saved* (Eph. 2:8). *If by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work* (Rom. 11:6). The way of salvation is here ascribed to grace. The Holy Spirit gives us both terms of the distinction, making grace and works such opposite terms that one excludes the other. That which was made with the first Adam was therefore a covenant of works, and that which is for restoration by Jesus Christ is a covenant of grace (see Rom. 6:14, 26-28).

The acceptance of Jesus Christ in our stead, to be our second Adam, was by covenant, and this was of mere grace, just as what is promised to us through him is also of grace. These together constitute but one covenant of grace.

Some call the former a covenant of amity or friendship, because God and man were in perfect amity; and a covenant of nature, because natural integrity enabled man to perform it. But these do not fully express the nature of it, since the promised life therein was to be obtained by working.

Some call the latter a covenant of faith, and indeed, there is an opposition between the law of faith and the law of works in the matter of justification (Rom. 3:27-28). That particular privilege of the covenant, namely justification, is by faith and not by the works of the law. But in a full distribution of the covenant, these are not the most distinct members of the whole. Faith is but one particular blessing and fruit of the covenant, and therefore it cannot express the whole nature of it. Faith is not the opposite condition that replaces the works required in the covenant with the first Adam. Rather, it is what was done or suffered by Jesus Christ that supplies this (Isa. 53:10).

It is therefore improper to call it a covenant of faith, especially unless by faith one means the righteousness of Jesus Christ applied by faith, rather than faith as a particular grace for application.

It is important to note that in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, justification is said to be by faith in opposition only to works—not in opposition to Jesus Christ or free grace. If we were to give faith the same place that the false teachers gave to works, we would be just as guilty of error as they were, and we would contradict the very mind of the apostle on this matter.

The presence of some grace in the covenant with the first Adam does not make it coincide with, or deny, the fact that the covenant with Christ is a covenant of grace—any more than the presence of some works (namely, evangelical works) in the covenant with Christ denies

that the covenant with the first Adam was a covenant of works. Nor does the fact that some faith in God was required in the covenant of works (namely, faith in the word of Genesis 2:17) deny that which is called the covenant of faith to be truly such.

It must, therefore, be said that the covenant of works did not contain gospel grace or faith in a mediator. Just as that covenant may properly be called a covenant of works, so may the other be properly called a covenant of grace—especially since the gospel itself is called *the word of grace* (Acts 14:3; Acts 20:32).

As to the several parts following in the distribution of this Covenant of Grace, some of them carry evidence within themselves, as what is said of primary revelation, renovation, consummation, etc.; the others will be further clarified in the sequel. Yet, thus much I would say here for their explanation.

That the Covenant of Grace was made with Jesus Christ, that text doth witness, Isa. 42:6. For the Father is contracting with him—yea, all the Covenant of the people is primarily with him. He does not merely remove obstacles that would hinder their enjoyment of federal blessings, as an interested friend (whose name is not included in a covenant) may do among men; but he is the great Covenanter—a *Covenant of the people*. The promises are primarily made to him on behalf of men, and he makes the first claim to all as his own right, his own due, by a grant or covenant under the hand and seal of the Father to himself. This will be proved in the next question.

That also the Covenant is made with us in Christ is no less evident. Believers are of the seed of Abraham and David, and of the house of spiritual Israel, to whom the promises belong; they may lay claim to

them in their Head (Gal. 3:9, 14, 29; Rom. 11:27; Ezek. 20:37; Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8).

If any doubt the second distinction—into legal and evangelical—let them know, I am far from thinking that the Mount Sinai dispensation was a Covenant of Works to Israel, as if the design and intention of God therein had been to offer eternal life to Israel upon their own doing. Yet, it is called *the Law* (Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10, 13, 17), even in opposition to the promise (verse 12). Yea, in verse 8, *God—preached before the Gospel to Abraham.*

Here, the Covenant with Abraham is expressly called the Gospel, and that in distinction from the very Sinai dispensation, which is called *the Law*. Undeniably, the Apostle speaks of the Law, not as it was given to Adam before the fall (for then man himself must have been the door to life, and not another for him), but as it was given at Mount Sinai 430 years after that promise to faithful Abraham (verse 17).

So that the Covenant of Grace is rightly distinguished as legal and evangelical, for the Holy Spirit here gives us both parts of the distinction, speaking expressly of that at Mount Sinai as one part of it. Yea, he makes these so opposed that he says in verse 12, *The Law is not of faith*—and so it is not the Covenant of Grace. Yet, the Sinai Law pertains to it and refers to it, namely, as setting forth the condition thereof to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

## CHAP. II.

## Of the Oneness of the Covenant with Jesus Christ and Us.

The Covenant of Grace was made or established not only with us, but jointly with Jesus Christ and us in him, so that both are within one and the same Covenant. For the great transactions with Jesus—yea, even the giving and sending of him, his accepting the office of a Redeemer, and his undertaking for us—are all of grace, as well as what is promised to us through him. Therefore, the Covenant of Grace must include all that contributes (otherwise than by a mere decree) to our restoration and eternal salvation. And in Isa. 42:6, the Father is contracting with the Son, *I will give thee for a Covenant of the people*; therefore, that with the Son and that with the people belong to one and the same Covenant.

Indeed, as that which partakes of the nature of the whole, or is a part, is sometimes put for the whole, so that which is with the people alone—even here—bears the name of a Covenant, being within the grand contract with Jesus Christ as a branch and portion thereof. Yet, both together make up that one Covenant of Grace, as appears by the following:

1. There is no scriptural evidence for making these two separate covenants—one of suretyship or redemption with Jesus Christ, and another of grace and reconciliation made with us. That distinction, which some use, is improper, for its parts are coincident, seeing that the covenant with Jesus Christ was also entirely of grace (John 3:16). It is promised that Jesus Christ shall be given for a Covenant; therefore, it is of grace that we are redeemed by him (2 Tim. 1:9). There was grace before the world was, and that grace must have been in the Covenant as it was with Jesus Christ, which was established for the reconciling of the world to the Father (2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:20-21).

It is true that Christ alone is our Surety and Redeemer, and not we in our own persons. Yea, he is our Head, our Lord, and our King; and on account of his standing in these different capacities, he has some peculiar precepts and promises appropriated to him, which are not given to us in the same manner or degree. Yet this does not negate the oneness of the Covenant with him and us. As it is promised to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed, and that he shall be a father of many nations (Gen. 12:3; 17:4), so these promises are of a higher nature than those made to us—for every believer is not the father of many nations—yet we are within the same Covenant that was made with Abraham (Rom. 4:11-13; Gal. 3).

Just as in covenants between princes, some articles may concern prerogatives or royalties that are peculiar to them in their public capacities—such as striking sail—while other grants may concern the people in their private capacities, as merchants or mariners, yet both prince and people are within the same contract. So doubtless, there are various grants made to Jesus Christ in his public capacity as Mediator, and other promises made to his seed; yet King and subjects, Head and members, are within one and the same Covenant, just as a principal debtor and his surety are within the same obligation (Gal. 4:4-5).

Indeed, the same Covenant of Grace may be distinguished as it is made with Jesus Christ and as it is made with us, yet not as two distinct and complete covenants, but as two subjects of the same Covenant. As made with Jesus Christ, it was constituted from eternity before we had a being; as made with us, it has its application in time, after we exist.

I would rather, therefore, distinguish one and the same Covenant of Grace into these two parts:

1. **For redemption and reconciliation**—this as with Jesus Christ for us (Gal. 3:13; Tit. 1:2).
2. **For application**—this as with us in him (Heb. 8:10).

From eternity, Jesus Christ was a Mediator undertaking the Covenant; but in time, he is executing and interceding for our participation in it.

2. The Covenant of Grace was made with Jesus Christ as a public person, a second Adam, and therefore with all his seed in him. The Covenant of Works being violated, Jesus Christ was appointed as the means for restoration and recovery. He was our David, King of Saints (Isa. 53:3; Luke 1:32), and so represented many subjects; he was a common parent, having a great spiritual seed (Isa. 53:10). The first Adam was a figure of him that was to come (Rom. 5:14), that is, of Jesus Christ, and this is shown in that, just as the first stood for his seed and conveyed to them sin, misery, death, and condemnation, so the second, standing for and representing his seed, conveys to them righteousness, justification, and eternal life (verses 15 to the end; 1 Cor. 15:45, 47).

Thus, they are compared together, and Jesus Christ, the second Adam, is preferred before the first.

If the first Adam had never fallen, it is not imaginable that he should have enjoyed life by one Covenant and his posterity by another. Their life would have been by keeping, just as their death was by breaking, one and the same Law of Works. So, Jesus Christ, the second Adam, and all his spiritual seed enjoy justification and life by one and the same Covenant of Grace. *We are quickened together with him* (Col. 2:13), that is, as our common person standing in our stead.

3. All that is undertaken for and promised in the Covenant as with us is first secured in the Covenant as between the Father and the Son, and thus both together make up but one Covenant. For his being the Covenant of the people implies that all promised to, or required from, the people is secured in the contract with Jesus Christ. Whatever was necessary for our restoration, redemption, and reconciliation, he agreed to accomplish (Isa. 53:10). The same objects and ends are found in that as with him, and in that as with us (1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 Cor. 6:20).

Yea, all things necessary for application are also included in the Covenant as with him. Is justification and the giving of a new heart promised to us (Jer. 31:31)? The same is promised to Jesus Christ (Isa. 53:11): *By his knowledge (that is, by the knowledge of him) shall my righteous servant (that is, Jesus Christ) justify many—and he shall see his seed, and be a light to the Gentiles* (Isa. 42:6), which implies newness of heart and having God as their God.

4. All blessings afforded to us in a Covenant way were first granted to Jesus Christ, and therefore the Covenant is jointly with him and us. As Mr. R. observes, Christ is first justified and acquitted from the guilt of sin, and then we (Isa. 53:11). Christ is first sanctified and filled with the Spirit, and then we (Isa. 42:1). He is first glorified, and then we (Heb. 1:2; Rom. 8:17). Jesus Christ



is our great Feoffee in trust; all the riches of grace and glory are granted to him and vested in him for our use and benefit. Both we and he receive them by the same Covenant.

Indeed, he has the preeminence; he excels in dignity and power; he is *the firstborn among many brethren* (Rom. 8:29), *the firstborn from the dead* (Col. 1:18-19). All fullness dwells in him. All is first granted into his hands and then, in the second place, to us. If we would obtain any spiritual gifts, any graces, any comforts, any glory, we must be beholden to him, borrow all from his store, and receive all from his hand. The Divine Spirit is from him (John 16:7-8). All grace is from him (Rom. 16:20, 24; 1 Cor. 16:23). Repentance is from him (Acts 5:31), for he is exalted to give repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Even faith itself is from him (Heb. 12:2). These things show that all flow from the same Covenant. The name of Jesus Christ is in the Covenant; he is the principal party to whom all the promises are first made on our behalf.

5. Union with Jesus Christ is the only way to promised blessings, and therefore the Covenant is made jointly with him and us (2 Cor. 1:20). Not only some, but all the promises of God *in him* are *yea*, and *in him amen*. Twice it is said, *in him*—none of the promises are made immediately to us, but all are invariable and unchangeable, both in their making and in their fulfillment. Yet all is *in him*.

I might also argue from the fact that Jesus Christ received the same signs as we do—Baptism and the Supper. Why were they applied to him if he was under one Covenant and we under another?

6. All the ancient Covenant expressions run jointly to Jesus Christ and to believers, who are his seed. The promises to Adam, Abraham, and David were not so many distinct Covenants of

Grace; they were but various, gradual discoveries of the same Covenant, according to the variety of occasions in the several ages—each new one being given for some new end and bringing with it a further degree of manifestation. And all these promises run to Jesus Christ and to us.

1. That gracious promise revealed to Adam primarily pertains to Jesus Christ as the blessed Seed, and then to us in him. Wretched man, having eaten of the forbidden fruit, could expect nothing but the execution of that dreadful sentence (Gen. 2:17), *In the day thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die.*

O, what inexpressible astonishment must have seized upon his guilty soul on this account, there being no contrivance by any creaturely wisdom, no way open either for escaping the stroke of divine wrath or for bearing up under it. For how should a feeble creature sustain, or avoid being crushed beneath, the weight of an omnipotent arm?

Now, behold, in the cool of the day, when the shadows of evening were falling upon undone, fallen man, then was the first dawning of a day of grace, as God said (Gen. 3:15), *I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, &c.* The bowels of divine compassion so tenderly moved towards him that God would not let one day pass without some intimation of his love and a revelation of his gracious intentions toward him.

Indeed, this was immediately spoken, not to Adam as a promise, but to the serpent as a threat; yet it was uttered that Adam might overhear and perceive something of a promise in it. Jesus Christ is primarily this Seed of the woman that bruises the serpent's head; for he alone stands as Conqueror over all the enemies of salvation—sin, Satan, death, and hell. He procures their utter overthrow and

destroys the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). He vanquishes and overcomes him (Rev. 12:9). Christ is chiefly intended in this promise, for believers are victorious only in and through Jesus Christ. *They overcome by the blood of the Lamb* (Rev. 12:11), and so the promise is jointly to him and to them.

Many things in this first revelation of the Covenant remained obscure and were hidden. It did not yet reveal distinctly what seed of the woman it would be, nor the way or means by which this should be accomplished, nor that he should be both God and man, nor how this should come to pass—things which were afterward revealed.

2. The Covenant with Abraham was jointly made with Jesus Christ and us. A gracious promise, upon which faith might rest, was as early as the days of Adam—this being the promise of a blessed Seed given for man. Yet the Covenant with man concerning it seems to be dated, not from Adam, but from Abraham (Gal. 3), for the Lord was pleased to deal with Abraham in a more familiar way than with those before him, placing himself under covenant engagements to him (Gen. 12:3), *In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed* (Gen. 17).

The people must have been greatly uncertain concerning the Seed of the woman and of which lineage he should come. Thus, the chief additional excellence of this federal revelation to Abraham was the assurance that the Messiah would descend from his seed according to the flesh. *In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed* (Gen. 22:18). Thus, what was general in the promise to Adam is here made more particular, for it is now restricted to this family. It was a great advantage to know from which family the Messiah would arise.

Other promises were made to Abraham, concerning the land of Canaan and that the Lord would be his God (Gen. 17:7). The latter

was hinted at earlier to another person: *Blessed be the Lord God of Shem* (Gen. 9:26). Some have observed that Shem was the first man in all of Scripture to be so honored, for it is not expressly said that the Lord was the God of Adam or of Noah, but of Shem. Now, this promise is made more general: God will be the God of Abraham and his seed.

This Seed is expressly identified as Christ (Gal. 3:16): *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to thy seed," which is Christ.* So also in verse 19. Whether this is taken for Christ mystical or as a public person, yet Christ is first and chiefly that Seed. It is as clear as the sun that not only Christ, but believers also, are the Seed in the same Abrahamic Covenant (Gal. 3:7, 26), especially verse 29: *And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* What can be more evident? Believers are also of the Seed, and thus the Covenant with Abraham runs jointly to Jesus Christ and to them.

3. The Covenant made with David likewise runs jointly to Jesus Christ and to us. *I have found my servant David... my covenant shall stand with him* (Ps. 89:20, 28, 29). Abraham was not a king, but David was, and the Covenant was made with him in that capacity, as its great additional excellence. It also serves as a type of Jesus Christ's exaltation to regal dignity.

Certain things in this Covenant apply only to Jesus Christ, as in verse 27. He is often called the Son of David, and it is promised: *I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them* (Ezek. 34:24-25). This was long after David had died and therefore must refer to Jesus Christ. Yet this Covenant with David also extends to his seed, which would break God's statutes and sin against him

(Ps. 89:30-32)—which cannot refer to Christ, but must refer to us. Thus, this federal revelation ran jointly to Jesus Christ and to us.

4. The New Covenant also runs jointly to Jesus Christ and to us. He died as Mediator not of the Old, but of the New Testament (Heb. 9:15), which he could not have done if he had not been under it.

As an additional excellence of the New, Jesus Christ is mentioned not as undertaking, but as actually exhibited, or come; and his being the Mediator, and the New Covenant itself whereof he is the Mediator, are distinct things, yet both within the Covenant of Grace. Indeed, whatever promises there are for the application of blessings to us in Christ, they are included in the New Covenant, which extends to all matters of his ministration as already in that office. But the promises are all primarily made to Jesus Christ and to us in him.

**Corollary 1.** Hence, the Covenant of Grace is very extensive; it includes all the promises made to Jesus Christ and to us. Yea, all the ancient promises of a blessed Seed to come belonged to that Covenant, in place of which we now have a Mediator actually exhibited, and also the New Covenant.

It may be questioned by some whether all the promises still in force in the Book of God belong to the Covenant of Grace, because so few are enumerated where it is mentioned as with us (Gen. 12; 17; Heb. 8:10-12).

But since all are made and fulfilled in Christ, they must all flow as living streams from that Fountain. The Covenant of Grace with Jesus Christ is the great Charter by which we hold all our privileges, and all the promises in some way or other pertain to it.

Some promises are constitutive of the Covenant, as those between the Father and the Son concerning a Seed. Others are executive, referring to the execution and application of it (Isa. 53:10-11; Heb. 8:10-12).

Some are principal, concerning the end—eternal life (Heb. 8; Heb. 9:15; Gal. 3:8, 9, 18). Others are less principal, concerning the means, whether internal—such as the Spirit and faith—or external, such as ordinances.

Not only spiritual promises, but even promises of temporal blessings, such as succor and relief in particular cases and conditions of outward straits and distresses, belong to the Covenant of Grace. *He spread a cloud for a covering*—here is protection; *a fire to give light by night*—this signifies direction; *he brought quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven*—here is gracious provision; *he opened the rock and the waters gushed out*—this speaks of miraculous refreshment and consolation (Ps. 105:39-41). And whence came all this care over them? *For he remembered his holy Covenant, and Abraham his servant* (verse 42). All these, then, were to be deemed Covenant mercies.

Where had the Lord particularly promised any such extraordinary relief to Abraham or his seed? He had witnessed himself to be their God and promised the land of Canaan, which implied all mercy and means necessary for them in the pursuit of their calling to it. Thus, all protections, preservations, and provisions—everything for sustaining, upholding, and succoring the people of God, even their lowest mercies—have a tincture of Covenant love to enliven them. So, too, the returns of prayer in a day of outward affliction are in remembrance of his Covenant (Ps. 106:44-45; 2 Kings 13:22-23).

Yea, observe: in some places where the Covenant is mentioned, additional promises are included (and so belong to it) that in other recitations of it are omitted. For example, in Jer. 32:38-40, *oneness of heart and way* and *his fear in their hearts* are promised in the Covenant, yet they are omitted in the earlier recital of it (Jer. 31:31-35). Likewise, in Ezek. 36:25 to the end, the word *Covenant* is omitted, yet many of its promises are mentioned, as appears by their identity with those found elsewhere where it is expressly named.

Therefore, we are not to confine the Covenant of Grace to those promises explicitly enumerated in the New Covenant; all the promises to us are, in some way, comprised within it.

**Corollary 2.** Hence, there is infallible certainty in, and grounded consolation issuing from, the Covenant of Grace, seeing it is made jointly with Jesus Christ and us.

All the promises are his right as well as ours and can never fail. Is Jesus Christ the Seed of the woman who has the assurance of being victorious over the serpent (Gen. 3:15)?

So are believers. Yea, they are of the seed of Abraham and David, interested in the same promises (Gal. 3:19, 21).

If anything be a condition of the Covenant of Grace, it must be so of the promises to Jesus Christ, as well as of those to us, since the Covenant includes both and is made primarily with him and with us only in him, as his seed. Thus, faith cannot be that condition, for the promises were not made to Jesus Christ upon the condition of our believing, but upon what he himself should do and suffer. Rather, therein he has a promise and assurance that we shall believe (Isa. 53:10), *He shall see his seed*. It would be a great dishonor to the Lord

Jesus to say that the efficacy and effect of all his undertaking depended upon any act of ours, such as believing.

It is by the efficiency of the Word of the New Testament that faith is given (Rom. 10:14-17; Acts 13:47-48).

Yea, the gift of faith is promised in that very declaration of writing his law in their hearts (Heb. 8:10). Therefore, by its obligation, it must be fulfilled, for it is a contradiction to speak of a promise without an obligation for performance to the persons to whom it is made. And what does it matter whether the obligation is upon the sinners themselves or upon another (Jesus Christ), their trustee on their behalf? It is by the New Covenant, which is made with them, and that of grace is jointly with Christ and them.

Believers are not merely the objects concerning whom God promises to Jesus Christ that he will do them good (as brute or inanimate creatures are improperly said to be in covenant with him), but they are also the subjects to whom he promises special blessings in Christ. Thus, the promises are directed to them and may be claimed by them. Jesus Christ has an interest therein; they are his right as well as theirs. And this is no disadvantage, but rather a great advantage, as it gives assurance that they will be fulfilled to the very least detail.

*If you can break my covenant of the day and my covenant of the night... then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant* (Jer. 33:20-21). Long before the prophecy of Jeremiah, David had been in the dust, yet the covenant with him remained in force. And since it was made with Jesus Christ, who is our David, then the order of nature—the revolutions of night and day—might sooner fail than any promises made to him be annulled or go unfulfilled.



Yea, he will intercede for us, even when, because of inward cloudings and darkness (even concerning our interest in them), we cannot lay any claim to them ourselves. He would suffer loss if they were not fulfilled—he would lose his right as well as we ours, for Christ and we have a joint interest in them.

Had Christ the assurance of being victorious over the serpent? We also have the assurance of standing as conquerors over him in Christ, by the same promise, and under the same designation—the Seed of the woman.

Thus, this is the foundation of everlasting consolation: that Jesus Christ and we are within one and the same Covenant.

## CHAP. III.

### Of Christ as the Sum of the Covenant.

The Covenant of Grace running primarily to Jesus Christ and to us in him, so that he not only makes it with us, but is himself the Covenant of the people (Isa. 42:6), it will be necessary to inquire what interest Jesus Christ has, or how and in what place and office he stands in reference to the Covenant.

1. Jesus Christ is the very foundation upon which the Evangelical Covenant is built. As he is our life (Col. 3:3; 1 John 5:20) and the cause of it, so he is the Covenant itself—that is, the very basis of it (1 Cor. 3:11), *For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* The Covenant of Works was

founded upon something in man—his created ability and natural strength; all the obedience of the first Adam (if he had stood) and the fruits thereof would have resulted from the sufficiency of his own power and free will, and, when he failed, the entire fabric fell.

But the Lord has established another glorious Covenant, and this is built upon something firmer and of greater strength—Jesus Christ himself. *This stone that is laid in Zion is a tried stone* (Isa. 28:16), *a sure foundation*. Now, the structure of our salvation will never fall because it has such a secure groundwork, able to bear up the weight and stress of all that is laid upon it. No other foundation can be laid. He is the only foundation of all the promises, all the graces, all the obedience, all the peace, all the comfort, and all the glory that is promised. That Covenant with Abraham before Christ's incarnation was *confirmed of God in Christ* (Gal. 3:17); he was the Mediator of Abraham's Covenant, and therefore that Covenant contained in substance the same as the New.

Indeed, Jesus Christ is the foundation of all the blessings and special privileges in the Covenant as with us. If the Lord is a God to any, it is in Christ. If their iniquities are forgiven, it is through the blood of Christ. If the Divine Law is written in their hearts, it is by the finger of the Spirit of Christ. Thus, he lies at the bottom of all and is therefore called the *Covenant of the people*.

2. Jesus Christ makes way for our enjoyment of all federal blessings by standing in manifold relations to the Covenant.

As he stands between God and us as a mediator to effect reconciliation, he is *the Mediator of the Covenant* (Heb. 9:15). There was a vast breach that we could never have repaired—yea, such a variance that there was no possibility of our approaching to God to

enter upon a treaty of peace, much less of procuring our own reconciliation. Sin raised such enmity that the Lord would have been a consuming fire to us if we had drawn near to him. But the Lord Jesus interposed and took up this case, undertaking to compose and bring an end to this difference. There were iniquities in the way that hindered our reception of the promised mercies, but he took an effectual course for their removal. He is *the Mediator of the New Testament*—to what end? *For the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first Testament* (Heb. 9:15). Satisfaction was fully made by him to Divine Justice; he answered all the demands of the righteous Law and so wrought out reconciliation for us.

As he undertook for the parties at variance, he also became *the Surety of the Covenant* (Heb. 7:22), *Jesus was made a surety of a better Testament*. The Lord would not accept our bond for the great debt we had contracted, knowing we could never pay it. We were like a poor man under arrest for an enormous sum—unless a sufficient man undertook the bond on our behalf, we must go to prison without hope of release. So it was with us: the righteous Law of God arrested us for infinite transgressions, demanding a great yet just debt which we, already bankrupt, could never satisfy. It required a debt of infinite suffering—the just due of our sin, which, if laid upon us, would have sunk us forever, *for the wages of sin is death*. It required a debt of perfect obedience and universal righteousness unto life, which we were utterly incapable of rendering.

Now, unless someone sufficient would undertake and be bound for us, there was no escaping the prison of hell, the chains of infernal darkness, the everlasting wrath of the Omnipotent God. Under this misery we must have remained without hope of recovery. This was our state upon the fall of our first parents. And in this desperate condition, one not of our procuring, but of his own free grace

offering himself, even Jesus Christ, stepped in and became a surety for us, to pay our ransom, to satisfy our debt to the utmost farthing. He put his name into our obligation, and was *made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law* (Gal. 4:4).

Yea, he also became *God's surety to us*, to free us from all doubts about the fulfillment of the Covenant. He undertook and promised that he would *lose nothing that was given him* (John 6:39), but would *raise it up at the last day*—that is, to everlasting salvation. For others shall be raised up also unto condemnation, but these unto eternal glory.

As he ratified and confirmed all, he was *the Testator of the Covenant* (Heb. 9:16-17). *Where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator, for a testament is of force after men are dead.* Nothing less than death itself was threatened upon the first transgression (Gen. 2:17), and that must be endured if sinners are to be recovered to eternal life. Behold the matchless love of Jesus Christ—*I will die in their stead to save them from eternal death.* Thus, he has turned it into *a New Testament*, sealing it with his own blood.

As he acts for our obtaining of the promised blessings, he is *the Messenger of the Covenant* (Mal. 3:1), *the Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in, behold, he shall come.*

We would have remained ignorant of this grace, altogether strangers to it, if he had not revealed it to us. Without this knowledge, we would never have sought it, but would have fallen short of the blessings of the Covenant. But Jesus Christ himself brings these blessed tidings; he reports all the federal transactions between the Father and him for our salvation, opens the soul-ravishing mysteries, and declares the precious promises, making known the way for our

participation in these blessed privileges. Thus, he is *the Messenger of the Covenant*.

As he seeks to assure us of the reality of God in these federal transactions, he is *the Witness of the Covenant* (Isa. 55:4), *Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people*.

When poor souls hear of Covenant love in the heart of God towards them, they are ready to suspect it is too good to be true, hardly persuaded to believe it—at least as to themselves. But Jesus Christ condescends to take upon him the office of a witness to confirm its truth. Yea, now in heaven, he does not cease this work, still sending down news from heaven concerning it (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). He is *the faithful Witness still*—as if to say, *I lay in the bosom of the Father, I have seen all transactions, I know how the heart of God stands towards this Covenant work. If my word has any weight, I testify that the Father is real in this, the work is done, the Covenant is established, and it is ratified and sealed with my blood*.

Thus, as our spiritual Head and the blessed Seed, he is a party in the Covenant, and as *the Substance of the Covenant*, he is called *the Covenant of the people*. Well may he bear this name, standing in all these relations to it.

3. Jesus Christ was the principal promise of the Covenant. This denominates him the Covenant, his being truly the chief part of it, or the thing first promised in it, and all other things for his sake. Thus, he primarily was the Seed of the woman that was promised to break the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). He is that Seed of Abraham in whom all the nations are blessed (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16). He is the royal Seed of David to be enthroned, of whose kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:32-33).

Indeed, this is a grand privilege of Gospel times—that what was of old the great thing under promise to come, namely a blessed Seed, a Messiah, is now turned into a performance, and he now stands as an actual Mediator instead. All the prophecies were of him (Acts 10:43), *To him give all the prophets witness*. Of the Scriptures he says (John 5:39), *They are they which testify of me*, as if they said nothing else but Christ, Christ. Thus, he is the Covenant.

4. Jesus Christ is, in reality, to us all that was typically represented under any ancient Covenant; and so he is substantially the Covenant of the people. As Dr. Sibbes observes, Christ is all to us that was held forth of old, whether in **personal types**—he is the second Adam, the true Isaac, Joseph, Joshua, Solomon, Melchizedek—or in **real types**. He is the true brazen serpent that heals sin-stung souls who, by an eye of faith, look to him (John 3:14-15). He is the true manna, the bread of life, to all those who believe and feed upon him (John 6:31, 33, 35). He is the true sacrifice, the Paschal Lamb; and when our hearts are sprinkled with his blood, the destroying angel shall pass over us. He is our true Tabernacle, true Altar, and true Ark; all that these typified is truly fulfilled in him.
5. Jesus Christ is the excellency, marrow, and sweetness—yea, the sum and substance—of all that is under promise, and so he is the Covenant of the people. Indeed, he is the very storehouse where the promises are treasured up. All mercies from the Father must be conveyed to us through the hands of his Son. Yea, Jesus Christ is the very quintessence, the chief part, the very life of all the mercies themselves, and all come with him (Rom. 8:32), *How shall he not, with him, also freely give us all things?* It is Christ who puts fullness into all things and adds sweetness to them. Without him, they are embittered and as nothing. The

promises, though full in themselves, are empty to us unless taken with Christ. All privileges are empty, all enjoyments empty, unless taken with him. Hence, he is said to be *all in all* (Col. 3:11). He is all in all graces, all in all peace, all in all promises, all in all comforts, all in all glory.

6. Jesus Christ accomplishes all that is necessary for the procurement of all federal blessings; and so he is the Covenant of the people. As he is *the resurrection*—that is, the cause of it (John 11:25)—so he is the cause and procurer of all federal blessings. Not only shall he *make* a Covenant with the people, but he shall *be* a Covenant of the people. That is, all that is required in a federal way from the people, Jesus Christ shall be to them. If the Father demands it of them, they must not present him with any duties or performances of their own for acceptance unto life, but with Jesus Christ. He is their Covenant, to perform all for them that they are obliged to do in order to that end.

Saith the Lord, *I will not enter into Covenant or deal in an immediate way with them as with the first Adam, but I will take a surer course. I will give thee for that end; thou shalt undertake all matters therein, even for thy seed; I will look to thee for the performance thereof.* Thus, he is the Covenant of the people.

All that is promised to Jesus Christ or to us is upon his obedience (Isa. 53:10-12).

It is not by the obedience of every individual for himself, but *by the obedience of one*, that is, of Jesus Christ, that many are made righteous (Rom. 5:19). Justification of life and remission of sins are procured by him (Rom. 5:18; 3:24). So, too, reconciliation or promised peace (Isa. 53:5), *The chastisement of our peace was upon him*. We would have remained forever at enmity if he had not

stepped in to procure our peace. Hence, *he is our peace* (Eph. 2:14)—not only its author and procurer but even the sum of it.

So, too, the promise of communion with and propriety in God has its procurement and takes effect only through the obedience of Jesus Christ. All are afar off from God, under the greatest estrangement, until they are made nigh by the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:12-13). The promise of the communication of sanctifying grace, of the law written in the heart, is from him (Isa. 53:10; 1 Cor. 1:30). Yea, the promise of salvation and eternal life takes effect through him. His death was for this end (Heb. 9:15), *That they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*

Thus, he is for a Covenant of the people.

## CHAP. IV.

### Of the Date of Covenant Mercies.

If it be inquired when the Covenant of Grace was made between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son, it must be answered that it was from eternity—it was an eternal Covenant. Indeed, the actual giving of him for a Covenant was not until his incarnation; it is mentioned as a future thing—he was promised before, but given then. Whence Isaiah 42:1-3, etc., is applied to him when he had taken our nature (Matt. 12:17-18, etc.).

Also, the first revelation of it was in Genesis 3:15, in the promise of his becoming the Seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head.



That implies a prior agreement or consent to grapple with the serpent but does not determine the first date of the Covenant. The first declaration of the Covenant of Grace was there, but its constitution or establishment was before all time, even from eternity. This appears from the following considerations:

1. There were mutual operations or actings of the will of God the Father and the Son from eternity concerning the restoration of fallen man, which amount to a Covenant. For what more is requisite for a Covenant? Scripture reveals that such a compact existed between them (Isa. 53:10-12; 42:1-8). God works all things *after the counsel of his own will* (Eph. 1:11); therefore, so great a transaction was not without it. And the will of God is eternal, for he does not begin to will or not will that which he did not before. According to their distinct personalities, the will of the Father was that the Son should, in the fullness of time, take our nature, do and suffer all that was necessary for the restitution and recovery of the elect. The will of the Son echoed back and answered to that of the Father, accepting the office. This distinct acting or new relation (as Dr. O. calls it) of will in the Father and the Son toward each other goes beyond a mere decree that the thing should be and thus constitutes an eternal Covenant.
2. The designation of Jesus Christ to, and his undertaking of, the Mediatorial office (which amount to a Covenant or agreement) was before all time. *He hath chosen us in him*—that is, in Christ. And when? *Before the foundation of the world* (Eph. 1:4). Christ is, though not the cause, the medium or means for the execution of election. That could not have run upon an uncertain means; therefore, there was an agreement concerning it from eternity. Yea, as to his mediatorial employment, he is said to have

preexisted all creatures: *I was set up [or anointed, that is, to be King, Priest, and Prophet] from everlasting, before the earth was* (Prov. 8:23-31).

3. Many believed (Heb. 11), and salvation was obtained in the times of the Old Testament by Jesus Christ through a Covenant of Grace. To say they were saved merely by virtue of a decree would be to assert that their salvation was obtained one way and ours another. That would render the Covenant superfluous, vain, and needless if some were saved without it. It would also contradict Revelation 13:8, which declares that he was *a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*. Their partaking of the fruits and benefits of his death (before it actually occurred) could only have been based on the assurance that Jesus Christ would, in due time, take our nature and suffer death. This assurance could arise from nothing but a Covenant in which Jesus Christ promised to do so, and the Father trusted the Son for its due performance. Thus, the Covenant was in force before his incarnation and must have been made with him personally considered, that is, as the second person in the Trinity, and consequently from eternity. For no acts between them as God are other than eternal. The Father and the Son, as such, do not begin to act toward each other in ways they did not before. Therefore, there was an eternal Covenant.
4. There were some reciprocal or federal actions of the Father's giving souls and the Son's receiving them, prior to faith (John 17:2, 6, 12): *That he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him*. This deed of gift serves the same purpose as the Covenant of Grace—namely, that they might enjoy eternal life (John 6:37): *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me*, that

is, they shall believe (v. 35). This free giving is first, and believing follows; therefore, it seems to be eternal.

This donation is an act of the divine will, granting certain persons to Jesus Christ that they might be ransomed or redeemed. The right to receive and take them is relative to this act and therefore differs from election. The reason for election does not stand in such a grant, but in a distinct act of the same will—namely, in divine love with separation, choosing some to salvation while refusing others. This giving, then, is a federal act from all eternity.

5. Some federal matters are declared to be from eternity: *In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised—but when? Before the world began* (Titus 1:2). We are saved and called not only according to his purpose, but *according to grace, which was given us in Christ—but when? Before the world began* (2 Tim. 1:9).

All promises of eternal life, and all such grace, belong to the Covenant of Grace. These were then made or given—not to us in our own persons (for we had no existence so early)—but in Jesus Christ. It would sound harsh to interpret *promised* as meaning merely *decreed to promise*. Likewise, it would be absurd to render *before the world began* as meaning *from the beginning of the world*, for the Greek word **πρό** (pro) means *before*, not *since*.

I ask, should we render it differently when speaking of election or of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20)? If not, let us own this truth—that in the Covenant of Grace, eternal life was promised, and grace was given in Jesus Christ from all eternity.

## CHAP. V.

### General Inferences from the Whole.

#### Corollary 1.

Hence, we may behold infinite condescension that the eternal God will deal or treat with us in a familiar Covenant way. What an honor is this! By his prerogative and sovereignty, he could have commanded all duty from us without promising anything to us; but behold, the Lord has put himself under everlasting engagements to his people, so that, upon the account of his faithfulness, they may expect (through Christ) all mercy needful in all estates and conditions.

When they are under great sufferings (as Israel of old), this Covenant may be of encouraging use: *God remembered his Covenant and had respect to them* (Exod. 2:23-24). When under temptation to think that divine wrath and displeasure will go out against them, it is of sustaining use: *As readily might the waters of Noah return, and as easily might the mountains depart, as the Covenant of his peace be removed* (Isa. 54:9-10). When under pressing wants, it is of relieving use: *Remember the mercies of David thy servant* (2 Chron. 6:42). When looking death in the face, it may be of comforting use: *Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting Covenant* (2 Sam. 23:5). These were the last words of David (v. 1), so that this unchangeable Covenant may make a dying man lift up his head with rejoicing. His house was not duly ordered toward God, and yet he could bear up against all his failings, unworthiness, and undeservings by resting in this Covenant.

## **Corollary 2.**

Hence, there are transcendent excellencies in the Covenant of Grace far above what are found in the Covenant of Works. For here the Father is promising to the Son that he shall be a Covenant of the people. The excellency of this might be evinced from its properties: it is a free, gracious, holy, well-regulated, sure, and everlasting Covenant (2 Tim. 1:9; Luke 1:72; 2 Sam. 23:5; Isa. 55:3). These things being largely handled by others, I only touch upon them.

Also, the vast difference between the Covenants of Works and Grace makes this evident. The Covenant of Works was made with the first Adam and all his seed in him, without a Mediator, requiring perfect, personal obedience by his natural, concreated power, with free will to stand or fall, implicitly promising life upon keeping it and threatening death and a forfeiture of all upon breaking it (Gen. 2:17). It speaks nothing of remission of sin, even upon the deepest sorrow and repentance. If Adam had wept day and night, even with tears of blood, yet that Covenant promised nothing—not the least mercy or favor after its violation, only death to be expected from it. This speaks to the misery of all who are in a natural condition and have not come under a better Covenant.

But the Covenant of Grace is made with Jesus Christ, the second Adam, and all his seed in him, as their Mediator to make reconciliation and work out a righteousness for them. Now the promise is sure to all the seed (1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 4:16).

The Father covenants with Jesus Christ as a more glorious head than the first Adam, promising to give him to be a Covenant of the people, to stand on their side. This must argue a pacification in that he who was God (the one offended) would be God-man, a Redeemer, so that he and the people make but one party in this Covenant. Yea, he

wrought out that righteousness which is unto justification of life (Rom. 5:18-19).

In handling the subject of the Covenant, the clearest way is to compare the Covenant of Works with the first Adam and the Covenant of Grace with Jesus Christ, the second Adam. Thus, the two Adams are paralleled (Rom. 5).

It is also necessary to compare the old Covenant at Mount Sinai with the new Covenant (Jer. 31:31-32). The mingling of these together has occasioned much confusion in many matters. These differences, being rightly stated, may be compared secondarily with less danger of misinterpretation.

### **Corollary 3.**

Hence, it is rich grace and special favor to be in the number of the people that were covenanted for between the Father and the Son, since none are freed from the sentence of death and condemnation or saved but in the way of a Covenant of Grace (Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9). To be under this Covenant is not a privilege given to all. It reaches some and not others, for there is no Covenant expressure that extends now to all mankind without exception.

Genesis 3:15 implies that some are the seed of the serpent, just as others are the seed of the woman. All the world are not the seed of Abraham or David, nor of the house of Israel and Judah, with whom the new Covenant is made (Jer. 31:31). The Father's act of donation was not of all without exception: *I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me* (John 17:9). The opposition here strongly proves that some are of the world and were not given to Jesus Christ, nor prayed for by him.

It would sound harsh to say either that he covenanted with the Father to die for and redeem some who were never given to him or that he would not intercede and pray for some whom he did redeem. The act of giving was absolute, not upon the condition of our believing, for *all that the Father giveth me shall come to me* (John 6:37). All those who were given shall certainly believe (and so shall be saved, Mark 16:16), and therefore some were never given to him.

Impetration (the securing of redemption) and application are of equal latitude and extent (Rom. 5:10). From reconciliation, which is by the death of his Son, the Apostle argues unto salvation with a *much more*. All those, therefore, for whom it was purchased shall certainly have it applied to them and be reconciled in their own persons.

Yea, in the great charter—the Covenant as between the Father and the Son—an effectual application of Covenant blessings is absolutely promised (Isa. 53:10-11). *He shall see his seed, he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, and he shall justify many.* How many *shall*s are here! And all this because *he shall bear their iniquities*.

All then, whose iniquities he bore, he shall convert and justify. He has the highest assurance that he shall enjoy the very seed for which he travailed. It was not a mere conditional satisfaction that he made. Upon his death, all matters became absolute—the very persons were appointed, and there was an unalterable determination of the Father concerning their conversion. This cannot extend to all men without exception, for then all would certainly be saved.

So in Isaiah 42:6-7, it is not only promised that he shall be a Covenant *of the people* (the Jews), but also *a light of the Gentiles*, which implies the removing of spiritual blindness by affording

special illumination. He will not only be redemption to the Gentiles but a light for applying it to all whom he has redeemed. Yea, he will bring them from prison—from their spiritual thralldom and bondage to sin and Satan—which denotes effectual vocation (Acts 13:47-48; 26:18).

Thus, an effectual application of Covenant grace unto conversion is absolutely promised to all those for whom Jesus Christ undertook. Yet you see here that the accomplishment thereof is by means of his appointment. The Lord does not mock or delude men in the general invitations and calls of the Gospel, any more than he mocked Pharaoh when he (through Moses) commanded him to let Israel go, while also declaring that he would harden Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let them go (Exod. 4:21-23).

The Lord, by his will of precept, commands all who hear the Gospel to believe. And all who do believe shall certainly be saved (Mark 16:16); therefore, he does not mock. The dispensation of the Gospel is the means which he sanctifies and blesses for that end—to work and beget faith. If any neglect, abuse, or make light of the means of grace (Matt. 22:5) and prefer their worldly matters, they sin against it and put a slight upon the grace and salvation tendered therein. This leaves them inexcusable and exposes them to just condemnation.

Yet no one knows whether he is not among those whom Jesus Christ covenanted for and will make the Gospel effectual to. The Lord is not bound to abate his demand for duty because of man's sinful inability to obey.

All, therefore, ought to give utmost attention to the general call of the Gospel, as a matter of highest concern for their souls for eternity; and the neglecting hereof is a despising of Jesus Christ and his



benefits (Luke 10:16). And then no wonder if the wrath of God abides on them.

#### **Corollary 4.**

Hence, there were glorious transactions in order to the salvation of the elect long before their believing. Though the actual application of federal blessings to them is not one moment before the gift of faith, yet, before that, there are glorious advantages arising from the Covenant as between the Father and the Son on their behalf.

Virtually and *ex foedere*, all that conduces to happiness was secured for them from eternity. Then there was not only an act passed by which they could not eventually be damned (which, far from proving an actual justification, is something a mere decree of election would have been sufficient for, seeing that it must certainly have its execution), but by a federal act, so early was the undertaking of Jesus Christ on their behalf. Then was the Covenant made between the Father and the Son, which had all blessedness in the womb of it (Tit. 1:2).

Indeed, he had not actually taken our sin upon him, nor was he justified before his incarnation (Isa. 50:7-8), for his coming in the flesh would have been vain and unnecessary if he had already been discharged.

This also shows that our justification does not in every way run parallel to his; for believers under the Old Testament were actually justified before Jesus Christ himself was. Yet so early did the elect in some special way belong to God, being federally made over by him to Jesus Christ for gracious ends (John 17:6): *Thine they were, and thou gavest them unto me.*

And this was a great matter, for he was appointed to be their representative and to pay their ransom money. So that when he did it, they were virtually deemed as justified, yea, sanctified and glorified in him—not in their own persons, but in him (Eph. 2:5-6): *He hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

### **Corollary 5.**

Hence, there was some love in the bosom of God toward the elect from all eternity. Sending Christ himself (who is given for a Covenant and is the sum of it) is the fruit and effect of that love (John 3:16): *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.* And if the Covenant was from everlasting, then that divine love, which is the fountain and first spring from whence it flows, must needs be from eternity also.

God does actually love the elect before they are regenerated or can actually believe, with a love of benevolence or goodwill, though not with a love of complacency and delight. He bears love to their persons, though not to their qualities and actions, nor to their state and condition.

Yea, God owns them not only with electing love but with redeeming love (Rom. 5:8): *God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* This extols his love and makes it surpass all others—that he gave his Son to die for them while they were in a state of sin and misery.

There was some federal love in that he gave them to Jesus Christ to be redeemed by him (John 6:37, 39), so as to own them as the

persons who should afterward share in Covenant grace, when others were left out.

The love of God is an unchangeable and eternal act of his will, ever one and the same, admitting of no increase or decrease in him. He does not begin to love any person whom he once hated, for *he changeth not* (Mal. 3:6).

But to help our weak understanding, he is said to let it out to us according to his acting toward us, and according to the change that is made in us, and as we partake of his benefits (1 John 3:1): *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God.*

Thus, the Lord does not love his creatures equally or all alike, but some more than others—the regenerate more than the unregenerate, and those most who share most in the effects of it, both for this life and that which is to come.

From eternity, although God had no love of approbation for the state of the elect unconverted, yet he had a love of commiseration toward their persons (Ps. 103:17): *The mercy of the Lord (which has miserable creatures as its proper objects) is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him.*

Before the foundations of the earth were laid, he considered them as possibly miserable and was a God of mercy. Then he had such a love of benevolence for them as certainly issued in a love of beneficence or soul-enriching bounty (Eph. 2:4-5):

*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.*

Here the first operations of divine grace—the recovery of a soul out of a dead state unto spiritual life, the first quickenings of a soul from the death of sin—are made to be the effects of divine favor. They spring from mercy and rich mercy, from love and great love.

## **Corollary 6.**

Hence, the Covenant of Grace as made with Jesus Christ had the precedence, and was before the Covenant of Works. That was first in execution, but this was before it in constitution. For, though there was a divine decree concerning the creation and the Covenant of Works to be in time, yet that was not actually made so early, because Adam (who was to be the head of it) was not then existing, and had not a being for it to be made with. Whereas, Jesus Christ (who was the head of the Covenant of Grace) was not only really existing but undertaking from eternity.

The Covenant of Grace, without any incongruity, may be asserted in its constitution and making to be first, or before the Covenant of Works, though in its execution and application it comes after and presupposes the breaking of the first. As a healing balm may be prepared before the wound is made, and a salve before there is a sore, although the applying thereof be afterward, so the Covenant of Grace was made from eternity—not actually with us in our own persons, but with Jesus Christ for us as our great Feoffee in trust, though we then were unborn and had no being.

## **Corollary 7.**

Hence, the whole contrivance of the Covenant of Grace must be ascribed to God alone, seeing it was from all eternity. No creature was then existing to have any hand or influence therein; there was

none to counsel, advise, or persuade in this matter. It was conceived in the heart and bosom of God, and none but he had to do in the concluding of it, and so he alone is to be magnified and extolled therein.

A Christian, as one transported, may cry out on this account, as in Isaiah 25:1, *O Lord, I will exalt thee—for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.*

Now, there is no room for our boasting, nothing to be ascribed to ourselves. God alone is to be admired in Covenant Grace, seeing it was working toward us from all eternity (2 Tim. 1:9). It is said to be *not according to our works*. The eternity of our mercy is exclusive of our duty as any cause of his affording it. This puts a glory upon Covenant Grace and love—that it is ancient, before the world began.

### **Corollary 8.**

Hence, there is stability in Covenant mercies, seeing that compact which gives assurance thereof was from all eternity. Saith he in Psalm 25:6, *Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving-kindnesses. Why? For they have been ever of old.*

The antiquity thereof is a strong argument to urge for the obtaining of them. We may have hope to receive what the Lord was so early determined to give out (2 Tim. 2:19), *The foundation of God standeth sure.*

The apostasy of eminent professors is a great temptation unto many sincere Christians. They are apt to say, *If such glittering, shining stars fall, good Lord, how shall we stand?* But to help against it, he tells us that the foundation is steadfast, firm, and immovable—it *standeth sure*. By the Covenant of Grace, they are granted to Jesus

Christ from all eternity (2 Tim. 1:9). Such eternal acts of God are firm and stable, abiding forever, and will secure against defection or falling away.

Satan shall never utterly prevail against them; grace shall never be overthrown or extinguished. *Having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are his* (2 Tim. 2:19). He has set his mark upon them, and wherever they be, he can distinguish them from the world. As he knows them by number, so also by mark or seal, and when he makes up his jewels, not one of them that are his shall be missing.

### **Corollary 9.**

Hence, there is a foundation of consolation for all that are within the Covenant of Grace, in that it was established from all eternity. O how may it fill them with comfort, that their salvation stands by an eternal act of God that cannot be repealed, altered, or changed—yea, by a Covenant act, wherein the faithfulness of God is engaged for its fulfillment, even by the Father's gift.

How often does Jesus Christ mention them as given to him? (John 6:37, 39; John 17:2, 9, 12). As if he delighted in and gloried in, or boasted of, this giving act.

How may this secure them against all fears of everlasting loss—that they are given to Jesus Christ from all eternity? For he will never forfeit his Father's gifts, nor displease him so that he should withdraw them from him. They will be *gifts without repentance*.

This eternal act will never be recalled, which may make for their everlasting consolation.

## CHAP. VI.

Of the Old and New Covenant, what they are and how distinct?

Having cleared the Covenant of Grace as to the transactions between the Father and the Son from eternity, and as to the first revelations of its grace to the patriarchs, as Abraham and David, &c., before the incarnation—wherein the great thing promised was that blessed Seed, so that all blessings were to be expected only in him—we now come to consider:

First, that dispensation which held forth the way and means whereby Jesus Christ came under our obligation, and by answering it, confirmed the Covenant of Grace. This is contained in the Old Covenant made at Mount Sinai.

Secondly, that dispensation whereby the special blessings and privileges (which are the issue of his obedience) are imparted to us, and this is the New Covenant.

The Apostle compares these together in various chapters in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and saith of Jesus Christ, Heb. 8, *He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the Mediator of a better Covenant*—which implies that there is another Testament, viz., that at Mount Sinai, when they came out of Egypt (v. 9), to which the Aaronical priesthood belonged, and which the priesthood of Christ is compared with, as is manifest in Heb. 7, 8, and 9.

It is that which the Lord made with the fathers *in the day when he took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt* (Heb. 8:9). And therefore, undeniably, it was the Sinai Covenant, for then that was made with them, Exod. 19:1–5, &c. In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone out of the land of Egypt, the same day they came to the wilderness of Sinai. The matter of the Covenant and the manner of its promulgation appear in that and the following chapters.

The Apostle declares that this Covenant was *worse*, but it is the excellency of Jesus Christ that his ministration is conversant about a *better Testament*, which has the pre-eminence on this account, as being *established upon better promises*. The opposition is not laid between the Covenant of Works, as with the first Adam, and the New Covenant, but between that at Sinai and the New.

The word for Covenant is *diathēkē* (*Testament*), which denotes a disposition or declaration by way of will or promise and may be the act of one or more. Indeed, the Hebrew word *Berith* is used in Jer. 31:31–32 and expressed by *diathēkē* in Heb. 8:8–10. But the Apostle intimates that a Testamentary disposition is intended by it (Gal. 3:15, 17), as if Jesus Christ, by fulfilling the condition of the Covenant of Grace, had turned it into a Testament, the blessings of it being now legacies absolutely promised to us in the New.

It will be necessary here to inquire: What is the *worse* Covenant, and what is this *better* Testament which is compared with it?

## **Answer 1**

The worse Covenant is that conditional Divine grant of blessings upon the obedience required in the Law of Moses, or, that Old



Covenant which was made at Mount Sinai. This is undoubtedly that which is compared with the other; for it is that to which the Levitical Priesthood belonged, which the Priesthood of Christ is compared with, as is manifest in Hebrews 7, 8, and 9. It is that Covenant which the Lord made with the Fathers *in the day when he took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt* (Heb. 8:9). And therefore, undeniably, it was the Sinai Covenant, for then that was made with them (Exod. 19:1–5). In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone out of the land of Egypt, the same day they came to the wilderness of Sinai. Both the matter of the Covenant and the manner of its promulgation are seen in that and the following chapters.

It is a conditional grant, promising nothing except upon the condition of obedience. *If you will obey my voice and keep my Covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure* (Exod. 19:5). All is upon an *If*. So also in Leviticus 26:3–4: *If you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments and do them, then will I give you rain, &c.* The same condition is repeated in many other places; all promises under that dispensation are contingent upon keeping his commandments.

**The whole Law is generally divided into three parts, viz., Moral, Judicial, and Ceremonial; no precept falls outside of these, and obedience to all of them is required as the condition of this Sinai Covenant, for all are comprehended within it.**

### **1. The Moral Law**

The Moral Law is such a principal part of the Sinai Covenant that it bears the very name of the Covenant itself, and the tables thereof are

called the *Tables of the Covenant* (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:9, 11, 15). The terrible appearances of God—thunderings, lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet—were at the promulgation of the Moral Law before the Ceremonial was given forth (Exod. 19:16; Exod. 20:1–19).

Thus, the first constitution of the Sinai Covenant was only of the Moral Law. This is very observable: Moses, having rehearsed these very commandments in Deuteronomy 5, closeth with these words (v. 22): *These words the Lord spake unto your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, and he added no more*—that is, in making this Covenant, he added no more than these Moral Precepts, though he reserved to himself a liberty to add the Ceremonial Laws afterward.

Yet at first, he did not. Indeed, virtually, they were contained therein but not actually discovered, any more than Gospel institutions were, which Israel was not obliged to until revealed, and which, after revelation, were equally reducible thereunto. The holy God, in order to tame their rebellious spirits, came in this terrible way, requiring exact obedience to the Moral Commandments—*and added no more*.

At the first giving, he revealed no way for their relief and succor. Even before any Ceremonial Laws were added, a Covenant was made (Deut. 5:2). The people could see nothing but wrath and a curse before them. They were forbidden from coming up into the Mount upon pain of death, and so were not admitted to familiar converse with God. Instead, they were met with dreadful tokens of a Divine presence, appearing as a consuming fire. For this reason, the Sinai Covenant is opposed to the New Covenant (Heb. 12:18–25):

*"For ye are not come to the Mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, &c."*

That is, *you are not come to Mount Sinai and the terror of that Old Covenant, but you are come to Mount Zion—to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant.*

## **2. The Judicial Laws**

The Judicial Laws belong to the Sinai Covenant as well. These are called *Judgments* (Exod. 21:1), and obedience to them is urged upon Israel under the same strict conditions as the Moral Law.

*"Ye shall therefore do my judgments—Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in them, I am the Lord."* (Lev. 18:4–5)

Here, keeping his Judicial Laws is urged as necessary unto life.

## **3. The Ceremonial Law also appertains to the Sinai Covenant**

For, the Apostle mentions the Levitical Priesthood and sacrifices, &c., as belonging to the Old Testament, and prefers the ministry of Jesus Christ before it, even in the text, in that he is a Mediator not of the Old but of the New Testament (Heb. 7 and 8; Heb. 9:1–3, 15).

These Ceremonial Laws were called Statutes, containing institutions of worship, and are urged also on as strict terms as the Moral Law (Lev. 18:5): *Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in them.* These positive precepts (*his statutes*) run upon the terms *do and live*, and therefore belong to the Law in the strict sense (Rom. 10:5). Yea, exact obedience to these Ceremonial Laws is required on pain of the curse (Deut. 27:26, compared with Gal. 3:10). So also in Leviticus 26:2–4, 14, 15:

*"Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord. If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, &c."*

He enjoins reverencing his sanctuary and keeping his statutes and judgments, threatening death upon the neglect thereof. And in verse 46:

*"These are the statutes and judgments and laws which the Lord made between him and the children of Israel in Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses."*

Likewise, he closes the book of Leviticus with this summary (Lev. 27:34):

*"These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in Mount Sinai."*

By this, it is evident that the laws contained in Leviticus (many of which are Ceremonial and Judicial as well as Moral) belong to the Sinai Covenant.

The same applies to some laws contained in the book of Numbers—compare Numbers 19:3–4 with Hebrews 9:13 and Hebrews 13:11. And also, to some in Deuteronomy, for the Apostle refers to it as part of the Law (Gal. 3:10), which is drawn from Deuteronomy 27:26.

However, I do not say that all things in these books are to be considered part of the Sinai Covenant. Some matters are not of a federal nature, such as:

- **The numbering of the congregation** (Num. 1)
- **The order of their tribes** (Num. 2)

- **The stories of their murmuring** (Num. 10:33 to the end; Num. 11:1, &c.)
- **Miriam's case** (Num. 12)
- **The spies searching the land** (Num. 13–14)
- **The rebellion of Korah** (Num. 16)
- **The story of Balaam and Balak** (Num. 23–24)
- **Israel's journeys** (Num. 33)

And many other such historical accounts, as found in Deuteronomy 1–3, are not included in the Covenant itself.

Yet, whatever is scattered throughout these books that has the nature of a Covenant, where obedience is the condition, that is to be deemed as belonging to the Sinai Covenant.

## **The Ceremonial Law: A Later Addition**

The Ceremonial Law came in by way of addition to the other, after an apparent interval, upon Israel's desiring a Mediator, who might receive the Law for them and declare it to them (Exod. 20:19, 24–26; Exod. 21–23). There was a solemnization and ratification of all, upon the people's promising to fulfill it (Exod. 24).

God himself uttered the Moral Law to the people with great terror, but the Ceremonial Law (though it later belonged to the Sinai Covenant) was revealed to Moses in the mount, without those thunderings and lightnings that attended the other.

I have wondered what should be the reason for these additional things.

But I consider that temporal mercies being promised by that Covenant unto Israel upon their perfect obedience, they would have been hopeless of enjoying these unless some typical expiation and atonement had been provided, so that their sins might not hinder them from receiving the blessings.

Thus, Moral, Ceremonial, and Judicial Laws belonged to the Sinai Covenant, and, together with the promises and threatenings annexed, made up the whole of it.

## **Answ. 2. The Better Covenant**

The better Covenant is an absolute Divine grant by way of promise, bestowing great blessings that come through the mediation and ministry of Jesus Christ. In its excellency, it is called that whereof he is Mediator, and thus, it is the New Covenant or Testament (Heb. 9:15; 12:24).

That it runs upon absolute terms is evident from Hebrews 8:7 to the end, where it is explicitly stated that it is not according to the Old (verse 9). The Apostle's chief design in mentioning these promises is to show how the New Covenant is distinct from and superior to the Old.

Here, four grand promises of the New Covenant are given, so comprehensive that all other promises made to us are reducible to them.

### **1. The Inscription of the Divine Law in the Hearts of Men**

"I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb. 8:10).

In the state of innocence, the Law was written in lively characters upon the heart, but since the Fall, it must be transcribed and written anew.

The Old Covenant had the Law written upon tablets of stone—external to man—not absolutely promised, and rarely found within. Hence, the Lord even laments over them:

"O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments!" (Deut. 5:29).

But in opposition to the Old, God now undertakes to write it upon better tablets—even upon the heart—signifying his work within them:

- A new inward frame
- A disposition and inclination toward universal obedience

Thus, the soul is carried forth to obedience, not merely by external compulsion, but by internal transformation.

Whereas under the Old Covenant, they were given a large volume of Laws and Ordinances to obey, under the New, all is reduced to a single promise:

"I will write my Law in their hearts."

Now, promise leads the way to obedience, and how sweet is that obedience which begins in and flows from a divine promise!

## **2. A Mutual Relationship Between God and His People**

"I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb. 8:10).

Here is propriety—each in the other.

Under the Old Covenant, they were externally related to God. But now, as under the Abrahamic Covenant of old, so now under the New, it is absolutely promised to some that He will be their God, which means:

- More intimate communion with Him
- Higher manifestations of His presence

"Happy is that people whose God is the Lord!" (Ps. 144:15).

For if He is their God, then:

- All creatures are theirs
- Christ is theirs
- Grace is theirs
- Glory is theirs
- All the attributes of God are theirs—his wisdom, power, goodness, faithfulness, lovingkindness
- All his promises are theirs
- His all-sufficiency is theirs

What more can they desire than to have Him who is all in all?

Also, "they shall be to me a people":



- God will own them in a clearer, more eminent, and more glorious way than before
- They shall be separated from all corruption—sin, Satan, and the world (1 Cor. 6:19–20; 2 Cor. 6:17)
- Their whole course shall be dedicated to Him (Zech. 14:20)

"In that day, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the Lord."

There shall be a universal tincture of holiness (Isa. 44:5):

"One shall say, I am the Lord's."

- There shall be a more voluntary and free self-resignation to Him
- Yea, even when their hearts stand off and hang back, they can plead the promise:

"They shall be to me a people."

### **3. Special Illumination is Promised**

"They shall all know me, from the least to the greatest" (Heb. 8:11).

There shall be an enlargement of knowledge and acquaintance with God and Divine things.

At first glance, it may seem to exclude private teaching, for it says:

"They shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother."

But this is not an absolute exclusion of outward instruction by means and instruments, but rather a comparison—highlighting how far

more excellent and surpassing the New Testament discoveries of Christ shall be.

- Under the Old, their knowledge of Christ was dark, typical, and shadowy
- Under the New, their knowledge is clearer, transcendent, and more universal

"They shall all know me."

- Not only some, but all
- Not merely outwardly, but inwardly

Thus, this promise is a foundation for seeking greater knowledge than what Old Testament saints could attain.

Public and private teaching still remain necessary means (Matt. 28:19–20; Eph. 4:11–13; Col. 3:16). But under the New Covenant, the Spirit's inward teaching surpasses all outward instruction.

## **4. Remission or Pardon of Sin**

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12).

That particle "for" denotes a reason—it explains why He bestows other covenant blessings:

- He writes his Law in their hearts because He forgives their sins
- He becomes their God, and they His people because He pardons their iniquities

Thus, forgiving grace is the very spring of all other mercies:

- It makes way for the enjoyment of them
- Without it, none could receive them

"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin!" (Rom. 4:8).

There was a typical forgiveness in the Old Covenant (Heb. 9:9–10, 14; 10:1–3, etc.), but there is real remission in the New (Heb. 10:16–17). By this, the whole of our justification is set forth, for the Apostle, in Romans 4, from the way of the non-imputation of sin, proves that our justification is by faith and not by the works of the Law.

But pardon of sin denotes:

1. Freedom from an obligation unto the punishment of the Law. For pardon is opposed to guilt, which properly means an obligation to punishment. Exodus 34 says, "Pardon our iniquity and our sin," meaning, do not hold us as guilty. It is noted by not imputing sin (Ps. 32:2), that is, do not charge it upon us. It is called a covering of sin, a blotting of it out, as when a man crosses out a debt in his book. In Hebrews 8:12, it is said, "I will remember it no more," meaning that he will not so remember it as to keep it on record and hold the person obligated to its penalty.
2. Pardon also denotes impunity, or a discharge from the punishment of sin. When pardoning mercy is extended to a soul, the Lord grants freedom not only from the obligation to punishment but from the punishment itself that is due to sin. Numbers 14:19 says, "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people," meaning, do not inflict the deserved punishment. The Lord had threatened to cast them off, to disinherit them, and to kill them as one man (verses 12, 15). Moses intercedes, and the

Lord answers (verse 20), "I have pardoned according to thy word," that is, I will not punish and execute the fierceness of my wrath upon them. Yet he swears that they shall not enter the promised rest (verses 21–23).

Thus, the Lord may pardon in the sense that he does not deal in utmost severity with a people, while still reserving the right to chastise them by withholding some desired enjoyment from them. Indeed, so far as he does not chastise them, he may be said to pardon. When Zion's warfare is accomplished, it is said (Isa. 40:2) that "her iniquity is pardoned," meaning that the Lord will not visit her iniquity as he did before: "she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." This does not mean that her suffering gave any satisfaction to divine justice for her sin, for that belongs to Christ alone. Rather, she had experienced a large measure of fatherly chastisement, and now, being released from it, she is said to be pardoned. In Isaiah 33:24, it is written, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." Thus, as there is freedom from sickness and tokens of fatherly displeasure, so in this sense, sin is said to be forgiven.

Now, in the New Covenant, the Lord's remembering iniquity no more also implies that he will not execute eternal wrath upon the sinner. Nothing vindictive or satisfactory to divine justice will ever be laid upon him; even fatherly chastisements will be taken away as far as is good for him.

And now, what a rich treasury is this New and better Covenant! It has enough in it to supply all wants and to answer all the grounded desires of poor souls. If they lack an obedient heart, here it is promised: "I will write my laws in their hearts." If they desire an interest in God as the only satisfaction for their immortal souls, it is

promised: "I will be to them a God." Do they find a backwardness in giving themselves up to God? It is promised: "They shall be to me a people." Do they find cause to complain of spiritual blindness, darkness, and ignorance? It is promised: "All shall know me." Does sin threaten them? It is promised: "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

O, how miserable are all unbelievers who have no interest in this New Covenant! They do not have this law of grace written within; they are without God and without true knowledge of him, strangers to forgiving grace. And in these things lies the sum of all unhappiness.

**Question: Whether that better Covenant (wherein the ministration of Jesus Christ doth lie) be distinct from that at Mount Sinai? Are they two Covenants, or but one?**

**Answer:** That New or better Covenant is distinct from that at Mount Sinai. It is usually said that they are two administrations or dispensations of the same Covenant. However, I think they are not merely one and the same Covenant diversely administered, but they are two Covenants.

Yet, to prevent mistakes, I would explain my meaning herein. I grant that the Sinai Covenant had a special relation to the Covenant of Grace and was of great use concerning it. Also, I am far from thinking that there are two Covenants of Grace if thereby be meant two ways to life and salvation, specifically and essentially different from each other. I conclude that the elect were saved in one and the

same way, for substance and essence, in all ages—namely, by grace, through a Mediator, by faith in him. The grand Covenant of Grace was made with Jesus Christ and us in him, and is essentially one in all times. Therefore, no one of those federal expressures to Adam fallen, or to Abraham, or to David, can rightly be deemed the Covenant of Grace itself (unless summarily, or as an epitome thereof), but only discoveries of some small parcels and branches thereof. They differ from it as a part from the whole, or as a particular article from a whole federal transaction which consists of many more. This Covenant comprises all the promises of furnishing Jesus Christ for the work and rendering him prosperous and successful in it (Isa. 53:10–12), as well as promises of what he will do for us.

And one article may be distinct enough from another. As among men, a father by an indenture (containing many articles) may settle an inheritance upon his son and his posterity, and all make up but one Covenant in the main. Yet, one article may be distinct enough from another, and any one may be called a distinct Covenant when it is compared with another. One Covenant may concern some condition to be performed by the son, another Covenant for the father to acknowledge a fine or give further assurance, another to free from encumbrances.

So the great God settles an everlasting inheritance upon some of the sons of men by one grand Covenant of Grace made with Jesus Christ as their Head, which has many articles and matters belonging to it, distinct enough from each other. One Covenant concerns a condition to be performed by men in their surety, Jesus Christ—this is that at Mount Sinai. Another Covenant concerns the privileges that shall be afforded by him, that condition being performed—this is the New Covenant, as stated in Jeremiah 31:31: "Behold, the days come, saith

the Lord, that I will make a New Covenant." Here is a Covenant to give further assurance, and of what; and thus, although the grand Covenant be but one, yet these several articles thereof, compared with each other, are clearly distinct, and so that at Sinai and the New are two Covenants, as may appear by these ways.

First, the Sinai Covenant is denied to have been made before Israel's coming out of Egypt, and therefore it must be distinct, or another Covenant from that which promised special blessings in Christ. For that was made with the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—long before Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Gen. 12:1–3; Gen. 17:2, 7). The Apostle asserts the stability of the Covenant with Abraham and his seed and proves it thus in Galatians 3:15–17: "This I say, that the Covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul."

Here, he argues that the Covenant made at Mount Sinai, coming after, could not disannul that with Abraham, which was of a more ancient date. He does not speak of the moral Law merely as a rule of life, for even before Abraham, it was binding. Immoralities were always sinful and exposed those guilty of them to dreadful judgments, as with Sodom and Gomorrah, which were consumed with fire and brimstone, and the old world, which was destroyed by a flood. Therefore, he must speak of the Law considered as a Covenant given at Mount Sinai. Thus, it was not until four hundred and thirty years after that with Abraham, and so these must be two distinct Covenants of vastly different dates. Otherwise, the Apostle's argument, which is built upon their difference in respect of time, is not cogent; it would have no force if they were of the same date—one as early as the other. For the false apostles among the Galatians might have said that the Law as a Covenant was as early as Abraham,

for substance, though not for form and administration. This would have been enough to elude his plea, which was grounded upon the time of it. Especially since the Law was urged among the Galatians not merely as to any circumstances in that new ministration, but as to the substance of it, the question then being whether justification and the eternal inheritance were by the works of the Law or by grace and in a way of faith. The Apostle argues that this federal transaction at Sinai, not existing until Moses, so long after that with Abraham, could not establish another way of life opposite to that—namely, by works of the Law.

Also, Deuteronomy 5:2–3 states: "The Lord our God made a Covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this Covenant with our fathers, but with us." The Sinai Covenant is clearly intended here by that at Horeb (compare Deut. 4:10–13 with Exod. 19:1, 8, 9), and this is expressly denied to have been made with their fathers. The Sinai Covenant, then, was not made with the Patriarchs—not with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, nor with any that lived before the time of Moses. Those who were alive that day are intimated to be the first with whom it was made: "It was not with our fathers, but with us, even with us who are all of us here alive this day." Those, then, who before the times of Moses were dead, had not this Covenant made with them, and therefore it is distinct from that which was made with the fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

He does not say, "The Lord made not this administration of it with our fathers," or, "He made it not in this form," but rather, "The Lord struck not this Covenant." He denies that the Covenant itself was made with them. It is an addition to the word to insert (as some do) *tantum*, as if the meaning were, "Not only with our fathers, but also with us." This is to say that it was made with the fathers when the Holy Spirit expressly denies it. Such additions, if admitted elsewhere



in Scripture, would be found to be desperately dangerous, and here they can by no means be allowed, seeing that the Apostle gives it an after date (Gal. 3:17).

2. The better Covenant and that at Sinai are contradistinguished, and so must be two distinct Covenants, else the opposition would be groundless. Jeremiah 31:31–32 states, "I will make a New Covenant—not according to the Covenant I made with their Fathers," that is, not according to the Sinai Covenant, for that was the one made when they were brought out of the land of Egypt. He does not say, "I will set up a new administration of my Covenant" (though that had been true), but "a New Covenant." There is a plain opposition between Covenant and Covenant, and therefore the New and that at Sinai must be two distinct and not one and the same in different forms. This is further evident because the New Covenant is not opposed to the Covenant with Abraham, nor to that with David, but only to that with Moses and Israel at Mount Sinai. Let any instance be given of anything that is found contradistinguished in such a manner as these are, when only some modification and different respects of the same subject are intended to be signified thereby.

3. The betterness of the Covenant would not be a sufficient evidence that the ministration of Jesus Christ is of greater excellency than the other, if they were not two distinct Covenants. The Apostle proves that Jesus Christ has obtained a more excellent ministry by this medium, Hebrews 8:6: "By how much also he is a Mediator of a better Covenant." He does not say "only a better administration," but "a better Covenant." Much of the force of his argument would be lost if the ministry of those Levitical priests and that of Christ were conversant about the same Covenant. But if they be two, then it is very

forcible; they ministered about one Covenant, and Christ about another and a better, and therefore his is the more excellent ministry. Besides, it is taken from his being a Mediator of that better Covenant, which implies that he was not then a Mediator of that worse Sinai Covenant (though of old typified therein), which their ministry related to. Indeed, it would have been a slender proof of the excellency of his ministry if the better Covenant were the same for substance as the worse, since then that at Sinai must still be continuing, and so Jesus Christ, not only in his type but in his own person, must be Mediator thereof, ministering therein, which that text does not give the least countenance to. Rather, there and elsewhere, Christ is called the Mediator of the New Covenant in opposition to the Old (Heb. 12:18–20, 24; Heb. 9:15), even in satisfying the Old by his death. Therefore, they must be two distinct Covenants.

4. The many notes of distinction given between them argue that they are two Covenants. They are not only called the Old and the New—this, possibly, might be said of the same subject, as we say "the old and the new moon," and yet mean one and the same moon—but also the first and the second, Hebrews 8:7: "If that first Covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." As Dr. C. states, "That it should be affirmed of one and the same Covenant, that this is the first Covenant and that is the second, and yet those two should be but one—that is strange."
5. They are successive, the second coming in the place of the first, and so they must be two distinct Covenants. Hebrews 10:9 states, "He taketh away the first that he may establish the second." Nothing comes in the room and stead of itself, but of something else. Now, the second, better Covenant comes in the

place and stead of the first, so that the one must be removed and taken away that the other may be established, and so they must be two distinct Covenants. The first is old, and Hebrews 8:13 states, "That which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." Hebrews 7:18 adds, "There is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before," that is, of the first Covenant. The Old, then, is such as is disannulled and vanishes away, whereas the New Covenant cannot be disannulled, never vanishes away. Neither is it said that one administration vanishes, is disannulled, and taken away that another might succeed (though this is true), but rather, that one—namely, a first Covenant itself—is taken away that a second may come in its place.

6. They are expressly called two Covenants or Testaments. The Apostle mentions Abraham's two sons: one by a bondwoman, born after the flesh; the other by a free woman, born by promise. He then makes this application in Galatians 4:24: "Which things are an allegory: for these are the two Covenants; the one from Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar." What can be more plain? Here, it is expressly affirmed that there are two Covenants or Testaments. Neither of these two was formally (though materially one might be) the Covenant of Works or the Covenant of friendship made with the first Adam in his estate of innocence, for then man himself must have been the worker for life. Therefore, of necessity, there must be two Covenants besides. Thus, it is no way incongruous to speak of three Covenants, seeing that with Adam is generally acknowledged to be one, and here the Scripture expressly speaks of two Covenants—and that with Adam is none of them. It is not that signified by the free woman and her son Isaac, for that, in opposition to the other, is said to be free and to be by promise

(vv. 23, 26, 31). Neither is it signified by the bondwoman and her son, for after he said, "These are the two Covenants," it immediately follows (v. 24), "The one from Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar."

So then, not the Covenant of Works as made with Adam, but the Sinai Covenant is the other here intended. Plainly, he speaks of both according to divine ordination or institution and concludes them to be two Covenants. In this allegory, he does not mention them as considered abusively according to the intention of the Judaizing prophets, but in themselves. Verses 21–22 state: "Ye that desire to be under the Law, do ye not hear the Law? For it is written, Abraham had two sons, etc." Therefore, as they warrantably heard the Sinai Law, so it and the free promise made two Testaments.

Yea, in the times of the Old Testament, these were kept very distinct. Hence it is observable that when the children of Israel had sinned egregiously in making the calf, and the Lord severely threatened even to consume them (Exod. 32:10–11), Moses, in interceding for them, does not plead the covenant newly made at Mount Sinai, but that with Abraham. Verse 13 states, "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest," &c. He saw he could not ground his plea upon the Sinai covenant, already violated by them, and therefore he flees to another, founded upon free grace. So also in Deuteronomy 9:27 and 2 Kings 13:23: "The Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and had respect to them." He does not say, "because of his covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai," but "because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," &c. So that, whilst the Sinai covenant was in force, that with Abraham (which went before) was not swallowed up in it or mixed with it, but remained entire and distinct, still dispensing blessings to its subjects. They were not one and the same covenant in that day.

O then, let Christians beware of mixing and confounding the Old and New Covenants, which are so distinct. It is the great design of the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians to beat men off from this mixture. Both have their great use, but they must have their due place (Gal. 4:21), "Ye that desire to be under the Law," &c. There is a great aptness to legalize, or to desire to be under the Law.

The false prophets were ready to brand Paul as an Antinomian, as if he rendered the Law unprofitable by preaching the doctrine of free grace. To remove this aspersion, he puts the question (Gal. 3:19), "Wherefore then serveth the Law?" That is, if the Law does not justify, why then was it given, or what use was it? He answers, "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made."

Observe how carefully the Apostle distinguishes these. He does not make the Sinai Law or Covenant one and the same with the promise, but something added or put to it, a distinct thing. It was additional, and so not the promise itself, yet was of admirable use. It was added "because of transgressions." Some say this means to reveal and discover sin and to lay restraint upon men, that they run not into it. But the Law, in the hand of Christ, is still of such use to believers, whereas he speaks of such a use of it as lasts only till the coming of the promised seed. Therefore, I understand it thus: "Because or for the sake of transgression," viz., that Jesus Christ, by coming under it, might make full satisfaction for that transgression in which man was involved. It was added not for justification, but for transgression's sake, that its curse might be endured and removed. This additional use of the Law lasted only until the promised seed came, and then it ceased, having its accomplishment in him. The Law was added that he might finish transgression and make an end of sin (Dan. 9:24), and thus a way was made for the divine promise to pass upon us.

Now, there is a sinful mixing of these two covenants, the Old and the New, which are distinct.

1. When there is a joining of anything of ours with Jesus Christ in the matter of acceptance unto eternal life. This was the case of those Judaizing prophets in Acts 15:1, where they taught, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." The same is found in Galatians 5:2: "If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." They expected advantage by Jesus Christ, else this argument would have been of no force to them. Verse 4 states, "Christ is of no effect to you," &c. They were therefore jumbling works of their own and Jesus Christ together, mixing these in the matter of their acceptance unto life. This is intimated to be desperately dangerous.

Christians ought to perform all duty in conformity to Jesus Christ, in the way to salvation, but not in the least as that which justifies or saves. See with what earnestness and vehemency the Apostle speaks in verse 3: "I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to the whole law." This intimates that acting in any work upon a legal account, or on a legal ground, is a putting of ourselves under the obligation of the whole law. It is all one as if we sought life altogether by the law. For if they were circumcised upon a principle or opinion that it contributed to their justification, they became debtors thereby to the whole law. Though they did not think other services required, or themselves obliged to them, yet by one, they put themselves under the bond of the whole. Thus, if any should act in any gospel institutions, such as baptism or the Lord's Supper, upon a like account as they did take up circumcision—namely, with an opinion of its contributing to justification and acceptance with God unto eternal life—they would thereby make themselves debtors to the whole law. So also, if they should give repentance, mourning for sin,

self-emptiness, or even faith itself, the same place, and act therein upon such a ground as they did in circumcision, Christ would be rendered of no effect unto such souls.

2. When there is a living in the spirit of the Old Covenant while dealing with the promises of the New, then indeed there is a mixing of the two covenants, which are so distinct. The Old Covenant carried with it a spirit of bondage and terror, as seen in Romans 8:15 and Hebrews 12:18. If souls, in looking to the promise, carry it as if they were conversing with God upon the burning mount—chiefly eyeing divine wrath, dwelling more upon the divine curse than upon the grace of God in the free promise when looking for mercy—this is the spirit of the Old Covenant. Likewise, when souls are shy of the promise and ready to stand at a distance from it, or when they carry themselves toward God as if Jesus Christ had not satisfied the curse of the law, and yet in part look to the promise, there is a mixing of the two.

The Old Covenant ran upon "Do and live," intending that Jesus Christ should be the doer in reference to eternal life. But when souls are like those who were hired into the vineyard in Matthew 20:1, 2, &c.—when they are indenting with God for their penny, when they must have such incomes and such enjoyments from God in case they act in duty, when they seek the reward upon their own doing—they may work hard and sink under their burden and have little thanks for their pains, as that parable shows. When duty is not managed with a gospel spirit, when the divine Spirit is not acting upon the soul by the promise of the New Covenant, it comes to little.

The Old Covenant ran upon condition, and so when souls dwell upon conditions performed by or wrought within themselves, building

their hope, peace, and comfort upon them, so that they look little or nothing to the free grace of God in absolute promises, making but little use of these in comparison to the other, then they are too much in the spirit of the Old Covenant and mixing it with the New.

## **CHAP. VII.**

### **SECT. I.**

#### **Answ. I. Negatively in Four Propositions.**

**Prop. I.** The Sinai Law was not given as a Covenant of Works to Israel. It was designed to be a Covenant of Works as to be accomplished by Jesus Christ, as will appear afterward, but the end of the Lord was not that it should be so to Israel. For,

1. The nature of a Covenant of Works, and also the general current of Scripture, denies the Sinai Law to be such.

A Covenant of Works requires perfect personal obedience, promising life or a reward of justice thereupon, and threatening death upon the least violation thereof.

This is evident from the covenant with Adam in innocence, Genesis 2:17. He obeying, it is implied he should live; he disobeying by eating the forbidden fruit, the sentence of death passed upon him. And clearly, this is a true description of a Covenant of Works, for whatever is opposite to this speaks grace. If justification and eternal life be attained by another's righteousness or obedience (without their personal performance of it), there is grace herein. If the reward



be not of justice, it must be of grace. If imperfections and sinful failings be not followed with death, there is grace in that also.

Now, the design or intention of God in giving the Sinai Covenant was not that Israel should by their own obedience obtain eternal life and salvation. Indeed, the false apostles in gospel times put their trust in personal obedience; they urged circumcision and other works of the law as necessary unto justification and eternal life. But in opposition to them, the apostle argues in various chapters of the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, proving that these come by a righteousness performed for us by Jesus Christ. Romans 3:20: "Therefore by the deeds of the Law (i.e., as performed by themselves) shall no flesh be justified in his sight." It is stated again in verse 28, "Without the deeds of the Law." Likewise, in Galatians 2:16 and 3:10: "As many as are of the works of the Law (i.e., as performed by themselves) are under the curse," and verses 11–12; also Galatians 5:2–3. Yea, our salvation is not of works, as seen in Ephesians 2:8–9 and 2 Timothy 1:9. Adam forfeited life when he might have had it on the terms of his own doing, and hence, the Lord would never deal with man in that way anymore.

Lest any should think that this was only since the Sinai Covenant was at an end, the apostle proves that our works are now excluded by the examples of Abraham and David, Romans 4:2–3: "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God," and again in verse 5, "To him that worketh not." In verse 6: "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." Clearly, we are justified in gospel times in the same way for substance as they were of old. It is expressly stated that this was not by works of their own performance—not even by such as they came up to after they were in a state of grace, much less by any works of theirs before they

believed. Otherwise, the apostle's argument would not be cogent. The false prophets might easily have answered that now, in gospel times, we are not justified as Abraham and David were, thereby dismissing whatever is urged from these instances. The whole argument is built upon the foundation that we are justified as they were. Only this can hardly be evaded—that David (who lived under the Sinai Covenant) is denied justification by works of his own.

Yea, the apostle excludes works even from the nature of a Covenant of Works. This denies that any lapsed man in any age can be saved by his own obedience, as seen in Romans 4:4: "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." Therefore, unless it could be said that those under the Sinai Law had eternal life, not of grace but of debt, it must be said that they did not have it in the way of a Covenant of Works.

2. Moses and the children of Israel were antecedently under a Covenant of Grace before the making of that at Mount Sinai, therefore that could not be a Covenant of Works. In the very preface, he saith, Exodus 20:2, 5, I am the Lord thy God. The Lord did not first become their God by that, but was so before, as they were the seed of Abraham and under that covenant with him, Exodus 2:24 and 3:6, 7, I have seen the affliction of my people, verse 15, 16. And Moses himself entered into the same Sinai Covenant with the people, Exodus 34:27, I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. Not only with Israel, but with him also.

Now, it is not imaginable that the Lord would reduce them and Moses himself from a Covenant of Grace back to that of Works. Surely the Lord would advance them higher rather than bring them

lower. He is ever one and the same in his grace and promises unto souls; no such inconstancy or changeableness is found with him.

3. The Sinai Testament typically revealed mercy for sinful men and therefore was not a Covenant of Works. For that, being once violated and broken, holds forth nothing of mercy to the sinner, whatever his repentance may be; it gives no hope of salvation but denounces judgment, death, and utter destruction against him. Adam, having eaten the forbidden fruit, that saith, Genesis 2:17, Dying thou shalt die.

Whereas the Sinai Covenant includes the Ceremonial Law as well as the Moral, as is plain in Hebrews 9:1–3, etc., the first Testament had ordinances of divine service and a worldly sanctuary, a tabernacle, priests and sacrifices, offerings for the errors of the people, etc. Although these services did not of themselves expiate sin and purge the conscience, yet they did point out a way wherein they might have an expiation of and freedom from sin, which a Covenant of Works gives not the least intimation of.

Yea, the Sinai Covenant was ordained by angels, Galatians 3:19, in the hands of Moses, a typical Mediator; and this argued a variance between God and Israel, else no need of any. And there is grace in a covenant that does admit of any way for the making up of such differences. There was an abundance of grace wrapped up in many types and ordinances in the Sinai Covenant. Yea, it was confirmed by blood and sprinkling, called the blood of the covenant, Exodus 24:3–5, which typified the blood of Jesus Christ, and therefore it was no Covenant of Works, for that speaks nothing thereof.

4. There had been an utter impossibility for Israel or any other to have attained unto eternal life and salvation if they had been under that at Sinai as a Covenant of Works. For they could never

have performed the works which were the condition of it and so must have been hopeless of the benefit which was promised thereupon, Galatians 3:21, If there had been a law that could have given life, righteousness had been by the law. This clearly concludes that righteousness did not come by the law, that is, as performed by us in our own persons. And also, that the law could not give life—no eternal life was to be expected by it. And he speaks of the Sinai Law, as is clear in verse 17, and therefore that could not be a Covenant of Works to Israel or us for eternal life. Romans 8:3 also proves that the law could not free from condemnation, in that it was weak through the flesh, and so no eternal life was attainable thereby.

5. That way which the Lord had established with Israel for life and salvation before the Sinai Covenant was utterly inconsistent with that of Works, and therefore that could not be a Covenant of Works, Galatians 3:18, For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise. These two ways cannot stand together; if it be by one of them, then it is not by the other. They carry a contradiction to each other. If Israel had the inheritance by the law, that is, by works performed by themselves, then it could not be by the obedience of another, of Jesus Christ for them. If it were by their own righteousness of the law, then it could not be by the righteousness of Jesus Christ entertained in the promise by faith. One of these ways necessarily subverts, overthrows, and destroys the other, so that the same person at the same time cannot have it both ways.

Now, such an opposite way of a gospel promise was established with Israel long before the Sinai Covenant, Galatians 3:16–17. They were the seed of Abraham; and he concludes that the Sinai Law, coming so long after, could not disannul the Abrahamic Covenant or promise

(wherein they had interest), which was so long before it. And consequently, it was not a Covenant of Works to Israel, for then it must necessarily have disannulled the foregoing promise, as the demonstration in verse 18 clearly shows.

## SECT. II.

**Proposition 2.** The Sinai Law was not a mixed Covenant for Eternal Life to Israel. It was not partly a Covenant of Works to them, and partly of Grace. For,

1. It is an undoubted obstacle or hindrance in the way of Salvation to seek it in a Covenant of Works by personal performances; and therefore the Covenant at Sinai could not have been even partially of this nature to Israel. The reason why Israel did not obtain righteousness (and so life) was because they sought it not by faith, that is, in another, in Jesus Christ, but as it were by the works of the Law, Romans 9:31-32. He does not say they sought it entirely by their own works, but in some measure, "as it were," and this obstructed their obtaining it. Likewise, their failure to attain salvation is traced to the same cause in Romans 10:1, 3: "They, going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Seeking salvation by one's own works (which is our own righteousness) keeps the soul from submitting to that righteousness which is necessary for Eternal Life. If the Sinai Covenant were a mixed Covenant, then one part of it would hinder the other, as if the Lord, in the same dispensation, should pull forward and backward, set Israel on the pursuit of life, yet simultaneously place an obstacle in their way. To assert such a thing would be an affront to the wisdom of God.
2. Legal works are excluded from justification and salvation in conjunction with Jesus Christ, and therefore the Sinai Law could not be a mixed Covenant, Galatians 5:2-3: "I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." Verse

4: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified (that is, seek to be justified) by the Law; ye are fallen from Grace" (Acts 15:1, 11; Ephesians 2:8-9). This implies that they were attempting to use circumcision and the works of the Law alongside Christ for justification and life. Paul's argument would have meant little if they had not expected to gain some benefit from Jesus Christ while also relying on the works of the Law. However, the Apostle concludes that one of these excludes the other. A mixture of our works with Christ's righteousness is a falling away from the way of Grace. Taking any of our own services alongside Jesus Christ in the matter of justification is enough to cut us off from any benefit in Christ. He will profit nothing if he is not owned exclusively in this matter.

3. Once a Covenant of Works is violated, nothing less than utter ruin and destruction is threatened therein, Genesis 2:17: "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." A Covenant of Works offers no further promise after it is broken, no matter what services are afterward performed—nothing but death remains. Therefore, the Sinai Law could not be a mixed Covenant. Israel is often accused of breaking it, Jeremiah 31:32: "Which Covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord." If it had been a Covenant of Works, then after its violation no good could have been obtained from any supposed gracious element in it, since the death threatened in the works portion would have cut off all hope of life. Consequently, unless Israel had kept it without fault (which they could not), it would have been utterly unprofitable to them. As Dr. Bolton observes, "Man was not able to stand to the lowest terms, to perform the meanest condition."

4. There is such an opposition between our works and Divine grace in relation to Eternal Life that they are mutually exclusive. Therefore, the Sinai Law could not be a mixed Covenant. There is no *medium participationis*, or middle way between these two; it is impossible to obtain life both ways. This was previously demonstrated from Galatians 3:18, and the argument is equally strong here.

It is further proved in Romans 11:4-6: "If by Grace, then it is no more of Works, otherwise Grace is no more Grace; but if it be of Works, then it is no more of Grace, otherwise Work is no more Work." This passage makes clear that the way of Grace and the way of Works are so mutually destructive that if salvation is by one, it cannot be by the other. If Israel had been required to do even the least work for Eternal Life, then salvation would not have been by Grace. As Augustine says, *Gratia nullo modo gratia nisi omni modo gratia*—Grace is no way Grace unless it be every way free. Seeing, then, that Israel was justified and saved in the same way as we are (Acts 15:11), and we are justified freely by his Grace (Romans 3:24) and saved by Grace (Ephesians 2:8), it follows that the Sinai Law could not have been a mixed Covenant—partly of Works and partly of Grace—for these two ways are diametrically opposed.

### SECT. III.

**Proposition 3.** That the Sinai Law was not only a Covenant for temporal mercies, such as the Land of Canaan and similar blessings, but had a further connection to the Covenant of Grace and bore great significance for our Eternal Salvation as its principal aim and end.

Temporal blessings were dispensed (and possibly those only) by virtue of the Sinai Covenant upon Israel's performance of it. Yet, as it



was to be fulfilled on their behalf by Jesus Christ, it had reference to the great matters of the Covenant of Grace, including spiritual and eternal blessings, as may appear. For,

1. There were typical representations in it of spiritual and eternal blessings. The legal types and shadows of old contained an abundance of the Gospel.

There were priests, and a High Priest, who was an eminent type of Jesus Christ; for this reason, he is also called a High Priest, Hebrews 8:1 and elsewhere.

O what an advantage it was, so long before the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, to have such a lively emblem of this glorious office, upon which our everlasting salvation so necessarily depended! As the Levitical High Priest stood and appeared for the people in many ways and for many precious ends that none else could, so they might expect that Jesus Christ would do the same for them. As the priests offered sacrifices for the errors of the people, so they might anticipate that the Lord Jesus would offer a better sacrifice for them. They could easily infer that the antitype, Jesus Christ, would far excel, surpass, and go beyond the types—the substance being greater than the shadow. What a privilege it was to have such a vivid resemblance of all this so long beforehand! Hebrews 9:23-24 intimates that those things under the first Sinai Testament were patterns of things in the heavens and figures of the true. There was a holiest of all, into which the High Priest alone entered once every year, not without blood, signifying that the true holiest of all was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was standing (verses 3, 7, 8). This intimates that Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, would enter into that which is truly the holy of holies, to appear in the

presence of God for us (verse 24), thereby making their holiest of all a type of Heaven.

A similar type was the Land of Canaan, which bore the very name by which Heaven itself is set forth to us—it is called the "rest of the Lord," Psalm 95:11: "If they shall enter into my rest," meaning the Land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 12:9). This was another type of the rest in Heaven, as shown in Hebrews 3:19 compared with Hebrews 4:8-9. Many other instances could be given in which the Sinai Covenant represented matters of the Covenant of Grace, even spiritual and eternal blessings, to Israel.

### **SECT. III.**

2. Some of the same promises of spiritual and eternal blessings, which are found in other federal expressions, appear under a conditional form in the Sinai Covenant. Therefore, that covenant pertains in some way to the Covenant of Grace and does not merely concern temporal blessings.

In preparation for it, the Lord says to Israel in Exodus 19:5-6, "If ye will obey my voice and keep my covenant, ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people, and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Indeed, this cluster of promises has an "if" attached to it, placing it under a condition—that obedience be rendered to the Sinai Covenant. If so, the blessings contained therein may be enjoyed, and all the temporal benefits the world can afford are as nothing compared to one drop of these spiritual blessings. It is true that a condition places nothing into actual being (*conditio nihil ponit in esse*), and so we must understand that the Sinai Covenant set forth

the condition upon which not only temporal, but also spiritual and eternal blessings, were granted. This condition remained unfulfilled at that time but has since been performed by Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the Apostle applies this passage to the saints in Gospel times, which provides sufficient evidence that the Sinai Covenant, to which it belonged, had a notable relation to the Covenant of Grace. As Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people." These are reckoned among Gospel privileges and are attainable only through Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:5-6). Indeed, they are glorious advantages.

To be a "peculiar treasure" implies not only God's acceptance of them into favor above others and His special claim upon them but also His highest estimation of them. They shall receive peculiar preservation, peculiar affection, peculiar influences, and peculiar consolations. To be "a kingdom of priests" signifies their eminent separation unto the highest services and employments, their admission to the closest approaches to God, their participation in the spiritual anointing of the Divine Spirit for that end, and their enjoyment of intimate fellowship and communion with the Lord Himself. To be "a holy nation" means that while others remain in their sin and pollution, given over to their profaneness, these shall bear the image of God in a transparent manner, displayed in a holy profession. O, how far superior this is to mere temporal blessings!

There are other conditional promises in the Sinai Covenant concerning the Lord dwelling among the children of Israel and being their God, such as Exodus 29:45-46, and Leviticus 26:3, 11-12, among others. These undoubtedly hold forth the privileges of the Covenant of Grace, yet the condition was to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

3. The nature of many services commanded under the Sinai Covenant demonstrates its special connection to the great matters of the Covenant of Grace, indicating that it aimed at higher things than mere temporal blessings. There were sin offerings for the ignorances of the priests, the congregation, the rulers, and the people (Leviticus 4), with provisions for atonement and forgiveness of sins. These offerings did not, in themselves, make atonement, but they pointed to Jesus Christ, by whom we truly have atonement. The same may be argued regarding the scapegoat and other ceremonial observances.

Additionally, some of the arguments under the affirmative part, which demonstrate that the Sinai Covenant contained the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace, are equally strong in proving that its purpose was not limited to temporal blessings.

## SECT. IV.

**Prop. 4.** That the Sinai Law is not merely a gradually different administration of the Covenant of Grace to Israel from that which we have in the New and better Covenant.

Many suppose that the Sinai Covenant was simply a federal transaction with Israel, in which the obedience required as its condition (upon which all its blessings depended) was no different from that which is now required of us in Gospel times, except that it was then exacted with dreadful terrors, thunderings, and lightnings, whereas now it is delivered in a gentler and milder way. However, a higher matter—a perfect obedience—is clearly aimed at therein.

It is true that Christians are obligated to all duty under the better Covenant, which contains a promise of writing the Divine Law in

their hearts for that very purpose. The difficulty with the Sinai dispensation does not arise merely from its requirement of obedience (for obedience is required in all administrations of God's covenant), but from the fact that it annexes life to that obedience—"This do and live"—and pronounces a curse upon failure. If the Sinai Covenant had contained all the laws found in it, even the ceremonial ordinances, these would indeed have rendered it more burdensome than other dispensations, yet it would still as clearly have belonged to the Covenant of Grace as did the covenant with Abraham and others, which also contained sacrifices and typical ceremonies.

The real difficulty lies in the fact that obedience under the Sinai Law was required *for life*. Had the law not been given in this manner, there would be no greater difficulty in understanding the Sinai Covenant than in understanding any other expression of God's covenant. The central issue, then, is to determine on what basis it is framed in this manner. This inquiry will reveal that, although there was an administration of the Covenant of Grace in the Sinai Covenant for Israel, there was also a higher intention: namely, that it should be performed by Jesus Christ to obtain and secure covenant blessings for us. Thus, the Sinai Covenant was not merely a gradually different administration of the Covenant of Grace for Israel, as compared with the New Covenant given to us.

1. The Sinai Covenant required such obedience as would constitute a righteousness unto life, as seen in Romans 10:5: "*For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them.*" The Apostle is undeniably speaking of the Sinai Law, for the passage he cites is from Leviticus 18:5. Furthermore, he states that this *doing* described by Moses is a righteousness unto justification and life.

The Apostle does not merely quote the words as they were misused by the false teachers, but affirms that *Moses himself* describes the righteousness of the law in this way. Thus, this was not merely the erroneous opinion of the false prophets, but the very intention of the Mosaic covenant itself—"Do this and live." The same truth is confirmed in Galatians 3:12. This proves that the obedience required under the Sinai Covenant was vastly different (in respect to its purpose) from that which could have been rendered by Israel then, or by Christians now under the New Covenant, for our obedience is not performed in order to work out a righteousness unto justification and life.

2. The Sinai Covenant required such obedience as stood in direct contrast to faith. In Romans 10, having explained the law's demand for obedience, the Apostle sets it in opposition to the righteousness of faith: "*But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise,*" etc. (verse 6). Here, he plainly makes the righteousness of the law, which Moses described, and the righteousness of faith to be mutually exclusive, standing upon opposite terms. The same contrast is found in Galatians 3:12: "*And the law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live in them.*" The Apostle here speaks explicitly of the Sinai Law (verse 17), citing the same passage from Leviticus 18:5, and denies that its obedience was *of faith*. It is therefore evident that the Sinai Law required an obedience that was not of faith, and thus demanded a form of righteousness specifically different (in its purpose and end) from that which was to be rendered by Israel then or by Christians now—an obedience that naturally flows from faith.

This, together with the preceding argument, shows the weakness of the interpretation given by some regarding the meaning of "Do this

and live" in the Sinai Covenant, as will become especially clear under the sixth argument in the affirmative section.

## SECT. V.

**Answ. 2.** Affirmatively, the Sinai Covenant was a Covenant of Works as to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ, represented under an imperfect administration of the Covenant of Grace to Israel. Or thus:

The Sinai Law is the Covenant of Grace in respect to its legal condition (even for eternal blessings), to be performed by Jesus Christ, held forth under a servile, typical, conditional administration of it for temporal blessings unto Israel.

It promised its blessings, especially eternal life, upon the condition of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ; thereby was the procurement of all.

It promised temporal mercies to the children of Israel upon condition of their due obedience; thereby was the obtainment of them.

There were many articles in the covenant between the Father and the Son which are not found in the Sinai dispensation. Thus, it was not the whole Covenant of Grace, but referred to it—specifically, it was a covenant for the performance of its legal condition, both in respect to duty and penalty.

The Covenant of Works, having been broken by us in the first Adam, made it of great necessity that satisfaction should be rendered to it. Unless its righteousness were fulfilled for us, the promised life was unattainable; and unless its penalty were borne for us, the

threatened death (Gen. 2:17) was unavoidable. In Moses' time, this condition remained unfulfilled, and so the Lord placed Israel—who belonged to the principal guilty party, namely, mankind—under a solemn covenant at Mount Sinai. In doing so, Israel acknowledged their just debt, confessing their obligation to render perfect obedience to God and their deserving of an eternal curse upon the least failure. They solemnly pledged full payment of the whole debt: *"All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do,"* Exod. 19:8; 20:19; 24:3, 7. Not merely some of His words, but *"All that the Lord hath said, we will do."*

Yet the Lord never intended that Israel (the principal debtor) should actually fulfill the required obedience unto life; rather, His purpose was that Jesus Christ, the surety, should perform it on their behalf. His payment would be accepted for what Israel had covenanted to render but, through their inability, were never able to accomplish. This much is evident from the very structure of the Sinai dispensation, with its many types and sacrificial services, all of which pointed to the fact that this obedience would be performed by Jesus Christ for them.

In the one and the same Sinai Covenant, the all-wise God required a double obedience for vastly different ends:

1. A perfect obedience to be performed by Jesus Christ as the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace—this was the principal end.
2. An obedience to be performed by Israel, pertaining to the administration of the covenant in order to their enjoyment of temporal blessings.

Under the latter, the former was represented. These two forms of obedience were so interwoven in the same law that, in the very same breath, the Lord demanded both from Israel—the principal debtor—



who covenanted to yield universal obedience. Yet the divine intention was that Jesus Christ should fulfill the first on their behalf.

I shall now endeavor to clarify this matter under two propositions.

## SECT. VI.

**Prop. 1.** That the Sinai Covenant did hold forth the Covenant of Grace as to its legal condition to be performed by Jesus Christ, and so was a Covenant of Works as to be fulfilled by him. Or,

It conditionally promised its blessings, especially eternal life, upon the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, which was not yet fulfilled in the time of Moses.

The Sinai Covenant did not merely intend an obedience to be performed by Israel, but also a higher and greater obedience to be rendered by Jesus Christ. Indeed, Israel did undertake in a federal way to yield this obedience and thereby became obligated to perfect compliance; being of the principal debtors, they placed themselves under its obligation by their own act. Yet the divine intent was that the actual performance should be by their surety, Jesus Christ, on their behalf. Thus, "*Do and Live*" in that Sinai Covenant primarily had respect to the doing which could only be accomplished by Jesus Christ for us. This appears from the following considerations:

1. The Sinai Covenant demanded perfect obedience, which constitutes a righteousness unto life, and therefore it set forth the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace to be performed by Jesus Christ alone. For it was impossible that Israel, or any of the sons of men, could render such perfect obedience for

themselves (Gal. 3:21), and so they must have missed eternal life unless he performed it for them.

That such perfect obedience was indispensably required by the Sinai Covenant as a condition of life is evident from Lev. 18:5, compared with Gal. 3:10, 12. It was a requirement standing in opposition to faith, impossible for any man to fulfill, as previously demonstrated, and it amounted to a righteousness, as seen in Deut. 6:25: *"And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us."*

Likewise, Rom. 10:5 plainly determines that the Sinai Law enjoined a doing that amounted to righteousness unto life and must therefore have required a perfect obedience that no man could personally perform. To this the apostle adds in verse 4: *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth."*

This teaches that the law had an end to be attained, and that end was righteousness. Moreover, Jesus Christ fulfilled it, becoming that end for believers. This is not merely in an accidental or indirect sense, as though the law merely exposed man's inability and thus drove him to seek relief elsewhere, but in a direct sense—Jesus Christ actually worked out and fulfilled the righteousness which the law required, and so he is its end. For, in verse 3, this righteousness is expressly opposed to that which a man might work out himself.

It must be understood that when Adam was in his state of innocence, God required perfect fulfillment of the law for his continued life. And now, though man is fallen, God does not abate this requirement in the least. Still, without a righteousness specifically the same, no eternal life can be obtained (Rom. 1:17; Rom. 4:6; Rom. 5:18, 21; 2 Cor. 3:9, etc.). That end of the law—righteousness—must still be

fulfilled. However, under the Covenant of Works, man was to perform it personally; now, under the Covenant of Grace, Jesus Christ is admitted to work out this perfect righteousness for him (Rom. 5:18–19: *"By the obedience of one [i.e., Jesus Christ] many are made righteous."*). Hence, he is said to be *"made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness"* (1 Cor. 1:30), and we are *"made the righteousness of God in him"* (2 Cor. 5:21). It is not the righteousness of a mere man, but of one who is also God, in which we must stand.

Now, the Sinai Covenant is a platform of the legal righteousness which was indispensably necessary unto life. There, it is most clearly delineated and described, more fully than in any other federal expression. Among all the covenants, the Sinai Covenant excels in revealing what that righteousness is upon which eternal life depends.

The promissory aspect of the Covenant of Grace is more fully revealed in other federal expressions, such as those made with Abraham, David, and in the New Covenant. But the mandatory and minatory aspects of it—the duty to be performed and the curse to be endured—are most clearly set forth in the covenant at Mount Sinai.

Adam was obligated to a righteousness in obedience to a positive command—not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17)—as well as to the moral law. Likewise, in the Sinai Law, a righteousness was required that included obedience to many positive and ceremonial commands. Jesus Christ fulfilled this. He took it upon himself as his office to *"fulfill all righteousness"* (Matt. 3:15).

He also fulfilled the righteousness of the moral law (Matt. 5:17–18). *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it."* He rendered perfect obedience to its moral precepts and likewise

satisfied its demands, even for transgressions committed under the first testament (Heb. 9:15).

## SECT. VI.

### Prop. 2.

That the Sinai Covenant denounces a dreadful curse (which could only be borne by Jesus Christ) upon the least failure of perfect obedience, and therefore expresses the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace to be performed by Christ. In this sense, it is a Covenant of Works as to be fulfilled by him; for only a Covenant of Works threatens a curse upon the smallest imperfection in obedience.

The Sinai Law does precisely this, as seen in **Gal. 3:10**:

*"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."*

Here, the law operates under such strict terms that if a man performs numerous acts of obedience yet fails in one, he falls under its curse. Even if he keeps all but does not *continue* in all, he is cursed. The law thus requires perfect, uninterrupted obedience under penalty of a curse.

Nothing could more clearly express the nature of a Covenant of Works than this. If the covenant with Adam in innocence was one, then so must this be, for there is no essential difference: *"If thou eatest, thou shalt die"* (Gen. 2:17) is the same principle as *"If thou failest in one thing, thou shalt be cursed"* (Deut. 27:26). The Apostle, however, is not here speaking of the original covenant with Adam,

but of one established much later, at Mount Sinai. He cites what was *written*, and it is in Moses' law (long after Adam) that this is found.

Thus, the Apostle refers to the Sinai Law as expressing the same principle, and he does not merely cite this as the opinion of false teachers among the Galatians but as the intent of the divine law itself: "*It is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all—*"

Furthermore, the Apostle's argument proves the impossibility of attaining justification by the works of the law. "*As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.*" Why? Because no mere man can continue in all that is written in the law. Even the best have sinful infirmities, and the smallest transgression brings a divine curse, which must either be borne by the sinner himself (to his eternal ruin) or by Jesus Christ. In the latter case, Christ fulfills the law's legal condition for his people.

3. Jesus Christ, by coming under and fulfilling the Sinai Covenant, accomplished our redemption.

Since redemption is the work of Christ alone, the Sinai Covenant must have presented not only an obedience to be performed by Israel but also the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace to be performed by Jesus Christ.

This is evident in **Gal. 4:4–5**:

*"God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law—"*

Here, *the law* refers to that which bound men before Christ's incarnation (**v. 3**), which was the Sinai Covenant (**v. 24**). One of the great purposes of Christ's coming is explicitly said to be "*to redeem them that were under the law.*" And how was this accomplished? By

*"being made under the law."* Therefore, his fulfilling the Sinai Covenant was the very condition of redemption.

Indeed, one of God's great purposes in bringing Israel under the Sinai Covenant was to prepare the way for Christ to be born *under the law*, so that he might fulfill it for us. Without this covenant, it is difficult to see how Christ could have been visibly and legally *under the law* as a covenant of works.

The original Covenant of Works with Adam had been broken and was, as to its promises, entirely set aside. Once violated, it offered no further promise—only its curse remained, condemning all his posterity. It provided no entry for an innocent person to fulfill its terms, since it was never renewed in the same manner with mankind. Thus, the only way for Christ, the sinless one, to come under the law in a federal and representative way was through some repetition or reestablishment of it—not for individuals to fulfill it themselves, but so that a surety might fulfill it on their behalf.

There had to be a means whereby Christ, though innocent, could be legally bound by the law in order to meet its demands and satisfy its penalty. In his infinite wisdom, God provided this through the Sinai Covenant, where Israel—who were guilty—voluntarily placed themselves and their seed under the obligation of perfect obedience and under the curse for failure. Christ, being born of their seed and under that covenant, was thus born *under the law*

Without this, even though Christ was of Adam's lineage, it is unclear how he could have been legally bound under the law as a Covenant of Works.

Had he not been born *under* this law as a covenant, he could not have satisfied its demands, whether in fulfilling its righteousness or

in bearing its penalty. He would have merely performed or suffered *in place* of it, rather than satisfying it in the precise terms it required. But because he was truly under it, his fulfillment of the law was exact and sufficient for his people's salvation.

Thus, the Sinai Covenant was absolutely necessary—not merely as a shadow of grace, but as an essential means by which Christ came under the law to redeem us from its curse.

It is true that the Covenant of Grace was established between the Father and the Son from eternity, but the Sinai Covenant was the divinely appointed means for executing that eternal decree in time.

#### **Prop. 4.**

That Jesus Christ actually bore the very curse of the Sinai Law, thereby obtaining our freedom from it, and thus fulfilled the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace on our behalf. Otherwise, how could his bearing of the Sinai curse bring us deliverance from it?

This is explicitly stated in **Galatians 3:13**:

*"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles."*

Here, we see our privilege: we partake in the blessing of Abraham and are redeemed from the curse of the law. The Apostle is clearly speaking of the Sinai Law, as seen in **verses 10 and 17**. The way this privilege was secured was by Christ *being made a curse for us*—he actually underwent the very curse pronounced in the Sinai Covenant to redeem us from it.

The Apostle's argument concerns how we obtain justification and eternal life. He asserts that it is by Christ's redemption from the curse of the law, meaning that his bearing of that curse constitutes the legal condition of our salvation, just as his active obedience constitutes our righteousness.

It should also be noted that these Galatians were Gentiles, yet before their conversion, they were under the very curse mentioned in the Sinai Covenant and needed to be redeemed from it. Although the Sinai Covenant was made specifically with Israel, the Gentiles—who were never formally under it—are still said to have been under its curse. This implies that its demands and penalties extended beyond the Jewish people. The covenant itself had already expired before the Galatians' conversion (**Gal. 3:13–14, 21; 5:1**), so Christ's bearing of the curse was not merely to prevent them from coming under it but to redeem them from its condemnation.

Thus, the Sinai Covenant contained the condition of the Covenant of Grace, which concerned not only the Jews but also the Gentiles.

#### 5. The Ceremonial Services in the Sinai Covenant Typically Pointed to Christ's Sufferings.

Many of the ceremonial ordinances in the Sinai Covenant were direct types of Christ's sufferings. This further proves that the primary design of that covenant was to hold forth the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace.

Some may object that the Sinai Covenant appears to be exclusively between God and Israel, requiring their obedience rather than Christ's. However, Israel's obedience under this covenant included not only moral precepts but also ceremonial services, as seen in **Leviticus 18:5** and **Leviticus 26:46**. These ceremonial statutes



clearly typified Christ, particularly in his passive obedience—his shedding of blood as the great requirement for our redemption.

Israel was commanded to perform sacrifices and offerings for sin, yet these could never make real atonement. Christ alone could. Though the people were required to offer them under pain of a curse, they could contribute nothing to their own satisfaction for sin. The entire sacrificial system pointed to Christ, who alone fulfilled what these types represented.

Thus, if the principal condition of the Covenant of Grace—the remission of sins—was undeniably typified in the ceremonial services of the Sinai Covenant, why should it be deemed strange that the moral law, also enjoined upon Israel, should likewise point to Christ's perfect obedience as our righteousness?

The legal sacrifices did not truly expiate sin but merely typified the true atonement. As **Hebrews 9:9** states, "*They offered both gifts and sacrifices that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.*" The sacrifices, though divinely instituted, were not pleasing to God *ex opere operato* (by the mere act itself) but only as they directed sinners to Christ. In him alone was true remission of sins and sanctification found (**Hebrews 7:19; 9:12–14**).

Under the Sinai Covenant, the Israelites were required, through their priests, to offer sacrifices for sin and make atonement, yet Christ alone was the true atonement. The law demanded these sacrifices as part of the covenant, yet it was never intended that Israel, by these works, would attain eternal life. Rather, they pointed to Christ, who alone could satisfy divine justice.

Since the ceremonial and moral laws were both imposed in the Sinai Covenant, and since Christ undeniably fulfilled the ceremonial law as our atonement, the same reasoning must apply to the moral law, which he fulfilled as our righteousness. If one accepts that the ceremonies typified his sufferings, it follows that the moral law typified his obedience.

The Sinai Covenant, Though Made with Israel, Principally Concerned Christ.

Some may still object that the Sinai Covenant was between God and Israel, not between God and Christ. However, Old Testament matters were often expressed in dark and veiled terms, appearing at first to refer only to temporal or national concerns while ultimately pointing to Christ.

Many Old Testament passages seem to concern David or Solomon alone but are later revealed to be prophetic of Christ. For example, **Psalms 16:10**, which speaks of not seeing corruption, is applied to Christ in **Acts 2:31** and **Acts 13:35**. **Psalms 22:18** is fulfilled in **John 19:24**, and **Psalms 89:36** is applied to Christ's eternal reign in **Luke 1:32–33**.

Similarly, the Sinai Covenant, though appearing primarily to require Israel's obedience for temporal blessings, was chiefly intended to foreshadow Christ's perfect obedience for eternal life. This is evident in the New Testament, where the law is applied to Christ. The fulfillment of the law and our deliverance from it is explicitly ascribed to him.

Thus, the Sinai Covenant was a legal framework that both obligated Israel in a typological sense and, more importantly, set forth the legal

conditions that Christ would fulfill as the mediator of the New Covenant.

## 6. The Great Difficulties Concerning the Sinai Covenant Are Resolved When Understood as the Legal Condition of the Covenant of Grace to Be Fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

The principal challenge regarding the Sinai Covenant lies in its clear declaration: *"Do and Live, and Cursed is he that doth not."* This has led to significant debate and difficulty in interpretation.

On one side, some assert that the Sinai Covenant was a Covenant of Works for Israel, entirely distinct from the Covenant of Grace. They argue that it required perfect obedience and made no provision for the forgiveness of a single offense, citing **Galatians 3:10**, which states that the law brings a curse upon all who fail to uphold it perfectly. They further point to the fact that the seed of this covenant are represented as outcasts in **Galatians 4**.

However, these difficulties dissipate when the Sinai Covenant is understood as setting forth the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace, to be fulfilled by our Surety, Jesus Christ. Initially, Israel entered into this covenant and assumed its obligations, but ultimately, its fulfillment was always directed toward Christ, who alone could satisfy its demands. The Sinai Covenant required perfect obedience for life, and Christ perfectly fulfilled this requirement. No offense was excused; the full curse was borne by him. Those who attempt to take Christ's place in fulfilling this law for eternal life are the seed who are cast out.

On the other side, some contend that the Sinai Covenant was merely an administration of the Covenant of Grace, differing from the New Covenant only in degree or external form. However, this position

fails to account for the fact that the blessings of the New Covenant are presented as the direct result of Christ's accomplishment of the Old. The New Covenant presupposes the fulfillment of the Sinai Covenant by Jesus Christ, who bore its curse and satisfied its demands.

### **Other Interpretations of "Do and Live" in the Sinai Covenant Fail If the Doing Is Confined to Israel and Not Extended Primarily to Jesus Christ.**

Some argue that the phrase "*Do and Live*" does not refer to the law in isolation but to the law in conjunction with the promise. They claim that the command to obey is given within the context of a gracious covenant that includes divine promises.

However, this explanation is unsatisfactory, for the Apostle explicitly states in **Galatians 3:12**, "*The law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live in them.*" Here, Paul distinguishes between two ways of obtaining life—one by doing, the other by faith. The law speaks of a doing that does not include the promise, for if it did, it would not be opposed to faith.

Furthermore, Scripture consistently presents this doing as directly opposite to believing in the matter of justification and life. This is evident in **Leviticus 18:5**, **Romans 10:5–6**, and **Galatians 3:12**, where the law's demand is clearly stated: *If any man undertakes to be the doer, he must do all perfectly*. Thus, the Sinai Covenant cannot be merely an administration of the Covenant of Grace in the same way as the New Covenant, but rather, it sets forth the legal condition of that covenant, to be accomplished by Christ.

### **Refutation of Alternative Interpretations of "Do and Live" in the Sinai Covenant**

Some argue that "Do and Live" does not mean *living by doing*, but rather *living in doing*, implying that Christians live in obedience, though not by obedience.

However, this does not resolve the issue. The doing required in the Sinai Covenant constitutes a *righteousness unto life* and is directly opposed to the *righteousness of faith*, as seen in **Romans 10:5–6**. Therefore, it cannot merely refer to the sincere or evangelical obedience of Christians, but must indicate something vastly different—namely, perfect obedience.

Others suggest that "Do and Live" applies not only to the Moral Law but also to the Ceremonial Law.

Yet this is equally unsatisfactory. There is no valid reason to exclude the Moral Law, as it was this very law that *concluded all under sin* (**Galatians 3:22**). Moreover, whether the requirement involved moral or ceremonial obedience, the principle remains unchanged: any requirement of obedience for life establishes a *Covenant of Works*. Even the original covenant with Adam in innocence was based on a *positive precept*—not eating from the tree of knowledge (**Genesis 2:17**).

Some claim that the Lord was merely repeating the Covenant of Works at Sinai to present Israel with a choice—whether to seek salvation by works or by faith.

This cannot be correct. Israel was already within the Covenant of Grace and had the Lord as their God (**Exodus 20:1**). God would not lead them to forsake his grace, much less enter into a solemn covenant with them for the purpose of allowing them to undermine his grand design of free grace.

Another perspective suggests that the Law, when considered absolutely in itself (**Galatians 4:21–31**), is purely a Covenant of Works. However, when viewed in relation to the promise (**Galatians 3:17–4:21**), it serves subservient ends—convicting of sin, humbling the sinner, and leading to faith in Christ.

While it is true that the Sinai Covenant was designed to serve the ends of the Covenant of Grace, this does not eliminate the fundamental problem: it was, in itself, a covenant that *gendered to bondage* (**Galatians 4:24**), carrying a principle of works distinct from the promise. The Law could not lead to grace except by demonstrating its own insufficiency. Thus, its very inability to give life must first be acknowledged before its usefulness in driving sinners to Christ can be understood. The terms "**Do and Live**" cannot be merely rhetorical; rather, they indicate an actual requirement of perfect obedience. Since Israel was incapable of fulfilling this requirement (**Galatians 3:21**), it follows that this doing was ultimately to be accomplished by Jesus Christ as their Surety.

Others argue that the Law is sometimes taken broadly, referring to the whole doctrine and administration of the Sinai Covenant, in which life is granted upon faith in Christ (**Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23–24**), thus making it a *Covenant of Faith*. However, when taken strictly, as an abstract rule of righteousness—consisting of precepts, threats, and promises of life upon the impossible condition of perfect obedience—it is a *Covenant of Works*. They claim that in this latter sense, Moses did not give the Law.

This explanation is also insufficient. **Romans 10:4** speaks of the Law *for righteousness*, referring to the very same Law described in **Romans 10:5**, which demands perfect obedience for life. The only

difference is that Christ has fulfilled it on behalf of believers. Similarly, **Galatians 3:12, 23–24** describes the Law as a schoolmaster leading to Christ, yet believers are *not under it*. Moreover, even if the Law is taken in a broader sense, it cannot be shown to possess the nature of a covenant in that capacity. Whatever aspect of the Sinai Covenant is federal in nature operates on the principle of perfect obedience—"Do and Live"—thus assuming the character of a Covenant of Works. However, this was never intended to be fulfilled by Israel themselves, but by Jesus Christ for them.

The Sinai Covenant as a Conditional Administration of the Covenant of Grace for Temporal Mercies

The servile and typical nature of the Sinai Covenant is evident from Galatians 4:3, 24 and Hebrews 8:9. It will be more fully demonstrated elsewhere, but these passages make clear that the Sinai Covenant functioned as a form of bondage and a shadow pointing to a greater reality.

The Conditional Nature of the Sinai Covenant

## SECT. VII.

The Sinai Covenant promises nothing apart from the condition of obedience. This obedience was not only to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ but also by Israel.

- Exodus 19:5–6: If Israel obeyed and kept God's covenant, they would be his peculiar treasure and a holy nation.
- Deuteronomy 4:13: The covenant was declared to them, and they were commanded to perform it—specifically, the Ten Commandments.

- Jeremiah 31:32: Israel is reproached for breaking this covenant, confirming that they were indeed bound to obey it.

### The Promise of Temporal Mercies upon Obedience

The Sinai Covenant explicitly promises temporal blessings to Israel upon their obedience:

- Leviticus 26:3–4: If Israel walked in God's statutes and kept his commandments, then they would receive rain in due season and their land would yield increase.
- Leviticus 26:6: Peace in the land is promised as another temporal blessing.

These blessings were conditioned not only upon obedience to the judicial commands, which regulated them as a commonwealth, but also upon adherence to moral and ceremonial precepts.

- Deuteronomy 5: The Ten Commandments are repeated, followed by statutes and judgments, and Israel is urged to obey all these so that they may live and enjoy the land of Canaan and prolong their days there (Deuteronomy 5:31–33; 6:1–3, 17–18, 24; 11:8).
- Deuteronomy 11:13–14: Israel was required to love and serve God with all their heart and soul in order to receive rain, grass for their cattle, and other outward mercies.

This obedience was not merely external but also required heartfelt devotion, as seen in Deuteronomy 6:5, where love for God with all the heart, soul, and might was commanded. Conscience, therefore, was involved in these obligations.

### The Connection to the Covenant of Grace



Disobedience to these moral commands, which bound the conscience, led to the loss of temporal mercies.

- Jeremiah 11:8, 10: Israel's failure to obey resulted in divine judgment.
- Jeremiah 44:21–23: Their transgressions were the cause of their suffering.

Thus, it remains to be demonstrated that the Sinai Covenant, as it was to be performed by Israel, was an administration of the Covenant of Grace and contained grace for them.

It is true that the Sinai Covenant required of Israel not only sincere but perfect obedience, even in order to temporal mercies. Their obedience had to be to all commands and with all the heart, as previously demonstrated. Their coming short of this standard was sinful, for even within that very covenant, sacrifices were appointed where sincere obedience was performed, providing atonement for sins of infirmity, such as sins of ignorance, as well as for other transgressions. This is evident in Leviticus 4:26, 29, 31, 35, and 5:10, 13, 16, 18, among other passages.

This provision of relief and remedy implies that Israel would fail, would sin, and would stand in need of that forgiveness which, in many cases, was promised within this covenant. Yet, in following the prescribed directions, in offering sacrifices exactly according to divine appointment, they would be forgiven—that is, so far as the temporal judgments threatened would be averted and the temporal mercies promised would be bestowed. Their sins, when atoned for by the appointed means, would not hinder their receiving these mercies. In this respect, it was a real forgiveness, for if there had been no real expiation by those sacrifices, and nothing truly forgiven, how could they have served as types of the forgiveness that believers receive

through the true sacrifice, Jesus Christ? However, it was not a real spiritual forgiveness as pertaining to the conscience, for, as Hebrews 9:9 states, the Law could not make the one who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience.

It should also be noted that when the Apostle speaks not in relation to temporal but to eternal matters, he sets forth the Sinai Law in its strict terms: "Do and live," and "Cursed is he that continueth not in all things" (Galatians 3:10; Romans 10:5). We must not think that the righteousness by which we are justified is to be performed by ourselves, as if the sacrifice of Jesus Christ were intended only to expiate and obtain the pardon of our sins in coming short of it. Rather, the righteousness required for justification and eternal life is absolutely perfect, without flaw or sinful imperfection. No forgiveness is needed in this righteousness, for it is such as could be performed only by Jesus Christ alone (Romans 10:4; Romans 5, latter part). Hence, if the Romans and Galatians so much as attempted to seek this righteousness by any works of their own, the Apostle warns them that the least sin would lay them under the curse. Indeed, they would thereby frustrate and nullify the whole undertaking of Jesus Christ, rendering themselves incapable of any profit or advantage from him (Galatians 5:2, 4). Thus, in relation to eternal matters, the Lord exacted perfect obedience without any abatement, making it a strict Covenant of Works.

However, as to temporal matters, the case was different. Although temporal blessings were promised in the Sinai Covenant upon the condition of Israel's perfect obedience, when they failed and so forfeited them, provision was made for the forgiveness of many sins. The Lord did not take the forfeiture absolutely or deal with them upon such strict terms as in the Covenant of Works. Instead, if they duly offered sacrifices according to the prescribed order, they would

not lose their temporal mercies. In this way, the Sinai Covenant was an administration that included some measure of grace for Israel. This will be further demonstrated in the following ways.

1. The laws and ordinances for the public worship of God among the children of Israel were contained in the Sinai Covenant as part of its condition, and therefore it belonged to the administration of the Covenant of Grace. There is a detailed description of the tabernacle, which was for the worship of God (Exodus 26), and in Leviticus, many sacrifices and services are required of the children of Israel—burnt offerings, trespass offerings, peace offerings, and the like. The rules and directions given by the Lord had to be exactly followed by them, under the threat of severe consequences, lest they die or be cut off (Exodus 28:35; 30:20, 21, 33; Leviticus 7:21, 25, 27; 15:31; 16:2, 13; 17:4, 9, and many other places).

The Lord would not have so precisely appointed the manner of his worship unless he had intended that Israel should find acceptance in keeping close to him in these appointments. The free-will offering had to be brought to the door of the tabernacle (Leviticus 1:3, 4), and it would be accepted for him that brought it—meaning he would have acceptance with the Lord to some end. Many of these ceremonial services are said to be “for a sweet savor unto the Lord” (Leviticus 4:31; 6:15; 23:18), which implies their acceptance with God in these acts of worship, at least to the granting of the promised temporal blessings. This demonstrates their connection to the administration of the Covenant of Grace, for sinners cannot be accepted in any service apart from the way of grace. Furthermore, the Lord honored them with evident tokens of his presence when they duly performed these ordinances (Leviticus 9:23): “The glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people.”

2. Israel's obedience was not the righteousness that procured the temporal blessings promised in the Sinai Covenant; therefore, that covenant was an administration of grace. The procurement even of these blessings was by the righteousness of another—namely, the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ—and was therefore of grace.

In the Covenant of Works, man could have expected blessings based on his own obedience, but it was otherwise in the Sinai dispensation. In Deuteronomy 9:4-6, the Lord emphatically denies that Israel was given the land of Canaan as a reward for their own righteousness: "Speak not thou in thine heart, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land... Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart dost thou go to possess their land." And again, in verse 6, the Lord reiterates, "Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness." The possession of Canaan was a great mercy promised in the Sinai Covenant, yet the Lord three times over denies that it was granted for Israel's righteousness. This clearly demonstrates that they received it in a way of grace and favor.

3. The Sinai Covenant contained provisions for dealing with sins and transgressions, and therefore it was an administration of grace. A Covenant of Works offers no relief or provision for sin—nothing but death and a divine curse is to be expected (Genesis 2:17).

However, in the Sinai Covenant, the children of Israel continually fell short of the obedience required, yet divine indulgence was revealed even within that very covenant. Pardoning mercy was represented in the ceremonial law. When the priest, the rulers, the whole

congregation, or any of the common people sinned through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord, a sin offering was provided (Leviticus 4). When they followed the prescribed directions in offering these sacrifices, it is said, “they shall be forgiven” (Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35). For sins committed knowingly, there were trespass offerings (Leviticus 6). There were also days of atonement and many washings—all of which signified that the Lord would not deal with them according to strict justice, nor according to the rigid terms of a Covenant of Works. This confirms that the Sinai Covenant, to Israel, was indeed a ministration of grace.

If Israel had been strictly held to the condition of perfect obedience, without any means of being freed from their sin, they would have been utterly incapable of receiving any temporal blessings from the Sinai Covenant. They would never have met its conditions and thus would have missed all the good promised in it. Consequently, if this covenant for temporal blessings had been based on absolute, unrelenting obedience, it would have been vain and useless—an assertion that would impugn the wisdom of God, who established it. Therefore, there must have been grace in it.

4. Considerations of mercy are presented as great inducements to Israel’s obedience in the Sinai Covenant, and therefore it was an administration of grace to them.

A Covenant of Works is founded upon perfect obedience as its condition and enforces duty in a way of strict justice. In the covenant with Adam in innocence, the primary enforcement of obedience was the danger of failing in it: “Dying thou shalt die” (Genesis 2:17). On the other hand, the hope of a reward was based on justice; if Adam

had perfectly obeyed, the Lord in justice would have been obliged to grant what he had promised.

However, in the Sinai Covenant, a principal motive and encouragement to Israel's obedience was mercy. This is evident in the very preface to the Decalogue (Exodus 20:2): "I am the Lord thy God," which denotes a covenant relationship with him—a remarkable mercy to a sinful people. The Lord further states, "Which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Here, their redemption from Egypt is presented as a mercy, and this is given as a reason for their obedience to the commandments that follow (verses 3, 4, etc.). Thus, covenant mercy and redeeming mercy serve as grand arguments urging Israel's obedience in the Sinai Covenant, demonstrating that there was grace in that administration. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 27:9-10, we read: "Thou art become the people of the Lord thy God." Here is their mercy; and what is the application? "Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the Lord thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day." The same principle is found in Leviticus 19 and Leviticus 20:7-8.

5. No violation or breaking of the covenant on Israel's part deprived them of the temporal mercies promised, unless it was against the substantials of the Sinai Covenant. This shows that it was an administration of grace to Israel, for otherwise, even the least sin would have cut them off from all its benefits.

Wherever the Lord speaks of breaking the covenant, it concerns serious transgressions against its principal matters. For example, in Leviticus 26:1-2, they are commanded: "Ye shall make you no idols, nor graven images." In verse 15, despising his statutes and breaking his covenant are connected. Likewise, Joshua 23:16 states: "When ye

have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them.” Every sin was in some sense a violation of the covenant, but because of the covenant with Abraham, it was only such transgressions as serving other gods and worshiping them that provoked the Lord’s anger to destroy them (see Jeremiah 11:10; Deuteronomy 8:19-20).

If we examine instances where the Lord removed temporal mercies from them, he did not take advantage of every sin of infirmity to do so, but only of greater violations against the essence of the covenant. In Deuteronomy 4:3, the Lord destroyed those who followed Baal-Peor. Judgment was executed upon transgressors, while in contrast, verse 4 states: “But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day.” In verses 5-6, the Lord implies that he would not deal with them in severe judgment for lesser sins of infirmity but only for greater miscarriages. Those who walked in believing, careful, and conscientious obedience were spared by the Lord, as he declares here. Likewise, Israel’s exile into Babylon and other scatterings from the land of Canaan, along with the loss of their temporal mercies, resulted from violating major purposes of the covenant, not merely from minor transgressions. This clearly indicates that grace accompanied the Sinai Covenant in its administration to Israel.

6. After Israel violated the Sinai Covenant, it still admitted repentance and promised a return of mercy, and therefore it was an administration of grace to them. Had it been a Covenant of Works to them, no benefit could have been expected after a violation, regardless of any repentance.

However, this was not the case. In Deuteronomy 30:1-2, when they were scattered among the nations, the Lord promised: "If thou shalt return to the Lord thy God, and obey his voice with all thy heart..." Then, in verse 3: "The Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee." In verse 5: "And will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it, and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers."

Thus, when by their sin they had forfeited their temporal mercies, yet upon the condition of repentance, they might repossess and enjoy them again. This shows that, to Israel, it was an administration of the Covenant of Grace.

Objection: Did not the Lord dispense spiritual and eternal mercies of the Covenant of Grace through the Sinai Covenant, as well as temporal blessings? If so, why is it mentioned as if it were only an administration of it to Israel for temporal blessings?

Answer:

1. I freely grant that many under the Sinai Covenant obtained spiritual and eternal mercies. Moses and other Israelites had faith, as seen in Hebrews 11, and were saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, just as we are (Acts 15:11). However, they may have enjoyed these blessings by virtue of the Covenant with Abraham rather than by the Covenant made at Mount Sinai.
2. Under the temporal blessings of the Sinai Covenant, many spiritual privileges were typified. The Lord's dealings with Israel in that dispensation are compared to how an heir is treated while still in infancy (Galatians 4:1-3). Just as children are led to understand and appreciate things through pictures, so the Lord used the Sinai Covenant to represent spiritual blessings under



types and shadows (Hebrews 8:5). This was designed to draw forth and strengthen their faith, which was rooted in the Covenant with Abraham. Thus, while the Sinai Covenant itself did not dispense spiritual blessings, it served as a means to direct them to look to the Abrahamic Covenant for such blessings.

3. The Sinai Covenant must be considered in two respects. First, as it set forth the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace, it promised blessings only upon perfect obedience—an obedience not to be performed by Israel but by Jesus Christ. In this regard, it could not grant life through Israel's obedience (Galatians 3:21; Romans 8:2-3), nor did Christ dispense life through it, for he was the Mediator of the New and better Covenant.

Second, we may consider it as an administration of the Covenant of Grace (albeit a servile one), in which the obedience was to be performed by Israel. In this sense, it was "added" (Galatians 3:19), meaning it was an appendix to the Covenant with Abraham, containing many precepts, rules, and ordinances—such as sacrifices and ceremonial services concerning the Tabernacle, the priesthood, and external worship—not previously revealed. Those who faithfully observed these ordinances, while looking in faith to the ancient promise, received spiritual blessings. However, these blessings were not necessarily dispensed through the Sinai Covenant itself but rather through their faith in the Abrahamic Covenant, to which the Sinai Covenant was annexed and with which it was to be taken in conjunction.

I do not think that the Lord would require them to engage in so many acts of worship without intending that they should enjoy his spiritual presence and acceptance in their observance of them.

Furthermore, even the temporal mercies promised and granted under the Sinai dispensation were fruits of the Covenant of Grace. No outward mercies can be enjoyed by sinful men in a federal way without there being grace involved. Thus, in many respects, the result is the same, whether those spiritual privileges were derived from one covenant or the other. I do not suggest that the Israelites enjoyed only temporal blessings; they undoubtedly received spiritual blessings as well, though possibly by means of a different covenant.

For the sake of clarifying the nature of the Sinai dispensation and preventing some practical misunderstandings regarding it, I will now add the following considerations.

4. It is probable that spiritual and eternal blessings were not dispensed to Israel by the Sinai Covenant, but were only typified therein. The primary purpose of that covenant, under its servile administration of the Covenant of Grace, was to foreshadow higher spiritual realities. Just as, upon literal Israel's performance of the obedience required as a condition of the covenant, they enjoyed the temporal blessings promised, so, upon the performance of the main condition by Jesus Christ—his perfect obedience—the true spiritual Israel would inherit the spiritual blessings promised to them. Thus, while temporal blessings were granted by the Sinai Covenant, spiritual blessings were not dispensed through it. This, subject to better judgment, appears evident for the following reasons.
5. No life was attainable through Israel's obedience to the Sinai Covenant, and therefore spiritual blessings were not dispensed through it. Galatians 3:21 states, "For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." The great blessing of the Covenant of

Grace—life—could not be obtained through obedience to the Sinai Law, of which Paul speaks in verse 17. Consequently, other blessings, which depend upon and proceed from that life, could not be obtained through it either. Just as Christians are not now to "do" for life, neither were the Israelites then. That Moses and Aaron were forbidden from entering the earthly Canaan and instead died upon the mountain may signify that the Sinai Covenant could not grant entrance into the heavenly Canaan. Moses entered that inheritance not through the works of the law but by faith.

6. Spiritual blessings were not dispensed on the condition of Israel's obedience to the Sinai Covenant, for they frequently violated that covenant. Jeremiah 31:32 says, "Which covenant they brake." If their spiritual mercies had depended upon their obedience to that covenant, they would have forfeited and lost them entirely, for they fell far short of its requirements. Yet, just as now, there was no falling from special grace in that day. When they forfeited the temporal blessings promised by breaking the covenant, they had to appeal to another covenant. In Exodus 34:13, when the Lord's anger burned against Israel for their idolatry in making the golden calf (verse 11), Moses did not plead the Sinai Covenant but fled to the Covenant with Abraham for their relief, saying, "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self."

Indeed, the Sinai Covenant externally represented spiritual blessings. In making atonement and offering sacrifices for various sins, it is said they would be forgiven (Leviticus 4:26, 27, 28, 29, 31; Leviticus 5:10, 13, 16, 18; Numbers 15:28). However, no real atonement was made by these sacrifices, for "the law made nothing

perfect" (Hebrews 7:19; Hebrews 9:9). No true forgiveness was granted through them except in the sense that their sins would not prevent them from obtaining the temporal blessings promised in that covenant or bring down its temporal curses. These sacrifices merely typified the spiritual forgiveness that believers would receive through another covenant—namely, the Covenant with Abraham.

Likewise, when Israel entered into covenant with the Lord, it was said to be "that he might establish thee today for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God" (Deuteronomy 29:12-13). They were thereby recognized in a federal relationship with God. Yet this was an external relationship, as later made evident when the Lord declared, "Lo-ammi," meaning, "Ye are not my people, and I will not be your God" (Hosea 1:9). Thus, their status under the Sinai Covenant was only an external and typical relationship, not a spiritual and eternal one.

3. The ceremonial ordinances, which most strongly suggested the dispensing of spiritual blessings, were merely typical representations of them. These ceremonies were but "shadows of heavenly things" (Hebrews 8:5). The forgiveness of sins under the Sinai Covenant meant only that temporal punishments would not be inflicted. This was merely a shadow of the true and real forgiveness, which, in contrast, is ascribed exclusively to Christ in Hebrews 9 and 10. Their acceptance was limited to temporal privileges, serving as a mere shadow of true spiritual acceptance. Their prolonged life in Canaan was but a shadow of eternal life in heaven. Thus, spiritual blessings were not dispensed through the Sinai Covenant but only signified by it.
4. Those who seek spiritual blessings solely through the Sinai Covenant and their personal performance of it are excluded

from them. Galatians 4:30 declares, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." The bondwoman is expressly identified as the Sinai Covenant (verse 24), and as a covenant, it must be cast out. Likewise, those who are its seed—those who base their profession solely on legal obedience or fear—must also be cast out. Those who stand on the ground of the old covenant and subject themselves to it shall not inherit the everlasting promise. Rather, another and opposite seed—those begotten by the Gospel Promise—shall inherit. Therefore, the Sinai Covenant was never intended to be the means by which souls would receive spiritual and eternal blessings through obedience to its terms. If it had been, its seed would have inherited just as much as the seed of the freewoman. Instead, its purpose was to reveal the impossibility of its fulfillment by fallen man, thereby driving sinners to become the children of the freewoman, who are born by promise and through a distinct covenant.

Furthermore, Paul does not speak merely of the law as it was mistakenly applied by the false teachers. Rather, he speaks of it as it was truly given by God at Mount Sinai. As an argument against the Galatians' errors, he says in verses 21-22, "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman." He then explains that these two sons allegorically represent two covenants—the one from Sinai, which leads to bondage, and the other from the free promise. He concludes that those born of the Sinai Covenant, or its seed, are not heirs of the promise and must be cast out. Thus, even the law itself excludes them from the eternal inheritance. This demonstrates that it was always an abuse of the Sinai Covenant to expect spiritual blessings

through it. The Lord had ordained another way—the free promise—for that purpose.

## CHAP. VIII.

### Of the Sinai Covenant, Whether Ceased or Continuing?

Some question whether the Sinai Covenant is still in force so that Christians remain obligated to it in Gospel times. It is referred to as "the Law" (Malachi 4:4; Romans 7) and as "a Covenant or Testament" (Exodus 34:23; Deuteronomy 4:13; Jeremiah 31:31-32; Galatians 4:24).

**Answer:** The moral law contained within the Sinai dispensation remains binding, but considered as a covenant or testament, it is no longer in force.

*Cessavit lex, ut norma est operum naturae ex formula foederis operum; manet vero iis qui in Christo sunt, ut est regula operum gratiae, saith Rollock, de Vocat. Cap. 2.*

### **1. The Moral Law as an External Rule of Obedience Is Universally and Perpetually Binding**

Certain circumstances, such as Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the promise of prolonged days in the land of Canaan (Exodus 20:2, 12), were specific to the children of Israel. However, the essence of

the Ten Commandments remains binding upon all men. Though acceptable obedience flows only from union with Christ and an internal, vital principle (John 15:5), the moral law itself continues to be obligatory.

### **Reasons for Its Perpetuity:**

#### **1. The Moral Law Is a Perfect Rule of Righteousness and Conformity to the Will of God, and Therefore Is Perpetual**

All good is commanded, and all evil is forbidden within it. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). The very definition of sin is drawn from the law, so if we are to avoid sin, we must continue to obey the law.

Christ calls his disciples to "remember the law of Moses" (Malachi 4:4), and this command extends to Gospel times, as the prophecy continues, "when the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings" (Malachi 4:2).

The moral law is, in essence, a restatement of the law of nature, which is engraved upon the hearts of even the most barbarous peoples (Romans 2:14-15). "The work of the law is written in their hearts," showing that as long as human nature endures, so too does the obligation to obey God's moral law.

Romans 7:13 declares, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good." Therefore, whatever contradicts the law must be unholy, unjust, and evil.

Before Sinai, and even since, the moral law has functioned as a rule of inward holiness and sanctification for all who live under

the free promise of grace. Under the Sinai Covenant, it also had a temporal function in securing outward blessings for Israel.

## **2. God Has Declared His Approval of Conformity to the Moral Law and Has Witnessed Against Disobedience in Every Age**

Long before the Sinai Covenant, righteousness was commended and wickedness condemned. Abel was praised for his faith, worship, and acknowledgment of the true God, while Cain was disapproved for his contrary ways (Genesis 4:4; Hebrews 11).

The reverence of God's name is recorded as early as Genesis 14:19-20. The Sabbath was instituted at creation (Genesis 2:3). Honor toward superiors is exemplified in Noah's sons (Genesis 9:23) and in Isaac (Genesis 22:7). Murder was condemned in Cain's punishment. Adultery and unchastity were judged severely in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was reproved for bearing false witness when he misrepresented Sarah as his sister. Laban was accused of defrauding and coveting (Genesis 31:7-9).

Though the moral law was formally delivered at Sinai, transgressions of it were always sinful. The New Testament also affirms this. Christ observes the ways, actions, and inclinations of men and either commends or condemns them, even within his churches (Revelation 2-3). Any deviation from this rule is sin.

## **3. The Moral Law's Natural Tendency Is to Promote Love**

Christ himself summarized the law by reducing the Ten Commandments to two great commandments: love toward God



and love toward neighbor (Matthew 22:36-41).

The duty to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind and to love one's neighbor as oneself is binding at all times. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). The fulfillment of these commandments is the fulfillment of the law.

## **4. The Moral Law Is Explained and Obedience to It Earnestly Pressed in the Times of the Gospel**

To free it from the false glosses of the Jewish Rabbis, Jesus Christ himself expounds the moral law in Matthew 5, showing that not only outward acts but also inward dispositions are sinful. He declares that not only gross acts are to be avoided, but even the inclinations leading thereto—such as unchaste looks and unclean thoughts—are condemned (Matthew 5:28).

Christians remain obligated not only to sincere but to perfect obedience to the "royal law of liberty" (James 1:15). Though believers are not condemned under it, even the least failure is still sinful. Worshiping God remains a duty (Matthew 4:10), as it is a means of withstanding Satan's temptations. The duties of the second table of the law are also plainly enforced in the New Testament (Ephesians 6:3; Romans 13:8). Love is undeniably a duty in Gospel times, and in it the fulfillment of the law is wrapped up:

*"Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet."*

These commandments are therefore still in force, and even the Gentile Christians in Rome were under obligation to them. Thus, their perpetuity is evident.

Jesus Christ himself affirms them as his commandments:

*"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love"* (John 15:10).

Keeping these commandments—through faith and love—is the way to experience Christ's love. He calls the commandment of love a "new commandment" (John 13:34), which sweetens obedience. Christians remain under the law, but to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21)—to their Mediator, who has satisfied the law for their transgressions. They receive the law not from the hand of Moses, in its terror and rigor, but from the hand of Jesus Christ, who has redeemed them from its curse.

The first tablets of the law, written by God, were quickly broken (Exodus 32:16, 19). But the second tablets, which Moses (a type of Christ) was commanded to hew, endured longer. It was then that the Lord proclaimed his pardoning mercy (Exodus 34:1, 4, 6). The moral law, in the hand of Jesus Christ, the true Mediator, abides, accompanied by pardoning grace.

Of old, the Ark of the Covenant contained only the moral law, not the ceremonial (Deuteronomy 10:2), signifying that the ceremonial law would be abolished while the moral law would remain with the covenant. Accordingly, it is promised in the New Covenant:

*"I will write my law in their hearts"* (Hebrews 8:10).

All these considerations argue for the perpetuity of the moral law.

## **2. The Mount Sinai Dispensation as a Covenant Is Not Continuing**

It is generally granted that the Sinai covenant is abrogated in respect of certain circumstances, fruits, and effects, such as its servile bondage and fear. However, it is further to be affirmed that no one in Gospel times remains under its obligation as a covenant or testament.

## **The Cessation of the Sinai Covenant**

This may appear in the following ways:

### **1. The Succession of the New Covenant in Place of the Old Argues That It Is Not Continuing**

One covenant must be removed when another takes its place, as seen in Deuteronomy 2:12, 21, 22; 25:6; and 19:1.

The New Covenant succeeds the Old. The Hebrews were prone to cling to the covenant made at Mount Sinai; to correct this, the Apostle tells them of a better covenant that has replaced it (Hebrews 8:8-9). The distinction is not merely between circumstances or external aspects of the same covenant, but between two distinct covenants.

Hebrews 8:13 states, *"In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."* It is the covenant itself that is said to be old and vanishing. Therefore, the Sinai Covenant must have ceased and come to an end. Calvin affirms this, stating that the second covenant is of another quality.

It is true that the New Covenant, in its substance, existed in the covenant with Abraham, though not under the title *New*. That designation was given in contrast to the *Old*. However, it could not be said to have *succeeded* the Old until the Old had expired.

## **2. The Ceremonial and Judicial Laws Are Generally Granted to Be Abrogated, and So the Old Covenant, as to Them, Is Not Continuing**

The judicial laws, in their moral equity, are still deemed binding, but not as part of the Sinai Covenant, for then they would bind in precisely the same way as they stood in it. These laws were specific to Israel.

They are called *judgments* (Exodus 21:1) and concern legal determinations between man and man, including punishments for transgressions, given with reference to Israel's inheritance in the land of Canaan. Dr. Owen notes that they cannot formally bind others who do not possess an inheritance in that land.

As for the ceremonial laws, the Apostle, to prove their abolition, states in Hebrews 7:11-12:

*"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood..."*

He asserts that perfection (i.e., remission of sins, justification, etc.; Hebrews 10:16-18) was not attained through the Levitical priesthood or legal sacrifices, but only through Jesus Christ, whom these things typified. He argues, *"for under it the people received the law,"* implying that, once perfection is obtained under the Gospel, they are freed from that law as a testament (Hebrews 7:22).

He further states that, if perfection had been possible through that law, there would have been no need for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek rather than after the order of Aaron (Hebrews 7:11). The necessity of a new priesthood proves the imperfection of the old.

Thus, he infers the abrogation of the ceremonial law:

*"For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."* (Hebrews 7:12)

The connection between the priesthood and the law is such that they stand and fall together. If the Aaronic priesthood is abolished (as it is), then necessarily, the ceremonial law that upheld it must also be abolished. He calls it a *carnal commandment* (Hebrews 7:16) and a *disannulled commandment* (verse 18) due to its weakness and unprofitableness.

The same point is made in Hebrews 9, where ceremonial practices are said to have lasted *"until the time of reformation."* They were patterns and figures of heavenly things, but once the substance has come, the shadow must vanish. The coming of the antitype, Jesus Christ, necessitates the cessation of the type.

What a glorious privilege it is to have freedom from the burdensome ceremonies of the law!

## **The Moral Law Alone Remains**

Of all the aspects of the Sinai Covenant, the moral law is the only part that remains binding. Any suggestion that the promises and

threatenings of the Sinai Covenant still apply must, therefore, be limited to the moral law alone.

### **3. Jesus Christ Hath Perfectly Satisfied and Fulfilled the Mount Sinai Moral Law, as It Was a Covenant for Eternal Life, and Therefore, as Such, It Is Not Still Continuing**

It was impossible for us perfectly to obey the Law, by reason of the infirmity of our flesh (Rom. 8:3-4), but whatever is demanded therein, in any of its precepts, as the condition of life, Jesus Christ hath performed it for us (Matt. 3:15; 5:17), and so hath brought in a perfect righteousness to be imputed to us (Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 5:21). Yet we are not exempted from all obedience to the Moral Law, by his obeying perfectly in our stead; for his righteousness was for one end, viz. to merit eternal life for us (Rom. 5:21). Our obedience is for other ends, as to testify our conformity and subjection unto God, and so to glorify him, &c., just as his sufferings were for one end, viz. to make satisfaction for our sin, whereas our afflictions and sufferings are for other ends, and not for that.

Also, he satisfied all the threatenings of the Sinai Covenant; these all did meet upon him (Gal. 3:13): *He was made a curse for us*. So that these federal precepts and curses expire by satisfaction, as the judicial and ceremonial laws did by abrogation.

There remain, then, only the promises of it; and upon his satisfying the other, he altereth these, and turneth them from conditional into absolute, as we see in the New Covenant. Hence, whereas in the Sinai Covenant, that cluster of promises concerning their being a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, &c. (Exod. 19:5-6), did run upon the condition of obedience, *If ye will obey...*—Jesus Christ, having done and suffered all which that Covenant could exact, now

hath given all forth in an absolute form to believers, and expresseth all as already accomplished unto them.

Thus, 1 Peter 2:9 saith, *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, &c.* It is not now upon an *If*, as in the Sinai Covenant, but the promise is fulfilled to them, and in Christ, they are such as it was conditionally promised of old they should be.

Thus, Rev. 1:5-6: *Hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.* But how? *He hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* It is upon his satisfying the Sinai Covenant by his sufferings unto death, as it was the condition of life.

Its **not continuing** as an administration of the Covenant of Grace will be cleared in the following particulars.

#### **4. The Lord Is Not Rigorously Exacting Duty from Believers Now, Upon the Legal Terms of the Sinai Covenant—"Cursed Is He That Continueth Not in All"—Therefore, the Sinai Covenant Is Not Continuing**

For, such coercion would inevitably follow from being under the obligation of it, in regard that is the very nature and tenor of it (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26), and all the promises run upon those terms. If these curses be not in force against them, then it is ceased as a Covenant; if they be in force, then they are under the same rigorous exaction of duty still as Israel was of old, for then the enforcement to it is the same.

For, we must know that the Sinai Covenant was not made with Pagans, Infidels, or professed unbelievers; the great God would not engage himself by Covenant unto such, but it was made with the

Children of Israel, with those who were the people of God already, by the Covenant with Abraham, before they came at Mount Sinai. Hence, the preface runneth thus (Exod. 20:2), *I am the Lord thy God*, &c., not that he became their God then, but was their God before.

Therefore, if it be continuing to any as a Covenant, it must be to the people of God (for it was made with none else), and they must (if any) be under the terror of it.

Whereas it is evident, that Christians are to yield obedience upon more evangelical accounts; the Gospel urgeth upon them, duties of holiness, the avoiding of apostasy and profaneness by sweetness and love, not by legal terror, but by their freedom from it (Heb. 12:14, to the end).

As if he had said, *Ye are not come to a legal Mount Sinai dispensation, enforcing duty by terror, thunderings, and lightnings; but to Mount Zion, to a dispensation of Gospel Grace* (verse 25): *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh*, &c.; now, the terror is upon abusing grace.

So Rom. 7:6: *Their being delivered from the Law* in its compelling and condemning power, is made the means to raise up unto new and spiritual obedience.

Not so much from the wrath, as the mercy of God (Rom. 12:1); from the constraints of love (2 Cor. 5:14); from an eyeing of the promises of God (2 Cor. 7:1): *Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*.

And here I may hint one considerable difference between the Covenant of Works and that Covenant at Mount Sinai: the former



extended to all mankind, and was made with all in Adam their common head; but the latter was made only with some, with Israel and Judah, the people of God.

**5. If the Sinai Covenant Were Still Continuing, Then the People of God Within It Might Still Be Laying Claim to the Blessings of It, by Virtue of the Same Promises, in the Very Form as They Are Found Therein; for, If the Form Be Altered, Then the Claim Is by Another Covenant Whereby Such an Alteration Is Made.**

Whereas temporal mercies are promised in a new dialect, more absolutely (Jer. 32:36 to the end, and 31:27, 28, 31, 32), they are not afforded unto Christians now upon the same conditional terms that they were to Israel under the Sinai Covenant. By way of analogy, those ancient promises may intimate to Christians now, that walking circumspectly is the way to be supplied with earthly blessings that are good for them; but there is no such special contract or distinct covenant (as that made at Mount Sinai) whereby they may claim so large a portion of temporal enjoyments as Israel could by that.

Rather, we find that those who were most obedient in the first times of the Gospel were put upon an expectation of little in temporals (in comparison), and were to look for a plenty of troubles, losses, persecutions, &c. (Matt. 6:31-33; Matt. 10:22; Acts 20:23; 2 Tim. 3:12; Acts 14:22; Luke 9:23).

See Mr. Bisco, in his book entitled *The Glorious Mystery of God's Mercy*, who endeavoreth to prove that temporal blessings were made over and dispensed to the Jews under the Law in a peculiar manner, and as never to any people or nation but them.

## **6. Various Expressions Holding Forth Our Freedom from the Law Do Conclude That It Is Not Continuing as a Covenant; as,**

Romans 6:14: *For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the Law but under grace.* Those, then, that are under the Law in the sense here intended, cannot be under grace and are under the dominion of sin; and therefore, the direction of the Law for duties of holiness is not denied here. But they are not under the Law as a Sinai Covenant, exacting full and perfect obedience upon pain of an eternal curse; not under it as a condition of life unperformed, for that were inconsistent with grace and would infer that sin is still exercising lordship over them.

Romans 7:4: *Ye are become dead to the Law by the body of Christ, that ye might be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, &c.* He speaketh (verses 1-3) of the Law as an imperious husband (which is by covenant), and thus they are dead to the Law, not under the power of it, by the body of Christ—that is, by his bearing the curse of the Law on his body; and therefore, they are dead to it as a Covenant, for so he had it on his body.

Galatians 4:21, 24, 30: The bondwoman Hagar is expressly said to be the Covenant or Testament from Mount Sinai; and she and her son, all that are of a legal birth, must be cast out (verse 30). That

Covenant, therefore, from Mount Sinai, was but temporary, is cast out in Gospel times, and is not continuing.

In some respect, that at Mount Sinai may be called (as it is by the learned Cameron) a subservient covenant, viz. in respect of Israel, as it discovered sin and provoked them to seek after a Mediator (Exod. 20:19), in promising temporal mercies upon obedience, representing spirituals and eternal. But subserviency doth not fitly express its federal nature, as it promised life upon doing, or perfect obedience, threatening death and a dreadful curse upon falling short of it.

I do not call it *the Covenant of Grace*, nor *the Covenant of Works*, but to express the formality and essential nature of it, I call it *the Covenant of Grace as to its legal condition*, or *a Covenant concerning the legal condition of the Covenant of Grace*, which is held forth under an administration of it for temporals unto Israel.

## **Exhortation to Christians to Avoid Seeking to Maintain the Old Covenant**

O let Christians yield utmost obedience to the royal law of liberty, but let all be done in the strength of Christ, and in the way of the New Covenant; make use of a promise of grace in setting about all duty.

And beware of seeking to keep up the Old Covenant, which really is not continuing. We seek to keep it up:

1. When we live in the spirit of the Old Covenant, acting by its enforcements—terror, wrath, curse—rather than by the allurements of grace in the free promise.

2. When there is a grounding of acceptance with God upon our own duties and performances. The Old Covenant did run upon *do and live*, intending a *doing for eternal life*, which was peculiar to Jesus Christ; but our nature is prone to run our own doing into the place of his—as if we could gain acceptance unto life by our own services, or do something that way.

We are apt to build expectations of mercy upon our own doing, instead of building them upon Jesus Christ. Evangelical obedience may be a secondary evidence, but when we dwell more upon anything done by us—yea, or upon any inherent grace, anything within ourselves—than upon the free grace of God in Christ, we then make something of our own a ground of acceptance, and not an evidence only.

When something within raiseth our hope of acceptance more than the grace of God in the New Covenant, we err. The promise and oath of God (which are both without us) are the two immutable things of Divine appointment for the raising of strong consolation (Heb. 6:18). All grace within should be improved for carrying out our souls to God and Jesus Christ therein.

- 3. When there is not an improvement of our freedom from the Law towards making out the more after Jesus and the free grace of God in him, then we seek to keep up the Old Covenant still.**

Romans 6:14: *Being under the Law and under grace are opposites there; the less grace exerciseth lordship over the soul, the more sin domineereth and getteth the upper hand of it, and the more it is under the Law.*

The greater freedom from the Law as a Covenant, the more grace is used towards freedom from the dominion of sin.

**4. When there is a looking for what is promised only in a conditional way, then there is a keeping up the Old Covenant, which did run upon conditional promises.**

When souls have acted in duty, and now are ready to count the Lord engaged to give out or afford mercy upon their performing thereof—when they look for nothing but as a fruit of some condition performed by themselves (Isa. 58:3), and their hopes of mercy rise or fall by that rule of their own performance rather than by the free grace and faithfulness of God, then there is a holding up the Old Covenant.

## **CHAP. IX.**

Of the Good That Was in the Sinai Covenant.

I shall now show what excellency there was in the Mount Sinai, or Works, Covenant.

The greater the good in this covenant, the more the superiority of the New, which is a better covenant, will appear.

There was excellency in its content—such precepts were contained in it as bore the stamp of righteousness, Deuteronomy 4:8; precepts that elevated Israel above other nations, Nehemiah 9:13; Psalm 147:19–20.

It was excellent in the manner of its manifestation; there was a fearfully glorious display of God's majesty in its giving, Exodus 19:16–18. He revealed himself in an extraordinary way—thundering, lightning, thick darkness, and more. This was a stupendous dispensation meant to humble that rebellious people. The mountain smoked, a thick cloud covered it, and the trumpet sounded—all indications of his divine majesty, distinguishing him from dumb idols. Exodus 20:22—"Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven"—as if the Lord himself had spoken in a direct manner.

It was not altogether immediate, for the ministry of angels was involved, Acts 7:38. Yet it was by the authority of God himself, accompanied by extraordinary demonstrations of his almighty power—so great that they were struck with terror and amazement that they remained alive, Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:26. Who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire as we have, and yet lived?

O what grace it is that the Lord does not deal with us in such a dismaying, terrifying manner, but rather in a milder and more familiar way through the dispensation of the Gospel.

It was excellent in the special uses and ends it served. The two principal ones I have already explained and must recall here: it served for eternals upon the obedience of Christ and for temporals upon the obedience of Israel. I shall now hint at some other uses and ends of the Sinai Covenant.

1. To provoke Israel to look to a Mediator, the Lord Jesus, to fulfill and accomplish it for them. Both the terrifying manner in which it was given and their experience of their inability to keep it themselves served to drive them in this direction. Exodus 20:19: "They said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear;

but let not God speak with us, lest we die." In this, they asked for a typical mediator, and through him, a real one—Jesus Christ. The Lord himself interpreted their request this way and promised to grant it, Deuteronomy 18:15: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet... according to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb." This Prophet is identified as Jesus Christ, Acts 3:20, 22. The terror of the Sinai Law provoked them to ask for a mediator to go into the burning mount on their behalf, receive the law for them, and deliver it as a law of love. This request was highly commended, Deuteronomy 5:27–28. Thus, the purpose of that fiery dispensation was not that life might be attained by it, but to drive them to seek another covenant for life.

2. To compel them to duty and restrain them from sin. Exodus 19:9: "Lo, I come to thee in a thick cloud." To what end? "That the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever." The goal was to shake them from their unbelief and bring them to trust in God's word. When they were struck with fear, Moses encouraged them, saying, Exodus 20:20: "Fear not, for God is come to prove you, that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." Thus, one purpose of the Sinai Covenant was to deter them from sin.
3. To serve as a guide for Israel in the worship of God. The church had previously been domestic, consisting of families, but as Abraham's descendants increased in number, God intended for them to form a congregational body. They were to unite as one ecclesiastical entity through this Mosaic dispensation, which provided ordinances of worship suited to this new state of the church. God gave Moses the pattern for the Tabernacle (the place of public worship) with a strict command, Hebrews 8:5:

"See that thou make all things according to the pattern shown thee in the mount." This is reiterated in Hebrews 9:1 and Exodus 25:40. The following chapters contain detailed instructions concerning the Ark, the Table, the Candlestick, and the ordination of the ministers of the Tabernacle—Aaron and his sons in the priestly office. Regulations for consecrating the Ark, the Tabernacle, and the Altar of Incense, along with many other ordinances, were given. This highlights another significant purpose of the Sinai Covenant.

4. To serve as a model or rule for both ecclesiastical and civil government. Israel received righteous laws, statutes, and judgments directly from God himself. In this, they were set apart from and elevated above other nations, being placed under God's immediate rule as their sole Lawgiver. In addition to the eternal curse threatened for breaking these divine laws, various ecclesiastical and civil penalties were attached, Exodus 22:1, 4, 20; Leviticus 20; Numbers 5, 19; Deuteronomy 13, 25, and many others. Thus, another purpose of the Sinai Covenant was to function as the legal framework for governing the children of Israel.
5. Another end of the Sinai Covenant was to provide a typological representation of many glorious mysteries pertaining to the Covenant of Grace. These laws were not empty, insignificant rites but divinely appointed shadows, types, and patterns of heavenly realities, Hebrews 8:5–6; 9:23. Even their temporal mercies served as symbolic representations of spiritual and eternal blessings. The Land of Canaan prefigured the heavenly rest. The Levitical or Aaronic priesthood typified our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus, Hebrews 7. The Tabernacle was a type of his human nature, as he is called "a greater and more perfect



Tabernacle, not made with hands," Hebrews 9:11; 8:2. It may also represent the true church, Revelation 21:3.

The Ark and the furnishings of the Most Holy Place, which only the High Priest could enter, Hebrews 9:3–4, 7, pointed directly to Jesus Christ, who alone is the true repository in whom the divine law is kept for believers. He is their glory and their guide to eternal rest. Many other types of Christ were embedded in the Sinai Covenant.

It is also significant that Moses remained below with the people to encourage them against fear as the law was given and the covenant was established. Yet, he was later called up to the mountaintop to receive the tables of the covenant and the pattern of the Tabernacle, Exodus 19:24–25; 20:1, 20; 24:12, 18. This typifies Christ, who stands with us to strengthen us as we receive the law, and who, through closer communion with the Father, gives forth the framework for his solemn worship.

These were the ends of the Sinai Covenant.

## **CHAP. X.**

Of the Differences Between the Old and the New Covenant, and the  
Excellency of the Latter Above the Former.

It may be asked, How is the New Covenant, in which the ministration of Jesus Christ lies, a better covenant than the Old, which was made at Mount Sinai?

I would first note that in Hebrews 8 and Jeremiah 31:31–32, the contrast is not between the Covenant of Works made with the first Adam and the New Covenant, but rather between the Old Covenant (established when Israel came out of Egypt at Sinai) and the New Covenant. These two covenants are directly compared, and therefore, the differences between them, whether in matter or form, must demonstrate the superiority and excellence of the New Covenant over the Old.

1. The New Covenant presupposes obedience unto life as already performed by Jesus Christ and is therefore better than the Old, which required an after-performance of it.

The very tenor of the Sinai Covenant was, "Do this and live" (Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 27:26; Romans 10:5). Israel, in a federal manner, was engaged to perform the righteousness required in the unspotted Law. The command was given that obedience must be rendered for eternal life, even perfect obedience (Galatians 3:12). Indeed, Israel engaged to this, yet they were to perform it through their Surety, Jesus Christ.

However, at that time, all remained undone, unfulfilled, and unperformed, for Jesus Christ had not yet been manifested. Therefore, the Law retained its commanding force and could exact that obedience from Israel, who covenanted that it should be rendered in the future.

But the New Covenant assumes that all this doing for life is already accomplished—completed, not to be done—since Jesus Christ has now been manifested. Whereas the Old Covenant was largely composed of precepts and commandments, the New Covenant consists entirely of promises. Hebrews 8:8 and following declare that all is fulfilled, nothing remains to be done, either by the principal

party or the Surety, for the obtaining of life. The Lord is fully satisfied, so that in the New Covenant, He grants a general acquittal and acknowledges that He has no further demands. All is transformed into promise: "I will," and "You shall."

Jesus Christ is said to be the Mediator of the New Testament (Hebrews 8:6), meaning He is actually fulfilling that role now. This single title, "Mediator," encompasses the entire fulfillment of the doing required under the Old Covenant and prepares the way for us to receive the promise (Hebrews 9:15). During the seventy weeks, the Messiah came (Daniel 9:24) to make reconciliation and "bring in everlasting righteousness." Before, righteousness was commanded under the Sinai Covenant, but then it was introduced. By one offering, He has perfected forever those who are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14). Nothing remains to be done to procure these eternal blessings.

Therefore, in contrast to the Sinai Law, which was based on "Do and live," under the New Covenant, we continually hear, "Believe and be saved," and, "He who believes has everlasting life" (Mark 16:16; John 3:16, 36). This does not mean that believing now takes the place of doing under the Old Covenant. If that were the case, then faith itself would become our righteousness unto justification (Galatians 3:12; Romans 10:5). But the righteousness that justifies is called "the righteousness of faith" (Romans 10:6; Philippians 3:9), which means faith is distinct from that righteousness itself—it is not even the smallest part of it. It is not our believing, but the obedience of Jesus Christ, that replaces the doing for life required by the Law (Romans 5:19). He is "the Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

To emphasize that righteousness is wholly outside of ourselves, that it is not gained by any of our performances but by another—Jesus Christ—it is said to be received "by faith," meaning faith serves as the instrument of application. Believe that the work is already accomplished—Jesus Christ has done all—and He says, "If you do not believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24).

Thus, the Apostle, speaking not merely of the false opinion of the Jews concerning the merit of their good works or external services as perfect obedience to the Law for life, but of the very righteousness of the Law itself (Romans 10:5), declares in contrast:

"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Romans 10:9–10).

It is then a believing in Him as already come, as having all righteousness fulfilled in Him—yes, as dead and risen—that is required. When the Jews relied on works of the Law performed by themselves, the Apostle directed them away from such trust, showing that all legal obedience for life must be found in Christ alone. Thus, he continues:

"For with the heart, man believes unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10), meaning faith is the means by which we obtain righteousness. Our own works cannot be our righteousness, nor can our faith itself—faith is merely the means by which the righteousness in Christ is applied.

The Apostle's aim is not to divert them from legal obedience by natural power and ability and instead direct them to evangelical believing and doing as the condition of life. Rather, his purpose is to turn them wholly away from themselves, from all their own doings—

whether by nature or by grace—and lead them to Jesus Christ alone for righteousness unto life. If a man were to set about any Gospel service upon a legal foundation, he would be guilty of the same error as the Judaizing professors. The kind of doing rejected in the epistles to the Romans and Galatians is that which contributes anything towards life by fulfilling its condition. Evangelical services are required on different grounds—they are to be performed in obedience to God's will and as evidence of life, but not as a means of obtaining it.

Faith itself, though necessary, receives the title from Jesus Christ—it does not bestow it (John 1:12). The statement, "He who believes shall be saved," does not express the precise tenor of the New Covenant. We do not claim salvation on the basis of any act of ours, nor upon the rent of faith (as men hold tenements by the payment of a penny, a rose, or such things). No such arrangement exists here. All has been paid to the last farthing by our Surety, and we claim our standing solely upon the obedience of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:18–19, 21).

## 2. The New Covenant Represents the Lord as Dealing with His People Universally in a Way of Promise, and Thus Is Better Than the Old, Which Represents Him as Treating Them in a Way of Threatening

The New Covenant consists entirely of promises (Hebrews 8:8 and onward), as if the heart of God were so full of love and overflowing with grace that He could express nothing else but what He will be to, and do for, His people. The Father, having received full satisfaction for all the demands of the Old Covenant through the mediation of His Son, now makes it His purpose to give the fullest assurance—through a constellation of promises in the New Covenant—that He

will fulfill every obligation on His part. Believers are completely freed from the curse; there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1; Hebrews 12:18). They are under a ministration of righteousness (2 Corinthians 3:9).

By contrast, the Old Covenant represented God as a consuming fire, denouncing curses and threats against the children of Israel, His own people—for the Sinai Covenant was made with them, not with unbelievers of the Gentiles. Though some promises were scattered throughout, they were conditional, and Israel failed to meet the conditions. Had they not been privileged with the covenant made with Abraham, to which they could turn for relief, what hope would have remained for them? By divine appointment, some were set to stand upon Mount Ebal to proclaim curses, while others stood on Mount Gerizim to pronounce blessings (Deuteronomy 27:13 and onward). There were about twelve curses to which the people were required to assent with, "Amen." The last was a general one, stating that if they did not continue in all things written in the Law, they were liable to the curse (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10). This shows that while a temporal curse was included, an eternal curse was also, in some way, intended, which is why it is called a "ministration of condemnation" (2 Corinthians 3:7).

Their situation under this curse was different from that of Christians under the New Covenant. By their voluntary act of entering into the Old Covenant, Israel effectively passed sentence upon themselves. Moreover, at that time, the curse of the Law had not yet been satisfied by Jesus Christ, and therefore, it remained upon them as an uncanceled obligation, filling them with great dread. But now, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13). The debt is fully discharged for us, and thus, the New Covenant is the better covenant.

### 3. The New Covenant Consists of Absolute Promises, and Therefore Is Better Than the Old Sinai Covenant, Which Was Conditional and Dependent on Works

In the Old Testament, the price of our redemption had not yet been paid by Jesus Christ. Because of this, life was offered on the condition of obedience, as the Lord said: "Do and live" (Leviticus 18:5; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12). Just as in the New Testament, what may appear conditional in one place is promised absolutely in another, so in the Old Covenant, what seems to be absolute in one passage is found to be conditional in another. For instance, Exodus 29:45–46 states, "I will dwell among the children of Israel, and be their God." Though this may seem unconditional, the preceding verses show that it was based on what Aaron, as a type of Jesus Christ, would do. Moreover, the same promise is explicitly made conditional in Leviticus 26:3, 11–15.

Similarly, the promise to circumcise the hearts of Israel and their children, enabling them to love the Lord (Deuteronomy 30:6), is stated conditionally in verse 9: "If you shall hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God and keep his commandments."

By contrast, the New Covenant consists entirely of absolute promises: "I will... and you shall" (Hebrews 8:10–13).

Once the condition of a covenant has been fulfilled, it becomes as absolute as if no condition had ever been attached. In Hebrews 8, Jesus Christ is presented as our great High Priest and Mediator, having completed the work of satisfaction (verses 1, 2, 6). Since He has fully and perfectly fulfilled the conditions of the Old Covenant, the New Covenant naturally and necessarily must be absolute. Nothing more is required of Him, and all that was promised must now be accomplished for us.

The Apostle in Hebrews 8 is explicitly drawing a distinction between the Old and New Covenants. Since the Old was unquestionably conditional, and the New is described in opposition to it as absolute, this alone proves much of the New Covenant's superiority.

It was prophesied of Jesus Christ in Daniel 9:27: "He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week." One of the great purposes of His coming and His death was to confirm the New Covenant on behalf of those He represented. Now that He has done so, it is called a **Testament**, as the Greek word **διαθήκη** (diathēkē) often signifies (Galatians 3:15–17): "Though it be but a man's testament, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto." The free promise was confirmed by an oath beforehand, then by testimony afterward, and especially by the death of Christ. His fulfillment of the Old Covenant's conditions ensures that it can admit no further additions or alterations (Hebrews 9:16–17): "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead." It is not merely called a Testament in relation to His death, but in a proper sense, carrying the legal force of an unalterable last will and testament. Though a man may include conditions in his last will, once it is confirmed, it remains fixed. I do not argue that the New Covenant is absolute simply because it is called a Testament, but because it is unchangeable and is expressed in an absolute form: "I will... and you shall."

There is a vast difference between Christ's mediation before and after His incarnation. Since His coming, His work has been far more glorious. Before, He might plead: "Father, Thou hast promised me that upon my obedience, which I will perform, those souls I have undertaken for shall receive these blessings." There was a mutual trust between the Father and the Son, and He could plead this promise in terms of God's faithfulness. But now, having actually



performed the covenant's conditions, Christ pleads in terms of divine justice. Since He has been set forth as a propitiation (Romans 3:25–26), God now declares "at this time" His righteousness in justifying those who believe in Jesus. The contrast here is between the Old and New Testaments—**now**, under the New, God's righteousness is displayed in forgiving sinners. Those who receive the remission of sins do so by grace, but for Christ Himself, it is a matter of justice. He can now plead: "Father, I have fully satisfied for the sins of these souls; now declare Thy righteousness in pardoning them. I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do (John 17:4). I have paid the full price of their redemption; now let them receive what I have purchased for them." Thus, He appears in heaven in our nature, not merely as an intercessor but as an advocate (1 John 2:1), pleading, not for mercy alone, but for justice in securing our full discharge. This is a great excellency of the New Covenant: it is absolute in itself and absolute to Christ.

Even if certain covenant privileges were outwardly dispensed conditionally—such as justification upon faith or temporal mercies upon obedience—this would not prove that faith or obedience is a condition of the promise itself or of the covenant. Faith itself is a particular blessing of the New Covenant and therefore cannot be its condition. Otherwise, what would be the condition for faith?

Furthermore, under the New Covenant, there is no distinct covenant guaranteeing temporal blessings as there was under the Old. Temporal mercies are now promised generally, and sovereign grace determines when and how they are given to the saints. They are provided as needed, for God's glory and their good, not by any fixed covenantal contract as in the Old (Matthew 6:32–33).

Thus, nothing performed by us can be the **condition of the covenant itself**—Jesus Christ has already fulfilled all that was required in that regard.

However, whether anything is the **condition upon believers** within the covenant remains to be considered.

## **Objection: Is the New Covenant Absolute or Conditional for Us?**

Are there not conditional promises in the New Covenant as there were in the Old for Israel? Can we expect any mercy without performing some condition that it is promised upon?

### **Answer:**

1. If by **condition** we mean something that is simply a **necessary duty, a means of receiving the promised blessings**, then I acknowledge that certain promises in the New Covenant are conditional in this sense. Many Scriptures that are often cited in support of conditional promises should be understood in this way.

To avoid a mere dispute over words, I would suggest stating the question differently:

**Do evangelical duties and graces, which are worked in us by Jesus Christ, exist in all those who are actually partakers of the New Covenant?**

To this, I answer: **Yes.**

For in the very Covenant itself, God promises to write His laws in the hearts of His people (Hebrews 8:10). This includes faith, repentance, and every other gracious disposition. Those who have God as their God are also His people. If the concern is whether a person has an interest in Jesus Christ, they need not rely on having fulfilled a condition of the Covenant; rather, they should see that the Covenant itself, in some promise distinct from its condition, has been fulfilled in them.

Those who are entirely without these graces remain strangers to the Covenant (Ephesians 2:12) and cannot lay claim to its blessings. We are commanded to seek after what is promised, and one blessing may be sought as a means to another—for instance, the Spirit as a means to faith, and faith as a means to obedience (Galatians 5:6).

Faith is a great duty connected to and a means of salvation:

- "He that believeth shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).
- "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36).
- "By grace are ye saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8).
- "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:5, 9).

## **The Connection of Duties, Graces, and Blessings**

God has ordained an order for dispensing these blessings, so neglecting to seek them displeases Him. This is our privilege: the promises of God are interwoven like links in a chain, encouraging souls to seek them. If one link is grasped, many more follow. The means and the end cannot be separated.

Because duties, graces, and blessings are so closely connected, Scripture sometimes presents them in a conditional form, using "if":

- "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart... thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9).

These "ifs" highlight the truth of the connection—that whoever believes shall certainly be saved. Yet, faith itself is not properly the condition of salvation, for even faith is absolutely promised in the New Covenant:

- "He shall see his seed... the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (Isaiah 53:10–11).
- "I will put my laws into their minds and write them in their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10).

Thus, some Scriptures seem to speak of conditions, but they only indicate a necessary connection between covenant blessings. One is given as a means to another, yet the promises remain absolute in their fulfillment.

## **The Difference Between the Covenant Itself and Its Execution**

There is a vast difference between:

1. **The New Covenant itself** (which is an absolute grant)
2. **The way God executes and applies it**

The New Covenant is absolutely granted, not only to Jesus Christ but in Him to the house of Israel and Judah (Hebrews 8). However, the

Lord may propound these absolute promises conditionally as a means to stir up souls to seek their participation in them.

This distinction is evident in **Acts 27**, where Paul, speaking to those in the ship, declares:

- **An absolute promise:** "There shall not be a loss of any man's life" (Acts 27:22).
- **A conditional exhortation:** "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 27:31).

Although their survival was absolutely decreed and assured, Paul still used a conditional statement as a means of preservation.

## **Application to the New Covenant**

Likewise, while the salvation of the elect and their coming to faith is absolutely decreed, the Lord uses conditional exhortations to press upon them the urgency of believing:

- "If ye believe, ye shall be saved."

Though it is certain that they shall believe, the conditional exhortation is a means by which God brings them to faith.

Thus, the New Covenant, in its essence, is absolute. The conditions we see in Scripture do not undermine this but rather serve as instruments for accomplishing what God has absolutely promised.

**Answer 2.** There is no such condition in the New Covenant for us as there was in the Old for Israel. The Apostle, in comparing them together, presents the New Covenant entirely in absolute promises, given to Israel, as seen in Hebrews 8. In showing that the New

Covenant is not according to the Old, he highlights the key difference in verse 9: "Because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord," and again in Jeremiah 31:32, "which covenant they brake," etc.

This implies that the Old Covenant had a condition where its fulfillment gave Israel assurance of the temporal mercies promised. Yet failure to meet that condition left them uncertain as to whether they would receive those mercies, making their enjoyment of them conditional not only in nature but also in outcome: "I regarded them not, saith the Lord."

If their fulfillment of the condition had been as absolutely promised as the blessings of the New Covenant are, then Israel would have continued in it. However, they did not, and they forfeited what was promised multiple times, even to the point of being excluded from Canaan. Jurists define a *condition* as a stipulation, manner, or law attached to an action, delaying or suspending its effect and making it uncertain whether it will be fulfilled. Cowell, citing West, *Part 1. Symb. 2. Sect. 156*, describes a condition in contrast to an absolute promise.

That there is no such condition in the New Covenant—nothing to be fulfilled by us that gives us the right to its blessings while also leaving us uncertain or liable to miss them, as there was in the Old Covenant for Israel—is evident from the following considerations:

1. If there were any condition, it must be either an *antecedent* or a *subsequent* condition. But it is neither.

Sir Edward Coke, in his commentary on *Littleton*, states of a precedent condition: *Conditio adimpleri debet priusquam sequatur effectus*—"The condition must be fulfilled before the

effect follows." But there can be no such antecedent condition in the New Covenant whereby we, by our own actions, gain entrance into it. Until we are in the Covenant, no action of ours can find any acceptance with God, as Hebrews 11:6 declares: "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

Furthermore, our being in the Covenant is, in the order of nature (though not necessarily in time), before faith, for faith itself is a benefit of the Covenant—a part of the new heart and a fruit of the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit (which works faith and is itself a promised blessing of the Covenant) is first given before faith arises. Jesus Christ is the first saving gift, Romans 8:32, and with him, God freely gives all things. While men ought to use the appointed means, it is God alone who admits them into the Covenant, as Ezekiel 16:8 declares: "I entered into covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine." Before this, they were polluted in their own blood (verse 6), utterly incapable of acting in any way that could bring them into the Covenant.

Nor is there any subsequent condition we must fulfill. The purpose of a subsequent condition is to maintain one's right to a covenant's benefits, and upon failing it, those benefits would be forfeited—just as was the case with Adam.

However, in the New Covenant, no act of ours maintains our right to its blessings, such that failure would forfeit them. Our right to the Covenant and the ground of our claim rest on a far higher foundation than any act of our own—it is secured by the purchase of Jesus Christ. These are "the sure mercies of David" (Isaiah 55:3), which are "sure to all the seed" (Romans 4:16). Moreover, for those who have become believers, eternal life is absolutely promised (John 3:16, 36; 1 John 5:10-12), and it is a

contradiction to say that something is absolutely promised while at the same time making it conditional.

2. The Lord has assured that there shall never be a complete violation of the New Covenant, which was not the case with the Old. Therefore, the New Covenant cannot have the same kind of condition that was attached to the Old.

The Lord openly declares that Israel broke the Old Covenant (Jeremiah 11:3-4, 10; 31:32). Littleton, speaking of an estate held upon condition, explains that it is called such because "the estate of the feoffee is defeasible if the condition be not performed" (*Ten. lib. 3. cap. 4*).

But the New Covenant is secured against any such failure; it cannot be annulled so that those within it would lose the great blessings promised therein. This is clearly affirmed in Jeremiah 32:40: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them." But could there not still be some condition that might cause them to fall short of all its blessings? No, for the Lord declares: "I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

If there were any risk of forfeiting or losing these blessings, it would have to be either on God's part, by his withdrawing from them, or on their part, by their departing from him. Yet here, the Lord undertakes to secure them against both. Thus, the matter is settled: the New Covenant stands firm, unlike the Old.

Indeed, though what the Lord has absolutely promised will certainly come to pass, he has nevertheless appointed means for its fulfillment. He has established both internal means, such as faith, and external means, such as ordinances. He commands



diligent attendance upon these means in the ordinary course of grace. This is necessary as an act of obedience, and failure to seek God in the means he has ordained is itself sinful.

Thus, God is immutably determined to grant his people a spirit of obedience, as Ezekiel 36:25-30 promises. Yet, obedience is still required of us; we are the agents of it. While we may sin in neglecting the means by which we are to receive the blessings stored up in the absolute promises, faith must be exercised in them—otherwise, what use are they? And we would be at fault if we did not attend to them diligently.

3. If there be any condition of the New Covenant, it would most likely be precious faith. But faith is not a condition in that sense.

A condition, properly speaking, influences one's right to a benefit; if the condition is fulfilled, it grants a right to the promised benefit. If it is not fulfilled, no right is obtained, making it a cause of that right—it gives *jus ad rem*, which means a person may have a legal right but still need to seek possession afterward. If the condition exists only as a formality or external requirement, then it functions in this way: for example, if a large estate were granted upon presenting a white lily, but someone instead brought a yellow lily, he would have no right to the estate. All would be null and void. Those who place their hope for eternal mercies on such conditional terms stand upon very uncertain ground.

Now, faith does not grant a right. John 1:12 states, "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Jesus Christ is freely offered in the promise of the gospel; faith, which consents to and receives him, secures a right and title in him to the blessings of the covenant. Yet faith itself does not create that right.

The Father offers righteousness as a gift (Romans 5:17). Faith accepts the offer and receives Jesus Christ as righteousness, thereby leading to justification (Romans 4:3): "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness," meaning that faith was reckoned as a means to righteousness (verse 5). Faith itself was not considered part of the righteousness by which we are justified, but rather the means of applying Christ, who is our righteousness.

The covenant, as it pertains to justification, is not without means, yet it may be absolute without any condition in the strict sense. Just as condemnation results from the law due to disobedience for all under the covenant of works, so justification results from a divine promise based on the obedience of Jesus Christ for all under the New Covenant. The reason unbelievers are not justified is not because they have failed to fulfill a condition, but because they are not yet included in the obedient righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is the true condition of justification (Romans 10:10).

God's act of justifying is met with the act of faith, which consents to the gospel's offer. Just as the death and satisfaction of Christ fully answer the charge that we are sinners deserving eternal wrath, so when the accusation is that we have no share in Christ's satisfaction, anything that evidences our interest in Christ—whether faith or other graces—may be used as a plea. These graces may serve as evidence, but they do not constitute a title. They are fruits and effects of an already granted right, but not the cause or condition by which we obtain that right.

It is a great mistake to assume that a plea can only be made by appealing to the fulfillment of a condition. Evidence may arise from effects as well as from causes. Even in civil matters, a witness may confirm that a person was given rightful possession of an estate

without requiring additional proof. Moreover, if a charge is brought against those who are not in Christ, many things could be used to make that charge valid. But if it is brought against those in Christ, then who makes the charge? Not God, for "it is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33). And if God justifies, he will not condemn (verse 34). If the charge comes from Satan or our own hearts, then the gracious effects of faith are sufficient to refute it. Through the direct act of faith, believers ought to resist and withstand Satan, and he will flee from them (1 Peter 5:9; James 4:7). There is no necessity of pleading the fulfillment of a condition to counter this.

4. Our obedience, though evangelical, is not a condition of the New Covenant in the way that conditions were attached to the Old Covenant for Israel. The Lord himself has undertaken to ensure that his people will obey. Ezekiel 36:25-30 declares, "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my ways." Hebrews 8:10 likewise promises obedience as absolutely as any other blessing in the New Covenant. Therefore, it cannot be the condition of the covenant itself.

The Apostle, having asserted and extensively proven in Romans 3 that justification is by faith and not by works of the law, further supports this by citing Abraham and David in Romans 4:3: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." He then states in verse 4, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." This implies that the reward must be reckoned of grace and not of debt. The emphasis is placed on this truth, so that if it were otherwise, the Apostle's entire argument would collapse.

Some argue that only meritorious works would render the reward a debt rather than grace. But consider that works can be meritorious

only in one of two ways:

1. **By their inherent worth and value**, making it a matter of justice that such a reward is deserved, even apart from any contract. Yet who dares to say that any work of man, even in a state of innocence, could thus merit before God? Is not all obedience already due to God, so that even when we have done all, we are still "unprofitable servants" (Luke 17:10)? Job 22:3 and 35:7 say, "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him?" And Romans 11:35 asks, "Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" Surely, nothing from man is given to God as something that he did not already have or as something that he could gain from.
2. **By agreement or contract (ex pacto)**, meaning that though the works themselves are insufficient in worth, the Lord has nevertheless promised a reward for them. In this way alone could Adam's obedience in innocence be considered meritorious. He owed full obedience to God simply by virtue of creation, and God could have required it without promising any reward. Finite human obedience could not, by its intrinsic worth, merit an infinite reward. However, God was pleased to promise life to Adam based on his perfect, unsinning obedience.

Likewise, no one among the Romans or Galatians expected justification or eternal life by works apart from such a promise. They mistakenly assumed that the Lord had made a covenant promising salvation based on their works. But the Apostle clearly refutes this, demonstrating that the righteousness required for salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Thus, a reward may be of merit and of debt, and yet still be of grace in some sense (though not of special gospel grace). For all good

promised or given by the Lord to his creature is of grace, since God owes nothing to anyone. The very fact that God made a promise to Adam in his state of innocence, to reward his works, was itself an act of grace. Yet, once the promise was made, if Adam had continued in that state, the reward would have been a matter of debt. Therefore, if life were now promised to us upon evangelical obedience, then it would be just as truly meritorious (even if the condition were more favorable) and just as much a matter of debt as it would have been to Adam upon his sinless obedience. For in both cases, it is the promise alone that would make it so.

The text under discussion must refer either to the works of the Law—which cannot properly merit, since they are due even by the Law of Nature—or else to those works performed by Abraham after believing. In either case, the Apostle concludes that if the reward were granted based on these works, it would be reckoned as a matter of debt. However, neither of these could make it so, except by a divine promise assuring such a reward upon the fulfillment of a condition. Therefore, since the Apostle concludes that the reward is not of debt, no obedience of our own can be a condition of the New Covenant.

It is difficult to understand how a reward could be legally due as a debt while not making God a debtor. If a promise alone makes it a debt, then while something may become due to us, it does not necessarily mean that God is bound to us in obligation. However, in the case at hand, where the reward is due only by promise and upon the fulfillment of a supposed condition by us, it would seem that the promiser is indeed a debtor—though, prior to his promise, he was entirely free. Yet, in Romans 4:4, not only is God denied to be a debtor, but the reward itself is denied to be a matter of debt. Therefore, the promise is not made upon any such condition as our

works, for that would make the reward one of debt. In contrast, it is declared to be of grace—that is, of gospel grace.

It is true that divine promises are made regarding the reward of Christ's works, but they are not made to us immediately, either upon our believing or our obedience. Rather, they are made mediately and secondarily, so that our claim does not rest on the performance of any gospel condition by us (for if it did, the reward would be as much a matter of debt as it was for Adam). Instead, all promises are made immediately to Jesus Christ upon his righteousness and meritorious obedience. On this account, the promises are a matter of debt to him. However, God is not a debtor to us, but to himself—to his own goodness and faithfulness, and to his Son, but not to our works. Faith is merely the means by which we are counted righteous in Christ's righteousness, which alone merited our eternal reward.

Second Corinthians 1:20 affirms this: "All the promises in him are yea, and in him Amen." We cannot claim a single promise in our own name, based on any gospel condition we have fulfilled, even if done by the help of grace—for then, no matter how small the condition, the reward would be of debt to us. Our only claim is in Christ, in the right of our elder brother, Jesus Christ. Thus, the reward is of debt to him but only of grace to us. Augustine states in *Psalm 83, Debitorem Dominus ipse fecit se, non accipiendo sed promittendo*—"The Lord made himself a debtor, not by receiving, but by promising." We can plead for nothing that has been promised except on the basis of divine faithfulness. However, if any act of ours (no matter how small) were the condition of any promise, then once performed, we could claim what was promised on the basis of justice. Aquinas defines the formal nature of justice as *ut sit ad alterum*—that is, justice consists in giving to another what is his due, whether by contract, promise, or some other obligation.

If divine promises were to become a matter of debt, they would be so only to God himself. Dr. Arrowsmith states in *Tractatus Sacramentorum*, "Ipsi etiam Deo competit duplex debitum, condeceniae unum, fidelitatis alterum"—"To God himself belongs a twofold debt: one of propriety, the other of faithfulness." He further cites Augustine: *Deus sibi debitor est, ut agat condecener et prout congruit bonitati suae; ubi seipsum negare non potest, ita non debet aliquid se indignum facere*—"God is a debtor to himself, to act in a manner consistent with his own goodness. Just as he cannot deny himself, so he cannot do anything unworthy of himself." Similarly, Davenant states: *Cum Deus dat vitam aeternam Petro aut Paulo, divina voluntas non solvit debitum creaturae, sed sibi ipsi*—"When God gives eternal life to Peter or Paul, his divine will is not satisfying a debt to the creature, but to himself."

If either faith or obedience were a condition, then God's acts would be suspended upon some act of the creature. Dr. Owen (*Of Perseverance*, p. 53) states that this "would subject eternity to time, the first cause to the second, the Creator to the creature." Furthermore, if our performance laid God under obligation to grant mercy—indeed, to grant life and salvation—then we could claim them on the basis of our own acts.

Therefore, we may indeed keep the recompense of reward in view as an encouragement to duty (1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 11:26; 12:2). We may exercise faith as a means of attaining life and salvation and engage in evangelical obedience to show forth his praises, honoring him who has called us by the fruits and effects of his grace. These may serve as evidences of our interest in Christ. In the strength of Christ, we may strive to enter in at the strait gate, wrestle against spiritual enemies, and work out our salvation (1 Corinthians 9:24-25; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; Philippians 2:12). We

may pray, read, hear, believe, and repent as means to obtain what has been promised, seeking our right thereto only in Jesus Christ.

However, we may not believe or obey as a condition upon which our right and title to the promised blessings—even eternal salvation—depend. If we did, then by fulfilling the condition, we would have a rightful claim to life. Some act of ours would then be the basis of our title to life, and we could demand it on that ground. But the gospel disclaims and condemns any such doing for life, whatever the act may be (Romans 4:4; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Faith itself only receives a right; it does not give one. It is not upon any act of ours that the Lord is engaged to fulfill his promise, nor that we lay claim to it. If a malefactor had not petitioned the prince, he would have died, though no promise of life had been made to him upon that condition. Thus, his petitioning was merely a means to his being spared. Had it been a condition of his pardon, then the prince would have been unfaithful, and even unjust, if he had not granted it.

Even in the most absolute grants—where no condition exists that would make an estate liable to forfeiture by non-performance—there may still be parties and stipulations involved.

It is the excellence and glory of the New Covenant that it rests entirely upon absolute promises. It does not leave its blessings uncertain, nor is there any liability to forfeiture of its special privileges. This, combined with its remarkable freeness, provides great encouragement and everlasting consolation to all who are under it. See further discussion on this in the last question concerning the use of so-called conditional promises.

The New Covenant brings in a real, complete, and perfect remission of sins, and so it is better than the Old, which fell short of this. Under



the Old Covenant, some sins had no sacrifice provided for them and were not forgiven in such a way that the offender could enjoy the temporal blessings promised. Some were to be cut off entirely—for example, those who committed presumptuous sins were to be cut off from among the people (Numbers 15:28, 30). Yet, believers in that day could still be forgiven of those very sins and attain eternal salvation through the free promise in Jesus Christ. Acts 13:38-39 confirms this: “By him (i.e., Jesus Christ), those who believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the Law of Moses.” The typical remission under the Old Covenant did not extend to all sins as Christ’s does, except for the sin against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31; 1 John 1:7).

The great design of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to show the superiority of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice over the Levitical system, and how much better the New Covenant is than the Old, particularly regarding the remission of sins. The legal sacrifices were imperfect; the forgiveness they provided extended only so far as to avert temporal judgments and afford temporal mercies. They could not truly take away sin, nor did they purify the conscience or make those who offered them perfect (Hebrews 9:9; 10:1-4). In contrast, the glory of Jesus Christ is declared in Hebrews 10:12, 14: “By one offering he hath perfected forever those that are sanctified”—that is, the people of God, those in Covenant.

This truth is further confirmed by the New Covenant itself (Hebrews 10:15-19), which declares, “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” Calvin comments on this passage: “From this we gather that sins are now pardoned in another manner than they were in old time, but this diversity consists neither in the word nor in faith but in the ransom of the remission.”

Under the Old Covenant, sacrifices were repeated continually. The typical pardon of new sins was delayed until new sacrifices were offered, and there was a yearly remembrance of old sins (Hebrews 10:3). In contrast, the perfection of the New Covenant is seen in that, just as there will be no more offerings for sin, so there will be no more remembrance of the sins of believers. This means that believers will never again come under the curse or obligation of the Law to eternal punishment for their sins. The declared discharge from this obligation—wherein the pardon of sin properly consists as it is God's act—is not suspended until new acts of faith or repentance are put forth (though these should follow). Rather, it is granted to the believer at the very moment he sins, whether he is immediately aware of it or not.

I acknowledge that there is difficulty on either side of this matter. For if believers come under the Law's curse and obligation through new sins, then they are unjustified as often as they sin, which cannot be admitted. However, if they do not come under it, then it might seem as though they are not daily pardoned, since pardon consists in a declared discharge from that obligation. This issue will be addressed in a subsequent objection.

The discussion here concerns actual pardon. It is granted that at the moment of initial justification, all sins—past, present, and future—are virtually pardoned.

The question at hand is whether actual remission, pardon, or forgiveness of sins committed by those who are in Covenant and already justified, occurs at the very moment the sins are committed—so that believers do not remain under the obligation of the Law to eternal punishment for even a single moment. The immediacy of pardon may be established as follows:

1. Believers always have an actual interest in Jesus Christ, his righteousness, and the satisfaction made by him, and therefore they are never, even for a moment, unpardoned after committing new sins. Ephesians 1:7 states, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.” It is a glorious mystery of the Gospel that sin is removed upon a full satisfaction, and yet in a way of forgiveness. It was in a way of redemption to Jesus Christ, and yet in a way of pardon and free grace to us. It cost Christ dearly—his precious blood—yet it costs us nothing.

The elect, while unconverted, have no personal interest in that redemption and are therefore unpardoned. But believers not only shall have it hereafter, but already possess it, and in that redemption is the remission of sins. They cannot be without it for even a moment, for there is an inseparable connection between these: those who have the one also have the other. Christ is theirs, and in him, they have redemption. There will never be an interruption of believers' union with him; and because Christ is theirs, his satisfaction is theirs, which fully answers and discharges the obligation of the Law. Thus, they are always in a state of freedom from that condemnation.

Since Jesus Christ is theirs, they are always interested in his righteousness, and the Law cannot actually obligate or curse any who possess its righteousness—it only curses those who lack it. Righteousness and pardon are so connected that the Apostle argues from one to the other in Romans 4:6-8. He proves the blessedness of imputed righteousness from David's declaration in verse 7: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven.” Therefore, unless believers could be stripped of that righteousness and momentarily lose that blessedness, they cannot be, for even a moment, unpardoned.

If souls were actually under the Law's guilt for any sin, even for an instant, they would no longer be perfectly righteous. These are incompatible: to be completely righteous and yet to be under the Law's guilt at the same time (see 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:23, 25).

Furthermore, Jesus Christ did not suffer a *tantundem*—something in place of what we should have suffered—but the *idem*, the very same punishment required by the Law. This ensures that our continued interest in him always renders us disobliged, or pardoned. Genesis 2:17 states, “In the day thou eatest thereof [dying, thou shalt die].” Death was the full penalty exacted; nothing more was required of us by the Law of Works, and nothing less was suffered by Jesus Christ in our stead. Hebrews 2:9 confirms, “That he by the grace of God should taste [death] for every man.”

The very thing that was threatened was undergone by him for us. As for the eternity of death and other circumstances to which we are liable, these arise from the incapacity of our persons, who cannot bear infinite suffering in a short time, as Jesus Christ did for us. As Mr. B. observes, despair and death in sin do not proceed from the threatening itself, but from the condition and disposition of those upon whom the execution of the curse falls. Punishment properly satisfies for the injury done, but sin itself continues that injury (see *Christ in Travail*, p. 71).

Galatians 3:13 states, “Christ was made a curse for us.” The very thing that the Law threatened—indeed, all that the Law threatened—was the curse, and Jesus Christ did not merely undergo something in its place but bore the very curse of the same Law under which we stood. Therefore, he suffered the *idem*.

Jesus Christ, having undertaken the office of our great High Priest, was charged with bearing our iniquities, as Isaiah 53:6 declares: “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” However, I cannot understand how iniquity itself could be transferred to the Lord Jesus. Sin is a *non ens*, a privation of good. If it could pass from one subject to another, it could not rest upon any without polluting the subject it rests upon, for sin is entirely evil. Anything short of this is not truly sin. To deny pollution is to deny sin itself upon any subject. Jesus Christ, being infinitely pure, could not suffer the least taint of defilement. Therefore, by *iniquity* must be understood the guilt of sin or its obligation to punishment—not merely a *tantundem*, which would not have been *our* iniquity. Rather, it was our very guilt.

Whatever the Lord had threatened against us and might justly exact from us on account of our sin, it is expressed by Christ’s being “wounded for our transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5), by his being “made an offering for sin” (verse 10), and by his “bearing iniquity” (verse 11). Whatever burden was to be borne, or whatever man was liable to suffer for his iniquity, this was laid upon Jesus Christ. Moreover, it was laid there by the Father himself: “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” O what grace is here to us! The Lord was the one offended, provoked, and dishonored by sin, and yet he was so desirous that we should be discharged from it that he, with his own hand, laid it upon his beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

And it was the iniquity “of us all.” It was not at an uncertainty; the persons were determined, counted, and numbered by name. He was wounded for *our* transgressions and bruised for *our* sins. The chastisement of *our* peace was upon him (Isaiah 53:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Since Jesus Christ suffered the *idem*, the very same penalty that was threatened by the Law, and since he bore it for the very persons he came to redeem, and since believers are always interested in him, they cannot—*even for a moment*—be unpardoned.

2. Believers are at all times actually interested in the general acquittance obtained by Jesus Christ, and therefore they are never, even for a moment, without the actual pardon of particular sins after committing them; for that acquittance is their general pardon.

As he was charged with our sin, so he was discharged by the Father from it. Isaiah 50:8 declares, “He is near that justifieth me.” This is spoken of Jesus Christ, as is evident from verse 6. He had justification not for himself (for he needed none) but for us, since our sin and guilt were laid upon him. Because all the demands of divine justice were fully satisfied, he was justified, obtaining a general acquittance for the whole body of his elect. Hence, it is not only said that he was “delivered for our offenses” (Romans 4:25), meaning that he suffered death as the wages due for our sin, but also that he “was raised again for our justification.” If he had not made full satisfaction for us, death would have held him still. The fact that death could not hold him any longer proves that it had no dominion over him, but that he had achieved complete victory over that last enemy. His resurrection was his general acquittance for all the elect, and thus it was for their justification.

Believers, therefore, have reason to say, as in Romans 8:34, “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again.” They have not only a continual interest in his death but also in his resurrection, and they are called to triumph in faith on this account. Verse 33 asks, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that

justifieth.” It is the standing privilege of all who are in a justified state that nothing can be justly laid to their charge. Therefore, none of their sins are ever actually unpardoned as to legal guilt, for otherwise, those sins could be laid to their charge. Colossians 2:12-13 declares that they have been “quicken together with him.” Christ stood as a representative, so that his seed may be said to have died and risen in him as their substitute. However, this passage also refers to an actual sharing in Christ’s resurrection: “You are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God.” This privilege is not enjoyed until they attain a faith that works by divine power, at which point the full benefit of his resurrection becomes theirs. In Jesus Christ, they have a general acquittance and discharge.

Believers are risen with him, and it is accounted to them as if they had died and risen again in their own persons. Neither is this suspended until they put forth daily acts of faith (though such acts must not be neglected), but it takes effect at their first conversion, at the very first exercise of faith when they are delivered from a spiritually dead condition. “You, being dead in your sins, hath he quickened together with him.” That general justification at Christ’s resurrection becomes theirs at their first believing, which secures them from all legal guilt so that it can never seize upon them again. As the passage continues, “Having forgiven you”—not merely *some* trespasses but *all* trespasses. They then have, in their resurrection with Christ, a general discharge in hand—not only for past and present sins, but for *all* sins to come. This general pardon is ever ready, so that as soon as particular sins are committed, they are immediately absolved from them. The actual pardon is as immediate as the actual sin, and thus the apostle speaks as though all were already forgiven.

3. Believers are always under justification unto life, and therefore can never, at any time, be actually under the obligation of the Law unto eternal death. The Law pronounces nothing less than a sentence of death and condemnation, a dreadful curse against sinners, as declared in Genesis 2:17 and Galatians 3:10, “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things,” etc. If believers were laid under the obligation of the Law for new acts of sin, even for a single day or moment, then for that time they would be unjustified again. This would require an intermission of their justification, for condemnation is the direct opposite of justification and utterly inconsistent with it (Romans 5:16, 18; Romans 8:33-34).

However, Romans 8:1 expressly states, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” This is not merely a suspension of the curse; rather, believers are fundamentally different in their state from others who are out of Christ. After union with him, and even after the fullest pardon, every sin still deserves condemnation. Pardon does not remove the *desert* of sin, but it does remove the legal obligation to condemnation. This obligation is taken away, as seen in Romans 8:33-34 and John 5:24, where Christ declares, “He that believeth hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation.” By daily pardons, a person’s justification is continually affirmed. Though new acts of faith may not always be put forth the very moment a person sins, he is nonetheless secured from condemnation from the moment he first believes and passes from death to life.

The same truth is evident from believers' declared freedom from the Law and its curse, as seen in Romans 6:14 and Galatians 3:10, 13. “As many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse.” This



strongly implies that others—believers—are not under the curse, as is further confirmed in verse 13.

Though, materially speaking, the afflictions of the elect before conversion may be similar to those of others under the curse, yet not the smallest part of that curse formally falls upon them. Jesus Christ has endured the entire curse on their behalf. Before believing, they were legally under the sentence of the curse according to the Law, but not under its execution. How much less, then, can they be under it after union with Christ?

4. Believers are continually under the New Covenant, and therefore, the very instant their sins are committed, they are remitted. That is, they are immediately absolved from the Law's curse and actually pardoned. For this, nothing more is required than their interest in the satisfaction of Jesus Christ (which they have by union with him) and the Lord's declaration of their discharge upon that satisfaction. This is established by the New Testament, which was sealed by his blood for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28). All pardoning mercy is stored up there, and this is the very act of pardon.

Believers are always within the New Covenant and therefore have an actual right to the pardon of all sins—past, present, and future. They hold this right beforehand in the promise, even if not yet in possession. Thus, they have a ground upon which to claim pardon for future sins and may plead the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promise. Moreover, the moment they commit sin, the New Testament declares it remitted. It is a standing pardon, always testifying to all who are under it: “Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31, 34; Hebrews 8:12). Because of this, believers can never again be subject to the Law's obligation to

punishment. They are also under the promise of a new heart and the Law being written within them, ensuring that they will continue to repent and believe. However, while such spiritual dispositions may not immediately manifest (as they develop progressively through real transformation), the remission of sin is a *relative* change, occurring instantaneously by the promise to all under the Covenant when they stand in need of it.

Here, it should be observed that the pardon or forgiveness of sin is a divine grant issued under the Law of Grace—the New Covenant. It is God's act of oblivion (Hebrews 8:12; 10:16-17; Romans 11:27). Thus, we read of “the Law” of works and “the Law” of faith (Romans 3:27), with the latter referring to justification and the remission of sins. Just as condemnation is administered by the Law of works, which pronounces sentence upon sinners—the seed of the first Adam—the very moment they sin, whether they realize it or not, so justification and remission of sins are administered under the Law of Grace. The New Covenant pronounces sentence upon all the seed of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, at the very moment they sin, even when they are not immediately aware of it.

Just as among men, one may have his offenses pardoned by an act of oblivion, even if no formal accusation has yet been brought against him before a judge (which may come later), so it is with God's forgiveness. It is not granted through a judicial act but through an act of God as *Lawgiver*. Present justification and pardon are not issued by God as Judge but as the sovereign Author of the New Testament. These are the sentences of his Law, under which believers continually remain. Accusations from Satan or their own consciences may come later, leading to a formal trial before the Judge on the last day.

Failing to grasp this distinction has led to many misunderstandings. Some argue that justification is from eternity, but they fail to recognize that the elect may—and indeed must—remain under the sentence of the Law of works (without yet suffering its execution) until they come under the sentence of another Law, namely, the New Testament, which then discharges them.

Others speak of justification as a response to an accusation, where one pleads their case and is then discharged. However, justification is simply the sentence of one Law declaring a discharge from the sentence of another, based on the individual's interest in the righteousness of Jesus Christ through union with him. God is not acting as a Judge in this immediate justification but as the Lawgiver. Often, Scripture speaks of judgment as a future event. Paul reasoned of "judgment to come" (Acts 24:25), and Jesus himself declared, "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment" (Matthew 11:22, 24; 12:36). Peter likewise states that God "reserves the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9), and John records Christ's words: "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:47-48).

At present, Christ's work is not to judge the world but to save it. He comes in a dispensation full of grace, calling sinners to enter the Law of Faith, which is a ministration of righteousness and life, exceedingly glorious (2 Corinthians 3). But when he comes again as Judge, he will come clothed with terror, and all must appear before his judgment seat (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Acts 3:19 states, "When the times of refreshing shall come, then will their sins be blotted out." This does not mean that believers lack a complete pardon until the Day of Judgment, for they are already as fully and perfectly justified and pardoned as they were previously

condemned. Just as they were under condemnation by a Law, they are now justified and have remission by a Law grant—the New Covenant. Some refer to this as a *sentential* justification, meaning that its sentence will be repeated and publicly affirmed at the Last Judgment when believers will be judicially acquitted before all the world.

In what court or before what judge are any pardoned here on earth? If it is said that the tribunal is one's own conscience, this presents difficulties, for conscience cannot pass sentence without first discerning that it is within the New Covenant and pleading that truth against Satan's accusations. However, a soul may be clothed in Christ's righteousness and possess justifying faith long before it is able to discern and acknowledge this. Consequently, justification and pardon may exist prior to any judicial act of conscience.

**Objection.** If believers are not actually under the obligation to punishment (which is guilt), then asking for its removal or praying for the daily pardon of sin is unnecessary. Moreover, if they are not obliged, they cannot be disobliged, and therefore, they cannot be pardoned. This suggests that the curse of the Law must be in force against them for some time before a new pardon is granted.

**Answer.** 1. In their daily pardons, believers are declared to be discharged from the very obligation and curse of the Law itself, but not from a personal obligation to it. The obligation to punishment resides in the Law, yet it does not actually pass upon believers for even a moment.

It must be remembered that present pardon is not a judicial act but a sentence of the Law of Grace, which declares all under it to be discharged from the penalty of another Law.

Consider this: when a violated Law has already passed sentence upon an offender, and an act of pardon subsequently comes into force, it dissolves or removes the obligation to punishment that was already imposed upon the person. This is the case of the elect at their first conversion.

However, when an act or Law of pardon is in force for certain persons and applies even to future offenses, then the obligation to the penalty never actually passes upon them at any point. Yet they receive as full a pardon (even from the entire penalty of the Law) as the former, and with greater grace, for they are spared from having the sentence pronounced upon them.

This is precisely the case of believers. They are always under the New Covenant, which is a divine act of pardon. This Law is in force for them even before they commit new sins and already declares their discharge from the penalty of the Law of Works. Therefore, the very moment their sins are committed, they are immediately remitted by virtue of the New Covenant.

The commanding Law is not repealed (for then their acts would not be offenses), but the curse of it never rests upon their persons for even a moment (1 John 2:2-3). “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.”

1. The pardons granted to sinners come from Jesus Christ as the offering Priest, who has made satisfaction for sin. However, if one who already has fellowship with God—one who is a believer—sins, his relief comes from the ongoing advocacy of Jesus Christ. An advocate or attorney pleads an existing Law that secures his client’s discharge. Likewise, Jesus Christ pleads on behalf of believers, who are already under the New Testament,

by which they have a right to indemnity. Although the Law of cursing remains in force for unbelievers, this new act of grace grants believers full pardon for all transgressions against it.

2. Nevertheless, it is unquestionably the duty of believers to pray daily for pardoning mercy. Those who are taught to call upon God as “Our Father” (Luke 11:2) are also commanded to pray, “Forgive us our sins” (verse 4). Therefore, even those who have received the Spirit of adoption must still seek daily forgiveness.

There is *reatus simplex* as well as *reatus redundans in personam*. Although believers should not confess themselves to be personally under the Law’s obligation or curse (for which they should rather offer the highest thanks for their deliverance by grace), there remains cause for the deepest acknowledgment of their own sin and guiltiness in having deserved it. This alone is sufficient for their humility. Even though they are pardoned persons by grace, the penalty of the Law is still *due* for their offenses. This reality may be acknowledged even under the clearest assurances of pardon, for pardon does not remove the *desert* of sin but only frees from the punishment that sin deserves.

Indeed, there is much work for faith in prayer on this account.

Believers are to pray for the continuation of the pardon they already enjoy, as well as for the remission of sins they will yet commit. The New Covenant contains a promise of future pardons, and therefore faith may act upon the Lord in it, even though they are assured of forgiveness. The certainty of a promised mercy does not exempt us from praying for it. Jesus Christ had the assurance that he would be glorified, yet he prayed, *Father, glorify thou me* (John 17:5). He knew that he would be kept, yet he prayed for it (John 17:11). David had an absolute promise that his house and kingdom would be

established forever (2 Sam. 7:14–16), yet he prayed all the more earnestly for it, grounding his prayer upon the promise itself.

Thus, we may ask for future pardons, even though we are certain we shall receive them.

Additionally, we are to ask for clearer manifestations of our interest in pardoning mercy.

Furthermore, believers, in praying for the pardon of sin, are:

1. To seek a fresh application of the blood of Jesus Christ in the promise of pardon. He is declared to be a *propitiation through faith in his blood* (Rom. 3:25). Not only must they seek a clearer manifestation of pardon, but they must exercise faith in the application of Christ's blood as the price that has purchased and procured it. His blood is to be regarded as the ransom of redemption, the seal of the New Testament for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28). It is this blood that cleanses those who have fellowship with God from all sin: *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins* (1 John 1:3, 7, 9).

Pardon must come by a word or promise, for it is by his faithfulness that God is engaged to this work. Faith is to acknowledge both the promise and the grace of God displayed therein: *Whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins* (Acts 10:43). The Lord's act of giving pardon comes first in order of nature, but it is to be followed by the believer's reception of it through faith. As soon as believers sin, God's act of pardon disobliges them from the Law's curse. Their response must be a renewed act of faith, applying this pardon to themselves, setting their seal to what God has done. Additionally, renewed acts of repentance are to follow. Under the Old Covenant, *it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats*

*should take away sins* (Heb. 10:4). But the New Testament is better, for through the blessed Mediator, believers receive real remission (Heb. 9:15).

2. To ask for impunity—that is, immunity and freedom from the execution of the curse and from other tokens of divine displeasure. Even if they know they shall have it, they must still ask for it, as previously shown. Though believers know that God is their Father and that the eternal curse will never seize upon them, they are nonetheless to pray for deliverance from it. Moreover, they should be encouraged and stirred up to do so, for the Lord has promised it.

Although justification is continued under the New Covenant, yet by gross acts of sin, the Lord may be provoked so that many sweet effects of being justified may be suspended. David, who was in a state of grace, when he had notoriously sinned, before renewed acts of faith and repentance, before confessing his sin, found that his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long (Ps. 32:3–4). Day and night the hand of God was heavy upon him. By this, it is evident that although, at the very instant of sinning, believers are truly disobliged from the eternal curse of the Law, they may not immediately experience a sense of that freedom, nor be delivered from temporal evils until afterward. They are exempted from vindictive justice in terms of making satisfaction for sin, but not from paternal corrective dispensations, which serve to humble them and deter them from sin (Ps. 51:2, 7). *Wash me thoroughly from my sin... Purge me with hyssop...* He was deeply sensible of his pollution, defilement, and uncleanness by reason of iniquity, confessing his sin and seeking its removal (v. 4). That he might justify God, whom he had greatly dishonored, and give glory to him by acknowledging his righteousness in all his judgments, he cried out (v. 9), *Hide thy face*



*from my sins.* His sins were not only ever before him, but seemed to be ever before the Lord, as if God were always looking upon them. Though he had not lost his salvation, he lacked much of the joy of it (vv. 11–12). Nathan had told him that God had pardoned his sin (2 Sam. 12:13–14), yet he was also warned that he must expect some tokens of divine displeasure. It seems he penned this penitential psalm afterward, for its title shows that this confession was directed to the chief musician—it was for the use of the Temple. He had confessed privately to Nathan, but now he does so more publicly, after being told of both his pardon and the judgments to follow (v. 4).

Thus, even after souls are truly disobliged from guilt and have received pardon itself, they may still lack the sense of it until there is a fresh application of the blood of Jesus Christ by the Spirit. This may cause them to cry out for it, as David did (v. 9), *Blot out all my iniquities*. There may be inward clouding and darkness, sin and guilt may lie heavy upon the conscience, producing distress and a dreadful sense of divine displeasure—enough to deter from sin. The Lord will visit transgressions with a rod, though he will not utterly remove his loving-kindness from them (Ps. 89:32–33). And who would willingly see the frowning face of God, a tender Father, and endure such sharp rebukes—not only by outward afflictions but by the withdrawing of the light of his countenance, which is better than life?

The Old Covenant did not purge the conscience, but the New is a better testament. For, having mentioned the remission of sins granted under it (Heb. 10:16–17), the Apostle adds, *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience* (Heb. 10:22). Likewise, in Hebrews 9:15, it is shown that through the New Covenant, they obtain *freedom from the accusations of an evil conscience*, which the Old could not afford. Thus, through the renewed exercise of faith,

believers may find deliverance not only from other fatherly corrections but also from those inward accusations and wounds of conscience that often accompany heinous sins—until renewed acts of faith and repentance restore peace.

5. The New Covenant raises a spirit of filial love and is therefore better than the Old, which left men under a spirit of servile fear. The New, being composed entirely of promises, must necessarily have a tendency to produce the sweetest spirit, as seen in Romans 8:15: *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* There is, then, an evident excellency in the evangelical spirit over that of the Old. I understand this passage as referring to the different states of the Church, or the people of God, since in the preceding and following chapters the Apostle clearly speaks of believers' freedom from the Law through the Lord Jesus. The word *again* suggests that they were once under this spirit of fear—namely, under the Old Mosaic dispensation—but are now freed from it in the times of the New Testament. Some understand the *spirit of bondage* as referring to operations of the Spirit in fear and terror leading to conversion. However, I do not find that he is treating of that here. Rather, it is more fitting to understand it as referring to the state under the Old Testament, especially because it is introduced as proof of their sonship, as the word *for* indicates. This was not, therefore, a desirable frame to seek after but a misery to be under, and it is a mercy to be freed from it.

The Old Covenant carried more of the *spirit of a servant*, as the phrase implies. Although serving the Lord primarily or solely for reward savors of a legal spirit—and is one difference between the spirit of a servant and that of a son—yet here another distinction is

being made, for it is said, *Ye have not received it again to fear*. The Sinai Covenant compelled duty by dreadful threatenings and presented curses before them (not yet actually borne by Jesus Christ) as arguments or enforcements, which naturally produced terror and filled them with the kind of fear found in servants under the severe threats of their masters. Israel was filled with fear and astonishment at the first proclamation of the Law. Whether this was the proper effect of the Sinai Law—designed to produce servile fear and bondage as a duty then, though not now—or whether it was simply an unavoidable consequence due to the frailty of sinful man, is debated. However, hearing the Law proclaimed by the Almighty God as a consuming fire would necessarily have such an effect. Furthermore, the conditional promises under that covenant were insufficient to free them from this servile fear, leaving them under it. In contrast, the New Covenant contains more evangelical encouragements to duty, through grace and the free promise. The Sinai Covenant, by its very nature, tended to produce the fear of a servant toward his master. As the Apostle states, it *gendereth to bondage* (Gal. 4:24), rather than producing the fear and love of a son, which is the fruit of gospel revelation.

Christians now are to act upon more evangelical motives, from greater love and faith, having received the Spirit of adoption, by which they cry, *Abba, Father*. This believing spirit gives souls liberty of access to God, with the freedom that children have in approaching a tender father. The spirit of fear kept them at a distance from the Lord, like a servant who dared not approach an austere master. But by the Spirit of adoption, they may now draw near with holy boldness and firm assurance and cry, *Abba, Father*.

This is even clearer when compared with the parallel passage in Galatians 4:1–2: *The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing*

*from a servant...* Even so, we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. Here, the state under the Old Sinai Covenant is plainly expressed as bondage. Not that they were absolutely bondslaves, nor fully in the condition of servants, but rather like those under tutors and governors, in a state of subjection, so that they appeared little different from servants. They seemed to have more of the spirit of a servant (being driven by fear) than the spirit of a son. But now, under the dispensation of the New Covenant, they are freed from this servile state, redeemed by Jesus Christ from the rigor of the Law, and possess the full spirit of adoption (vv. 5–6). The change is so great that it is as if their sonship had only now begun (v. 7), at least in comparison to the former state. Therefore, Christians are to act differently from those under the Old Covenant—more in the free spirit of adoption. Thus, bondage and freedom are opposed in verses 24–26, 31. Not that bondage here is absolute slavery, but rather a state of lesser freedom—though within the same family and household—as Hagar and Sarah represent. Hagar represents the Sinai Covenant, while Sarah represents the free promise.

Similarly, in Galatians 3:24, *The Law was our schoolmaster until Christ*, where the original Greek does not include the phrase *to bring us*. This passage does not refer to the continuing work of the Law in leading souls to Christ for conversion but describes the rigorous discipline of the Law over Israel, the people of God, compelling them to duty *until Christ*—that is, until his incarnation and satisfaction. The text speaks of a function of the Law that has now ended in gospel times, as made clear by the contrast in verse 25: *But after faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster*. This does not mean after faith is exercised in the individual soul, but after *the object of faith—Christ—has come in the flesh* and has satisfied the Law. He has purchased redemption, so believers are no longer under the

menaces and severity of the Law as a schoolmaster. Just as Christ is called our *hope*, so he is also our *faith*—meaning the object of faith, the one believed upon. The phrase *faith is come* in verse 25 corresponds to *the coming of the seed* in verse 19, which refers to Jesus Christ. Therefore, believers' present freedom from the Law as a severe schoolmaster demonstrates the superiority of their condition under the New Covenant.

6. The New Covenant is established upon spiritual promises and is therefore better than the Old Sinai Covenant, which primarily offered temporal promises to Israel. Now, I speak of it as an administration to them. All the promises of the New Covenant are of a spiritual nature: it promises to write the Law in the heart, that God will be their God, and that their sins will be pardoned (Heb. 8). These spiritual blessings are promised first, while temporal things are included within them. Godliness has the promise of this life as well, but the emphasis here is on spiritual blessings—grace, peace, communion with God, and the like—so that our hearts may be set primarily upon heavenly enjoyments.

I have often wondered why the New Covenant is framed in such a way that only true believers seem to have an interest in it. However, I now consider that this is not meant to exclude all from a visible interest in it—since elsewhere, it is clear that some have such an interest (Acts 8:12) even when the reality of grace is lacking. Rather, it is expressed in this way to contrast with the Old Covenant and to demonstrate how the promises of the New are superior. The Old Covenant primarily dealt with temporal blessings for Israel—such as long life, the land of Canaan, and material prosperity (Deut. 5; 11; Lev. 26). These were the most evident blessings under that dispensation and were types of greater spiritual realities. In contrast,

the New Covenant calls men to duty through spiritual promises and blessings rather than temporal ones, making it a better covenant.

7. The New Covenant itself ushers in spiritual blessings in a more immediate way than the Sinai Covenant, and so it is established upon better promises. The more directly God bestows his mercies, the greater their excellence; the more pure, new, and fresh they are from the fountain of divine love. The immediate visions of God in heaven will make that state supremely excellent. Likewise, in this world, blessings that, while not without all means, are comparatively immediate, are the best mercies—just as the more direct judgments of God are the most dreadful.

The Old Covenant did not, in itself, dispense spiritual and eternal blessings but instead directed men to look to the Abrahamic Covenant for them. They had to take a longer course to obtain these enjoyments than under the New. Under the Old, they had to look beyond its administration for the remission of sins (which was typified in it) and for other such mercies, turning instead to the free promise. But in the New Covenant, mercies are absolutely promised (Heb. 8), and therefore their application is more immediate than under the Old. By the eye of faith, believers may immediately look to Jesus Christ for the enjoyment of them. There is no longer a veil of typical institutions intervening between them and their blessings. This is a better way to obtain those spiritual benefits (John 1:17).

Indeed, the entire administration of the New Covenant is superior. The Apostle states in Hebrews 1:1–2 that *God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*. The superiority of the Gospel over the visions, dreams, and various

revelations of the Old Testament lies in this—that now Jesus Christ himself speaks directly to us. We have more immediate manifestations of God's will. Because of this, there is infinite danger in neglecting what is now spoken (Heb. 12:25).

As the Gospel is more extensive, it now reaches not only the Jews but also the Gentiles, who are made equal partakers of its blessings by faith. The partition wall has been broken down (Eph. 2:12–14; Rom. 3:22).

Likewise, there is now a more open door of access to God (Heb. 9:8). Under the Old Covenant, the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest, implying that under the New Covenant, the way is now open, giving believers greater freedom (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 10:19, 22) and better encouragements. The price of redemption has already been paid, and now Christians ask for mercy as something already purchased for them. Under the Old Covenant, the people were forbidden from drawing near to the holiest place—only the priests could approach. But now, believers themselves are made priests unto God (Rev. 1:6) and may enjoy more immediate communion with him than ever before. All of this testifies to the superiority of the New Covenant.

8. The New Covenant is full of efficacy and is therefore better than the Old. In the New, all is undertaken by an omnipotent God (Heb. 8:10–12), and thus, whatever difficulties or opposition may arise, this word of power is sufficient for its fulfillment. In contrast, the Old Covenant required much of Israel but contained no such absolute promises ensuring its effectual accomplishment. There is a difference between the Old and the New, as between the letter and the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6). The

ministers of the New Testament are not of the letter but of the Spirit, *for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.*

The Lord not only spoke the Law with a living voice but also wrote it with his own finger upon enduring monuments—tables of stone. Yet the Jews, grossly misunderstanding, relied too much on the letter, focusing on external obedience. The chief impression they received from the Law was from its threatening aspect: *the letter killeth*. The divine curse was a sentence of death that struck fear into their hearts. But the New Covenant brings more effectual, life-giving operations (verses 6, 8); *the Spirit giveth life*, making it a transcendent ministration of glory. It is a powerful means of reviving the heart from the deepest spiritual deadness, overcoming sinful indisposition, and providing consolation. It is full of quickening, life-giving influences, pouring forth abundant gifts and graces of the Spirit. Thus, it is a better covenant.

Lastly, the New Covenant is more enduring and lasting, not subject to the same violations as the Old, and is therefore a better covenant. When the Lord promises to establish a New Covenant, he adds (Jer. 31:32), *Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers... which covenant they brake*. Likewise, in Jeremiah 11:4, 6, 10, and Hebrews 8:9, it is clear that the Old Covenant was broken by the people. Indeed, the Old Covenant itself is said to be vanishing (Heb. 8:13), signifying that one of the grand differences between the two is that the New shall not be broken as the Old was.

Though those who are only externally and by visible profession within the New Covenant may fall away entirely, and even those who are internally and truly in it may fail partially, they cannot altogether cast themselves out of it as was the case under the Old. The vital principles and deep impressions of divine love in the Gospel age shall



be so strong, and the divine Law so firmly inscribed upon the hearts of believers, that they will be far more secure in the New than in the Old. An unsteady spirit or lack of establishment is an argument that a soul has but a feeble participation in the blessings of this covenant.

Furthermore, the New Covenant shall never be abolished, for there is none to succeed it. Both the Mediator and the privileges of this covenant are eternal. The blood of Christ is *the blood of the everlasting covenant* (Heb. 13:20–21), and therefore, it is a better covenant than the Old.

## CHAP. XI

### Of the Time of First Coming into Covenant

It may be asked: When is it that any are actually and personally interested in the spiritual benefits or blessings of the New and better Covenant?

It is not a virtual but an actual interest that is here inquired after; not when they were representatively in Covenant in their common person, but when they are personally brought into it by the application of its blessings to their own souls.

Indeed, the New Covenant is for application and is the sum of all that is to be applied, though it is not the whole Covenant of Grace, which includes all articles established between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son in order to our restoration.

It is also to be noted that some are visibly, while others are really, under the Covenant.

Some who are branches in Jesus Christ may yet be broken off (John 15:2, 6; Rom. 11), and therefore were only visibly in him. Some are sanctified by the blood of the Covenant and yet afterward may count it an unholy thing (Heb. 10:29), showing that they are only visibly under it—outwardly set apart or professing the name and faith of Jesus Christ so as to partake of common privileges belonging to its external administration. Persons thus in Covenant and under its sign may still be in a perishing condition (Acts 8:13, 23). Outward profession of faith does not itself entitle one to the external administrations of the Covenant but rather serves as a visible mark of those fit to partake of them, showing a visible interest in the promise by possessing *the things promised*. Likewise, their seed have as sure a mark of their being visibly included in *the promise* by the Lord's own declaration of their interest in it along with their parents (Gen. 17:7, 9; Acts 2:38). This inclusion is not by the Old Covenant (as some claim), which is annulled, but by that which was made with Abraham, which remains in force (Gal. 3:17).

Furthermore, those who are the subjects of the New Covenant were also the subjects of the Old—the house of Israel and Judah (Jer. 31:31–32; Heb. 8).

Just as Abraham was to exercise faith in the promise made to him on behalf of his seed, so also are believing parents to exercise faith on behalf of theirs. It is true that not all of them may be saved, but the same must be said of adult professors of faith. Therefore, the promise regarding either group (as to real interest) is to be understood *indefinitely*, not *universally*, just as other promises related to family instruction and even the public preaching of the Word. Christ is with his ministers until the end of the world, though not all who hear are converted. These are the means God usually blesses for such ends.

However, there is also a *real* interest in the New Covenant—one that is certainly accompanied by salvation—when the special blessings of it are actually bestowed (Heb. 8:10; 1 Pet. 3:9; 1 Pet. 1:23). This is the primary matter of inquiry: *When is this interest granted?*

Real, actual, and personal interest in the New and better Covenant is granted to souls when they attain union with Jesus Christ and the gift of faith—not one moment before.

Abstracted from Christ, or until one is in him, not a single promise is theirs; for all the promises of God *in him* are yea, and *in him* Amen (2 Cor. 1:20; Eph. 3:6). All are made, treasured up, and fulfilled or accomplished in him. If one is without Christ, they are without promise (Eph. 2:12; Rom. 8:32). Jesus Christ is the first saving gift of God; Christ and the promises go together.

There are special marks of distinction whereby those in Covenant are distinguished from the world—marks that apply to none outside of Christ (Heb. 9:15). They are called *those that receive the promise*. Abraham, that great Covenantor, was not actually so until the time of his effectual calling; from that point, the four hundred and thirty years begin, dating the Covenant or Promise as made with him (Gen. 12; Gal. 3:17). This does not begin from the day of his birth, much less from eternity, though he was then an elect vessel. By becoming Christ's, men become Abraham's seed and heirs of the promise (Gal. 3:9, 14, 26, 29).

Likewise, the New Covenant is made with the house of Israel and Judah (Heb. 8:13), and none are part of the spiritual Israel for life and salvation until they are in him (Rom. 2:28–29). Until then, they are far from a covenant state, which is one of life, peace, mercy, and salvation (Mal. 2:5; Isa. 54:10; 55:3; Luke 1:71–72; Rom. 11:26–27). Rather, they are declared to be in an opposite state—at enmity with

God, dead in trespasses and sins, and children of wrath just as others (Eph. 2:1–3, 5, 8, 15–16; Col. 1:21).

This may be further confirmed by an enumeration of the principal blessings of the New Covenant. It is promised that the Lord will write his law in their hearts and be to them a God (Heb. 8:10). Yet until they are in Christ, they are *without God in the world* (Eph. 2:12).

The greatest difficulty arises concerning the great privilege of pardon or remission of sin, under which the whole of justification is signified (Heb. 8:10, 12; Rom. 11:27).

Some believe that we are justified from eternity, while others argue that justification occurs at the death of Christ. However, the actual personal justification of a sinner before God takes place at his union with Jesus Christ and the gift of faith—not before.

1. No one is actually interested in the righteousness of Jesus Christ before union with him and the gift of faith. It is *he* who is made unto us righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). If one is without Christ, they are also without his righteousness (Rom. 5:18). *By the righteousness of one, upon all, unto justification of life*—none can therefore attain justification without a righteousness. For justification consists in a divine declaration of a person being righteous, and if he were not so, it would be a false sentence, which is incompatible with the true God.

Neither will a righteousness of one's own—though worked out with the help of grace—serve for justification, but only that of Jesus Christ. Hence, *by the obedience of one, many are made righteous* (Rom. 5:19). Just as his suffering and death made satisfaction for sin, so his obedience is a righteousness meriting blessings, even eternal life (Rom. 5:21). It is called *the righteousness of faith* (Phil. 3:9),

since faith is the means by which we apply that righteousness which is given (Rom. 3:22, 25, 26). Faith is not the meritorious or procuring cause of our justification, for it does not hold the same causality in justification as Jesus Christ does. No more is required for the release of our obligation than what the law—by which we are obliged—demands, which is satisfaction in terms of both duty and penalty. The fulfillment of this requirement was accomplished by Jesus Christ alone.

Yet more is required in two respects: first, to make way for this through a covenant or compact, without which all sufferings on our behalf would be of no benefit to us; and second, as a means of application, namely faith (Rom. 10:10). *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness*—that is, faith serves as a means to righteousness. Hence, justification is often said to be *by faith* (Rom. 3:28; Rom. 5:1). The question under consideration was not how men are manifested or declared in their own consciences to be justified, but how they are justified before God and in his sight. That is *not before* faith, but *by faith* (Gal. 3:11).

The Apostle's purpose in Romans 4 is to prove that we are justified by faith and its righteousness, not by the works of the law, so that there would be no grounds for boasting (Rom. 4:2). He supports this by referencing Abraham and David (Rom. 4:3): *For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. And again, David describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works* (Rom. 4:6).

It must be noted that *pardon of sin* is not the entirety of justification—righteousness is also necessary. If it were a righteousness of our own working, then we would be justified and saved by our own

works, which Scripture universally denies. This would confuse justification and sanctification, as if Christ merely satisfied for our sins and the defects in our own righteousness, making it acceptable unto life. However, justification is by *the righteousness of faith*—not one of our own making, but one wrought for us by Jesus Christ.

The false prophets among the Jews, who urged the works of the law upon the Romans and Galatians, emphasized ceremonial observances, which implicitly acknowledged their sinfulness. They did not expect justification apart from pardon but sought pardon carnally through their own works. In opposition to them, the Apostle excludes from justification not only works performed in natural strength but also those produced by sanctifying grace. The works of Abraham and David—who were both believers—are likewise excluded.

Some argue that the active obedience of Jesus Christ in our stead is unnecessary, except as a part of his satisfaction for sin, on the grounds that the law does not require both suffering and obedience from us.

**I Answer,** The Law as a Covenant of Works required suffering as satisfaction for sin, and as it belongs to the Covenant of Grace, so it requires perfect obedience (to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ) as the condition of the justification and life of sinners. New obedience (which refers to sanctification) is to be performed by Christians as the fruit and effect of their spiritual life. Rather, it was needless that Jesus Christ should fulfill righteousness or yield active obedience to the Law as part of a satisfaction for sin when by his passive obedience he underwent death, which was the very same, and all that the Law threatened against the sinner.

If man had never violated or broken the Covenant of Works, or had never sinned, then the Law would have required only righteousness of him for life; the tenor of it being, *Do and Live*.

When man had sinned, then the Law (as a Covenant of Works) required only suffering and threatened death (Gen. 2:17), but it ceased in its promise of life; that immediately became null and void. It is true, the Law, as a natural rule of righteousness, still required perfect obedience, which was due to God by right of creation, and his sinning could not free him from the obligation of it. But it promised nothing to a sinner; it would imply a contradiction that it should promise life to him still upon perfect, unsinning obedience when he was already a sinner under the threat of death. Indeed, if immediately after Adam's sin, satisfaction had been made and he pardoned, yet he would have been merely *in statu quo prius*, in his former state. If the Covenant of Works had been in force again as at the first, he must afterward have yielded perfect obedience, or else he would have had no promise of life. Therefore, there is no incongruity in saying that, after man sinned, the Law required satisfaction for sin and yet also required righteousness unto life—much more in our case. For there is another Covenant, namely, the Covenant of Grace, made with Jesus Christ, the second Adam, wherein he has undertaken by suffering to make satisfaction for our sin. Without this, we could never have been freed from the threatened death; there was no other way. The Lord might have refused a substitute and therefore might (without any show of injustice) have established whatever terms he pleased for our restoration unto life.

If freedom from threatened death were obtained, still the Lord might have annihilated us, for we had no promise of eternal life; that in the Covenant of Works became null and void upon the transgression of the first Adam.

Behold, therefore, the Lord agrees to stand to the first terms; the second Adam undertakes to do what the first should have done—to fulfill the same righteousness. The Lord, in response, promises life again. Thus, the Law is drawn into the Covenant of Grace and requires the same perfect righteousness as before, to be fulfilled not by ourselves for life, but by Jesus Christ, the second Adam. The aforementioned Scriptures testify to this, asserting not only suffering but also the righteousness of that one Jesus Christ as necessary for justification and life (Rom. 5:18–19). Hence, the Sinai Covenant (which Christ fulfilled) ran in the original form of *Do and Live*.

The ground of this mistake is a false supposition, namely, that no more is needed for life but satisfaction for our sin and disobedience, as if life would naturally follow from that. This assumes either that we have life without any righteousness (whereas there is no promise of life to Adam, or to any since, on such terms), or that we have it by a righteousness of our own working, with Christ merely satisfying for our sins and defects therein. This implies that we still have life by the Covenant of Works and in its way, which is highly anti-evangelical and unscriptural. For many testimonies affirm that for the pardon of sin, a new covenant is necessary (Heb. 8:12), and that life is by that covenant, where the righteousness required is wrought out not by ourselves but by another, even Jesus Christ.

Thus, the death of Jesus Christ was necessary to free us from death, though we obeyed in him, or he obeyed in our stead, to merit for us eternal life, which is promised not now by the Old Covenant of Works, but by the New Covenant of Grace.

And thus, although Christ fulfilled the Law for us, so that it is imputed to us and we are made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21), yet it does not follow that we are altogether freed from the



obligation of the Law unto obedience. The righteousness of Jesus Christ—his obeying and fulfilling of the Law for us—was the condition of life, or that upon which the Lord has promised justification unto life. However, we may (and are) obliged to obedience, not for that, but for other ends—not in the least for our justification and title to life, but as part of our sanctification. We sin in failing to obey, for obedience glorifies God through the fruits of our spiritual life. Christ's obedience was for one end, ours is for another; just as his sufferings were for one end, our afflictions serve another. Neither of these is unnecessary.

2. No actual interest in the promises of the New and better Covenant exists before union with Jesus Christ and faith. Even the elect of God, so long as they are unconverted and without Christ, are without the promises, as I have shown (Eph. 2:12; 2 Cor. 1:20; Gal. 3:22). They were not, from eternity, the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29), for he had no seed so early.

If the sinner himself had made satisfaction, then it would not have been a pardon, for he is not pardoned who pays his whole debt himself. But Jesus Christ interposed; he underwent the curse, and the New Covenant, or free promise, is God's grant or act of pardon (Heb. 8:11; 10:16–17): *This is my Covenant—Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more*. Remission of sin, then, is a glorious fruit and benefit of the New Covenant—not only manifested but conferred thereby. God justifies (Rom. 8:33), and this is his pardoning act. Not faith itself, nor any grace within us, is what grants the pardon; faith only receives the remission of sins (Acts 10:43), and the divine gift of it is by an immutable thing, even by the promise of the New Covenant.

And hence, if any object that Jesus Christ, as a surety, had the obligation of the elect transferred upon him and made full satisfaction to the Law for them—thus disabling it from holding them obliged, since they cannot ultimately be damned—

It is answered: As our obligation and condemnation were by the Covenant of Works, so our declared freedom from its obligation, and our justification, must be by the New Covenant. That is the divinely appointed way for granting it. Though our sin was transferred upon him and an act passed rendering it certain that we should be justified (and sanctified as well) in due time, yet not in such a way that we were immediately disobliged, but only in the way laid out by divine appointment for that end.

The Covenant of Works, once violated, required satisfaction; yet, though satisfaction had to be made, that covenant contained no promise of life to a sinner upon another's undergoing the very penalty threatened therein. Thus, it was so far from giving *ipso facto* deliverance that it would have availed nothing toward it without a New Covenant, for payment by a surety was a refusable satisfaction. The Lord, without any appearance of injustice, might have said, *The soul that sinneth, it shall die*. Therefore, the sentence of the Law lies against us until, by the Covenant of Grace, we are discharged from it in the way and time therein appointed—which is at our union with the Lord Jesus.

3. None are actually and personally the seed of Jesus Christ as the second Adam before union with him and faith; therefore, none are actually and personally justified until then.

They are only his seed—those whom he has redeemed, whom he justifies (Isa. 53:10–11; Rom. 3:24–25). The two Adams are paralleled in Romans 5:6 to the end. The day the first Adam sinned,

the Law passed a sentence of death upon all his seed (v. 12); virtually, they all sinned and died in him, but not actually until they exist and have a being. Just as none are actually under the sin and condemnation of the first Adam until they are naturally born of him into the world of sinners, so none are actually under the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the second Adam, unto justification of life until they are spiritually born of him into the world of saints (vv. 16, 18, 19; John 1:12; Gal. 3:16). The *one seed*, Christ, to whom the promise is made, does not exclude infant seed from ordinances but excludes an adult seed that sought justification and eternal life by the works of the Law. Thus, the *one seed* is that of faith (v. 26): *For ye are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ.*

Indeed, representatively, we were not only justified but also sanctified and glorified at the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:5–6): *He hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.* Not that we were the principal actors in this, with Christ acting only as our delegate, for then we would be self-redeemers and self-saviors, and the work would be more properly ours than his. Rather, Jesus Christ represented us in such a way that he was the principal actor, and the entire work remained his own. The act of redemption was his, not ours (Gal. 3:13; Rev. 5:9; Gal. 4:5; Rom. 3:24–25). The righteousness was his (Rom. 5:18–19, 21); he is its subject, and we are its objects. Yea, he represented us in such a way that all was federally ours in him—it was agreed that we should receive it in due time. All was for us in the covenant, but we are not actually his seed one moment before faith (Rom. 5:1).

To say, therefore, that we are justified not in our persons but to our persons in Christ is to grant what is desired, for men cannot be

actually justified except in their own persons, and that cannot be until they exist and have personality. Since, after their birth, their persons are unjustified, they cannot at the same time be said to be justified.

Indeed, the persons were determined—Jesus Christ had full assurance that he would not die at uncertainties (Isa. 53:11). But this does not prove the immediateness of their justification; rather, it occurs in the appointed season.

We must, therefore, carefully distinguish between justification itself in the abstract—consisting in the remission of sins and righteousness prepared—and our being justified, as Mr. Norton states in *Orthodox Evangelist*, p. 314.

Or, we must distinguish between justification as actually procured and as actually applied—the former is before faith, but the latter is not. Concerning the former, see Romans 5:8–10: *Our being reconciled was at the death of his Son, not at the time of our conversion.* Justification, in this sense, is the object of faith and may precede its act. Thus, Hebrews 1:3: *When he had by himself purged our sins, [he] sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.* Likewise, Hebrews 2:17. Remission of sins, purging, and reconciliation itself were complete at the death of Jesus Christ—then prepared for us—but were not conferred upon us until union with Christ and faith.

4. All are in a state of condemnation until union with Jesus Christ by faith, and thus have no actual justification until then; for these are opposites (Rom. 8:33–34): *It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?* The same persons cannot at the same time be both justified and condemned, for Paul proves immunity from condemnation by their being justified. And it is

only those *in Christ Jesus* who possess this immunity (v. 1); none outside of Christ actually enjoy it, and there is no union with him before regeneration and faith. *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature* (2 Cor. 5:17). All unbelievers are *condemned already* (John 3:18); *the wrath of God abideth on them* (v. 36); they are *children of wrath* (Eph. 2:3). Even elect vessels, before faith, are said to be in that state—under a sentence of wrath and condemnation, not merely in terms of merit, as all sin deserves wrath, but in an actual state distinct from what they enter upon believing. This condition is inconsistent with present justification unto life.

Though Jesus Christ alone made satisfaction to divine justice for their sins and was made a curse for them, so that not the least atom of the curse in its formal sense (i.e., vindictive wrath) shall be executed upon them, yet they remain under it materially. The sentence of the Law's condemnation still stands against them, and they remain subject to many tokens of wrath—not only in their bodies, suffering from sickness, infirmities, and diseases, but in their souls, weighed down by ignorance, darkness, and sinful inclinations. Their entire being is subjected to the bondage of Satan (Col. 1:13; Acts 26:18; 2 Tim. 2:26), deprived of fellowship and communion with God, and liable to the terror of such a state. These sufferings do not serve to make satisfaction but rather to magnify grace in their deliverance from such a miserable condition (Eph. 2:11–12) and to humble them, among other divine purposes.

If it be objected that since our obligation was transferred upon Jesus Christ and he bore our sin and curse, justice and equity require that the elect, upon his death, should be *ipso facto* discharged—since their debt was paid, it cannot afterward be charged upon either principal or surety—then I answer:

More must be considered in this case than mere debt. The sinner was first and primarily under the obligation. As Dr. Owen observes, since satisfaction by a surety was accepted, the Father might establish whatever terms he pleased for applying that satisfaction without any appearance of injustice. Thus, there is no necessity for an *ipso facto* discharge at Christ's death.

Furthermore, a debt may still be charged against the principal debtor until he obtains an actual interest in the satisfaction made by the surety. Until then, though no further satisfaction will ever be demanded from Christ or the elect, the Law's obligation unto wrath may yet stand against them for other ends—such as awakening them to seek deliverance from their deplorable condition. The lack of immediate freedom is not due to any defect in Christ's satisfaction but to the present incapacity of those who are to receive it. Just as a full ransom may be paid for slaves, yet, due to distance, a later day may be set for their release, so also the elect, while yet unborn, are incapable of being actually discharged, for the subjects must exist before even a relative change can pass upon them. Likewise, after their birth, they remain at a great distance from God. Without the reconciliation of that distance, they cannot possess redemption in actuality.

As a common person, Jesus Christ represented many across various ages of the world; therefore, their actual discharge must of necessity occur at different times—*not all at once*, but when they become his seed.

Additionally, a debt may remain upon the principal debtor under an old law until a new law or covenant declares his discharge. Thus, the sentence of the violated Covenant of Works may still stand against sinners until they are declared free by the New Covenant (Heb.

10:16–17). Notably, Jesus Christ, in suffering death for our redemption, acted as the Mediator of the New Testament (Heb. 9:15). In doing so, he satisfied for our breach of the first covenant with Adam as that was drawn into the Covenant of Grace as a condition of redemption.

Further, a debt may still be charged against the principal debtor even after a surety has made satisfaction, if the surety's name was not originally in the obligation but was later admitted by voluntary contract, covenant, or consent. In such a case, the covenant alone determines the conditions of release. Why, then, are the elect not immediately sanctified and glorified upon entering the world—though these are effects of Christ's death? It is because the covenant ordains otherwise.

Had Christ's name been originally included in Adam's obligation as surety, there might be stronger grounds for immediate discharge upon his satisfaction. But this was not the case. If it had been, his suffering and death would have been necessary and unavoidable, even apart from a new covenant. Indeed, the making of the New Testament itself would have been unnecessary, vain, and without purpose.

Yet it was exceedingly necessary, for without it, there could be no transference of our guilt to him. Christ's submission to death was by voluntary contract (John 10:17–18), and his name was not included in our original obligation. Therefore, his payment was a *refusable* satisfaction. It was by an act of free grace that he was admitted to undertake our cause and that his payment was accepted in our stead. Thus, although he paid the *idem*—the very same penalty we owed—there was nothing contrary to justice or equity in the Father

requiring additional terms. Consequently, there was no necessity for an *ipso facto* discharge.

The Law pronounces sentence not only upon sinful actions but upon the persons committing them (Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:22). Therefore, there can be no justification until one is delivered out of this state, which occurs only at union with Jesus Christ and faith.

5. I might argue from the many absurdities that follow the assertion of justification from eternity. It would be a harsh conclusion to deny that Adam was an elect vessel. Yet, if eternal justification is admitted, then he must have been actually under both the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace at the same time. This would mean that he was bound to seek life in two utterly inconsistent ways—by works, and by Jesus Christ through faith (Gal. 3:12). Indeed, this would imply that Adam was actually justified from sin before he had any sin from which to be justified, before sin even entered the world through his fall (Rom. 5:12), and that he did not become guilty by his fall, having been disobliged from eternity.

Nor can this be evaded by claiming that our sin was imputed to Jesus Christ before it was committed, and that the actual existence of sin is no more necessary for our disobligation than it is for our obligation to its punishment.

I answer: The sins of the elect were not actually upon Jesus Christ until he came under the Law in their place, for it was that very Law that bound them under condemnation (Gal. 4:4–5). Thus, all their sin met upon him before they committed it. Likewise, when persons come under the New Covenant, I grant that they are justified—even virtually—from sins not yet committed. However, the Old Law of Works must necessarily remain in force against them until a new law



discharges them from it. And this does not occur until they are united to Jesus Christ and receive the gift of faith.

Oh, how miserable, then, are all those who are out of Christ! They remain in an unjustified state, for they have no word or promise to assure them that the Lord has withdrawn his suit against them. But how great is the blessedness of all who are in Christ, of all believers, for they stand justified before the Lord! *Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven* (Rom. 4:7). It is sin alone that renders men miserable, yet now the Apostle challenges both earth and hell: *Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?* (Rom. 8:33–34). It is God himself who was offended by sin, and it is he who has the power to discharge it. No one can reverse or annul his act of justification.

Who, then, shall lay anything to their charge? Sin, Satan, and even their own hearts may draw up many accusations, but none will stand against them. Why? Because *it is God that justifieth*.

This justification is extensive, reaching to all sins (Col. 2:13). Jesus Christ is a *propitiation for the sins that are past* (Rom. 3:25), that is, for sins committed before his incarnation. This is stated in opposition to those who sought to be justified by the works of the Law (vv. 20–21). To draw them away from this false trust, Paul teaches them—as in Hebrews 9:15—that the redemption of transgressions under the first testament, or their remission, was not by legal sacrifices and observances, but by the blood of Jesus Christ. This does not deny that he is also a propitiation for sins to come, for his faithfulness is engaged in granting the remission of these as well (1 John 1:8–9; 2:1–2).

Even believers continue to sin daily, and the Lord extends pardoning mercy to them continually. Indeed, throughout their entire lives, he

magnifies this title—*The Lord God, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin* (Exod. 34:7). Yes, it is his very glory that he is a sin-pardoning God: *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?* (Mic. 7:18).

## CHAP. XII.

### Of the Evidences of Interest in the New Covenant

It may be questioned: How, or by what means, may a soul know its actual interest in and title to the New and better Covenant, and the better promises thereof?

For the clearing of this, I shall not insist upon the testimony of the Divine Spirit, which is the primary evidence (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 5:8), nor upon sanctification, as it stands in spiritual dispositions and inclinations conforming to the Divine will—whether in producing an answerableness of heart to what is commanded (comprised under the writing of the Law there), or in working evangelical obedience in the life, or in bringing about self-resignation to the Lord, as in Isaiah 44:5, where it is expressly promised: *They shall be my people*. These matters are discussed elsewhere and frequently insisted upon by others. Therefore, I shall pass them over at present and mention only one evidence.

### **Answer: Faith as the Chief Evidence**

By the operations and actings of precious faith, a soul may have a clear knowledge of its actual interest in the New and better Covenant. That noble grace of faith has such a special relation to the Covenant— which is made up of promises—that the Gospel is called *the Word of Faith* (Rom. 10:8). Faith is so expressive of the great matters of the Covenant that it is often placed in direct opposition to the Law or Old Covenant (Gal. 3:2, 5, 12, 23). Yea, in verse 9, it is said: *They that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*. These

are sharers with him in the same Covenant and are blessed therein, for *the very blessings of Abraham come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ* (v. 14), *that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Much is to be drawn out of the free promise for our relief and succor in any condition, and even for influencing other graces, by faith. By faith, our intercourse with God here is maintained. This is not because the promise is made to believing as a grace within us, or as a gracious act put forth by us, but rather to the believer as one who is in Christ. Faith is not magnified as a quality in itself, but as an instrument in receiving the promise and as a means of excellent use therein.

Thus, verse 22 states: *That the promise through the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.* Faith, then, is not properly the condition of the Covenant, upon the performance of which one gains a right and title to it; rather, it is a choice effect of the Covenant and a singular means for the application of the promises and the reception of Covenant blessings in the soul. By faith, the promise and all that is contained therein is given to the believer.

Since faith is uniquely engaged with the promises, it must have a greater aptitude than other graces—above even sanctification and evangelical obedience—to witness a soul's interest in the everlasting Covenant. As Hebrews 11:1 declares: *Faith is the evidence of things not seen*—and therefore, it is not as obscure or uncertain as those other evidences.

There are various acts of faith which, through the concurrence of the Divine Spirit, may serve as evidence of one's interest in the Covenant.

1. By faith in the free promise, such glorious discoveries of the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ unto sinners are afforded, that their hearts consent to the offer thereof. It is by the shining of Gospel light through the free promise into the hearts of men that they are turned from darkness to light (Acts 26:18). The highest natural light will leave them short of a discovery of sin in its exceeding sinfulness, as well as of the riches of grace in Jesus Christ for the recovery of lost sinners. They cannot see these aright until they are revealed by the Divine Spirit (Matt. 16:17; 1 Cor. 2:10, 14; Titus 2:11–12).

Unbelievers may have a notion of these things, but when they are seen with an eye of faith, they appear in an entirely different manner. *The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth* (Rom. 1:16–17). The heart, which previously stood at an infinite distance from the Lord Jesus and was full of opposition against him, is, by the work of faith upon it, drawn away from all other objects and fixed upon Christ alone for salvation in the way of free grace. Then it accepts the blessed offer, though all arguments in the world could not previously prevail upon it. The heart that once stood off from Christ is now brought over to him by the Gospel, and why? *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.*

It is in the Gospel's mirror that a soul gains a right discovery of the excellency of Jesus Christ and of that righteousness of his, without which there is no salvation. By faith, there is a learning of the Father, such that one is effectually drawn to the Son. This cordial consenting to the offer of the Gospel—submitting to the obediential righteousness of Jesus Christ alone for acceptance unto life—is faith unto justification (Rom. 10:3–4, 6, 10). Likewise, the soul's willingness to have Christ as Lord, to rule over it by his Spirit

dwelling in it, is faith unto sanctification (Acts 15:9; Rom. 8:9–16). Thus, the soul seeks out the blood of Christ for cleansing from all sin.

The first act of closing with Christ is by faith in a free promise. This is the first grace that lives in the soul—the first breathings of spiritual life. Such powerful and admirable alterations are found at one's first acquaintance with Christ, through discoveries above mere sense, that they must necessarily be evidence of one's interest in the promise and covenant from which all these blessings come. These first experiences bear a mark upon them and are often most discernible, since the state of the soul afterward is vastly different from what it was before, however refined by nature it may have seemed.

Thus, some have had their interest in the covenant cleared up by such a word as this: *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief* (1 Tim. 1:15).

By the eye of faith, the soul gains such a prospect of matchless love and free grace that it is won over to Jesus Christ through the powerful application of the promise to itself (1 John 5:10–11). *He that believeth on the Son hath the witness in himself*—being enabled by grace to embrace and heartily subscribe to the blessed record on a divine testimony, namely, *that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son*. Thus, he sets his seal to it that God is true in the word of his grace, which has a witnessing power. Even when the believer does not always discern it, he has the witness within himself.

2. By faith, the soul lays hold of Jesus Christ in the free promise, as he alone who gives it subsistence in spiritual life. Oneness with Jesus Christ cannot exist without an interest in the Covenant, as stated in 2 Peter 1:4, *In whom are given to us exceeding great and precious promises*, and in Ephesians 3:6, *Partakers of the*

*promise in Christ. Verse 17 further affirms, That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. It is through faith that we hold fast to the promise of Christ, and his indwelling in the soul is by faith. Thus, he animates the souls of the saints, as Paul testifies in Galatians 2:20, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. How? I live by the faith of the Son of God.*

Others live by sense, feeding upon earthly comforts, but Christians live by faith—by what is laid up in divine promises. *By these things they live* (Isa. 38:16). They know not how to subsist in any state or condition without a promise; indeed, they would count themselves as dead creatures without it, no matter what earthly enjoyments they possessed. Yet even a promise alone will not satisfy them unless Christ is in it—*Christ liveth in me*. He is the very life of their lives. Without him, they experience nothing but spiritual swoonings, faintings, and dyings—all arising from the lack or failure of faith. Faith draws in all divine influences from Christ for support and plays the principal role in all the actings of spiritual life. All spiritual motions are managed by it, as Hebrews 11:6 declares, *Without faith it is impossible to please God*.

Therefore, sanctification is only a secondary or subsequent evidence; it is not discernible until there is first a discerning faith, which speaks to justification. If faith is inevident, then all other graces will be so as well.

Faith may be demonstrated to others by works, as James 2:18 states, *Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works*. A man may be declaratively justified by works, but if he doubts his faith, he will likewise doubt his works—whether they proceed from a gospel-root or not. For no love of the right stamp

(and therefore no true obedience) exists except as the fruit and issue of faith in the Lord Jesus, *for faith worketh by love* (Gal. 5:6).

Just as the first acts of faith do not consist in believing that our sins are pardoned but in receiving Jesus Christ and his righteousness as the way to pardon (John 1:12), so, if Christians continued in the acts of faith—sending their hearts forth to him in the way of the promise for all that they lack—not only would love and evangelical obedience sweetly flow forth, but they would also be *filled with all joy and peace in believing* (Rom. 15:13).

I have often thought that if Christians gave more attention to such direct acts of faith, spending less time in questioning their condition or entertaining doubts about it, they would find their interest in the Covenant more clearly established. Indeed, consolation would then come in, as it were, incidentally and abundantly.

3. By faith, souls venture upon the free grace and faithfulness of God in his Covenant, even in their greatest distresses, with good success. The New Covenant is entirely composed of promises, and the Gospel is called *the Word of Faith* because it is the work of faith to draw out what is vesseled up therein (Heb. 10:38), *Now the just shall live by faith*. This applies not only to justification but also to the expectation of mercy as promised.

Many strive to act in faith by concluding their interest in Christ and eternal life, but they should rather be exercising faith in a cordial owning of evangelical principles. Indeed, Christians ought to live their entire lives by looking to the love and faithfulness of God in his promises for all their relief and succor, whatever condition they may encounter—even for eternal mercy (Heb. 6:18). They are pursued by spiritual enemies, corruptions, and temptations and are in great danger, but by hope (which flows from faith and can rise no higher



than faith itself), they flee for refuge to the hope set before them, even the heavenly glory. Thus, they lie at anchor in the stormiest days, upheld by two immutable things—the promise and the oath of God—that by these, they might have strong consolation.

By faith, they realize the very things contained in the promise or covenant, and thus their interest in it is experientially witnessed to them. They can say, *At such a time, when we were in soul distress, so that all the means in the world could contribute nothing to our inward peace, quiet, or consolation, we were enabled by grace to bear the weight of our souls and our conditions upon the faithfulness of God in his covenant and free promise. We found relief and refreshment—not merely by our own imagination or fancy, but by an actual deliverance from our distresses. By faith, we were enabled to draw out of the promise the milk of consolation, which no creature in the world could have afforded us.* And thus, they come to know and affirm that the covenant and its promises are indeed their own.

4. By faith in the free promise, there is a standing conquest in Jesus Christ over all spiritual enemies. It is a great promise of the covenant that *the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head* (Gen. 3:15). Therefore, by grace, there is a vanquishing of all enemies of salvation—sin and Satan—through the blessed Seed, the Lord Jesus. The promises are accomplished within the soul, but the means appointed is given in Ephesians 6:16, *Above all, take the shield of faith.*

This not only serves best for discerning Satan's stratagems but also for withstanding them. As John declares, *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith* (1 John 5:4). When the soul enters into combat or spiritual conflict and reason is overwhelmed,

unable to hold firm, then faith appears victorious—not by its own strength, but in the strength of Christ and his conquest, which it applies in these encounters. Thus, conquering acts of faith, as well as venturing, relieving, and discovering acts, serve to witness one's interest in the covenant.

I might further show that faith has other acts—such as acts of assurance, whereby the soul draws up conclusions, saying, *He hath loved me, and given himself for me* (Gal. 2:20). But I have said enough to demonstrate that faith indeed gives knowledge of one's being within the New Covenant.

## CHAP. XIII.

### Of the Use of Absolute Promises.

The question now arises: What is the use of absolute, better promises? When, or in what cases, are they to be applied?

#### **Answer.**

1. They serve to manifest the riches of divine grace and love to sinners. If there is grace in promising great blessings upon a very small condition, then certainly there must be even greater grace and love in promising the same blessings absolutely, without any condition. This magnifies the Lord in his distinguishing favor toward Israel above all people—that he loved them simply because he would love them (Deut. 7:6–8). It was not because they were greater or more worthy than others,

nor because they had any beauty or comeliness in themselves, but solely for his own sake, as is often intimated in Scripture.

Absolute promises are profound expressions of divine love, as seen in Hebrews 8:10–12. They proclaim the richness of God's mercy and the greatness of his love (Eph. 2:4–5). That the Lord should break through all unworthiness and undeservingness demonstrates his sovereign grace, which ought to humble sinners into the deepest self-emptiness and self-abasement.

The Lord made an absolute and peremptory promise concerning the establishment of David's throne forever (2 Sam. 7:13, 16). This overwhelming grace melted David's heart into a deep sense of his own nothingness, so that he responded in humility, saying (v. 18–19):

*"Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And yet this was a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"*

Thus, absolute promises of divine grace have great efficacy in humbling the soul, bringing it into profound abasement before God. David himself, overcome by such grace, breaks forth into adoration (v. 22):

*"Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee."*

Moreover, as the absoluteness of these promises demonstrates the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old and the greater glory of this gospel dispensation compared to all that preceded it, so also it may serve to counter the temptation of living under a spirit of

bondage to the Old Covenant. This very point is emphasized in the Epistle to the Hebrews to encourage believers in their assurance of grace.

**2.** Absolute promises are instrumental in the impartation or communication of first grace to the souls of men. Their initial interest in grace arises through the efficacious operations of the Spirit in absolute promises. These are sometimes called *promises of grace*, as they presuppose a state of being without grace. Thus, Hebrews 8:10–12 declares the writing of the law in the heart, implying that, immediately before this divine act, another law—the law of sin—was reigning there. The moment before the Lord becomes their God, they are *without God in the world* (Eph. 2:12). The instant before remission of sin, guilt still remains.

All first grace is comprehended in these promises, so that the means by which souls are initially drawn to Christ is through an absolute promise. While they may set their eyes upon what are called *conditional promises* in their conversion, yet if ever they receive even a measure of special grace, it is in an absolute manner. This grace is the fruit, the result, and the outcome of an absolute promise. Since all first grace is contained within these promises, it follows that until they are fulfilled in a person, no qualifying conditions can exist in that soul to alter its state or to render it acceptable to God.

Before quickening, the soul is *dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:4). Immediately before reconciliation, it remains in enmity against God (Col. 1:21). The moment before sanctification, it is still under sin and pollution. Therefore, it is entirely groundless for any soul to stand off from Christ and the free promise due to a perceived lack of qualifications. Rather, they should immediately close with him through the absolute promise, which is the very means by which

gracious qualifications are bestowed. The Lord, as a free agent, may work as he pleases, yet he has not given any warrant for souls to delay even a moment in coming to Christ due to a lack of qualifications. If he had, then he would be testifying his approval of their persistence in unbelief—something that is utterly hateful and abominable in his sight.

**3.** Absolute promises serve as both a provocation to seek grace and a direction to find all necessary supplies of it. Other promises may pertain to specific states or conditions, but absolute promises have universal applicability, regardless of the particular condition or complaint (Heb. 8:10–12). As first grace is promised there, so are all subsequent degrees of grace in the writing of the law upon the heart. As the first interest in God is promised in his declaration *I will be their God*, so also is all subsequent communion with him included in that promise. As initial justification is promised in *I will remember their sins no more*, so also is every subsequent act of remission extended to those in covenant with him.

Thus, absolute promises are always applicable. When souls feel as though they have no claim to other promises, these alone are sufficient to help and sustain them in every case. When they are at their greatest loss, unable to find a particular promise that speaks to their specific condition, they can be sure that they either lack grace, communion with God, or pardon of sin. The absolute promises extend to all these necessities. They are a constant relief, *bread that never fails, waters that are forever sure*—containing all that a soul could ever rightly desire from God's hand.

Furthermore, being absolute, these are free promises, containing no discouragement to hinder souls from closing with them. Often, men hesitate to lay hold of other promises because they doubt whether

they possess the qualifications annexed to them. But absolute promises do not presuppose any qualifications as antecedently necessary for a soul to embrace them. Rather, they promise all gracious qualifications—those very things that souls most deeply sense they lack. Whatever grace or measure of it is needed, it is found here; and souls are directed to turn to these promises for supply.

There is no reason to stand off from these promises even for a moment due to a supposed lack of humility or any other qualification. Rather, this should drive them to these promises, as they are the only means by which they may obtain grace. Here they must seek first grace when they seem utterly without it, evangelical sorrow when their hearts are hard, and all other spiritual frames of heart that they desire. When they can discern nothing in themselves but sinfulness, they must look all the more to the Lord in his absolute promises, that all desirable qualifications may be wrought within them. How else shall they obtain these but by looking unto the free promise?

The absolute promises belong to them, insofar as they may make use of them and venture upon the Lord in them for the obtaining of grace. Though they may not yet claim an interest in these promises as proof of a good estate or evidence that grace is already possessed, yet they must hold fast to them until the Spirit makes a powerful application of them to their souls.

**4.** Absolute promises are of great use in strengthening believers against, and supporting them under, all temptations that may arise in the course of their spiritual walk. If it is suggested that the promise is not theirs and that they have no right to lay hold upon it, there is sufficient answer to be given. It may be that other promises belong to them, though at present they cannot discern it. There are

seasons in which all experiences and all qualifications may be obscured, when they sit in darkness and see no light, yet remain children of light (Isa. 50:10).

Even if they cannot claim any promise so as to conclude from it their interest in salvation and eternal life, yet they may lay hold of it insofar as to seek an interest in it. The absolute promise is theirs in the offer of it, even if they are yet without the special grace it contains. Wherever the gospel comes, all have so far a right and title to the absolute promise that it is their duty to fasten upon it for the begetting of all gracious qualifications which they sense they lack. Otherwise, they could not be blamed, condemned, and punished for unbelief, as many are (Mark 16:16; John 3:18; Rom. 11:20).

If the temptation arises that it would be presumption to lay hold upon the promise when they are uncertain of their interest in it, the answer is clear: They are to look to the Lord in the absolute promise that it may become theirs, that grace may be theirs, that God may be their God, that the pardon of sin may be theirs—even though they cannot at present discern that these blessings belong to them.

To look to the promise in such a way as to take encouragement in sin or to persist in it would indeed be presumption. But to look sincerely to the Lord in the absolute promises and to venture to lay hold of them for deliverance from sin and the attainment of every gracious frame—this is duty. To neglect this duty is itself presumption, as it is a standing rejection of a divine call.

There is firm ground for putting forth direct acts of faith upon the Lord in the absolute promise for all grace that is needed. Even when a person does not presently discern, by reflective acts, that they have received gracious qualifications, they may still turn the heart toward the Lord in the promise, seeking these blessings to be granted. It is a

grave mistake to think that faith is to be exercised upon the Lord in the promise only upon the sight of some condition met within themselves. This would be to ground faith upon something of their own rather than upon the Lord in his free promise. It would subordinate the absolute promises to those that are called *conditional* as though the former depended on the latter for their efficacy and usefulness. But the truth is quite the opposite.

The New Covenant is, as it were, the fountain of all the promises, and it is wholly founded upon absolute promises. Therefore, those which are called *conditional promises*, being streams that flow from this fountain and branches of this tree, must ultimately be reducible to and partake of the nature of the New Covenant itself. Thus, in reality, they are absolute in themselves, though for the quickening of souls to seek after their blessings, they are sometimes presented as though they were dispensed in a conditional manner. Yet the Lord does not confine himself to that manner of working.

For instance, when Israel was destitute of commendable qualifications, when they had failed in the worship of God and had wearied him with their sins, the Lord directed their eyes not to their own conditions but to an absolute promise:

*"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."* (Isa. 43:25)

Thus, absolute promises stand as an unshaken foundation, inviting sinners to lay hold of them in faith, regardless of their present state, that they may find in them the very grace they lack.

**5.** Absolute promises serve as a means of evidencing a soul's interest in Christ and clarifying its eternal condition. The Lord can effect a saving change—one that is infallibly connected with salvation and



eternal life—through the opening of any promise, and this is solely from absolute grace. The begetting of faith, or the first work of grace in the soul, is always through an absolute promise. What condition could there be in any soul before the first act of grace to which a promise could be annexed? To assert otherwise would frustrate and nullify the work of Christ, implying that the Lord has promised eternal life to a mere work of nature, or that souls are in a state of salvation prior to union with Christ. Yet, this cannot be, for if they had any qualification that had salvation infallibly promised to it, they would already be in Christ.

The Lord declares in Ezekiel 36:26, “*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.*” What qualification preceded this? Only hardness and stoniness of heart—uncleanness before the sprinkling of divine grace (v. 25). Here, then, is a promise of first grace, and it is absolute. The operations of the Spirit in fulfilling this promise are so supernatural and glorious that they serve as clear evidence of God’s work. The Word of the Gospel comes in such power, accomplishing the very end for which the promise was given, that there are undeniable marks of divine excellence impressed upon the soul. By the efficacious application of the promise—by the actual enjoyment of what is promised—believers may discern their personal share in it. And since all gracious qualifications are first wrought by an absolute promise, why should that not be as much an evidence as the sanctified frames that follow?

Moreover, the absolute promises are made to specific persons—the house of Israel and Judah (Ezek. 36:21; Jer. 31:31). As expressions of God's determinate will, they must necessarily be evidential, for the chief purpose of promises is to assure the soul of God's disposition

toward those under them. The Lord ever speaks through them in this manner: *“I will be your God, and your sins and iniquities will I remember no more”* (Ezek. 36:28; Heb. 8:12). This is the natural language of the covenant. Though unbelievers outside the covenant may deceive themselves with similar thoughts, this does not invalidate the reality that the Lord truly speaks these words to believers who are unquestionably under the covenant.

Thus, at times, the state of a soul is evidenced by the application of such promises as:

*“Fear not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God”* (Isa. 41:10);

*“I am your God, saith the Lord”* (Ezek. 34:31);

*“I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins”* (Isa. 44:22).

The Holy Spirit often applies such promises with power, revealing the lovingkindness and free grace of God in such a way that the soul is given a clear understanding that God is speaking directly to it. It perceives this not as the voice of man or of Satan but as the very voice of God, and thus it serves as a strong evidence of its standing in the covenant.

At such times, the Lord shines upon His own graces in the believer’s soul, enabling them to discern these evidences. Yet, the soul does not rely merely on its own reflection upon faith or other graces for assurance. Rather, faith receives this testimony as a divine witness, grounded in the immutable promise of God.

**6.** Absolute promises serve as a means of filling the soul with consolation even in the saddest conditions and under the most trying dispensations. Jeremiah was sent to prophesy of the captivity of the Jews, which they had brought upon themselves by their sin. For

seventy years they would suffer under divine chastisement, yet to keep them from utter despair, the Lord not only assured them of a return but also foretold the establishment of the New Covenant—one that would be put into an absolute form (Jer. 31:31). Thus, absolute promises provide comfort even against the trials that sin itself may bring upon the believer.

The Apostle directs the believer's eye to "*two immutable things*"—the promise and the oath of God—as the appointed means for ushering in "*strong consolation*" (Heb. 6:18). The believer is to anchor their hope upon these unfailing assurances, for they are the foundation of all divine comfort.

Thus, when the condition of a soul seems most desolate, and when the graces of the saints are most obscured, they may still find recourse in the absolute promises. Even in the darkest seasons, when all other experiences and evidences fail, these promises stand as an unshaken foundation. The believer may look unto the Lord therein, finding in them all the grace and supply that is needed.

## **CHAP. XIV.**

### **Of Those That Are Called Conditional Promises**

Some may inquire, what is the use of those promises that are called conditional? Or, when and in what cases should they be applied?

**1. Conditional promises serve to reveal the extensiveness of divine grace, demonstrating its suitability to all the worst conditions into which souls may fall.**

The conversion of a soul to God ordinarily includes a special discovery of sin and an awareness of its lost and undone condition by nature, viewed in the Gospel glass. Indeed, the work of evangelical repentance is typically experienced in this process.

Moreover, there may sometimes be a common work of legal conviction of sin before and without a saving change. However, the idea that such a conviction is a necessary prerequisite for salvation, so that a sinner must wait until they have obtained it before they may look to Christ or take hold of the promise, is without scriptural foundation. Some fear that it would be presumptuous to attempt believing in Christ without first experiencing these preparatory exercises. Consequently, they remain hesitant, standing off from Christ and the free promise. Yet, I find no scriptural warrant for such delay. The worst of sinners—even those without any deep sense of sin—are immediately under the invitations and calls of the Gospel. If this were not so, they could not be justly condemned for unbelief, as those who reject the Gospel are, “*He that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mark 16:16). The Gospel invitation extends indiscriminately, as seen in Matthew 22:3, 4, 9, 10 and Revelation 3:17, 20.

Many scriptures that are often cited to support the necessity of such preparatory qualifications before conversion are, in fact, conditional promises. Yet these do not restrict the promise to those who possess such qualifications but rather declare that, even in the most unlikely and desperate conditions, there is an abundance of suitable grace to be found in Christ.

Such is the case with Isaiah 55:1–3, “*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters....*” The thirst mentioned here is not a desirable qualification; rather, it is a thirst for that which does not satisfy. The people labor for that which is not bread (v. 2). Yet even in such a condition, they are invited immediately to come to Christ, who offers abundant and freely given supplies—water and wine to refresh, milk to nourish—all without money and without price.

Similarly, in Matthew 11:28, Christ declares, “*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” Many mistakenly believe they must first seek to become weary and heavy laden, as if this were a necessary preparation before they may come to Christ. Yet, there is no indication that these are desirable qualifications to be sought after. Rather, they describe a sad condition in which Christ offers suitable relief. Whether their weariness arises from the burden of sin, the oppressive yoke of the Law (even as misapplied by the Pharisees), or any other self-inflicted burden, the invitation stands: “*Come unto me, and I will give you rest.*” Notably, the promise is not annexed to their weariness but to their coming to Christ.

Likewise, Christ is said to be “*anointed to preach good tidings to the meek*” (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18) and “*to heal the brokenhearted.*” Yet this brokenness is not limited to a sense of sin; it includes those broken by afflictions, distresses, or temptations of any kind. The purpose of such statements is not to restrict the promise to those who possess these qualifications, but rather to demonstrate the broad reach of Christ’s grace, which extends to those in even the most desperate conditions. These descriptions do not indicate desirable spiritual frames to be sought after—no more than being captives, blind, or bruised are conditions to be pursued. Rather, they illustrate that, whatever form of misery one may be in, there is a corresponding

provision in Christ: sight for the blind, deliverance for the captives, and rest for the weary. Even the most senseless and unawakened sinner is not excluded, for Christ, by his grace, brings them into a proper sense of sin.

This is evident in Matthew 5:3, 4, 6: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are they that mourn...*” Some interpret these as conditions upon which blessedness depends, as if one must first become poor in spirit or mourn before they may claim the promise. However, such an interpretation would be mistaken, for among these supposed conditions is persecution, which twice has the promised blessedness annexed to it (vv. 10–11). Outward poverty is also partly intended, as seen in Luke 6:20, 21, where the contrast is made explicit: “*Woe unto you that are rich... Woe unto you that are full.*”

Yet who would say that poverty or persecution are to be sought after merely to obtain the blessing? One cannot simply conclude, “*I am poor, therefore I am blessed,*” any more than they can say, “*I am persecuted, therefore I am blessed.*” These are not qualifications that give a right to the promise, nor do they serve as conditions that must be met before one can receive the promise. Rather, these words are spoken to the disciples (v. 20), and the blessedness is attached to discipleship itself, not merely to the conditions of mourning or poverty.

Thus, those already in Christ, who might be tempted to think themselves miserable due to their trials—whether poverty, persecution, or other afflictions—are here assured that such conditions do not exclude them from the promised blessedness. Instead, Christ reveals that there is suitable relief for them in his promises.

Correspondingly, woes are pronounced upon those in seemingly better conditions—upon the rich, the full, and the esteemed (vv. 24–25). This further confirms that the so-called conditions are not prerequisites to blessedness, but rather demonstrations that the promises extend to all states of affliction, assuring believers that their sufferings do not disqualify them from divine favor.

Thus, rather than serving as limitations on the promise, these conditions serve as revelations of its boundless reach. They declare that, no matter what trials, temptations, or afflictions a believer may endure, Christ's grace remains sufficient. The promises do not require that one first bring themselves into these conditions in order to obtain their benefits. Instead, they assure believers that, when they find themselves in these states, they have not fallen outside the reach of God's covenant mercies.

2. At times, when addressing a mixed audience of professors—some sincere, others not—the Lord expresses himself with an *if*, as in *Hebrews 3:6*: “*If we hold fast our confidence unto the end.*” This does not imply uncertainty in the promise but rather serves to distinguish true believers from those who eventually apostatize. Perseverance is thus a characteristic of sound believers, in contrast to those who fall away.

Similarly, certain scriptures describe the kinds of persons who shall obtain the blessings of the covenant, identifying them as those found believing, repenting, and obeying. This stands in opposition to those who remain in unbelief and disobedience, as seen in *Hebrews 5:9*: “*He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*” Such texts do not suggest that these qualifications earn salvation but rather describe those who are in a state of salvation.

These passages conclude negatively as well—those who lack these graces in some degree are not among the saved.

However, the promises are ultimately made not to the qualities themselves (such as faith and obedience), but to the persons in Christ who possess them. These graces are necessary in the believer, yet they do not function as conditions upon which the covenant depends. Consider how it behooved Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, to be “*holy, harmless, undefiled*” (Heb. 7:26). Yet, the promises were not made to him on account of his holiness and purity, but rather as part of the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son.

That said, these promises do testify to the Lord’s great approval of faith, hope, and obedience, which he commands. Yet, they do not function as conditions in the sense of obligating God to grant covenant mercies upon their performance. Will any say that nothing is acceptable to God unless it serves as a condition upon which he has bound himself to bestow mercy? Surely not.

Thus, many scriptures that appear to be conditional are best understood in this light. For example, *Colossians 1:21–23* and *Romans 2:7* do not impose conditions but rather declare the Lord’s approbation of faith, hope, and obedience.

3. Many seemingly conditional promises are not intended to discourage but rather to provoke and encourage the seeking of those gracious qualifications that are annexed to the promises. That which may appear to be a condition is, in fact, an exhortation to pursue the grace freely given in the covenant.

For instance, *Hebrews 8* sets forth the New Covenant as one entirely founded on absolute promises, including the remission of sins. Yet,



in *Matthew 6:14–15*, we read: “*If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*” At first glance, this might seem to condition divine forgiveness upon our forgiving others.

However, this does not mean that divine pardon is suspended until we first forgive, nor that any remain under condemnation despite being previously justified. Such an idea would subject the Creator to the creature, making divine acts dependent on human actions.

Rather, our forgiving others is not a condition in the strict sense—that is, it does not place God under obligation or give us the right to claim pardon by virtue of our actions. Instead, this language is employed as a pressing argument, an exhortation to fulfill the necessary duty of forgiving others. The Lord, in his absolute purpose, intends both to pardon us and to work in us a forgiving spirit.

The same principle applies to *Matthew 18:31*, *Mark 11:26*, and *Luke 6:37*, as well as *Acts 3:19*, where repentance and the blotting out of sins are mentioned together.

To illustrate: A father who is fully resolved to bestow a great favor upon his son may nonetheless express it with an *if*, so as to instill in him a sense of reverence and duty. Yet, this does not mean that his gift is truly conditional upon the son’s actions. Similarly, in these so-called conditional promises, the *if* does not indicate a condition upon which divine grace is suspended but rather serves as an exhortation to embrace that which God has already purposed to grant.

4. The eternal decrees of God are absolute and unalterable, yet they do not exclude the use of means for their execution in time. Likewise, divine promises, though absolute and without any condition in the proper sense, are not fulfilled apart from the means that God has

appointed. It is a gross error to assume that if there is no condition to be performed by us, then we need not concern ourselves with the matter at all.

We must understand that divine commands require us to use the means that God has ordained for the execution of absolute promises. The so-called conditional promises serve to declare the way and means by which divine blessings shall be conveyed to us. When men neglect to seek mercy in the way of God's appointment, they may fail to obtain it—not because they have failed to meet a condition, but because they have neglected their duty and, by sinning, have provoked God to withhold it. *James 1:6–7* and *Psalms 78:21–22* provide clear examples of this principle.

The promises of first grace are generally acknowledged to be absolute, for if they depended upon a condition, that condition would have to be performed before union with Jesus Christ. This would mean that the sinner must see something in himself before he has any ground to lay hold of the promise, and thus he would be assured of salvation while still in a state of nature. If faith were assumed to be the condition, then faith itself must preexist in the soul and be discerned before the sinner could believe in the promise. But faith itself is a grace, a fruit of the promise, just as much as any other grace.

Indeed, even the promises of first grace—though absolute—are sometimes expressed in seemingly conditional terms, as in *Proverbs 2:3–5*, *Mark 16:16*, and *John 3:16*. In such passages, the way and means of obtaining salvation are set forth. The promise is offered indefinitely to all—both elect and non-elect—but it becomes absolute in its application only to those who, by grace, become the subjects of it.

The Lord provides a cluster of absolute promises in *Ezekiel 36:25–27*:

*"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean... A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."*

Yet, in *verse 37*, we read:

*"Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them."*

This inquiring is not mentioned as a condition upon which the promise depends, for all was unalterably determined beforehand. Rather, it is set forth as the means by which the absolute promise is brought to fruition.

Thus, as a means to the reception of promised mercies, believers must not only trust but also engage in other duties, ordinances, and appointments of Christ—such as prayer for pardon, justification, and salvation, and seeking from the Lord a new heart and the indwelling of his Spirit. These are not conditions that give a right to salvation, for no act of ours places God under an obligation to bestow these blessings. All is from his mere grace and good pleasure.

Yet, as with a man who has purchased a remedy for his disease—who, though he has paid for it and has a rightful claim to it, will remain uncured unless he takes it—so believers have a right to all the promises, even those called conditional, since they are in covenant with Christ (*2 Peter 1:4, 2 Corinthians 1:20*). However, if they do not make use of these means, they may come short of the mercies promised—not because they have failed to meet a condition, but because they have neglected the means by which those mercies are to

be received. Just as a man may legally own a vast estate yet derive no comfort from it because he never lays hold of it, so too may believers lack the joy and benefits of covenant blessings if they do not actively appropriate them by faith.

5. Although the primary means of assurance lies in absolute promises, those that are called conditional promises serve a secondary evidentiary role. When the gracious qualifications described in such promises can be discerned, they provide confirmation of one's interest in eternal mercies. These promises give descriptions of those who partake of covenant blessings and serve as distinguishing marks by which believers may assess their spiritual condition.

Many passages of Scripture speak of these qualifications—not as conditions that grant a right to salvation, but as evidences of a title to covenant blessings. *Revelation 22:14* states:

*"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life."*

This does not imply that their obedience grants them a right to eternal life, for none can truly keep God's commandments before believing, and those who believe already have that right. Rather, their obedience serves as evidence of their standing in grace. The passage further contrasts these individuals with those who remain outside the covenant, *"Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters..."* (*Revelation 22:15*). The tree of life was given to confirm Adam in life (*Genesis 3:22–23*), and in the same way, keeping God's commandments—of which faith is chief—confirms believers in their living state and provides further testimony of their right to life.

Similarly, *James 2:24* states:

*"By works a man is justified, and not by faith only."*

This does not mean that love or evangelical works contribute in the least to justification as a cause or condition, for the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians are full of arguments against this notion. Rather, such works are the fruits and effects of justification. They serve as evidences—testifying to a man himself or to others—that he is justified. As *James 2:18* declares, *"I will show thee my faith by my works."* We are, then, justified by works only in a declarative sense—not properly, but evidentially. These works demonstrate the reality of a lively faith, which is the instrument of imputed righteousness and justification. Nowhere does Scripture affirm that works serve as a condition of justification.

Likewise, *1 John 1:9* states:

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

This does not mean that confession is a proper condition obligating God to forgive us, as though divine pardon were suspended until we confessed our sins. Rather, confession serves as a means by which we gain a renewed sense of pardon, fresh application of forgiving grace, and assurance of our interest in Christ.

While such evidences can strengthen a believer's assurance, caution must be exercised lest one ground his comfort primarily upon inward qualifications rather than upon the promise of God itself. Many attempt to derive comfort from their faith and other graces, placing the weight of their assurance upon these fluctuating experiences. As a result, their confidence ebbs and flows with their sense of spiritual

attainments. Instead, believers must rest their consolation upon the Lord in the immutable promise, *Hebrews 6:18*, using faith as the means to lay hold of it. Graces such as faith and repentance should be viewed as evidences of one's interest in the promise, not as the foundation of comfort.

Some, because they feel weary and heavy-laden, mistakenly take their rest and refreshment from their distress rather than from Christ himself. However, the call of the gospel directs them outside themselves: *"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."* (*Matthew 11:28*). Whether qualifications are clearly discerned or lie hidden in darkness, the believer's focus should be on Christ in the promise, rather than on his own spiritual condition, for comfort.

Thus, I have endeavored to set forth the nature of the Old and New Covenants.

As for the mediatorial office of Christ, it has been extensively handled by others, and I shall not expound upon it at length. However, I will briefly note that when Christ was on earth, he executed his office as Mediator by offering satisfaction for sin. Now, in heaven, he continues his mediation through intercession, as *Hebrews 7:25* states:

*"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."*

He continually presents his obedience before the Father on behalf of his people, securing for them all that he has purchased. If we desire any covenant blessings—whether a deeper inscription of the law upon our hearts, a clearer assurance that the Lord is our God, or

renewed pardon for sin—we must act in faith upon him as our Mediator. For he is "*the mediator of the new and better testament, which is established upon better promises.*"

FINIS.

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## **MONERGISM BOOKS**

The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace, by Samuel Petto.  
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