

CHAPTER 10

The Difference Between the Two Covenants

John Owen*

But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. (Heb. 8:6)¹

There is no material difference in any translators, ancient or modern, in the rendering of these words; their significance in particular will be given in the exposition.

In this verse begins the second part of the chapter, concerning the difference between the two covenants, the old and the new, with the pre-eminence of the latter above the former, and of the ministry of Christ above the high priests on that account. The whole church-state of the Jews, with all the ordinances and worship of it, and the privileges annexed to it, depended wholly on the covenant that God made with them at Sinai. But the introduction of this new priesthood of which the apostle is discoursing, did necessarily abolish that covenant, and put an end to all sacred ministrations that belonged to it. And this could not well be offered to them without the supply of another covenant, which should excel the former in privileges and advantages. For it was granted among them that it was the design of God to carry on the church to a perfect state, as has been declared on chap. 7; to that end he would not lead it backward, nor deprive it of any thing it had enjoyed, without provision of what was better in its room. This, therefore, the apostle here undertakes to declare. And he does it after his usual manner, from such principles and testimonies as were admitted among them.

Two things to this purpose he proves by express testimonies out of the prophet Jeremiah:

1. That besides the covenant made with their fathers in Sinai, God had promised to make another covenant with the church, in his appointed time and season.

* This is a slightly revised version of Owen's exposition taken from Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2005) and is used with permission. The footnotes are the ones in the Coxe/Owen volume. The footnotes bracketed with [] were provided by the editors of the Coxe/Owen volume.

¹ Νυνὶ δὲ διαφορωτέρας τέτυχεν λειτουργίας, ὅσῳ καὶ κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης, ἥτις ἐπὶ κρείττοισιν ἐπαγγελίαις νενομοθέτηται.

Exposition.- Turner remarks that *νυνὶ*, *now*, is not here so much a mark of time, as a formula to introduce with earnestness something which has close, and may have even logical, connection with what precedes. See also for this use of the term, ch. xi.16, 1 Cor. xv.20, xii.18, 20; in which passages it does not refer to time, but implies strong conviction grounded upon preceding arguments.- Ed. [Banner of Truth Edition.]

2. That this other promised covenant should be of another nature than the former, and much more excellent, as to spiritual advantages, to them who were taken into it.

From both these, fully proved, the apostle infers the necessity of the abrogation of that first covenant in which they trusted and to which they adhered, when the appointed time was come. And on this he takes occasion to declare the nature of the two covenants in various instances, and in which the differences between them did consist. This is the substance of the remainder of this chapter.

This verse is a transition from one subject to another; namely, from the excellence of the priesthood of Christ above that of the law, to the excellence of the new covenant above the old. And in this also the apostle skillfully comprises and confirms his last argument, of the pre-eminency of Christ, his priesthood and ministry, above those of the law. And this he does from the nature and excellence of that covenant of which he was the mediator in the discharge of his office.

There are two parts of the words: First, An assertion of the excellence of the ministry of Christ. And this he expresses by way of comparison; "He has obtained a more excellent ministry:" and after he declares the degree of that comparison; "By how much also." Secondly, He annexes the proof of this assertion; in that he is "the mediator of a better covenant, established on better" or "more excellent promises."

An Assertion of the Excellence of the Ministry of Christ

In the first of these there occur these five things: 1. The note of its introduction: "But now;" 2. What is ascribed in the assertion to the Lord Christ: and that is a "ministry;" 3. How he came by that ministry: "He has obtained it;" 4. The quality of this ministry: it is "better" or "more excellent" than the other; 5. The measure and degree of this excellence: "By how much also." All which must be spoken to, for the opening of the words.

The Introduction of the Assertion

The introduction of the assertion is by the particles *νυνὶ δέ*, "but now." *Νῦν*, "now," is a note of time, of the present time. But there are instances where these adverbial particles, thus conjoined, do not seem to denote any time or season, but are merely adversative, Rom. 7:17; 1 Cor. 5:11; 7:14. But even in those places there seems a respect to time also; and therefore I know not why it should be here excluded. As, therefore, there is an opposition intended to the old covenant, and the Levitical priesthood; so the season is intimated of the introduction of the new covenant, and the better ministry by which it was accompanied; "'now," at this time, which is the season that God has appointed for the introduction of the new covenant and ministry.' To the same purpose the apostle expresses himself, treating of the same subject, Rom. 3:26: "To declare ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, "at this instant season," now the gospel is preached, "his righteousness."

First Practical Observation

God, in his infinite wisdom, gives proper times and seasons to all his dispensations to and towards the church. So the accomplishment of these things was in "the fullness of times," Eph. 1:10; that is, when all things rendered it seasonable and suitable to the condition of the church, and for the manifestation of his own glory. He hastens all his works of grace in their own appointed time, Isa. 60:22. And our duty it is to leave the ordering of all the concerns of the church, in the accomplishment of promises, to God in his own time, Acts 1:7.

What is Ascribed to Christ in the Assertion

That which is ascribed to the Lord Christ is λειτουργία, a "ministry." The priests of old had a ministry; they ministered at the altar, as in the foregoing verse. And the Lord Christ was "a minister" also; so the apostle had said before, he was λειτουργός τῶν ἁγίων, verse 2, "a minister of the holy things." To that end he had a "liturgy," a "ministry," a service, committed to him. And two things are included in this:

(1.) That it was an office of ministry that the Lord Christ undertook. He is not called a minister with respect to one particular act of ministration; so are we said to "minister to the necessity of the saints," which yet denotes no office in them that do so. But he had a standing office committed to him, as the word imports. In that sense also he is called διάκονος, a "minister" in office, Rom. 15:8.

(2.) Subordination to God is included in this. With respect to the church his office is supreme, accompanied with sovereign power and authority; he is "Lord over his own house." But he holds his office in subordination to God, being "faithful to him that appointed him." So the angels are said to minister to God, Dan. 7:10; that is, to do all things according to his will, and at his command. So the Lord Christ had a ministry.

Second Practical Observation

And we may observe that the whole office of Christ was designed to the accomplishment of the will and dispensation of the grace of God. For these ends was his ministry committed to him. We can never sufficiently admire the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in undertaking this office for us. The greatness and glory of the duties which he performed in the discharge of it, with the benefits we receive by that means, are unspeakable, being the immediate cause of all grace and glory. Yet we are not absolutely to rest in them, but to ascend by faith to the eternal spring of them. This is the grace, the love, the mercy of God, all acted in a way of sovereign power. These are everywhere in the Scripture represented as the original spring of all grace, and the ultimate object of our faith, with respect to the benefits which we receive by the mediation of Christ. His office was committed to him of God, even the Father; and his will did he do in the discharge of it.

Third Practical Observation

Yet also, the condescension of the Son of God to undertake the office of the ministry on our behalf is unspeakable, and for ever to be admired. Especially will it appear so to be, when we consider who it was who undertook it, what it cost him, what he did and underwent in the pursuance and discharge of it, as it is all expressed, Phil. 2:6-8. Not only what he continues to do in heaven at the right hand of God belongs to this ministry, but all that he suffered also on the earth. His ministry, in the undertaking of it, was not a dignity, a promotion, a revenue, Matt. 20:28. It is true, it is issued in glory, but not until he had undergone all the evils that human nature is capable of undergoing. And we ought to undergo any thing cheerfully for him who underwent this ministry for us.

Fourth Practical Observation

The Lord Christ, by undertaking this office of the ministry, has consecrated and made honorable that office to all that are rightly called to it, and do rightly discharge it. It is true, his ministry and ours are not of the same kind and nature; but they agree in this, that they are both a ministry to God in the holy things of his worship. And considering that Christ himself was God's minister, we have far greater reason to tremble in ourselves on an apprehension of our own insufficiency for such an office than to be discouraged with all the hardships and contests we meet in the world on the account of it.

How Christ Came into this Ministry

The general way in accordance with which our Lord Christ came to this ministry is expressed: Τέτευχε, "He obtained it." Τυγχάνω is either "*sorte contingo*," "to have a lot or portion;" or to have any thing happen to a man, as it were by accident; or "*assequor*," "*obtineo*," to "attain" or "obtain" any thing which before we had not. But the apostle intends not to express in this word the especial call of Christ, or the particular way in accordance with which he came to his ministry, but only in general that he had it, and was possessed of it, in the appointed season, which before he had not. The way in accordance with which he entered on the whole office and work of his mediation he expresses by κληρονόμηκε, Heb. 1:4, he had it by "inheritance;" that is, by free grant and perpetual donation, made to him as the Son. See the exposition on that place.²

There were two things that concurred to his obtaining this ministry: (1.) The eternal purpose and counsel of God designing him to that—an act of the divine will accompanied with infinite wisdom, love, and power. (2.) The actual call of God, to which many things did concur, especially his unction with the Spirit above measure for

² [Owen's complete Exposition of Hebrews, as well as his Miscellaneous Works, is available from Banner of Truth. The reader is often directed to his previous writings.]

the holy discharge of his whole office. Thus did he obtain this ministry, and not by any legal constitution, succession, or carnal rite, as did the priests of old.

Fifth Practical Observation

And we may see that the exaltation of the human nature of Christ into the office of this glorious ministry depended solely on the sovereign wisdom, grace and love of God. When the human nature of Christ was united to the divine, it became, in the person of the Son of God, fit and capable to make satisfaction for the sins of the church, and to procure righteousness and life eternal for all that believe. But it did not merit that union, nor could do so. For as it was utterly impossible that any created nature, by any act of its own, should merit the hypostatical union,³ so it was granted to the human nature of Christ antecedently to any act of its own in way of obedience to God; for it was united to the person of the Son by virtue of that union. To that end, antecedently to it, it could merit nothing. Therefore its whole exaltation and the ministry that was discharged in that respect depended solely on the sovereign wisdom and pleasure of God. And in this election and designation of the human nature of Christ to grace and glory, we may see the pattern and example of our own. For if it was not on the consideration or foresight of the obedience of the human nature of Christ that it was predestinated and chosen to the grace of the hypostatical union, with the ministry and glory which depended for that reason, but of the mere sovereign grace of God; how much less could a foresight of any thing in us be the cause why God should choose us in him before the foundation of the world to grace and glory!

The Quality of this Ministry

The quality of this ministry, thus obtained, as to a comparative excellence, is also expressed: Διαφορωτέρως, "More excellent." The word is used only in this epistle in this sense, chap. 1:4, and in this place. The original word denotes only a difference from other things; but in the comparative degree, as here, it signifies a difference with a preference, or a comparative excellence. The ministry of the Levitical priests, was good and useful in its time and season; this of our Lord Jesus Christ so differed from it as to be better than it, and more excellent; πολλῶ ἄμεινον.⁴

The Preeminence of this Ministry

³ ["...the union of the two natures in the person of Christ. ...the assumption of a human nature by the preexistent eternal person of the Son of God in such a way as to draw the human nature into the oneness of the divine person without division or separation of natures..., but also without change or confusion of natures...; yet also in such a way that the attributes of both natures belong to the divine-human person and contribute conjointly to the work of salvation" (Muller, *Dictionary*, 316).]

⁴ [Greatly the best.]

And, there is added to this the degree of this pre-eminence, so far as it is intended in this place and the present argument, in the word ὅσῳ, "by how much." "So much more excellent, by how much." The excellence of his ministry above that of the Levitical priests, bears proportion with the excellence of the covenant of which he was the mediator above the old covenant in which they administered; of which afterwards.

So we have explained the apostle's assertion, concerning the excellence of the ministry of Christ. And by this means he closes his discourse which he had so long engaged in, about the pre-eminence of Christ in his office above the high priests of old. And indeed, this being the very hinge on what his whole controversy with the Jews did depend, he could not give it too much evidence, or too full a confirmation.

Sixth Practical Observation

And as to what concerns ourselves at present, we are taught by that means, that it is our duty and our safety to consent universally and absolutely in the ministry of Jesus Christ. That which he was so designed to, in the infinite wisdom and grace of God; that which he was so furnished for the discharge of by the communication of the Spirit to him in all fullness; that which all other priesthoods were removed to make way for, must needs be sufficient and effectual for all the ends to which it is designed. It may be said, "This is that which all men, all who are called Christians do fully consent in the ministry of Jesus Christ." But if it be so, why do we hear the bleating of another sort of cattle? What mean those other priests, and reiterated sacrifices, which make up the worship of the church of Rome? If they rest in the ministry of Christ, why do they appoint one of their own to do the same things that he has done, namely, to offer sacrifice to God?

The Proof of the Assertion

Secondly, the proof of this assertion lies in the latter part of these words: "By how much he is the mediator of a better covenant, established on better promises." The words are so disposed, that some think the apostle intends now to prove the excellence of the covenant from the excellence of his ministry in that respect. But the other sense is more suited to the compass of the place, and the nature of the argument with which the apostle presses the Hebrews. For on supposition that there was indeed another, and that a "better covenant," to be introduced and established, than that which the Levitical priests served in, which they could not deny, it plainly follows, that he on whose ministry the dispensation of that covenant did depend must of necessity be "more excellent" in that ministry than they who appertained to that covenant which was to be abolished. However, it may be granted that these things do mutually testify to and illustrate one another. Such as the priest is, such is the covenant; such as the covenant is in dignity, such is the priest also.

In the words there are three things observable: 1. What is in general ascribed to Christ, declaring the nature of his ministry—he was a "mediator;" 2. The determination

of his mediatory office to the new covenant—"of a better covenant;" 3. The proof or demonstration of the nature of this covenant as to its excellence, it was "established on better promises."

The Office of Mediator

His office is that of a mediator, μεσίτης, one that interposed between God and man, for the doing of all those things in accordance with which a covenant might be established between them, and made effectual. Schlichtingius⁵ on the place gives this description of a mediator: "Being a mediator is nothing other than being the negotiator of God and the go-between in settling (his) covenant with men; through whom, in other words, both, God might disclose his (own) will to men, and they, in turn, might agree with God, and having been reconciled with him, they might experience peace for the future..."⁶ And Grotius speaks much to the same purpose.

But this description of a mediator is wholly applicable to Moses, and suited to his office in giving of the law. See Exod. 20:19; Deut. 5:27, 28. What is said by them does indeed immediately belong to the mediatory office of Christ, but it is not confined to that; yea, it is exclusive of the principal parts of his mediation. And although there is nothing in it but what belongs to the prophetic office of Christ, which the apostle here does not principally intend, it is most improperly applied as a description of such a mediator as he does intend. And therefore, when he comes afterwards to declare in particular what belonged to such a mediator of the covenant as he designed, he expressly places it in his "death for the redemption of transgressions," chap. 9:15; affirming that "for that cause he was a mediator." But of this there is nothing at all in the description they give us of this office. But this the apostle does in his writings elsewhere, 1 Tim. 2:5, 6, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all." The principal part of his mediation consisted in the "giving himself a ransom," or a price of redemption for the whole church. On that ground this description of a mediator of the new testament is pretended only, to exclude his satisfaction, or his offering himself to God in his death and blood-shedding, with the atonement made by that means.

The Lord Christ, then, in his ministry, is called μεσίτης, the "mediator" of the covenant, in the same sense as he is called ἑγγυος, the "surety," of which see the exposition on chap. 7:22. He is, in the new covenant, the mediator, the surety, the priest, the sacrifice, all in his own person. The ignorance and lack of a due consideration of this are the great evidence of the degeneracy of Christian religion.

Although this is the first general notion of the office of Christ, that which comprises the whole ministry committed to him, and contains in itself the especial offices of king,

⁵ [Jonas Schlichtingius, a Socinian author. His works form one volume in the "Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum".]

⁶ *Mediatorem foederis esse nihil aliud est, quam Dei esse interpretem, et internuntium in foedere cum hominibus pangendo; per quem scilicet et Deus voluntatem suam hominibus declaret, et illi vicissim divinae voluntatis notitiâ instructi ad Deum accedant, cumque eo reconciliati, pacem in posterum colant.*

priest, and prophet, in accordance with which he discharges his mediation, some things must be mentioned that are declarative of its nature and use. And we may to this purpose observe,

(1.) That to the office of a mediator it is required that there be different persons concerned in the covenant, and that, by their own wills; as it must be in every compact,⁷ of whatsoever sort. So says our apostle, "A mediator is not of one, but God is one," Gal. 3:20; that is, if there were none but God concerned in this matter, as it is in an absolute promise or sovereign precept, there would be no need of, no place for a mediator, such a mediator as Christ is. To that end our consent in and to the covenant is required in the very notion of a mediator.

(2.) That the persons entering into covenant be in such a state and condition as that it is no way convenient or morally possible that they should treat immediately with each other as to the ends of the covenant; for if they are so, a mediator to go between is altogether needless. So was it in the original covenant with Adam, which had no mediator. But in the giving of the law, which was to be a covenant between God and the people, they found themselves utterly insufficient for an immediate treaty with God, and therefore desired that they might have an internuncio to go between God and them, to bring his proposals, and carry back their consent, Deut. 5:23-27. And this is the voice of all men really convinced of the holiness of God, and of their own condition. Such is the state between God and sinners. The law and the curse of it did so interpose between them, that they could not enter into any immediate treaty with God, Psa. 5:3-5. This made a mediator necessary, that the new covenant might be established; of which we will speak afterwards.

(3.) That he who is this mediator be accepted, trusted, and rested in on either sides of the parties mutually entering into covenant. An absolute trust must be reposed in him, so that each party may be everlastingly obliged in what he undertakes on their behalf; and such as admit not of his terms, can have no benefit by, no interest in the covenant. So was it with the Lord Christ in this matter. On the part of God, he reposed the whole trust of all the concernments of the covenant in him, and absolutely rested in that respect. "Behold," says he of him, "my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delights," or is "well pleased," ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα, Isa. 42:1; Matt. 3:17. When he undertook this office, and said, "Lo, I come to do your will, O God," the soul of God rested in him, Exod. 23:21; John 5:20-22. And to him he gives an account at last of his discharge of this thing, John 17:4. And on our part, unless we resign ourselves absolutely to a universal trust in him and reliance on him, and unless we accept of all the terms of the covenant as by him proposed, and engage to stand to all that he has undertaken on our behalf, we can have neither share nor interest in this matter.

(4.) A mediator must be a middle person between both parties entering into covenant; and if they be of different natures, a perfect, complete mediator ought to partake of each of their natures in the same person. The necessity of this, and the

⁷ [Covenant.]

glorious wisdom of God in this, I have elsewhere at large demonstrated, and will not therefore here again insist on it.

(5.) A mediator must be one who voluntarily and of his own accord undertakes the work of mediation. This is required of every one who will effectually mediate between any persons at variance, to bring them to an agreement on equal terms. So it was required that the will and consent of Christ should concur in his reception of this office; and that they did so, himself expressly testifies, Heb. 10:5-10. It is true, he was designed and appointed by the Father to this office; by reason of this he is called his "servant," and constantly witnesses of himself, that he came to do the will and commandment of him that sent him: but he had that to do in the discharge of this office, which could not, according to any rule of divine righteousness, be imposed on him without his own voluntary consent. And this was the ground of the eternal compact that was between the Father and the Son, with respect to his mediation, which I have elsewhere explained. And the testification⁸ of his own will, grace, and love, in the reception of this office, is a principal motive to that faith and trust which the church places in him, as the mediator between God and them. On this his voluntary undertaking does the soul of God rest in him, and he reposes the whole trust in him of accomplishing his will and pleasure, or the design of his love and grace in this covenant, Isa. 53:10-12. And the faith of the church, on what salvation does depend, must have love to his person inseparably accompanying it. Love to Christ is no less necessary to salvation, than faith in him. And as faith is resolved into the sovereign wisdom and grace of God in sending him, and his own ability to save to the uttermost those that come to God by him; so love arises from the consideration of his own love and grace in his voluntary undertaking of this office, and the discharge of it.

(6.) In this voluntary undertaking to be a mediator, two things were required:

[1.] That he should remove and take out of the way whatever kept the covenanters at a distance, or was a cause of enmity between them. For it is supposed that such an enmity there was, or there had been no need of a mediator. Therefore in the covenant made with Adam, there having been no variance between God and man, nor any distance but what necessarily ensued from the distinct natures of the Creator and a creature, there was no mediator. But the design of this covenant was to make reconciliation and peace. On this therefore depended the necessity of satisfaction, redemption, and the making of atonement by sacrifice. For man having sinned and apostatized from the rule of God, making himself by that means subject to his wrath, according to the eternal rule of righteousness, and in particular to the curse of the law, there could be no new peace and agreement made with God unless due satisfaction were made for these things. For although God was willing, in infinite love, grace, and mercy, to enter into a new covenant with fallen man, yet would he not do it to the prejudice of his righteousness, the dishonor of his rule, and the contempt of his law. To that end none could undertake to be a mediator of this covenant, but he that was able to satisfy the justice of God, glorify his government, and fulfill the law. And this could be

⁸ [The action or an act of testifying; the testimony borne.]

done by none but him, concerning whom it might be said that "God purchased his church with his own blood."

[2.] That he should procure and purchase, in a way suited to the glory of God, the actual communication of all the good things prepared and proposed in this covenant; that is, grace and glory, with all that belong to them, for them and on their behalf whose surety he was. And this is the foundation of the merit of Christ, and of the grant of all good things to us for his sake.

(7.) It is required of this mediator, as such, that he give assurance to and undertake for the parties mutually concerned, as to the accomplishment of the terms of the covenant, undertaking on each hand for them:

[1.] On the part of God towards men, that they will have peace and acceptance with him, in the sure accomplishment of all the promises of the covenant. This he does only declaratively, in the doctrine of the gospel, and in the institution of the ordinances of evangelical worship. For he was not a surety for God, nor did God need any, having confirmed his promise with an oath, swearing by himself, because he had no greater to swear by.

[2.] On our part, he undertakes to God for our acceptance of the terms of the covenant, and our accomplishment of them, by his enabling us to that.

Seventh Practical Observation

These things, among others, were necessary to a full and complete mediator of the new covenant, such as Christ was. And the provision of this mediator between God and man was an outworking of infinite wisdom and grace; yea, it was the greatest and most glorious external accomplishment of them that ever they did produce, or ever will do in this world. The creation of all things at first out of nothing was a glorious work of infinite wisdom and power; but when the glory of that design was eclipsed by the entrance of sin, this provision of a mediator, one in accordance with which all things were restored and retrieved to a condition of bringing more glory to God, and securing for ever the blessed estate of them whose mediator he is, is accompanied with more evidences of the divine excellencies than that was. See Eph. 1:10.

Further Description of His Mediatory Office

Two things are added in the description of this mediator: (1.) That he was a mediator of a covenant; (2.) That this covenant was better than another which respect is had to, of which he was not the mediator:

(1.) He was the mediator of a "covenant." And two things are supposed in this:

[1.] That there was a covenant made or prepared between God and man; that is, it was so far made, as that God who made it had prepared the terms of it in a sovereign act of wisdom and grace. The preparation of the covenant, consisting in the will and purpose of God graciously to bestow on all men the good things which are contained in

it, all things belonging to grace and glory, as also to make way for the obedience which he required in this, is supposed to the constitution of this covenant.

[2.] That there was need of a mediator, that this covenant might be effectual to its proper ends, of the glory of God and the obedience of mankind, with their reward. This was not necessary from the nature of a covenant in general; for a covenant may be made and entered into between different parties without any mediator, merely on the equity of the terms of it. Nor was it so from the nature of a covenant between God and man, as man was at first created of God; for the first covenant between them was immediate, without the interposition of a mediator. But it became necessary from the state and condition of them with whom this covenant was made, and the especial nature of this covenant. This the apostle declares, Rom. 8:3, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." The law was the moral instrument or rule of the covenant that was made immediately between God and man: but it could not continue to be so after the entrance of sin; that is, so as that God might be glorified by that means, in the obedience and reward of men. To that end he "sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh;" that is, provided a mediator for a new covenant. The persons with whom this covenant was to be made being all of them sinners, and apostatized from God, it became not the holiness or righteousness of God to treat immediately with them any more. Nor would it have answered his holy ends so to have done. For if when they were in a condition of uprightness and integrity, they kept not the terms of that covenant which was made immediately with them, without a mediator, although they were holy, just, good, and equal; how much less could any such thing be expected from them in their depraved condition of apostasy from God and enmity against him! It therefore became not the wisdom of God to enter anew into covenant with mankind, without security that the terms of the covenant should be accepted, and the grace of it made effectual. This we could not give; yea, we gave all evidences possible to the contrary, in that "GOD saw that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually," Gen. 6:5. To that end it was necessary there should be a mediator, to be the surety of this covenant. Again, the covenant itself was so prepared, in the counsel, wisdom, and grace of God, as that the principal, yea, indeed, all the benefits of it, were to depend on what was to be done by a mediator, and could not otherwise be accomplished. Such were satisfaction for sin, and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness; which are the foundation of this covenant.

(2.) To proceed with the text; this covenant, of which the Lord Christ is the mediator, is said to be a "better covenant." To that end it is supposed that there was another covenant, of which the Lord Christ was not the mediator. And in the following verses there are two covenants, a first and a latter, an old and a new, compared together. We must therefore consider what was that other covenant, of which this is said to be better; for on the definition of it depends the right understanding of the whole ensuing discourse of the apostle. And because this is a subject wrapped up in much obscurity, and attended with many difficulties, it will be necessary that we use the best of our diligence, both in the investigation of the truth and in the declaration of it, so as that it

may be distinctly understood. And I will first explain the text, and then speak of the difficulties which arise from it:

[1.] There was an original covenant made with Adam, and all mankind in him. The rule of obedience and reward that was between God and him was not expressly called a covenant, but it contained the express nature of a covenant; for it was the agreement of God and man concerning obedience and disobedience, rewards and punishments. Where there is a law concerning these things, and an agreement on it by all parties concerned, there is a formal covenant. To that end it may be considered two ways:

1st. As it was a law only; so it proceeded from, and was a consequent of the nature of God and man, with their mutual relation to one another. God being considered as the creator, governor, and benefactor of man; and man as an intellectual creature, capable of moral obedience; this law was necessary, and is eternally indispensable.

2dly. As it was a covenant; and this depended on the will and pleasure of God. I will not dispute whether God might have given a law to men that should have had nothing in it of a covenant, properly so called; as is the law of creation to all other creatures, which has no rewards nor punishments annexed to it. Yet God calls this a covenant also, inasmuch as it is an accomplishment of his purpose, his unalterable will and pleasure, Jer. 33:20-21. But that this law of our obedience should be a formal, complete covenant, there were moreover some things required on the part of God, and some also on the part of man. Two things were required on the part of God to complete this covenant, or he did so complete it by two things:

(1st.) By annexing to it promises and threats of reward and punishment; the first of grace, the other of justice. (2dly.) The expression of these promises and threats in external signs; the first in the tree of life, the latter in that of the knowledge of good and evil. By these God did establish the original law of creation as a covenant, gave it the nature of a covenant. On the part of man, it was required that he accept of this law as the rule of the covenant which God made with him. And this he did in two ways:

[1st.] By the innate principles of light and obedience co-created with his nature. By these he absolutely and universally assented to the law, as proposed with promises and threats, as holy, just, good, what was fit for God to require, what was equal and good to himself.

[2dly.] By his acceptance of the commands concerning the tree of life, and that of the knowledge of good and evil, as the signs and pledges of this covenant. So it was established as a covenant between God and man, without the interposition of any mediator.

This is the covenant of works, absolutely the old, or first covenant that God made with men. But this is not the covenant here intended; for,

1st. The covenant called afterwards "the first," was διαθήκη, a "testament." So it is here called. It was such a covenant as was a testament also. Now there can be no testament, but there must be death for the confirmation of it, Heb. 9:16. But in the making of the covenant with Adam, there was not the death of any thing, from what cause it might be called a testament. But there was the death of beasts in sacrifice in the confirmation of the covenant at Sinai, as we will see afterwards. And it must be

observed, that although I use the name of a "covenant," as we have rendered the word διαθήκη, because the true signification of that word will be more properly presented to us in another place, yet I do not understand by that means a covenant properly and strictly so called, but such a one as has the nature of a testament also, in which the good things of him that makes it are bequeathed to them for whom they are designed. Neither the word used constantly by the apostle in this argument, nor the design of his discourse, will admit of any other covenant to be understood in this place. Although, therefore, the first covenant made with Adam was in no sense a testament also, it cannot be here intended.

2dly. That first covenant made with Adam, had, as to any benefit to be expected from it, with respect to acceptance with God, life, and salvation, ceased long before, even at the entrance of sin. It was not abolished or abrogated by any act of God, as a law, but only was made weak and insufficient to its first end, as a covenant. God had provided a way for the salvation of sinners, declared in the first promise. When this is actually embraced, that first covenant ceases towards them, as to its curse, in all its concerns as a covenant, and obligation to sinless obedience as the condition of life; because both of them are answered by the mediator of the new covenant. But as to all those who receive not the grace tendered in the promise, it does remain in full force and efficacy, not as a covenant, but as a law; and that because neither the obedience it requires nor the curse which it threatens is answered. Therefore, if any man believes not, "the wrath of God abides on him." For its commands and curse depending on the necessary relation between God and man, with the righteousness of God as the supreme governor of mankind, they must be answered and fulfilled. To that end it was never abrogated formally. But as all unbelievers are still obliged by it, and to it must stand or fall, so it is perfectly fulfilled in all believers, not in their own persons, but in the person of their surety. "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us," Rom. 8:3, 4. But as a covenant, obliging to personal, perfect, sinless obedience, as the condition of life, to be performed by them, so it ceased to be, long before the introduction of the new covenant which the apostle speaks of, that was promised "in the latter days." But the other covenant here spoken of was not removed or taken away, until this new covenant was actually established.

3dly. The church of Israel was never absolutely under the power of that covenant as a covenant of life; for from the days of Abraham, the promise was given to them and their seed. And the apostle proves that no law could afterwards be given, or covenant made, that should disannul that promise, Gal. 3:17. But had they been brought under the old covenant of works, it would have disannulled the promise; for that covenant and the promise are diametrically opposite. And moreover, if they were under that covenant, they were all under the curse, and so perished eternally: which is openly false; for it is testified of them that they pleased God by faith, and so were saved. But it is evident that the covenant intended was a covenant in which the church of Israel walked with God, until such time as this better covenant was solemnly introduced. This is plainly declared in the following context, especially in the close of the chapter, where,

speaking of this former covenant, he says, it was “become old,” and so “ready to disappear.” To that end it is not the covenant of works made with Adam that is intended, when this other is said to be a “better covenant.”

[2.] There were other federal transactions between God and the church before the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. Two of them there were into which all the rest were resolved:

1st. The first promise given to our first parents immediately after the Fall. This had in it the nature of a covenant, grounded on a promise of grace, and requiring obedience in all that received the promise.

2dly. The promise given and sworn to Abraham, which is expressly called the covenant of God, and had the whole nature of a covenant in it, with a solemn outward seal appointed for its confirmation and establishment. Of this we have treated at large on the sixth chapter.

Neither of these, nor any transaction between God and man that may be reduced to them as explanations, renovations, or confirmations of them, is the “first covenant” here intended. For they are not only consistent with the “new covenant” so as that there was no necessity to remove them out of the way for its introduction, but did indeed contain in them the essence and nature of it, and so were confirmed in that respect. Therefore the Lord Christ himself is said to be “a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers,” Rom. 15:8. As he was the mediator of the new covenant, he was so far from taking off from, or abolishing those promises, that it belonged to his office to confirm them. To that end,

[3.] The other covenant or testament here supposed, to which that of which the Lord Christ was the mediator is preferred, is none other but that which God made with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. So it is expressly affirmed, verse 9: “The covenant which I made with your fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.” This was that covenant which had all the institutions of worship annexed to it, Heb. 9:1-3; of which we must treat afterwards more at large. With respect to this it is that the Lord Christ is said to be the “mediator of a better covenant,” that is, of another distinct from it, and more excellent.

It remains to the exposition of the words that we inquire what this covenant was of which our Lord Christ was the mediator, and what is here affirmed of it.

Of What Covenant Was Christ the Mediator?

This can be no other in general but that which we call “the covenant of grace.” And it is so called in opposition to that of “works” which was made with us in Adam; for these two, grace and works, do divide the ways of our relation to God, being diametrically opposite, and every way inconsistent, Rom. 11:6. Of this covenant the Lord Christ was the mediator from the foundation of the world, namely, from the giving of the first promise, Revelation 13:8; for it was given on his interposition, and all the benefits of it depended on his future actual mediation.

Difficulties of the Context Answered

But here arises the first difficulty of the context and that in two things; for,

[1.] If this covenant of grace was made from the beginning, and if the Lord Christ was the mediator of it from the first, then where is the privilege of the gospel-state in opposition to the law, by virtue of this covenant, seeing that under the law also the Lord Christ was the mediator of that covenant, which was from the beginning?

[2.] If it be the covenant of grace which is intended, and that be opposed to the covenant of works made with Adam, then the other covenant must be that covenant of works so made with Adam, which we have before disproved.

The answer to this is in the word here used by the apostle concerning this new covenant: *νενομοθέτηται*, of which meaning we must inquire into. I say, therefore, that the apostle does not here consider the new covenant absolutely, and as it was virtually administered from the foundation of the world, in the way of a promise; for as such it was consistent with that covenant made with the people in Sinai. And the apostle proves expressly, that the renovation of it made to Abraham was no way abrogated by the giving of the law, Gal. 3:17. There was no interruption of its administration made by the introduction of the law. But he treats of such an establishment of the new covenant as by which the old covenant made at Sinai was absolutely inconsistent, and which was therefore to be removed out of the way. To that end he considers it here as it was actually completed, so as to bring along with it all the ordinances of worship which are proper to it, the dispensation of the Spirit in them, and all the spiritual privileges by which they are accompanied. It is now so brought in as to become the entire rule of the church's faith, obedience, and worship, in all things.

This is the meaning of the word *νενομοθέτηται*, "established," say we; but it is, "reduced into a fixed state of a law or ordinance." All the obedience required in it, all the worship appointed by it, all the privileges exhibited in it, and the grace administered with them, are all given for a statute, law, and ordinance to the church. That which before lay hid in promises, in many things obscure, the principal mysteries of it being a secret hid in God himself, was now brought to light; and that covenant which had invisibly, in the way of a promise, put forth its efficacy under types and shadows, was now solemnly sealed, ratified, and confirmed, in the death and resurrection of Christ. It had before the confirmation of a promise, which is an oath; it had now the confirmation of a covenant, which is blood. That which before had no visible, outward worship, proper and peculiar to it, is now made the only rule and instrument of worship to the whole church, nothing being to be admitted in that respect but what belongs to it, and is appointed by it. The apostle intends this by *νενομοθέτηται*, the "legal establishment" of the new covenant, with all the ordinances of its worship. On this the other covenant was disannulled and removed; and not only the covenant itself, but all that system of sacred worship in accordance with which it was administered. This was not done by the making of the covenant at first; yea, all this was added into the covenant as given out in a promise, and was consistent with that. When the new covenant was given out only in the way of a promise, it did not introduce

worship and privileges expressive of it. To that end it was consistent with a form of worship, rites and ceremonies, and those composed into a yoke of bondage which belonged not to it. And as these, being added after its giving, did not overthrow its nature as a promise, so they were inconsistent with it when it was completed as a covenant; for then all the worship of the church was to proceed from it, and to be conformed to it. Then it was established. Therefore it follows, in answer to the second difficulty, that as a promise, it was opposed to the covenant of works; as a covenant, it was opposed to that of Sinai. This legalizing or authoritative establishment of the new covenant, and the worship to that belonging, accomplished this alteration.

The Proof of the Nature of this Covenant as to its Excellence

In the last place, the apostle tells us on what this establishment was made; and that is ἐπικρέιττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις, "on better promises." For the better understanding of this we must consider somewhat of the original and use of divine promises in our relation to God. And we may observe,

Every Covenant Established on Promises

That every covenant between God and man must be founded on and resolved into "promises." Therefore essentially a promise and a covenant are all one; and God calls an absolute promise, founded on an absolute decree, his covenant, Gen. 9:11. And his purpose for the continuation of the course of nature to the end of the world, he calls his covenant with day and night, Jer. 33:20. The being and essence of a divine covenant lies in the promise. Therefore they are called "the covenants of promise", Eph. 2:12; such as are founded on and consist in promises. And it is necessary that so it should be. For,

[1.] The nature of God who makes these covenants requires that it should be so. It becomes his greatness and goodness, in all his voluntary transactions with his creatures, to propose that to them in which their advantage, their happiness and blessedness, does consist. We inquire not how God may deal with his creatures as such; what he may absolutely require of them, on the account of his own being, his absolute essential excellencies, with their universal dependence on him. Who can express or limit the sovereignty of God over his creatures? All the disputes about it are fond. We have no measures of what is infinite. May he not do with his own what he pleases? Are we not in his hands, as clay in the hands of the potter? And whether he make or mar a vessel, who will say to him, What are you doing? He gives no account of his matters. But on supposition that he will condescend to enter into covenant with his creatures, and to come to agreement with them according to the terms of it, it becomes his greatness and goodness to give them promises as the foundation of it, in which he proposes to them the things in which their blessedness and reward do consist. For, 1st. In this he proposes himself to them as the eternal spring and fountain of all power and goodness. Had he treated with us merely by a law, he had in that respect only revealed his sovereign authority and holiness; the one in giving of the law, the other in the nature of it. But in

promises he reveals himself as the eternal spring of goodness and power; for the matter of all promises is somewhat that is good; and the communication of it depends on sovereign power. That God should so declare himself in his covenant was absolutely necessary to direct and encourage the obedience of the covenanters; and he did so accordingly, Gen. 15:1, 17:1, 2. 2dly. By this means he reserves the glory of the whole to himself. For although the terms of agreement which he proposes between himself and us be in their own nature "holy, just, and good," which sets forth his praise and glory, yet if there were not something on his part which has no antecedent respect to any goodness, obedience, or merit in us, we should have in which to glory in ourselves; which is inconsistent with the glory of God. But the matter of those promises in which the covenant is founded is free, undeserved, and without respect to any thing in us in accordance with which it may in any sense be procured. And so in the first covenant, which was given in a form of law, attended with a penal sanction, yet the foundation of it was in a promise of a free and undeserved reward, even of the eternal enjoyment of God: which no goodness or obedience in the creature could possibly merit the attainment of. So that if a man should by virtue of any covenant be justified by works, though he might have of which to glory before men, yet could he not glory before God, as the apostle declares, Rom. 4:2; and that because the reward proposed in the promise does infinitely exceed the obedience performed.

[2.] It was also necessary on our part that every divine covenant should be founded and established on promises; for there is no state in which we may be taken into covenant with God, but it is supposed we are not yet arrived at that perfection and blessedness of which our nature is capable, and which we cannot but desire. And therefore when we come to heaven, and the full enjoyment of God, there will be no use of any covenant any more, seeing we will be in eternal rest, in the enjoyment of all the blessedness of which our nature is capable, and will immutably adhere to God without any further expectation. But while we are in the way, we have still somewhat, yea principal parts of our blessedness, to desire, expect, and believe. So in the state of innocence, though it had all the perfection which a state of obedience according to a law was capable of, yet the blessedness of eternal rest, for which we were made, did not consist in that respect. Now, while it is thus with us, we cannot but desire and look out after that full and complete happiness, which our nature cannot come to rest without. This, therefore, renders it necessary that there should be a promise of it given as the foundation of the covenant; without which we should lack our principal encouragement to obedience. And much more must it be so in the state of sin and apostasy from God; for we are now not only most remote from our utmost happiness, but involved in a condition of misery, without a deliverance from which we cannot be in any way induced to give ourselves up to covenant obedience. To that end, unless we are prevented in the covenant with promises of deliverance from our present state, and the enjoyment of future blessedness, no covenant could be of use or advantage to us.

[3.] It is necessary from the nature of a covenant. For every covenant that is proposed to men, and accepted by them, requires somewhat to be performed on their part, otherwise it is no covenant; but where any thing is required of them that accept of

the covenant, or to whom it is proposed, it does suppose that somewhat be promised on the behalf of them by whom the covenant is proposed, as the foundation of its acceptance, and the reason of the duties required in it.

All this appears most evidently in the covenant of grace, which is here said to be “established on promises” and that on two accounts. For,

[4.] At the same time that much is required of us in the way of duty and obedience, we are told in the Scripture, and find it by experience, that of ourselves we can do nothing. To that end, unless the precept of the covenant is founded in a promise of giving grace and spiritual strength to us, in accordance with which we may be enabled to perform those duties, the covenant can be of no benefit or advantage to us. And the lack of this one consideration, that every covenant is founded in promises, and that the promises give life to the precepts of it, has perverted the minds of many to suppose ability in ourselves of yielding obedience to those precepts, without grace antecedently received to enable us to that; which overthrows the nature of the new covenant.

[5.] As was observed, we are all actually guilty of sin before this covenant was made with us. To that end unless there be a promise given of the pardon of sin, it is to no purpose to propose any new covenant terms to us. For “the wages of sin is death” and we having sinned must die, whatever we do afterwards, unless our sins be pardoned. This, therefore, must be proposed to us as the foundation of the covenant, or it will be of no effect. And in this lies the great difference between the promises of the covenant of works and those of the covenant of grace. The first were only concerning things future; eternal life and blessedness on the accomplishment of perfect obedience. Promises of present mercy and pardon it stood in need of none, it was not capable of. Nor had it any promises of giving more grace or supplies of it; but man was wholly left to what he had at first received. Therefore the covenant was broken. But in the covenant of grace all things are founded in promises of present mercy, and continual supplies of grace, as well as of future blessedness. Therefore it comes to be “ordered in all things, and sure.”

And this is the first thing that was to be declared, namely, that every divine covenant is established on promises.

The New Covenant is Established on Better Promises

These promises are said to be “better promises.” The other covenant had its promises peculiar to it, with respect to which this is said to be “established on better promises.” It was, indeed, principally represented under a system of precepts, and those almost innumerable; but it had its promises also, into the nature of which we will immediately inquire. With respect, therefore, to them is the new covenant, of which the Lord Christ is the mediator, said to be “established on better promises.” That it should be founded in promises was necessary from its general nature as a covenant, and more necessary from its especial nature as a covenant of grace. That these promises are said to be “better promises” respects those of the old covenant. But this is so said as to include all other degrees of comparison. They are not only better than they, but they are positively good in themselves, and absolutely the best that God ever gave, or will give to the

church. And what they are we must consider in our progress. And various things may be observed from these words.

Eighth Practical Observation

There is infinite grace in every divine covenant, inasmuch as it is established on promises. Infinite condescension it is in God that he will enter into covenant with dust and ashes, with poor worms of the earth. And in this lies the spring of all grace, from out of which all the streams of it do flow. And the first expression of it is in laying the foundation of it in some undeserved promises. And this was that which became the goodness and greatness of his nature, the means in accordance with which we are brought to adhere to him in faith, hope, trust, and obedience, until we come to the enjoyment of him; for that is the use of promises, to keep us in adherence to God, as the first original and spring of all goodness, and the ultimate satisfactory reward of our souls, 2 Cor. 7:1.

Ninth Practical Observation

The promises of the covenant of grace are better than those of any other covenant, as for many other reasons, so especially because the grace of them prevents any condition or qualification on our part. I do not say the covenant of grace is absolutely without conditions, if by conditions we intend the duties of obedience which God requires of us in and by virtue of that covenant; but this I say, the principal promises of it are not in the first place remunerative of our obedience in the covenant, but efficaciously assumptive of us into covenant, and establishing or confirming in the covenant. The covenant of works had its promises, but they were all remunerative, respecting an antecedent obedience in us; (so were all those which were peculiar to the covenant of Sinai). They were, indeed, also of grace, in that the reward did infinitely exceed the merit of our obedience; but yet they all supposed it, and the subject of them was formally reward only. In the covenant of grace it is not so; for several of the promises of it are the means of our being taken into covenant, of our entering into covenant with God. The first covenant absolutely was established on promises, in that when men were actually taken into it, they were encouraged to obedience by the promises of a future reward. But those promises, namely, of the pardon of sin and writing of the law in our hearts, on which the apostle expressly insists as the peculiar promises of this covenant, do take place and are effectual antecedently to our covenant obedience. For although faith be required in order of nature antecedently to our actual receiving of the pardon of sin, yet is that faith itself produced in us by the grace of the promise, and so its precedence to pardon respects only the order that God had appointed in the communication of the benefits of the covenant, and intends not that the pardon of sin is the reward of our faith.

A Discourse of Some Things in General

This entrance has the apostle made into his discourse of the two covenants, which he continues to the end of the chapter. But the whole is not without its difficulties. Many things in particular will occur to us in our progress, which may be considered in their proper places. In the meantime there are some things in general which may be here discoursed, by whose determination much light will be communicated to what does follow.

A Dispute Concerning Two Covenants

First, therefore, the apostle does evidently in this place dispute concerning two covenants, or two testaments, comparing the one with the other, and declaring the disannulling of the one by the introduction and establishment of the other. What are these two covenants in general we have declared, namely, that made with the church of Israel at Mount Sinai, and that made with us in the gospel; not as absolutely the covenant of grace, but as actually established in the death of Christ, with all the worship that belongs to it.

Here then arises a difference of no small importance, namely, whether these are indeed two distinct covenants, as to the essence and substance of them, or only different ways of the dispensation and administration of the same covenant. And the reason of the difficulty lies in this: We must grant one of these three things: 1. That either the covenant of grace was in force under the old testament; or, 2. That the church was saved without it, or any benefit by Jesus Christ, who is the mediator of it alone; or, 3. That they all perished everlastingly. And neither of the two latter can be admitted.

Some, indeed, in these latter days, have revived the old Pelagian imagination, that before the law men were saved by the conduct of natural light and reason; and under the law by the directive doctrines, precepts, and sacrifices of it, without any respect to the Lord Christ or his mediation in another covenant. But I will not here contend with them, as having elsewhere sufficiently refuted these imaginations. To that end I will take it here for granted, that no man was ever saved but by virtue of the new covenant, and the mediation of Christ in that respect.

Suppose, then, that this new covenant of grace was extant and effectual under the old testament, so as the church was saved by virtue of it, and the mediation of Christ in that respect, how could it be that there should at the same time be another covenant between God and them, of a different nature from this, accompanied with other promises, and other effects?

On this consideration it is said, that the two covenants mentioned, the new and the old, were not indeed two distinct covenants, as to their essence and substance, but only different administrations of the same covenant, called two covenants from some different outward solemnities and duties of worship attending of them. To clear this it must be observed,

1. That by the old covenant, the original covenant of works, made with Adam and all mankind in him, is not intended; for this is undoubtedly a covenant different in the essence and substance of it from the new.

2. By the new covenant, not the new covenant absolutely and originally, as given in the first promise, is intended; but in its complete gospel administration, when it was actually established by the death of Christ, as administered in and by the ordinances of the new testament. This, with the covenant of Sinai, would be, as most say, but different administrations of the same covenant.

But on the other hand, there is such express mention made, not only in this, but in various other places of the Scripture also, of two distinct covenants, or testaments, and such different natures, properties, and effects, ascribed to them, as seem to constitute two distinct covenants. This, therefore, we must inquire into; and will first declare what is agreed to by those who are sober in this matter, though they differ in their judgments about this question, whether two distinct covenants, or only a twofold administration of the same covenant, be intended. And indeed there is so much agreed on, as that what remains seems rather to be a difference about the expression of the same truth, than any real contradiction about the things themselves. For,

Four Agreements about the Two Administrations

1. It is agreed that the way of reconciliation with God, of justification and salvation, was always one and the same; and that from the giving of the first promise none was ever justified or saved but by the new covenant, and Jesus Christ, the mediator of it. The foolish imagination before mentioned, that men were saved before the giving of the law by following the guidance of the light of nature, and after the giving of the law by obedience to the directions of it, is rejected by all that are sober, as destructive of the Old Testament and the New.

2. That the writings of the Old Testament, namely, the Law, Psalms, and Prophets, do contain and declare the doctrine of justification and salvation by Christ. The church of old believed this, and walked with God in the faith of it. This is undeniably proved, in that the doctrine mentioned is frequently confirmed in the New Testament by testimonies taken out of the Old.

3. That by the covenant of Sinai, as properly so called, separated from its figurative relation to the covenant of grace, none was ever eternally saved.

4. That the use of all the institutions in accordance with which the old covenant was administered, was to represent and direct to Jesus Christ, and his mediation.

These things being granted, the only way of life and salvation by Jesus Christ, under the old testament and the new, is secured; which is the substance of the truth in which we are now concerned. On these grounds we may proceed with our inquiry.

The Judgment of Most Reformed Divines

The judgment of most Reformed divines is, that the church under the old testament had the same promise of Christ, the same interest in him by faith, remission of sins, reconciliation with God, justification and salvation by the same way and means, that believers have under the new. And although the essence and the substance of the covenant consist in these things, they are not to be said to be under another covenant, but only a different administration of it. But this was so different from that which is established in the gospel after the coming of Christ, that it has the appearance and name of another covenant. And the difference between these two administrations may be reduced to the ensuing heads.

Five Differences Between The Two Administrations

1. It consisted in the way and manner of the declaration of the mystery of the love and will of God in Christ; of the work of reconciliation and redemption, with our justification by faith. For in this the gospel, in which "life and immortality are brought to light," does in plainness, clearness, and evidence, much excel the administration and declaration of the same truths under the law. And the greatness of the privilege of the church in this is not easily expressed. For by this means "with open face we behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord," and "are changed into the same image," 2 Cor. 3:18. The man whose eyes the Lord Christ opened, Mark 8:23-25, represents these two states. When he first touched him, his eyes were opened, and he saw, but he saw nothing clearly; by reason of which, when he looked, he said, "I see men as trees, walking," verse 24: but on his second touch, he "saw every man clearly," verse 25. They had their sight under the old testament, and the object was proposed to them, but at a great distance, with such an interposition of mists, clouds, and shadows, as that they "saw men like trees, walking," nothing clearly and perfectly: but now under the gospel, the object, which is Christ, being brought near to us, and all clouds and shadows being departed, we do or may see all things clearly. When a traveler in his way on downs or hills is encompassed with a thick mist and fog, though he be in his way yet he is uncertain, and nothing is presented to him in its proper shape and distance; things near seem to be afar off, and things afar off to be near, and every thing has, though not a false, yet an uncertain appearance. Let the sun break forth and scatter the mists and fogs that are about him, and immediately every thing appears quite in another shape to him, so as indeed he is ready to think he is not where he was. His way is plain, he is certain of it and the entire region about lies evident under his eye; yet is there no alteration made but in the removal of the mists and clouds that interrupted his sight. So was it with them under the law. The types and shadows that they were enclosed in, and which were the only medium they had to view spiritual things in, represented them not to them clearly and in their proper shape. But they being now removed, by the rising of the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings, in the dispensation of the gospel, the whole mystery of God in Christ is clearly manifested to them that do believe. And the greatness of this privilege of the gospel above the law is inexpressible; of which, as I suppose, we must speak somewhat afterwards.

2. In the plentiful communication of grace to the community of the church; for now it is that we receive “grace for grace,” or a plentiful effusion of it, by Jesus Christ. There was grace given in an eminent manner to many holy persons under the old testament, and all true believers had true, real, saving grace communicated to them; but the measures of grace in the true church under the new testament do exceed those of the community of the church under the old. And therefore, as God winked at some things under the old testament, as polygamy, and the like, which are expressly and severely interdicted under the new, nor are consistent with the present administrations of it; so are various duties, as those of self-denial, readiness to bear the cross, to forsake houses, lands, and habitations, more expressly enjoined to us than to them. And the obedience which God requires in any covenant, or administration of it, is proportional to the strength which the administration of that covenant does exhibit. And if those who profess the gospel do content themselves without any interest in this privilege of it, if they endeavor not for a share in that plentiful effusion of grace which does accompany its present administration, the gospel itself will be of no other use to them, but to increase and aggravate their condemnation.

3. In the manner of our access to God. In this much of all that is called religion does consist; for on this depends all our outward worship of God. And in this the advantages of the gospel-administration of the covenant above that of the law is in all things very eminent. Our access now to God is immediate, by Jesus Christ, with liberty and boldness, as we will afterwards declare. Those under the law were immediately conversant, in their whole worship, about outward, typical things, the tabernacle, the altar, the ark, the mercy-seat, and the like obscure representations of the presence of God. Besides, the manner of the making of the covenant with them at Mount Sinai filled them with fear, and brought them into bondage, so as they had comparatively a servile frame of spirit in all their holy worship.

4. In the way of worship required under each administration. For under that which was legal, it seemed good to God to appoint a great number of outward rites, ceremonies, and observances; and these, as they were dark in their signification, as also in their use and ends, so were they, by reason of their nature, number, and the severe penalties under which they were enjoined, grievous and burdensome to be observed. But the way of worship under the gospel is spiritual, rational, and plainly subservient to the ends of the covenant itself; so as that the use, ends, benefits and advantages of it are evident to all.

5. In the extent of the dispensation of the grace of God; for this is greatly enlarged under the gospel. For under the old testament it was on the matter confined to the posterity of Abraham according to the flesh; but under the new testament it extends itself to all nations under heaven.

Various other things are usually added by our divines to the same purpose. See Calvin. Institut. lib. 2:cap. xi.; Martyr. Loc. Com. loc. 16, sect. 2; Bucan. loc. 22, etc.

The Lutheran Arguments

The Lutherans, on the other side, insist on two arguments to prove, that not a twofold administration of the same covenant, but that two covenants substantially distinct, are intended in this discourse of the apostle.

1. Because in the Scripture they are often so called, and compared with one another, and sometimes opposed to one another; the first and the last, the new and the old.

2. Because the covenant of grace in Christ is eternal, immutable, always the same, subject to no alteration, no change or abrogation; neither can these things be spoken of it with respect to any administration of it, as they are spoken of the old covenant.

Five Things Concerning This Matter

To state our thoughts aright in this matter, and to give what light we can to the truth, the things ensuing may be observed:

1. When we speak of the "old covenant," we intend not the covenant of works made with Adam, and his whole posterity in him; concerning which there is no difference or difficulty, whether it is a distinct covenant from the new or no.

2. When we speak of the "new covenant," we do not intend the covenant of grace absolutely, as though that were not before in being and efficacy, before the introduction of that which is promised in this place. For it was always the same, as to the substance of it, from the beginning. It passed through the whole dispensation of times before the law, and under the law, of the same nature and efficacy, unalterable, "everlasting, ordered in all things, and sure." All who contend about these things, only except the Socinians, do grant that the covenant of grace, considered absolutely, that is the promise of grace in and by Jesus Christ, was the only way and means of salvation to the church, from the first entrance of sin. But for two reasons it is not expressly called a covenant, without respect to any other things, nor was it so under the old testament. When God renewed the promise of it to Abraham, he is said to make a covenant with him; and he did so, but it was with respect to other things, especially the proceeding of the promised Seed from his loins. But absolutely under the old testament it consisted only in a promise; and as such only is proposed in the Scripture, Acts 2:39; Heb. 6:14-16. The apostle indeed says, that the covenant was confirmed of God in Christ, before the giving of the law, Gal. 3:17. And so it was, not absolutely in itself, but in the promise and benefits of it. The nomoquesi,a, or full legal establishment of it, by reason of which it became formally a covenant to the whole church, was future only, and a promise under the old testament; for it lacked two things to that:

(1.) It lacked its solemn confirmation and establishment, by the blood of the only sacrifice which belonged to it. Before this was done in the death of Christ, it had not the formal nature of a covenant or a testament, as our apostle proves, Heb. 9:15-23. For neither, as he shows in that place, would the law given at Sinai have been a covenant, had it not been confirmed with the blood of sacrifices. To that end the promise was not before a formal and solemn covenant.

(2.) This was lacking, that it was not the spring, rule, and measure of all the worship of the church. This does belong to every covenant, properly so called, that God makes

with the church, which it be the entire rule of all the worship that God requires of it; which is that which they are to stipulate in their entrance into covenant with God. But so the covenant of grace was not under the old testament; for God did require of the church many duties of worship that did not belong to that. But now, under the new testament, this covenant, with its own seals and appointments, is the only rule and measure of all acceptable worship. To that end the new covenant promised in the Scripture, and here opposed to the old, is not the promise of grace, mercy, life, and salvation by Christ, absolutely considered, but as it had the formal nature of a covenant given to it, in its establishment by the death of Christ, the procuring cause of all its benefits, and the declaring of it to be the only rule of worship and obedience to the church. So that although by "the covenant of grace," we oftentimes understand no more but the way of life, grace, mercy, and salvation by Christ; yet by "the new covenant," we intend its actual establishment in the death of Christ, with that blessed way of worship which by it is settled in the church.

3. While the church enjoyed all the spiritual benefits of the promise, in which the substance of the covenant of grace was contained, before it was confirmed and made the sole rule of worship to the church, it was not inconsistent with the holiness and wisdom of God to bring it under any other covenant, or prescribe to it what forms of worship he pleased. It was not so, I say, on these three suppositions:

(1.) That this covenant did not disannul or make ineffectual the promise that was given before, but that that does still continue the only means of life and salvation. And that this was so, our apostle proves at large, Gal. 3:17-19.

(2.) That this other covenant, with all the worship contained in it or required by it, did not divert from, but direct and lead to, the future establishment of the promise in the solemnity of a covenant, by the ways mentioned. And that the covenant made in Sinai, with all its ordinances, did so, the apostle proves likewise in the place before mentioned, as also in this whole epistle.

(3.) That it be of present use and advantage to the church in its present condition. This the apostle acknowledges to be a great objection against the use and efficacy of the promise under the old testament, as to life and salvation; namely, "To what end then serves the giving of the law?" to which he answers, by showing the necessity and use of the law to the church in its then present condition, Gal. 3:17-19.

4. These things being observed, we may consider that the Scripture does plainly and expressly make mention of two testaments, or covenants, and distinguish between them in such a way, as what is spoken can hardly be accommodated to a twofold administration of the same covenant. The one is mentioned and described, Exod. 24:3-8, Deut. 5:2-5, namely, the covenant that God made with the people of Israel in Sinai; and which is commonly called "the covenant," where the people under the old testament are said to keep or break God's covenant; which for the most part is spoken with respect to that worship which was peculiar to that. The other is promised, Jer. 31:31-34, 32:40; which is the new or gospel covenant, as before explained, mentioned Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24. And these two covenants, or testaments, are compared one with the other, and opposed one to another, 2 Cor. 3:6-9; Gal. 4:24-26; Heb. 7:22; 9:15-20.

These two we call “the old and the new testament.” Only it must be observed, that in this argument, by the “old testament,” we do not understand the books of the Old Testament, or the writings of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, or the oracles of God committed then to the church, (I confess they are once so called, 2 Cor. 3:14, “The veil remains untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament,” that is, the books of it; unless we should say, that the apostle intends only the reading of the things which concern the old testament in the Scripture;) for this old covenant, or testament, whatever it be, is abrogated and taken away, as the apostle expressly proves, but the word of God in the books of the Old Testament abides for ever. And those writings are called the Old Testament, or the books of the Old Testament, not as though they contained in them nothing but what belongs to the old covenant, for they contain the doctrine of the New Testament also; but they are so termed because they were committed to the church while the old covenant was in force, as the rule and law of its worship and obedience.

5. To that end we must grant two distinct covenants, rather than a twofold administration of the same covenant merely, to be intended. We must, I say, do so, provided always that the way of reconciliation and salvation was the same under both. But it will be said, and with great pretense of reason, for it is that which is the sole foundation they all build on who allow only a twofold administration of the same covenant, “That this being the principal end of a divine covenant, if the way of reconciliation and salvation be the same under both, then indeed are they for the substance of them but one.” And I grant that this would inevitably follow, if it were so equally by virtue of them both. If reconciliation and salvation by Christ were to be obtained not only under the old covenant, but by virtue of it, then it must be the same for substance with the new. But this is not so; for no reconciliation with God nor salvation could be obtained by virtue of the old covenant, or the administration of it, as our apostle disputes at large, though all believers were reconciled, justified, and saved, by virtue of the promise, while they were under the covenant.

Three Things Related to the First Covenant that Prove that It Was Not an Administration of the Covenant of Grace

As therefore I have showed in what sense the covenant of grace is called “the new covenant,” in this distinction and opposition, so I will propose various things which relate to the nature of the first covenant, which manifest it to have been a distinct covenant, and not a mere administration of the covenant of grace.

First, It Was Not for the Life and Salvation of the Church

This covenant, called “the old covenant,” was never intended to be of itself the absolute rule and law of life and salvation to the church, but was made with a particular design, and with respect to particular ends. This the apostle proves undeniably in this epistle, especially in the chapter foregoing, and those two that follow. Therefore it follows that

it could abrogate or disannul nothing which God at any time before had given as a general rule to the church. For that which is particular cannot abrogate any thing that was general, and before it; as that which is general does abrogate all antecedent particulars, as the new covenant does abrogate the old. And this we must consider in both the instances belonging to this. For,

(1.) God had before given the covenant of works, or perfect obedience, to all mankind, in the law of creation. But this covenant at Sinai did not abrogate or disannul that covenant, nor in any way fulfill it. And the reason is, because it was never intended to come in the place or room of it, as a covenant, containing an entire rule of all the faith and obedience of the whole church. God did not intend in it to abrogate the covenant of works, and to substitute this in the place of it; yea, in various things it re-enforced, established, and confirmed that covenant. For,

[1.] It revived, declared, and expressed all the commands of that covenant in the Decalogue; for that is nothing but a divine summary of the law written in the heart of man at his creation. And in this the dreadful manner of its delivery or promulgation, with its writing in tables of stone, is also to be considered; for in them the nature of that first covenant, with its inexorableness as to perfect obedience, was represented. And because none could answer its demands, or comply with it in that respect, it was called "the ministration of death," causing fear and bondage, 2 Cor. 3:7.

[2.] It revived the sanction of the first covenant, in the curse or sentence of death which it denounced against all transgressors. Death was the penalty of the transgression of the first covenant: "In the day that you eat of it, you will die the death." And this sentence was revived and represented anew in the curse by which this covenant was ratified, "Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of this law to do them," Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10. For the design of God in it was to bind a sense of that curse on the consciences of men, until he came by whom it was taken away, as the apostle declares, Gal. 3:19.

[3.] It revived the promise of that covenant that of eternal life on perfect obedience. So the apostle tells us that Moses thus describes the righteousness of the law, "That the man which does those things will live by them," Rom. 10:5; as he does, Leviticus 18:5.

Now this is no other but the covenant of works revived. Nor had this covenant of Sinai any promise of eternal life annexed to it, as such, but only the promise inseparable from the covenant of works which it revived, saying, "Do this, and live."

Therefore it is, that when our apostle disputes against justification by the law, or by the works of the law, he does not intend the works peculiar to the covenant of Sinai, such as were the rites and ceremonies of the worship then instituted; but he intends also the works of the first covenant, which alone had the promise of life annexed to them.

And therefore it follows also, that it was not a new covenant of works established in the place of the old, for the absolute rule of faith and obedience to the whole church; for then would it have abrogated and taken away that covenant, and all the force of it, which it did not.

(2.) The other instance is in the promise. This also went before it; neither was it abrogated or disannulled by the introduction of this covenant. This promise was given

to our first parents immediately after the entrance of sin, and was established as containing the only way and means of the salvation of sinners. Now, this promise could not be abrogated by the introduction of this covenant, and a new way of justification and salvation be by that means established. For the promise being given out in general for the whole church, as containing the way appointed by God for righteousness, life, and salvation, it could not be disannulled or changed, without a change and alteration in the counsels of Him "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Much less could this be accomplished by a particular covenant, such as that was, when it was given as a general and eternal rule.

Second, It Did Not Disannul the Promise Made to Abraham

But although there was an especial promise given to Abraham, in the faith of which he became "the father of the faithful," he being their progenitor, it should seem that this covenant did wholly disannul or supersede that promise, and take off the church of his posterity from building on that foundation, and so fix them wholly on this new covenant now made with them. So says Moses, "The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day," Deut. 5:3. God made not this covenant on Mount Sinai with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but with the people then present, and their posterity, as he declares, Deut. 29:14, 15. This, therefore, should seem to take them off wholly from that promise made to Abraham, and so to disannul it. But that this it did not, nor could do, the apostle strictly proves, Gal. 3:17-22; yea, it did in various ways establish that promise, both as first given and as afterwards confirmed with the oath of God to Abraham, in two ways especially:

(1.) It declared the impossibility of obtaining reconciliation and peace with God any other way but by the promise. For representing the commands of the covenant of works, requiring perfect, sinless obedience, under the penalty of the curse, it convinced men that this was no way for sinners to seek for life and salvation by. And by this means it so urged the consciences of men, that they could have no rest or peace in themselves but what the promise would afford them, to which they saw a necessity of committing themselves.

(2.) By representing the ways and means of the accomplishment of the promise, and of that on what all the efficacy of it to the justification and salvation of sinners does depend. This was the death, blood-shedding, oblation, or sacrifice of Christ, the promised seed. This all its offerings and ordinances of worship directed to; as his incarnation, with the inhabitation of God in his human nature, was typed by the tabernacle and temple. To that end it was so far from disannulling the promise, or diverting the minds of the people of God from it, that by all means it established it and led to it.

Third, It Had Other Benefits for the Church

But it will be said, as was before observed, “That if it did neither abrogate the first covenant of works, and come in the room of it, nor disannul the promise made to Abraham, then to what end did it serve, or what benefit did the church receive by that means?” I answer,

(1.) There has been, with respect to God’s dealing with the church, *οἰκονομία τῶν καιρῶν*, a “certain dispensation” and disposition of times and seasons, reserved to the sovereign will and pleasure of God. Therefore from the beginning he revealed himself *πολυτρόπως*⁹ *ανδ πολυμερῶς*,¹⁰ as seemed good to him, Heb. 1:1. And this dispensation of times had a *πλήρωμα*, a “fullness” assigned to it, in which all things, namely, that belong to the revelation and communication of God to the church, should come to their height, and have as it were the last hand given to them. This was in the sending of Christ, as the apostle declares, Eph. 1:10, “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might bring all to a head in Christ.” Until this season came, God dealt variously with the church *εν ποικίλῃ σοφίᾳ*, “in manifold” or “various wisdom,” according as he saw it needful and useful for it, in that season which it was to pass through, before the fullness of times came. Of this nature was his entrance into the covenant with the church at Sinai; the reasons of which we will immediately inquire into. In the meantime, if we had no other answer to this inquiry but only this, that in the order of the disposal or dispensation of the seasons of the church, before the fullness of times came, God in his manifold wisdom saw it necessary for the then present state of the church in that season, we may well consent in that respect. But,

(2.) The apostle acquaints us in general with the ends of this dispensation of God, Gal. 3:19-24: “To what end then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid; for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture has concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up to the faith which should afterwards be revealed. To that end the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Much light might be given to the mind of the Holy Spirit in these words, and that in things not commonly discerned by expositors, if we should divert to the opening of them. I will at present only mark from them what is to our present purpose.

A Double Inquiry Concerning the Covenant of Sinai

There is a double inquiry made by the apostle with respect to the law, or the covenant of Sinai: [1.] To what end in general it served. [2.] Whether it was not contrary to the promise of God. To both these the apostle answers from the nature, office, and work of

⁹ [In various times.]

¹⁰ [In various ways.]

that covenant. For there were, as has been declared, two things in it: [1.] A revival and representation of the covenant of works, with its sanction and curse. [2.] A direction of the church to the accomplishment of the promise. From these two does the apostle frame his answer to the double inquiry laid down.

And to the first inquiry, "to what end it served," he answers, "It was added because of transgressions." The promise being given, there seems to have been no need of it, why then was it added to it at that season? "It was added because of transgressions." The fullness of time was not yet come, in which the promise was to be fulfilled, accomplished and established as the only covenant in which the church was to walk with God; or, "the seed" was not yet come, as the apostle here speaks, to whom the promise was made. In the meantime some order must be taken about sin and transgression that all the order of things appointed of God might not be overflowed by them. And this was done two ways by the law:

[1.] By reviving the commands of the covenant of works, with the sanction of death, it put awe on the minds of men, and set bounds to their lusts, that they should not dare to run forth into that excess which they were naturally inclined to. It was therefore "added because of transgressions;" that, in the declaration of God's severity against them, some bounds might be fixed to them; for "by the law is the knowledge of sin."

[2.] To shut up unbelievers, and such as would not seek for righteousness, life, and salvation by the promise, under the power of the covenant of works, and curse attending it. "It concluded" or "shut up all under sin," says the apostle, Gal. 3:22. This was the end of the law, for this end was it added, as it gave a revival to the covenant of works.

To the second inquiry, which arises out of this supposition, namely, that the law did convince of sin, and condemn for sin, which is, "whether it be not then contrary to the grace of God," the apostle in like manner returns a double answer, taken from the second use of the law, before insisted on, with respect to the promise. And,

[1.] He says, "That although the law does thus rebuke sin, convince of sin, and condemn for sin, so setting bounds to transgressions and transgressors, yet did God never intend it as a means to give life and righteousness, nor was it able so to do." The end of the promise was to give righteousness, justification, and salvation, all by Christ, to whom and concerning whom it was made. But this was not the end for which the law was revived in the covenant of Sinai. For although in itself it requires a perfect righteousness, and gives a promise of life for that reason, ("He that does these things, he will live in them,") yet it could give neither righteousness nor life to any in the state of sin. See Rom. 8:3; 10:4. To that end the promise and the law, having diverse ends, they are not contrary to one another.

[2.] He says, "The law has a great respect to the promise; and was given of God for this very end, that it might lead and direct men to Christ." This is sufficient to answer the question proposed at the beginning of this discourse, about the end of this covenant, and the advantage which the church received by that means.

The Substance of the Whole Truth

What has been spoken may suffice to declare the nature of this covenant in general; and two things do here evidently follow, in which the substance of the whole truth contended for by the apostle does consist:

(1.) That while the covenant of grace was contained and proposed only in the promise, before it was solemnly confirmed in the blood and sacrifice of Christ, and so legalized or established as the only rule of the worship of the church, the introduction of this other covenant on Sinai did not constitute a new way or means of righteousness, life, and salvation; but believers sought for them alone by the covenant of grace as declared in the promise. This follows evidently on what we have discoursed; and it secures absolutely that great fundamental truth, which the apostle in this and all his other epistles so earnestly contends for, namely, that there neither is, nor ever was, either righteousness, justification, life, or salvation, to be attained by any law, or the works of it, (for this covenant at Mount Sinai comprehended every law that God ever gave to the church,) but by Christ alone, and faith in him.

(2.) That although this covenant being introduced in the pleasure of God, there was prescribed with it a form of outward worship suited to that dispensation of times and present state of the church; on the introduction of the new covenant in the fullness of times, to be the rule of all relationship between God and the church, both that covenant and all its worship must be disannulled. This is that which the apostle proves with all sorts of arguments, manifesting the great advantage of the church by that means.

These things, I say, do evidently follow on the preceding discourses, and are the main truths contended for by the apostle.

Six Reasons for the First Covenant

There remains one thing more only to be considered, before we enter on the comparison between the two covenants here directed to by the apostle. And it is how this first covenant came to be an especial covenant to that people: in which we will manifest the reason of its introduction at that season. And to this end various things are to be considered concerning that people and the church of God in them, with whom this covenant was made; which will further evidence the nature, use, and necessity of it:

(1.) This people were the posterity of Abraham, to whom the promise was made that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. To that end from among them was the promised Seed to be raised up in the fullness of time, or its proper season, from among them was the Son of God to take on him the seed of Abraham. To this end various things were necessary:

[1.] That they should have a certain abiding place or country, which they might freely inhabit, distinct from other nations, and under a rule or scepter of their own. So it is said of them, that "the people should dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations," Num. 23:9; and "the scepter was not to depart from them until Shiloh came," Gen. 49:10. For God had regard to his own glory in his faithfulness as to his word and oath given to Abraham, not only that they should be accomplished, but that their

accomplishment should be evident and conspicuous. But if this posterity of Abraham, from among whom the promised Seed was to rise, had been, as it is at this day with them, scattered abroad on the face of the earth, mixed with all nations, and under their power, although God might have accomplished his promise really in raising up Christ from among some of his posterity, yet could it not be proved or evidenced that he had so done, by reason of the confusion and mixture of the people with others. To that end God provided a land and country for them which they might inhabit by themselves, and as their own, even the land of Canaan. And this was so suited to all the ends of God towards that people, as might be declared in various instances, that God is said to have "espied this land out for them," Ezek. 20:6. He chose it out, as most fit for his purpose towards that people of all lands under heaven.

[2.] That there should be always kept among them an open confession and visible representation of the end for which they were so separated from all the nations of the world. They were not to dwell in the land of Canaan merely for secular ends, and to make as it were a mute show; but as they were there maintained and preserved to evidence the faithfulness of God in bringing forth the promised Seed in the fullness of time, so there was to be a testimony kept up among them to that end of God to which they were preserved. This was the end of all their ordinances of worship, of the tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifices and ordinances; which were all appointed by Moses, on the command of God, "for a testimony of those things which should be spoken afterwards," Heb. 3:5.

These things were necessary in the first place, with respect to the ends of God towards that people.

(2.) It becomes not the wisdom, holiness, and sovereignty of God, to call any people into an especial relation to himself, to do them good in an eminent and peculiar manner, and then to suffer them to live at their pleasure, without any regard to what he has done for them. To that end, having granted to this people those great privileges of the land of Canaan, and the ordinances of worship relating to the great end mentioned, he moreover prescribed to them laws, rules, and terms of obedience, on what they should hold and enjoy that land, with all the privileges annexed to the possession of it. And these are both expressed and frequently inculcated, in the repetition and promises of the law. But yet in the prescription of these terms, God reserved the sovereignty of dealing with them to himself. For had he left them to stand or fall absolutely by the terms prescribed to them, they might and would have utterly forfeited both the land and all the privileges they enjoyed in that respect. And had it so fallen out, then the great end of God in preserving them a separate people until the Seed should come, and a representation of it among them, had been frustrated. To that end, although he punished them for their transgressions, according to the threats of the law, yet would he not bring *הרס*, "curse of the law," on them, and utterly cast them off, until his great end was accomplished, Mal. 4:4-6.

(3.) God would not take this people off from the promise, because his church was among them, and they could neither please God nor be accepted with him but by faith in that respect. But yet they were to be dealt with according as it was proper. For they

were generally a stiff-necked people, of a hard heart and lifted up with an opinion of their own righteousness and worth above others. This Moses endeavors, by all manner of reasons and instances to the contrary, to take them off from, in the book of Deuteronomy. Yet it was not performed among the generality of them, nor is to this day; for in the midst of all their wickedness and misery, they still trust to and boast of their own righteousness, and will have it that God has an especial obligation to them on that account. For this cause God saw it necessary, and it pleased him to put a grievous and heavy yoke on them, to subdue the pride of their spirits, and to cause them to breathe after deliverance. This the apostle Peter calls "a yoke that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear," Acts 15:10; that is, with peace, ease, and rest: which therefore the Lord Christ invited them to seek for in himself alone, Matt. 11:29, 30. And this yoke that God put on them consisted in these three things:

[1.] In a multitude of precepts, hard to be understood, and difficult to be observed. The present Jews reckon up six hundred and thirteen of them; about the sense of most of which they dispute endlessly among themselves. But the truth is, since the days of the Pharisees they have increased their own yoke, and made obedience to their law in any tolerable manner altogether impracticable. It would be easy to manifest, for instance, that no man under heaven ever did, or ever can, keep the Sabbath according to the rules they give about it in their Talmud. And they generally scarce observe one of them themselves. But in the law, as given by God himself, it is certain that there are a multitude of arbitrary precepts, and those in themselves not accompanied with any spiritual advantages, as our apostle shows, Heb. 9:9, 10; only they were obliged to perform them by a mere sovereign act of power and authority.

[2.] In the severity by which the observance of all those precepts was enjoined them. And this was the threat of death; for "he that despised Moses' law died without mercy," and "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward." Therefore was their complaint of old, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever comes any thing near to the tabernacle of the LORD will die: will we be consumed with dying?" Num. 17:12, 13. And the curse solemnly denounced against every one that confirmed not all things written in the law was continually before them.

[3.] In a spirit of bondage to fear. This was administered in the giving and dispensation of the law, even as a spirit of liberty and power is administered in and by the gospel. And as this respected their present obedience, and manner of its performance, so in particular it regarded death not yet conquered by Christ. Therefore our apostle affirms, that "through fear of death they were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

This state God brought them into, partly to subdue the pride of their hearts, trusting in their own righteousness, and partly to cause them to look out earnestly after the promised deliverer.

(4.) Into this estate and condition God brought them by a solemn covenant, confirmed by mutual consent between him and them. The tenor, force, and solemn ratification of this covenant, are expressed, Exod. 24:3-8. To the terms and conditions of this covenant was the whole church obliged indispensably, on pain of extermination,

until all was accomplished, Mal. 4:4-6. To this covenant belonged the Decalogue, with all precepts of moral obedience from there drawn. So also did the laws of political rule established among them, and the whole system of religious worship given to them. All these laws were brought within the verge of this covenant, and were the matter of it. And it had especial promises and threats annexed to it as such; of which none did exceed the bounds of the land of Canaan. For even many of the laws of it were such as obliged nowhere else. Such was the law of the sabbatical year, and all their sacrifices. There was sin and obedience in them or about them in the land of Canaan, none elsewhere. Therefore,

(5.) This covenant thus made, with these ends and promises, did never save nor condemn any man eternally. All that lived under the administration of it did attain eternal life, or perished for ever, but not by virtue of this covenant as formally such. It did, indeed, revive the commanding power and sanction of the first covenant of works; and in that respect, as the apostle speaks, was "the ministry of condemnation," 2 Cor. 3:9; for "by the deeds of the law can no flesh be justified." And on the other hand, it directed also to the promise, which was the instrument of life and salvation to all that did believe. But as to what it had of its own, it was confined to things temporal. Believers were saved under it, but not by virtue of it. Sinners perished eternally under it, but by the curse of the original law of works. And,

(6.) On this occasionally fell out the ruin of that people; "their table became a snare to them, and that which should have been for their welfare became a trap," according to the prediction of our Savior, Psa. 69:22. It was this covenant that raised and ruined them. It raised them to glory and honor when given of God; it ruined them when abused by themselves to ends contrary to express declarations of his mind and will. For although the generality of them were wicked and rebellious, always breaking the terms of the covenant which God made with them, so far as it was possible they should, while God determined to reign over them to the appointed season, and repining under the burden of it; yet they would have this covenant to be the only rule and means of righteousness, life, and salvation, as the apostle declares, Rom. 9:31-33; 10:3. For, as we have often said, there were two things in it, both which they abused to other ends than what God designed them:

[1.] There was the renovation of the rule of the covenant of works for righteousness and life. And this they would have to be given to them for those ends, and so sought for righteousness by the works of the law.

[2.] There was ordained in it a typical representation of the way and means in accordance with which the promise was to be made effectual, namely, in the mediation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ; which was the end of all their ordinances of worship. And the outward law of it, with the observance of its institution, they looked on as their only relief when they came short of exact and perfect righteousness.

Against both these pernicious errors the apostle disputes expressly in his epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, to save them, if it were possible, from that ruin they were casting themselves into. On this "the elect obtained," but "the rest were

hardened." For by that means they made an absolute renunciation of the promise, in which alone God had enwrapped the way of life and salvation.

This is the nature and substance of that covenant which God made with that people; a particular, temporary covenant it was, and not a mere dispensation of the covenant of grace.

The Difference between the Two Covenants

That which remains for the declaration of the mind of the Holy Spirit in this whole matter, is to declare the differences that are between those two covenants, by reason of which fact the one is said to be "better" than the other, and to be "built on better promises."

The Opinion of the Church of Rome

Those of the Church of Rome do commonly place this difference in three things: 1. In the promises of them: which in the old covenant were temporal only; in the new, spiritual and heavenly. 2. In the precepts of them: which under the old, required only external obedience, designing the righteousness of the outward man; under the new, they are internal, respecting principally the inner man of the heart. 3. In their sacraments: for those under the old testament were only outwardly figurative; but those of the new are operative of grace.

But these things do not express much, if any thing at all, of what the Scripture places this difference in. And besides, as by some of them explained, they are not true, especially the two latter of them. For I cannot but somewhat admire how it came into the heart or mind of any man to think or say, that God ever gave a law or laws, precept or precepts, that should "respect the outward man only, and the regulation of external duties." A thought of it is contrary to all the essential properties of the nature of God, and fit only to ingenerate¹¹ apprehensions of him unsuited to all his glorious excellencies. The life and foundation of all the laws under the old testament was, "You will love the LORD your God with all your soul;" without which no outward obedience was ever accepted with him. And for the third of the supposed differences, neither were the sacraments of the law so barely "figurative," but that they did exhibit Christ to believers: for "they all drank of the spiritual rock; which rock was Christ." Nor are those of the gospel so operative of grace, but that without faith they are useless to them that do receive them.

The Scripture's Doctrine on the Difference Between the Covenants Expounded on 17 Particulars

¹¹ [Not generated, self-existent; inborn, innate.]

The things in which this difference does consist, as expressed in the Scripture, are partly circumstantial, and partly substantial, and may be reduced to the heads ensuing:

1. These two covenants differ in the circumstance of time as to their promulgation, declaration, and establishment. This difference the apostle expresses from the prophet Jeremiah, in the ninth verse of this chapter, where it must be more fully spoken to. In brief, the first covenant was made at the time that God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, and took its date from the third month after their coming up from there, Exod. 19, 24. From the time of what is reported in the latter place, in which the people give their actual consent to the terms of it, it began its formal obligation as a covenant. And we must afterwards inquire when it was abrogated and ceased to oblige the church. The new covenant was declared and made known "in the latter days," Heb. 1:1, 2; "in the dispensation of the fullness of times," Eph. 1:10. And it took date, as a covenant formally obliging the whole church, from the death, resurrection, ascension of Christ, and sending of the Holy Spirit. I bring them all into the epoch of this covenant, because though principally it was established by the first, yet was it not absolutely obligatory as a covenant until after the last of them.

2. They differ in the circumstance of place as to their promulgation; which the Scripture also takes notice of. The first was declared on Mount Sinai; the manner of which, and the station of the people in receiving the law, I have in my Exercitations to the first part of this Exposition at large declared, and to that place the reader is referred,¹² Exod. 19:18. The other was declared on Mount Zion, and the law of it went forth from Jerusalem, Isa. 2:3. This difference, with many remarkable instances from it, our apostle insists on, Gal. 4:24-26: "These are the two covenants; the one from Mount Sinai, which gives birth to bondage, which is Agar." That is, Agar, the bondswoman whom Abraham took before the heir of promise was born, was a type of the old covenant given on Sinai, before the introduction of the new, or the covenant of promise; for so he adds: "For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children." This Mount Sinai, where the old covenant was given, and which was represented by Agar, is in Arabia, cast quite out of the verge and confines of the church. And it "answers," or "is placed in the same series, rank, and order with Jerusalem," namely, in the opposition of the two covenants. For as the new covenant, the covenant of promise, giving freedom and liberty, was given at Jerusalem, in the death and resurrection of Christ, with the preaching of the gospel which ensued for that reason; so the old covenant, that brought the people into bondage, was given at Mount Sinai in Arabia.

3. They differ in the manner of their promulgation and establishment. There were two things remarkable that accompanied the solemn declaration of the first covenant:

(1.) The dread and terror of the outward appearance on Mount Sinai, which filled all the people, yea, Moses himself, with fear and trembling, Heb. 12:18-21; Exod. 19:16; 20:18, 19. Together by this means was a spirit of fear and bondage

¹² See vol. i, of this Exposition, p. 446. – Ed. [Banner Edition.]

administered to all the people, so as that they chose to keep at a distance, and not draw nigh to God, Deut. 5:23-27.

(2.) That it was given by the ministry and "disposition of angels," Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19. Therefore the people were in a sense "put in subjection to angels," and they had an authoritative ministry in that covenant. The church that then was, was put into some kind of subjection to angels, as the apostle plainly intimates, Heb. 2:5. Therefore the worshipping or adoration of angels began among that people, Col. 2:18; which some, with an addition to their folly and superstition, would introduce into the Christian church, in which they have no such authoritative ministry as they had under the old covenant.

Things are quite otherwise in the promulgation of the new covenant. The Son of God in his own person did declare it. This he "spoke from heaven," as the apostle observes; in opposition to the giving of the law "on the earth," Heb. 12:25. Yet did he speak on the earth also; the mystery of which himself declares, John 3:13. And he did all things that belonged to the establishment of this covenant in a spirit of meekness and condescension, with the highest evidence of love, grace, and compassion, encouraging and inviting the weary, the burdened, the heavy and laden to come to him. And by his Spirit he makes his disciples to carry on the same work until the covenant was fully declared, Heb. 2:3. See John 1:17, 18.

And the whole ministry of angels, in the giving of this covenant, was merely in a way of service and obedience to Christ; and they owned themselves the "fellow-servants" only of them that have "the testimony of Jesus," Rev. 19:10. So that this "world to come," as it was called of old, was not put in subjection to them.

4. They differ in their mediators. The mediator of the first covenant was Moses. "It was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator," Gal. 3:19. And this was no other but Moses, who was a servant in the house of God, Heb. 3:5. And he was a mediator, as designed of God, so chosen of the people, in that dread and consternation which befell them on the terrible promulgation of the law. For they saw that they could no way bear the immediate presence of God, nor treat with him in their own persons. To that end they desired that there might be a go-between, a mediator between God and them, and that Moses might be the person, Deut. 5:24-27. But the mediator of the new covenant is the Son of God himself. For "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all," 1 Tim. 2:5. He who is the Son, and the Lord over his own house, graciously undertook in his own person to be the mediator of this covenant; and in this it is unspeakably preferred before the old covenant.

5. They differ in their subject-matter, both as to precepts and promises, the advantage being still on the part of the new covenant. For,

(1.) The old covenant, in the preceptive part of it, renewed the commands of the covenant of works, and that on their original terms. Sin it forbade, that is, all and every sin, in matter and manner, on the pain of death; and gave the promise of life to perfect, sinless obedience only: from what cause the Decalogue itself, which is a transcript of the law of works, is called "the covenant," Exod. 34:28. And besides this, as we observed

before, it had other precepts innumerable, accommodated to the present condition of the people, and imposed on them with rigor. But in the new covenant, the very first thing that is proposed is the accomplishment and establishment of the covenant of works, both as to its commands and sanction, in the obedience and suffering of the mediator. On this the commands of it, as to the obedience of the covenanters, are not grievous; the yoke of Christ being easy, and his burden light.

(2.) The old testament, absolutely considered, had, [1.] No promise of grace, to communicate spiritual strength, or to assist us in obedience; [2.] Nor of eternal life, no otherwise but as it was contained in the promise of the covenant of works, "The man that does these things will live in them;" and, [3.] Had promises of temporal things in the land of Canaan inseparable from it. In the new covenant all things are otherwise, as will be declared in the exposition of the ensuing verses.

6. They differ, and that principally, in the manner of their dedication and sanction. This is that which gives any thing the formal nature of a covenant or testament. There may be a promise, there may be an agreement in general, which has not the formal nature of a covenant, or testament, and such was the covenant of grace before the death of Christ, but it is the solemnity and manner of the confirmation, dedication, and sanction of any promise or agreement, that give it the formal nature of a covenant or testament. And this is by a sacrifice, in which there is both blood shedding and death ensuing for that reason. Now this, in the confirmation of the old covenant, was only the sacrifice of beasts, whose blood was sprinkled on all the people, Exod. 24:5-8. But the new testament was solemnly confirmed by the sacrifice and blood of Christ himself, Zech. 9:11; Heb. 10:29; 13:20. And the Lord Christ dying as the mediator and surety of the covenant, he purchased all good things for the church; and as a testator bequeathed them to it. Therefore he says of the sacramental cup, that it is "the new testament in his blood," or the pledge of his bequeathing to the church all the promises and mercies of the covenant; which is the new testament, or the disposition of his goods to his children. But because the apostle expressly handles this difference between these two covenants, chap. 9:18-23, we must to that place refer the full consideration of it.

7. They differ in the priests that were to officiate before God in the behalf of the people. In the old covenant, Aaron and his posterity alone were to discharge that office; in the new, the Son of God himself is the only priest of the church. This difference, with the advantage of the gospel-state for that reason, we have handled at large in the exposition of the previous chapter.

8. They differ in the sacrifices on what the peace and reconciliation with God which is tendered in them depends. And this also must be spoken to in the following chapter, if God permits.

9. They differ in the way and manner of their solemn writing or enrolment. All covenants were of old solemnly written in tables of brass or stone, where they might be faithfully preserved for the use of the parties concerned. So the old covenant, as to the principal, fundamental part of it, was "engraved in tables of stone," which were kept in the ark, Exod. 31:18; Deut. 9:10; 2 Cor. 3:7. And God did so order it in his providence, that the first draft of them should be broken, to intimate that the covenant contained in

them was not everlasting or unalterable. But the new covenant is written in the "fleshy tables of the hearts" of them that do believe 2 Cor. 3:3; Jer. 31:33.

10. They differ in their ends. The principal end of the first covenant was to discover sin, to condemn it, and to set bounds to it. So says the apostle, "It was added because of transgressions." And this it did several ways:

(1.) By conviction: for "by the law is the knowledge of sin"; it convinced sinners, and caused every mouth to be stopped before God.

(2.) By condemning the sinner, in an application of the sanction of the law to his conscience.

(3.) By the judgments and punishments by which on all occasions it was accompanied. In all it manifested and represented the justice and severity of God.

The end of the new covenant is, to declare the love, grace, and mercy of God; and therefore to give repentance, remission of sin, and life eternal.

11. They differed in their effects. For the first covenant being the "ministration of death" and "condemnation," it brought the minds and spirits of them that were under it into servitude and bondage; but spiritual liberty is the immediate effect of the new testament. And there is no one thing in which the Spirit of God does more frequently give us an account of the difference between these two covenants, than in this of the liberty of the one and the bondage of the other. See Rom. 8:15; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:1-7, 24, 26, 30, 31; Heb. 2:14, 15. This, therefore, we must explain a little. To that end the bondage which was the effect of the old covenant arose from several causes concurring to the effecting of it:

(1.) The renovation of the terms and sanction of the covenant of works contributed much to that. For the people saw not how the commands of that covenant could be observed, nor how its curse could be avoided. They saw it not, I say, by any thing in the covenant of Sinai; which therefore "gave birth to bondage." The entire prospect they had of deliverance was from the promise.

(2.) It arose from the manner of the delivery of the law, and God's entering for that reason into covenant with them. This was ordered on purpose to fill them with dread and fear. And it could not but do so, whenever they called it to remembrance.

(3.) From the severity of the penalties annexed to the transgression of the law. And God had taken on himself, that where punishment was not exacted according to the law, he himself would "cut them off." This kept them always anxious and solicitous, not knowing when they were safe or secure.

(4.) From the nature of the whole ministry of the law, which was the "ministration of death" and "condemnation," 2 Cor. 3:7, 9; which declared the punishment of every sin to be death, and denounced death to every sinner, administering by itself no relief to the minds and consciences of men. So was it the "letter that killed" them that were under its power.

(5.) From the darkness of their own minds, in the means, ways, and causes of deliverance from all these things. It is true, they had a promise before of life and salvation, which was not abolished by this covenant, even the promise made to Abraham; but this belonged not to this covenant, and the way of its accomplishment, by

the incarnation and mediation of the Son of God, was much hidden from them, yea, from the prophets themselves who yet foretold them. This left them under much bondage. For the principal cause and means of the liberty of believers under the gospel arises from the clear light they have into the mystery of the love and grace of God in Christ. This knowledge and faith of his incarnation, humiliation, sufferings, and sacrifice, in accordance with which he made atonement for sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness, is that which gives them liberty and boldness in their obedience, 2 Cor. 3:17, 18. While they of old were in the dark as to these things, they necessarily have been kept under much bondage.

(6.) It was increased by the yoke of a multitude of laws, rites, and ceremonies, imposed on them; which made the whole of their worship a burden to them, and unendurable, Acts 15:10.

In and by all these ways and means there was a spirit of bondage and fear administered to them. And this God did, thus he dealt with them, to the end that they might not rest in that state, but continually look out after deliverance.

On the other hand, the new covenant gives liberty and boldness, the liberty and boldness of children, to all believers. It is the Spirit of the Son in it that makes us free, or gives us universally all that liberty which is any way needful for us or useful to us. For "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;" namely, to serve God, "not in the oldness of the letter, but in the newness of the spirit." And it is declared that this was the great end of bringing in the new covenant, in the accomplishment of the promise made to Abraham, namely, "that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve God without fear all the days of our life," Luke 1:72-75. And we may briefly consider in which this deliverance and liberty by the new covenant does consist, which it does in the following things:

(1.) In our freedom from the commanding power of the law, as to sinless, perfect obedience, in order to righteousness and justification before God. Its commands we are still subject to, but not in order to life and salvation; for to these ends it is fulfilled in and by the mediator of the new covenant, who is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes," Rom. 10:4.

(2.) In our freedom from the condemning power of the law, and the sanction of it in the curse. This being undergone and answered by him who was "made a curse for us," we are freed from it, Rom. 7:6; Gal. 3:13, 14. And in that respect also we are "delivered from the fear of death," Heb. 2:15, as it was penal and an entrance into judgment or condemnation, John 5:24.

(3.) In our freedom from conscience of sin, Heb. 10:2, that is, conscience disquieting, perplexing, and condemning our persons; the hearts of all that believe being "sprinkled from an evil conscience" by the blood of Christ.

(4.) In our freedom from the whole system of Mosaic worship, in all the rites, and ceremonies, and ordinances of it; which what a burden it was the apostles do declare, Acts 15, and our apostle at large in his epistle to the Galatians.

(5.) From all the laws of men in things pertaining to the worship of God, 1 Cor. 7:23.

And by all these, and the like instances of spiritual liberty, does the gospel free believers from that "spirit of bondage to fear," which was administered under the old covenant.

It remains only that we point out the heads of those ways in accordance with which this liberty is communicated to us under the new covenant. And it is done,

(1.) Principally by the grant and communication of the Spirit of the Son as a Spirit of adoption, giving the freedom, boldness, and liberty of children, John 1:12; Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:6, 7. From this place the apostle lays it down as a certain rule, that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," 2 Cor. 3:17. Let men pretend what they will, let them boast of the freedom of their outward condition in this world, and of the inward liberty or freedom of their wills, there is indeed no true liberty where the Spirit of God is not. The ways in accordance with which he gives freedom, power, a sound mind, spiritual boldness, courage, contempt of the cross, holy confidence before God, a readiness for obedience, and growth of heart in duties, with all other things in which true liberty does consist, or which any way belong to it, I must not here divert to declare. The world judges that there is no bondage but where the Spirit of God is; for that gives that meticulous fear of sin, that awe of God in all our thoughts, actions, and ways, that careful and circumspect walking, that temperance in things lawful, that abstinence from all appearance of evil, in which they judge the greatest bondage on the earth to consist. But those who have received him do know that the whole world does lie in evil, and that all those to whom spiritual liberty is a bondage are the servants and slaves of Satan.

(2.) It is obtained by the evidence of our justification before God, and the causes of it. Men were greatly in the dark to this under the first covenant, although all stable peace with God does depend for that reason; for it is in the gospel that "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith," Rom. 1:17. Indeed "the righteousness of God without the law is witnessed by the law and the prophets," Rom. 3:21; that is, testimony is given to it in legal institutions and the promises recorded in the prophets. But these things were obscure to them, who were to seek for what was intended under the veils and shadows of priests and sacrifices, atonements and expiations. But our justification before God, in all the causes of it, being now fully revealed and made manifest, it has a great influence into spiritual liberty and boldness.

(3.) By the spiritual light that is given to believers into the mystery of God in Christ. This the apostle affirms to have been "hid in God from the beginning of the world," Eph. 3:9. It was contrived and prepared in the counsel and wisdom of God from all eternity. Some intimation was given of it in the first promise, and it was afterwards shadowed out by various legal institutions; but the depth, the glory, the beauty and fullness of it, were "hid in God," in his mind and will, until it was fully revealed in the gospel. The saints under the old testament believed that they should be delivered by the promised Seed, that they should be saved for the Lord's sake, that the Angel of the covenant would save them, yea, that the Lord himself would come to his temple; and they diligently inquired into what was signified before concerning "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." But all this while their thoughts and

conceptions were exceedingly in the dark as to those glorious things which are made so plain in the new covenant, concerning the incarnation, mediation, sufferings, and sacrifice of the Son of God, concerning the way of God's being in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Now as darkness gives fear, so light gives liberty.

(4.) We obtain this liberty by the opening of the way into the holiest, and the entrance we have by that means with boldness to the throne of grace. On this also the apostle insists peculiarly in various places of his following discourses, as chap. 9:8; 10:19-22: where it must be spoken to, if God permits, at large; for a great part of the liberty of the new testament does consist in this.

(5.) By all the ordinances of gospel-worship. How the ordinances of worship under the old testament did lead the people into bondage has been declared; but those of the new testament, through their plainness in signification, their immediate connection to the Lord Christ, with their use and efficacy to guide believers in their communion with God, do all conduce to our evangelical liberty. And of such importance is our liberty in this instance of it, that when the apostles saw it necessary, for the avoiding of offense and scandal, to continue the observance of one or two legal institutions, in abstinence from some things in themselves indifferent, they did it only for a season, and declared that it was only in case of scandal that they would allow this temporary abridgment of the liberty given us by the gospel.

12. They differ greatly with respect to the dispensation and grant of the Holy Spirit. It is certain that God did grant the gift of the Holy Spirit under the old testament, and his operations during that season, as I have at large elsewhere declared;¹³ but it is no less certain, that there was always a promise of his more distinguished effusion on the confirmation and establishment of the new covenant. See in particular that great promise to this purpose, Joel 2:28, 29, as applied and expounded by the apostle Peter, Acts 2:16-18. Yea, so sparing was the communication of the Holy Spirit under the old testament, compared with his effusion under the new, as that the evangelist affirms that "the Holy Spirit was not yet, because that Jesus was not yet glorified," John 7:39; that is, he was not yet given in that manner as he was to be given on the confirmation of the new covenant. And those of the church of the Hebrews who had received the doctrine of John, yet affirmed that "they had not so much as heard whether there were any Holy Spirit" or no, Acts 19:2; that is, any such gift and communication of him as was then proposed as the chief privilege of the gospel. Neither does this concern only the plentiful effusion of him with respect to those miraculous gifts and operations by which the doctrine and establishment of the new covenant was testified to and confirmed: however, that also gave a distinguished difference between the two covenants; for the first covenant was confirmed by dreadful appearances and operations, accomplished by the ministry of angels, but the new by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit himself. But this difference principally consists in this, that under the new testament the Holy Spirit has graciously condescended to bear the office of the comforter of the church. That this unspeakable privilege is peculiar to the new testament, is evident from

¹³ See vol. iii. p. 125, of his miscellaneous works. – Ed. [Banner Edition.]

all the promises of his being sent as a comforter made by our Savior, John 14-16; especially by that in which he assures his disciples that "unless he went away" (in which going away he confirmed the new covenant) "the Comforter would not come; but if he so went away, he would send him from the Father," chap. 16:7. And the difference between the two covenants which resulted from this is inexpressible.

13. They differ in the declaration made in them of the kingdom of God. It is the observation of Augustine, that the very name of "the kingdom of heaven" is peculiar to the new testament. It is true, God reigned in and over the church under the old testament; but his rule was such, and had such a relation to secular things, especially with respect to the land of Canaan, and the flourishing condition of the people in that respect, as that it had an appearance of a kingdom of this world. And that it was so, and was so to be, consisting in empire, power, victory, wealth, and peace, was so deeply fixed on the minds of the generality of the people, that the disciples of Christ themselves could not free themselves of that apprehension, until the new testament was fully established. But now in the gospel, the nature of the kingdom of God, where it is, and in which it consists, is plainly and evidently declared, to the unspeakable consolation of believers. For although it is now known and experienced to be internal, spiritual, and heavenly, they have no less assured interest in it and advantage by it, in all the troubles which they may undergo in this world, than they could have in the fullest possession of all earthly enjoyments.

14. They differ in their substance and end. The old covenant was typical, shadowy, and removable, Heb. 10:1. The new covenant is substantial and permanent, as containing the body, which is Christ. Now, consider the old covenant comparatively with the new, and this part of its nature, that it was typical and shadowy, is a great debasement of it. But consider it absolutely, and the things in which it was so were its greatest glory and excellence; for in these things alone was it a token and pledge of the love and grace of God. For those things in the old covenant which had most of bondage in their use and practice, had most of light and grace in their signification. This was the design of God in all the ordinances of worship belonging to that covenant, namely, to typify, shadow, and represent the heavenly, substantial things of the new covenant, or the Lord Christ and the work of his mediation. The tabernacle, ark, altar, priests, and sacrifices did this; and it was their glory that so they did. However, compared with the substance in the new covenant, they have no glory.

15. They differ in the extent of their administration, according to the will of God. The first was confined to the posterity of Abraham according to the flesh, and to them especially in the land of Canaan, Deut. 5:3, with some few proselytes that were joined to them, excluding all others from the participation of the benefits of it. And therefore it was, that although the personal ministry of our Savior himself, in preaching of the gospel, was to precede the introduction of the new covenant, it was confined to the people of Israel, Matt. 15:24. And he was the "minister of the circumcision," Rom. 15:8. Such narrow bounds and limits had the administration of this covenant affixed to it by the will and pleasure of God, Ps. 147:19, 20. But the administration of the new covenant is extended to all nations under heaven; none being excluded, on the account of tongue,

language, family, nation, or place of habitation. All have an equal interest in the rising Sun. The partition wall is broken down, and the gates of the New Jerusalem are set open to all comers on the gospel invitation. This is frequently taken notice of in the Scripture. See Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; John 11:51, 52; 12:32; Acts 11:18; 17:30; Gal. 5:6; Eph. 2:11-16; 3:8-10; Col. 3:10, 11; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 5:9. This is the grand charter of the poor wandering Gentiles. Having willfully fallen off from God, he was pleased, in his holiness and severity, to leave all our ancestors for many generations to serve and worship the devil. And the mystery of our recovery was "hid in God from the beginning of the world," Eph. 3:8-10. And although it was so foretold, so prophesied of, so promised under the old testament, yet, such was the pride, blindness, and obstinacy, of the greatest part of the church of the Jews, that its accomplishment was one great part of that stumbling-block whereat they fell; yea, the greatness and glory of this mystery was such, that the disciples of Christ themselves comprehended it not, until it was testified to them by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the great promise of the new covenant, on some of those poor Gentiles, Acts 11:18.

16. They differ in their efficacy; for the old covenant "made nothing perfect," it could accomplish none of the things it did represent, nor introduce that perfect or complete state which God had designed for the church. But this we have at large insisted on in our exposition of the previous chapter. Lastly,

17. They differ in their duration: for the one was to be removed, and the other to abide for ever; which must be declared on the ensuing verses.

It may be other things of like nature may be added to these that we have mentioned, in which the difference between the two covenants does consist; but these instances are sufficient to our purpose. For some, when they hear that the covenant of grace was always one and the same, of the same nature and efficacy under both testaments, that the way of salvation by Christ was always one and the same, are ready to think that there was no such great difference between their state and ours as is pretended. But we see that on this supposition, that covenant which God brought the people into at Sinai, and under the yoke of which they were to abide until the new covenant was established, had all the disadvantages attending it which we have insisted on. And those who understand not how excellent and glorious those privileges are which are added to the covenant of grace, as to the administration of it, by the introduction and establishment of the new covenant, are utterly unacquainted with the nature of spiritual and heavenly things.

A Response to the Socinians

There remains yet one thing more, which the Socinians give us occasion to speak to from these words of the apostle, that the new covenant is "established on better promises." For from this place they do conclude that there were no promises of life under the old testament; which, in the latitude of it, is a senseless and brutish opinion. And,

1. The apostle in this place intends only those promises on what the new testament was legally ratified, and reduced into the form of a covenant; which were, as he declares, the promises of especial pardoning mercy, and of the efficacy of grace in the renovation of our natures. But it is granted that the other covenant was legally established on promises which respected the land of Canaan. To that end it is granted, that as to the promises in accordance with which the covenants were actually established, those of the new covenant were better than the other.

2. The old covenant had express promise of eternal life: "He that does these things will live in them." It was, indeed, with respect to perfect obedience that it gave that promise; however that promise it had, which is all that at present we inquire after.

3. The institutions of worship which belonged to that covenant, the whole ministry of the tabernacle, as representing heavenly things, had the nature of a promise in them; for they all directed the church to seek for life and salvation in and by Jesus Christ alone.

4. The question is not, What promises are given in the law itself, or the old covenant formally considered as such? But, What promises had they who lived under that covenant, and which were not disannulled by it? For we have proved sufficiently, that the addition of this covenant did not abolish or supersede the efficacy of any promise that God had before given to the church. And to say that the first promise, and that given to Abraham, confirmed with the oath of God, were not promises of eternal life, is to overthrow the whole Bible, both Old Testament and New.

Tenth Practical Observation

And we may observe from the previous discourses that although one state of the church has had great advantages and privileges above another, yet no state has had of which to complain, while they observed the terms prescribed to them. We have seen in how many things, and those most of them of the highest importance, the state of the church under the new covenant excels that under the old; yet that was in itself a state of unspeakable grace and privilege. For,

1. It was a state of near relation to God, by virtue of a covenant. And when all mankind had absolutely broken covenant with God by sin, to call any of them into a new covenant relation with himself, was an act of sovereign grace and mercy. In this were they distinguished from the rest of mankind, whom God permitted to walk in their own ways, and winked at their ignorance, while they all perished in the pursuit of their foolish imaginations. A great part of the Book of Deuteronomy is designed to impress a sense of this on the minds of the people. And it is summarily expressed by the psalmist, Psa. 147:19, 20; and by the prophet, "We are *yours*: you never bore rule over them; they were not called by your name," Isa. 43:19.

2. This covenant of God was in itself holy, just, and equal. For although there was in it an imposition of various things burdensome, they were such as God in his infinite wisdom saw necessary for that people, and such as they could not have been without. Therefore on all occasions God refers it even to themselves to judge whether his ways

towards them were not equal, and their own unequal. And it was not only just, but attended with promises of unspeakable advantages above all other people whatever.

3. God dealing with them in the way of a covenant, to which the mutual consent of all parties covenanting is required, it was proposed to them for their acceptance, and they did accordingly willingly receive it, Exod. 24, Deut. 5; so as that they had not of which to complain.

4. In that state of discipline in which God was pleased to order them, they enjoyed the way of life and salvation in the promise; for, as we have showed at large, the promise was not disannulled by the introduction of this covenant. To that end, although God reserved a better and more complete state for the church under the new testament, having "ordained better things for us, that they without us should not be made perfect;" yet was that other state in itself good and holy, and sufficient to bring all believers to the enjoyment of God.

Eleventh Practical Observation

The state of the gospel, or of the church under the new testament, being accompanied with the highest spiritual privileges and advantages that it is capable of in this world, two things follow from there:

1. The great obligation that is on all believers to holiness and fruitfulness in obedience, to the glory of God. We have in this the utmost condescension of divine grace, and the greatest effects of it that God will communicate on this side of glory. That which all these things tend to, that which God requires and expects on them, is the thankful and fruitful obedience of them that are made partakers of them. And they who are not sensible of this obligation are strangers to the things themselves, and are not able to discern spiritual things, because they are to be spiritually discerned.

2. The heinousness of their sin by whom this covenant is neglected or despised is therefore abundantly manifest. The apostle particularly asserts and insists on this, Heb. 2:2, 3; 10:28, 29.