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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 4—Chapter 1

**OF THE MANIFESTATION AND
ADMINISTRATION OF THE
COVENANT OF GRACE**

Having treated of the sin and fall of our first parents, and of the breach of the covenant of works by them, and of the sad effects thereof to themselves, and of the woeful consequences of the same to their posterity; of the imputation of their sin, and of the derivation of a corrupt nature unto them; and of actual sins and transgressions flowing from thence, and of the punishment due unto them: I am now come to the dawn of grace to fallen man, to the breakings forth and application of the covenant of grace, and the blessings of it to the spiritual seed of Christ among the posterity of Adam.

I have considered the covenant of grace in a former part of this work, as it was a compact in eternity, between the three divine persons, Father, Son, and Spirit; in which each person agreed to take his part in the economy of man's salvation: and now I shall consider the administration of that covenant in the various periods of time, from the beginning of the world to the end of it. The covenant of grace is but one and the same in all ages, of which Christ is the substance; being given for "a covenant of the people", of all the people of God, both Jews and Gentiles, who is "the same" in the "yesterday" of the Old Testament, and in the "today" of the New Testament, and "for ever"; he is "the way, the truth, and the life", the only true way to eternal life; and there never was any other way made known to men since the fall of Adam; no other name under heaven has been given, or will be given, by which men can be saved. The patriarchs before the flood and after, before the law of Moses and under it, before the coming of Christ, and all the saints since, are saved

in one and the same way, even "by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"; and that is the grace of the covenant, exhibited at different times, and in divers manners. For though the covenant is but one, there are different administrations of it; particularly two, one before the coming of Christ, and the other after it; which lay the foundation for the distinction of the "first" and "second", the "old" and the "new" covenant, observed by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 8:7,8,13; 9:1,15; 12:24), for by the first and old covenant, is not meant the covenant of works made with Adam, which had been broke and abrogated long ago; since the apostle is speaking of a covenant waxen old, and ready to vanish away in his time: nor was the covenant of works the first and most ancient covenant; the covenant of grace, as an eternal compact, was before that; but by it is meant the first and most ancient administration of the covenant of grace which reached from the fall of Adam, when the covenant of works was broke, unto the coming of Christ, when it was superseded and vacated by another administration of the same covenant, called therefore the "second" and "new" covenant. The one we commonly call the Old Testament dispensation, and the other the New Testament dispensation; for which there seems to be some foundation in 2 Corinthians 3:6,14 and Hebrews 9:15 these two covenants, or rather the two administrations of the same covenant, are allegorically represented by two women, Hagar and Sarah, the bondwoman and the free (Gal. 4:22-26), which fitly describe the nature and difference of them. And before I proceed any farther, I shall just point out the agreement and disagreement of those two administrations of the covenant of grace.

1. First, The agreement there is between them.

1a. They agree in the efficient cause, God: the covenant of grace, in its original constitution in eternity, is of God, and therefore it is called his covenant, being made by him; "I have made a covenant--my covenant I will not break", #Ps 89:3,34 and whenever any exhibition or manifestation of this covenant was made to any of the patriarchs, as to Abraham, David, &c. it is ascribed to God, "I will make my covenant—he hath made with me an everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:2 2; Sam. 23:5) so the new covenant, or new administration of it, runs in this form, "I will make a new covenant" &c. (Heb. 8:8).

1b. In the moving cause, the sovereign mercy, and free grace of God, which moved God to make the covenant of grace at first (Ps. 89:2,3). And every exhibition of it under the former dispensation, is a rich display of it, and therefore it is called, the "mercy promised to the fathers" in his "holy covenant" (Luke 1:72), and which has so largely appeared in the coming of Christ, which is ascribed to "the tender mercy of our God", that "grace" and "truth", in the great abundance of them, are said to come by him; by which names the covenant of grace, under the gospel dispensation, is called, in distinction from that under the Mosaic one (Luke 1:78; John 1:17).

1c. In the Mediator, who is Christ; there is but one Mediator of the covenant of grace, let it be considered under what dispensation it will; even Christ, who under the former dispensation was revealed as the seed of the woman that should bruise

the serpent's head, and make atonement by his sufferings and death, signified by the expiatory sacrifices, under the law; the Shiloh, the peaceable One, and the Peace Maker, the living Redeemer of Job, and of all believers under the Old Testament. Moses, indeed, was a Mediator, but he was only a typical one. There is but "one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus"; there never was any other, and he is the "Mediator of the new covenant" (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb 12:24).

1d. In the subjects of these covenants, or administrations of the covenants of grace, the elect of God, to whom the blessings of it are applied. It was with the chosen people of God in Christ, the covenant of grace was originally made; and according to the election of grace are the spiritual blessings of it dispensed to the children of men (Ps. 89:3; Eph 1:3,4), so they were under the former dispensation, from the beginning of the world, to the seed of the woman, in distinction from the seed of the serpent; to the remnant according to the election of grace among the Jews, the children of the promise that were counted for the seed; and election, or elect men, obtain the blessings of the covenant in all ages, and under the present dispensation, more abundantly, and in greater numbers.

1e. In the blessings of it; they are the same under both administrations. Salvation and redemption by Christ is the great blessing held forth and enjoyed under the one as under the other (2 Sam. 23:5; Heb 9:15). Justification by the righteousness of Christ, which the Old Testament church had knowledge of, and faith in, as well as the new (Isa. 45:24,25; Rom. 3:21-23). Forgiveness of sin through faith in Christ, all the prophets bore witness to; and the saints of old, as now, had as comfortable an application of it (Ps. 32:1,5; Isa. 43:25; Micah 7:18; Acts 10:43). Regeneration, spiritual circumcision, and sanctification, were what men were made partakers of under the first, as under the second administration of the covenant (Deut. 30:6; Phil. 3:3). Eternal life was made known in the writings of the Old Testament, as well as in those of the New; and was believed, looked for, and expected by the saints of the former, as of the latter dispensation (John 5:39; Heb. 11:10,16; Job 19:26,27). In a word, they and we eat the same spiritual meat, and drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:3,4).

2. Secondly, In some things there is a disagreement between these two administrations of the covenant of Grace.

2a. Under the first administration saints looked forward to Christ that was to come, and to the good things that were to come by him, and so were waiting, expecting, and longing for the enjoyment of them; but under the second and new administration, believers look backwards to Christ as being come, before whose eyes he is evidently set forth in the word and ordinances, as crucified and slain; and they look to the blessings of the covenant through him as brought in; to peace, pardon, atonement, righteousness, redemption, and salvation, as wrought out and finished.

2b. There is a greater clearness and evidence of things under the one than under the other; the law was only a shadow of good things to come; did not so much as exhibit the image of them, at least but very faintly. The obscurity of the former dispensation, was, signified by the veil over the face of Moses, when he spoke to the children of Israel; so that they could not see to the end of what was to be abolished; whereas, believers under the present dispensation, with open face, with faces unveiled, behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord clearly and plainly (Heb. 10:1; 2 Cor. 3:13,18), then, comparatively, it was night, now broad day; the day has broke, and the shadows are fled and gone.

2c. There is more of a spirit of liberty, and less of bondage, under the one, than under the other; saints under the one differed little from servants, being in bondage under the elements of the world; but under the other are Christ's freemen, and receive not the spirit of bondage again, to fear; but the spirit of adoption, crying Abba, Father; which is a free spirit, and brings liberty with it; and for this reason the two different administrations of the covenant, are signified, the one by Hagar, the bondwoman, because it engendered to bondage, and those under it were in such a state; and the other by Sarah, the free woman, an emblem of Jerusalem, which is free, and the mother of us all (Gal. 4:1-3,24-26; Rom. 8:15).

2d. There is a larger and more plentiful effusion of the Spirit, and of his gifts and graces, under the one than under the other; greater measures of grace, and of spiritual light and knowledge were promised, as what would be communicated under the new and second administration of the covenant; and accordingly grace, in all its fulness and "truth", in all its clearness and evidence, are "come by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17; see Jer. 31:31-34).

2e. The latter administration of the covenant extends to more persons than the former. The Gentiles were strangers to the covenants of promise, had no knowledge nor application of the promises and blessings of the covenant of grace, except now and then, and here and there one; but now the blessing of Abraham is come upon the Gentiles, and they are fellow heirs of the same grace and privileges, and partakers of the promises in Christ by the gospel (Eph. 2:12 3:6; Gal. 3:14).

2f. The present administration of the covenant of grace, will continue to the end of the world; it will never give way to, nor be succeeded by another; it is that which remains, in distinction from that which is done away, and so exceeds in glory: the ceremonial law, under which the former covenant was administered, was "until the time of reformation", until Christ came and his forerunner; "The law and the prophets were until John", the harbinger of Christ, the fulfilling end of them; (see 2 Cor. 3:11; Heb 9:10; Luke 16:16).

2g. The ordinances of them are different. The first covenant had ordinances of divine service; but those, comparatively, were carnal and worldly, at best but typical and shadowy, and faint representations of divine and spiritual things; and were to continue but for a while, and then to be shaken and removed, and other ordinances

take place, which shall not be shaken, but remain to the second coming of Christ; and in which he is more clearly and evidently set forth, and the blessings of his grace (Heb. 9:1,10; 12:27).

2h. Though the promises and blessings of grace under both administrations are the same, yet differently exhibited; under the former dispensation, not only more darkly and obscurely, but by earthly things, as by the land of Canaan, and the outward mercies of it; but under the latter, as more clearly and plainly, so more spiritually and nakedly, as they are in themselves spiritual, heavenly, and divine; and delivered out more free, and unclogged of all conditions, and so called "better promises", and the administration of the covenant, in which they are, a "better testament"; God having "provided" for New Testament saints some "better thing", at least held forth in a better manner; that Old Testament saints might not be "made perfect" without them (Heb. 8:6; 7:22; 11:40).