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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 4—Chapter 5

**OF THE ABROGATION OF THE OLD
COVENANT, OR FIRST
ADMINISTRATION OF IT, AND THE
INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW, OR
SECOND ADMINISTRATION OF IT.**

When we speak of the Abrogation of the Covenant this is to be understood, not of the covenant of grace, as to the matter and substance of it, which remains invariably the same in all periods of time; it is an everlasting covenant; it is ordered in all things and sure; it can never be broken and made void; every promise of it is unalterable, and every blessing irreversible; the covenant of peace can never be removed; it will stand firm to all generations; but with respect to the form of the administration of it only, even the form of it, under the former, or Old Testament dispensation, before described; and in order to set this in its true and proper light,

1. First, Let it be observed, that it was never designed that the first administration of the covenant of grace should continue always in that form; it was foretold that there should be a cessation of it, and therefore it might be expected.

1a. It was only intended to continue for a certain time, called, "The time of reformation" (Heb. 9:10), when there would be a reform from burdensome rites and ceremonies; or "of correction," when what was faulty and deficient would be corrected, amended, and become perfect; or "of direction," when the saints would be directed to look to Christ, the substance of types and figures, and for perfection

in him; the same with "the time appointed of the Father," until which time, children, though heirs, are under tutors and governors; so the Israelites were under the elements of the world, the ceremonies of the former dispensation, under the tutorage and pedagogy of the law: for the "law," the ceremonial law, was their "schoolmaster unto Christ," that led them to him, and instructed them in him; but when he came, they were no longer under a schoolmaster; and this was when "the fulness of time was come," agreed on between the Father and the Son; at which time the Son was sent, "that they might receive the adoption of children," and be no more considered as in their nonage, and as needing the instructions of a schoolmaster (Gal. 3:1-4; 3:24,25).

1b. The ancient form of the administration of the covenant of grace, in a course of time, was limited to a certain people in a certain country, worshipping at a certain place, and sacrificing on the same altar. The word, worship and service of God, peculiarly belonged to the Jews, which was their distinguishing privilege above all the nations of the world (Ps. 147:19,20; Rom. 3:1,2; 9:4). All their males were obliged three times in the year to appear at Jerusalem and worship together; and all their offerings and sacrifices were to be brought and offered on the altar there, and no where else (Deut. 12:11,14; 16:16). Now such a state of things was never designed to continue always; since when Shiloh, the Messiah, should come, there would be a gathering of the people to him, of people out of all nations of the world, who were to be blessed in him; he was to be set up as an ensign to them, to whom they would seek; from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, his name was to be great among the Gentiles, and incense to be offered to it in every place (Gen. 49:10; Isa. 11:10; Mal. 1:11). Now to such a dispensation the former state of things could never suit, and therefore could not be intended to be continued; the people of all nations could never be convened into one country, and worship at one place, and sacrifice on one altar.

1c. It is expressly foretold, that there would be "a new covenant," or a new administration of it; and that the former, in course, would cease (Jer. 31:31,32), and it is upon this the apostle reasons, and proves the abrogation of the former covenant, "in that he saith a new covenant, he hath made the first old" (Heb. 8:8,13). Particularly it was foretold, that sacrifices should cease, and be no longer acceptable to God; which were a considerable branch of the administration of the old covenant. These were from the beginning, as early as the first manifestation of the covenant of grace to fallen man: indeed, while they were in use by divine appointment, they were not in such high esteem with God as moral obedience and spiritual services (1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 69:30,31; Hosea 6:6). And plain hints were given, that the time would come when they should be no more practiced and regarded David had knowledge, by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, of what Christ, the surety of his people, said to his divine Father in the council and covenant of peace, and what he would say again when he came into the world to be their Saviour; "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire," &c. "Then said I, Lo, I come" &c. (Ps. 40:6,7; Heb. 10:5-7). Christ's coming into the world to offer up himself a sacrifice for the sins of his people, was virtually saying, that God would have legal sacrifices no longer ordered

up, and would no more accept of them. And Daniel expressly says, that the Messiah would "cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease;" the daily sacrifice, and every other offering according to the law (Dan. 9:27). And the Jews themselves say,^[1] "that all sacrifices will cease in time to come (in the time of their vainly expected Messiah) but the sacrifice of praise."

According to prophecy, the Levitical priesthood, with which so many rites and ceremonies were connected, and upon which sacrifices were established, and in the exercise of which they were performed, was to be changed; the Messiah was to come, an High Priest of another order of priesthood than that of Aaron; "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4), which are the words of God the Father to Christ, and from whence the apostle argues the imperfection of the Levitical priesthood, and the change of it; and also of necessity the change of the whole law, on which it was founded (Heb. 7:11,12; 7:15-17).

The ark was something very remarkable in the former dispensation; in it was the Decalogue, and on the side of it the whole body of the Jewish laws; it was a token, and indeed the place of the divine presence, and a type of Christ, a symbol of the covenant; and therefore called the ark of the covenant, and included the whole of the ceremonial law; and is put for the whole service and worship of that dispensation. Now of this it is foretold, that there would be a time when it should be no more, and should not be so much as thought of any more (Jer. 3:16).

The ecclesiastical, as well as civil state of the Jews, was to be shaken and removed; the one is signified by the shaking of the heaven, as the other by the shaking of the earth, in Haggai 2:6 which the apostle explains of "the removing of things shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb. 12:26,27), even of the immovable kingdom after spoken of; the second administration of the covenant of grace, which is to remain, and the ordinances of it, until the second coming of Christ; whereas the ordinances of divine service under the first covenant were so shaken as to be removed; and which were made to be removed, as they have been, according to the above prediction.

Prophecy was another considerable way and means by which the covenant of grace was administered, throughout the whole Old Testament dispensation; and it was foretold that this should be sealed up, finished, and cease; for one part of the Messiah's work, when come, was to seal up the "vision and prophecy" (Dan. 9:24), all the visions and prophecies of the Old Testament were to have, and had their accomplishment in Christ; were to be sealed up and fulfilled in him, the sum and substance of them; or to "seal up the vision and prophet;" the prophets were to be till John, the forerunner of Christ, and no longer: after Christ, the great Prophet to be raised up, like unto Moses, there was to be no other, he only is to be heard; whatever scheme of things, either as to doctrine or worship, is set up, through pretended vision and prophecy, is to be disregarded; nor has any prophet risen up since prophecy, as foretold, was at an end. From all this now it might be expected, that the first and old administration of the covenant would in time cease.

2. Secondly, There are reasons to be given why the first covenant should and must cease.

2a. It was a typical covenant; the people on whose account it was made, was a typical people, typical of the whole Israel of God, consisting of Jews and Gentiles; of the spiritual Israel, chosen of God, redeemed by Christ, and who shall be saved with an everlasting salvation; the works, duties, and services enjoined them, and required of them with so much strictness, rigor, and severity, were typical of the obedience of Christ, the surety of the spiritual Israel; of that righteousness he was to fulfil and bring in, by which they are made righteous in the sight of God. The blessings promised unto them were typical ones; they were only shadows of good things, of spiritual blessings that were to come by Christ (Heb. 10:1; 9:11). As the earthly Canaan was a type of the heavenly inheritance, obtained in him; the sacrifices offered under that covenant were typical ones; the priests that offered them, the garments they offered them in, and the gifts and sacrifices offered by them, "served to the example and shadow of heavenly things" (Heb. 8:4,5; 9:23). The mediator of it, Moses, was a typical mediator, typical of Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant; the blood with which the first testament, or covenant, was dedicated and confirmed, was typical blood, typical of the blood of Christ, called, "The blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 9:18; 13:20). Now when the Antitype of all this came, the types must cease; when Christ, the body, the sum and substance appeared, these shadows must flee away, and disappear, in course (Col. 2:17).

2b. It was a faulty covenant, and therefore it was proper it should give way to a new and better covenant; so the apostle reasons; "for if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second" (Heb 8:7,8). Not that there was anything sinful or criminal in the first covenant, but it was defective; there were some deficiencies in it, which made the abrogation of it necessary.—

2b1. It did not exhibit Christ present, only in figure, in promise, and in prophecy; it only signified, that he would come and save his people; but it did not hold forth salvation as wrought out by him; it gave an intimation of the righteousness of Christ, that he was to bring in, but not as brought in; under it the propitiation, reconciliation, and satisfaction for sin, were not made, nor redemption from it obtained; wherefore Christ became the propitiation "for the remission of sins that are past;" and he suffered death "for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament" (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15).

2b2. The sacrifices then offered were imperfect; for some sins there were no sacrifices appointed, as for sabbath breaking, murder, adultery, &c. and those that were appointed, could not really take away sin; at most they only made a typical expiation, not a real one; they sanctified only "to the purifying of the flesh;" but could not remove sin from the conscience, and "purge that from dead works;" that only the blood of Christ could do (Heb. 9:13,14).

2b3. There was but a small measure of the gifts and graces of the Spirit bestowed on men under the first covenant; for though there were here and there one on whom great gifts, and much grace were bestowed, as Abraham and David, &c. yet in common, it was but a scanty measure of grace, light, knowledge, and holiness, that was given to ordinary saints; and the communication was made, for the most part, only to Israelites, and but to a few among them, a remnant, according to the election of grace.

2b4. It was a state of darkness and obscurity under that covenant; it was like a night season, in which lamps are lighted, and torches used; such was the sure word of prophecy; it was like a light or lamp in a dark place; there was light in some particular persons, as in the prophets, and it was held forth by them; but in general there was but little among the people, who "could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished," the ceremonial law; under which the mysteries of grace were couched, were clouded, and lay hid; they could not clearly see the end, design, and scope of them; though there were glorious promises of grace, these were covered with the veil of ceremonies, of which the veil, on the glory of the face of Moses, was a type (2 Cor. 3:7,13).

2b5. It was a state of bondage; this covenant was signified by Hagar the bondwoman, and by mount Sinai, which engendered to bondage, and answered to Jerusalem, as it was in the apostle's time; to the state of the Jews then, who were in bondage with their children: and the Israelites, while in their nonage, while children, were in bondage, under the elements of the world, which brought upon them a spirit of bondage to fear; for such a number of laws and ordinances being given them, to the breach of which death was annexed without mercy; and they so liable to break them, they, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Gal. 4:3,24,25; Rom. 8:15; Heb 2:15).

2c. The rites and ceremonies by which this covenant was greatly administered, are by the apostle called, "weak and beggarly elements;" and being "weak" and "unprofitable," there was, therefore, a "disannulling" of them (Gal. 4:9; Heb 7:18,19). The sacrifices, which were a principal part of them, could not make, neither them that did them, nor the comers unto them, perfect, as to the conscience; they could not purge the worshippers, or those that attended ceremonial services, so as that they should have no more conscience of sin; they could not take away sin, neither from the sight of God, nor from the conscience of the sinner; nor so as that there should be no remembrance of them; for notwithstanding the daily sacrifices, morning and evening, and others on particular accounts, there was an annual remembrance made of them all, on the day of atonement (Heb. 9:9; 10:1-4). And especially when the great high priest was come, and his sacrifice was offered, they were quite impotent and useless, to answer any end at all: and therefore of right ought to cease, and be no more used; which leads,

3. Thirdly, To the abrogation of the first covenant, or of the administration of it; which was signified by the rending of the veil between the holy place and the holy of

holies, at the death of Christ; whereby the way into the holiest of all was made manifest, and all within exposed to open view; as are the mysteries of grace, the veil of ceremonies being removed; and now, with boldness and freedom, entrance is had into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, consecrated through the veil of his flesh, which the former veil was a type of. The abrogation of the old covenant is expressed by "breaking down the middle wall of partition," which stood between Jews and Gentiles; such the ceremonial law was, and is so called in allusion to the enclosure of the court of the Israelites, in the temple, over which the Gentiles might not pass; and by abolishing and slaving the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; the same ceremonial law, which had this name; because it indicated the hatred of God against sin, and irritated the hatred of natural men to it, by its numerous and wearisome rites; and because it was the occasion of enmity between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-16). It is moreover expressed by a disannulling of the commandment, the commandment of the priesthood, and of sacrifices and rites belonging to it; and even the whole ceremonial law, as to be of no more force, nor any longer binding; so that no man, henceforward, ought to "judge" another, with respect to them, nor take upon him to command an observance of them, and require obedience to them (Heb. 7:19; Col. 2:16,17). It is likewise expressed by "a blotting out the hand writing of ordinances that was against us;" being an accusation for sin, containing a charge of sin, and implying an acknowledgment of it; as if they had given it under their hands, and showing and owning that satisfaction for sin, and that expiation were not yet made; wherefore when Christ came and paid the debt, he took up his bond, and cancelled it, and blotted out this handwriting against his people, that it might not be read any more, and nailed it to his cross; where law and justice are directed to go for satisfaction (Col. 2:14). Once more, the abolition of the first covenant, and its form of administration, is signified by the fleeing away and disappearance of shadows. The law and its ceremonies were only shadows of good things to come by Christ; when he, the Sun of Righteousness, arose, these shadows fled; when he, the body, sum, and substance appeared, these disappeared: to this the church has respect (Song of Sol. 2:17 4:6).

Now the abrogation of the first and old covenant, or of that form of administration of the covenant of grace, was made, not at once, but gradually; and which the apostle suggests, when he says; "In that he saith a new covenant, he hath made the first old; now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). It began to decay, and there were some symptoms of a decay of it at the Babylonish captivity, and under the second temple; when the land of Canaan, a type of the heavenly inheritance, was seized upon by the Chaldeans, the inhabitants carried captive, a governor appointed over it by the king of Babylon, and people left in it to till it for his use; the temple was burnt, and temple worship and service ceased for many years, and the vessels of it were carried to Babylon; and though after a term of years there was a return of the people to their own land, and the temple was rebuilt, and worship restored; yet, as the Jews themselves own,^[2] the ark and many other things were wanting in that temple; great declensions there were, both in doctrine and worship; the sect of the Pharisees arose, and set up their

own traditions upon a level with the written word, if not above it; and great confusion there was in the priesthood, that and the civil government being blended together; and men were put into it, especially towards the close of this period, that were very unfit for it; and oftentimes obtained it by corruption and bribery; all which showed a decay, and foreboded a change of things as near.

John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, came and proclaimed the near approach of the Messiah; he declared, that "the kingdom of heaven was at hand" (Matthew 3:2). The gospel dispensation, the new administration of the covenant of grace, and the blessings of it: his father, at his birth, called him "the prophet of the Highest," who was to prepare his way, and give knowledge of salvation to his people; and when he entered upon his office, he directed the people to believe on Christ, who was to come; and quickly pointed him to them, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), which the lambs of the daily sacrifice, and all other sacrifices, could not do. Christ himself appeared, and preached the same as John had done, and began his ministry with the same words; but during his life the ceremonies of the law continued in use: he himself was circumcised the eighth day; his mother purified herself according to law, at the proper time, and presented him in the temple, according to the usual manner; at twelve years of age he went up with his parents to Jerusalem, to keep the passover; and when he had entered on his public ministry, he attended synagogue and temple worship; when he healed the leper he sent him to the priest to offer his gift; and one of the last actions of his life, was keeping the passover with his disciples; but at his death, of right, though not in fact, all ceremonies ceased, and even the whole dispensation or administration of the covenant, as it had been before in use; all things now concerning him had an end (Luke 22:37), all types and figures, shadows, sacrifices, promises, and prophecies; he by his sacrifice, by his sufferings and death, caused the sacrifice and oblation to cease, of right; nor should any afterwards have been offered up (Dan. 9:27), nor any other rite and ceremony observed: yet, through the influence of Judaizing teachers over weak minds, it was thought advisable to continue the use of some of the ceremonies, at least for a time; after it was known by Peter and others, that they were no longer in force, yet because of the many thousands of Jews, who were all zealous of the law, it was judged proper that compliances should be made, and charity and prudence to be exercised, that weak minds might not be offended, until they were better instructed in the doctrine of Christian liberty; which, when that was done, the use of them was strongly opposed against the obstinate and self-willed, who were resolved to retain them at any rate; and the saints were exhorted to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and not to be entangled with the yoke of bondage; by which means the Christian churches were freed from those burdensome rites and ceremonies. But still the carnal Jews continued them, and even sacrifices, until the destruction of Jerusalem, which put an end to them; for according to the law of God, no sacrifice might be offered but at Jerusalem, and upon the altar there; so that when the city, temple, and altar were destroyed, they ceased to offer any sacrifice, and never have offered any since; whereby that prophecy is remarkably fulfilled; "the children of Israel shall abide many days without a sacrifice" (Hosea 3:4), as they have for

nineteen hundred years, and still do; not even a passover lamb is slain by them, as well as no other sacrifice offered; which yet they would gladly offer, in defiance of Christ, the great Sacrifice, were it not for the above law, which stands in their way, and by which they are awed; and which is no small instance of the wisdom and goodness of God in providence. Now it was a little before the destruction of Jerusalem the apostle wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, and therefore, with great propriety, he says of the old covenant, that it was not only decayed, and waxen old, but was "ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). This being the case,

4. Fourthly, The new covenant, or the new administration of the covenant of grace, took place; and as the one was gradually removed, the other was gradually introduced; and this observation will serve to reconcile the different areas fixed by different persons, for the beginning of the new dispensation; some placing it at the birth of Christ; offsets at the ministry of John the Baptist; others at the death of Christ, and his resurrection from the dead; and others at his ascension, and the effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; whereas these were so many gradual manifestations of it: at the birth of Christ, undoubtedly, "the fulness of time" was come for the redemption of his people from the law who were under it; and on which very day the gospel was first preached by the angels to the shepherds, and afterwards more clearly and fully by John, by Christ and his apostles: Mark the evangelist, seems to make the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God, to be with the ministry of John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-3), and which agrees with what Christ says; "the law and the prophets were until John;" they terminated in him, his ministry put a period to them; "since that time the kingdom of God is preached" in a clearer manner, and attended to by more than it was before (Luke 16:16). Christ appeared, and preached the gospel as never man did; grace and truth came by him in a clearer and fuller manner than it ever had: he not only preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, as John did, but that it was already come; though not with pomp, with outward show and observation, and was actually among the people (Luke 17:20,21). At his death, and by the shedding of his blood, the New Testament was sealed, ratified, and confirmed by him, as the Testator of it; and therefore called, "the blood of the New Testament, and the blood of the everlasting Covenant" (Matthew 26:28; Heb. 13:20), of that new administration of the covenant which should always continue; but this new dispensation more clearly appeared at his ascension, and by the effusion of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at the day of Pentecost; at his resurrection he gave them a commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; and ordered them to wait at Jerusalem until they were endued with the Holy Spirit, as they were on the above day; whereby they were furnished and qualified to carry the gospel, and preach it among all nations, as they did. And now it may be observed, that the new administration of the covenant, under the gospel dispensation, lies in the following things:

4a. In an exhibition of Christ as come, and as become the author of eternal salvation; in it he is set and held forth as incarnate; as having obeyed, suffered, and died, and has made peace and reconciliation, and full satisfaction for sin; and has

obtained eternal redemption; has risen from the dead, and ascended to heaven, and has received for and given gifts to men to preach his gospel; these various articles of grace are comprised in the "great mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16), and in those words, which are the sum of the gospel declaration, "this is a faithful saying," &c. (1 Tim. 1:15).

4b. In a more clear and extensive ministration of the gospel: it first began to be spoken by Christ in the clearest and fullest manner it possibly could be; and then by his apostles, who received it from him, and gifts to minister it; and who by his orders carried it throughout the world, and preached it to every creature under heaven, first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles; and is, "according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations, for the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:25,26). so that the administration of the covenant is no longer restrained to a certain people, but men of all nations have the benefit of it.

4c. In a freedom from all bondage and servitude: not from the bondage of sin and Satan, common to all believers under every dispensation; but from the rigorous exaction of the law, as a covenant of works; from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and from the judicial laws, as peculiar to the Jews; and which further lies in the free use of things indifferent, and in the enjoyment of the privileges and immunities of the gospel church state: this is the glorious liberty of the children of God, the liberty with which Christ has made them free; and who receive the Spirit of adoption, by whom they cry, Abba, Father; and who is a free Spirit, and where he is, there is liberty.

4d. In a large communication of the gifts and graces of the Spirit: of extraordinary gifts, which in the first part of this administration were bestowed, not only upon the apostles, but upon common Christians, men and women, sons and daughters, servants and handmaids, according to the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2:28,29), of common and ordinary gifts, to fit men for the ordinary ministry of the word; and of the special graces of the Spirit, in a greater degree to saints in common; as a larger measure of faith, peace, joy, and comfort, and of light and knowledge; for according to this covenant, and the administration of it, all know the Lord from the least to the greatest; and though John was greater than the prophets, the least in this kingdom of heaven, or gospel dispensation, is greater than he (Jer. 31:34; Matthew 11:11).

4e. In ordinances more spiritual than the ordinances of divine service under the first covenant were, which are called "carnal" ones; but these, which are Baptism and the Lord's Supper, do in a very lively and spiritual manner represent the sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; and hold forth the blessings of the covenant of grace in a comfortable way, and are the means of applying them to believers, to the increase of their joy and peace; and these will continue throughout the present administration of the covenant, even to the end of the world (Matthew 28:19,20; 1 Cor. 11:26). Of these ordinances I shall particularly treat elsewhere.

Now as the former administration of the covenant was carried through the various periods of time from the first exhibition, after the fall of Adam, to the first coming of Christ; so this second and new administration of the covenant is carried through various successive periods, unto his second coming. The book of the Revelation exhibits the state of the church from the resurrection of Christ to his personal coming; and particularly the seven churches of Asia are emblematical of it in each of the successive periods of time within that interval; and represent it in its various changes and vicissitudes, as sometimes in prosperity and sometimes in adversity; sometimes in the freer use and enjoyment of the ministry of the word and ordinances, and sometimes as under clouds, darkness, and discouragements, through persecutors and false teachers, until the spiritual reign of Christ takes place; when the whole earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, and be enlightened with his glory; when the gospel will be in its purity everywhere, and the ordinances kept as they were first delivered, and gospel churches set up, and gospel discipline maintained everywhere; which will be followed with the personal reign of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the ultimate glory: of each of which in their proper place.