

The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained

*With an Exposition of the Covenant of Grace in the Principal Concernments of it**

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Preface by John Owen

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Christian Reader,

The ensuing Discourse contains a sober endeavor for the declaration and true stating of the nature and difference of the two Covenants of Works and of Grace. A subject this is which, by reason of the weight and rule of it in the whole business of Religious Obedience, has been attempted by many, and wherein, by reason of the difficulty of it, in conjunction with their own Prejudices, not a few have miscarried. Neither do I know of any who have yet handled it with that fullness and perspicuity as to shut up the way unto diligence of others in the investigation and declaration of the Truth, or to render Labour in the same kind either useless or superfluous.

The stores of heavenly wisdom, grace and truth which are treasured up in the Divine Revelations concerning God's Covenants, are far from being fully exhausted or drawn forth by the labors of any in this kind, although very many have already brought to light excellent and useful instructions in the mind of God and the duty of them who believe. But the thing itself so excellent, the mystery of it so great, the declaration of it in the Scripture so extensive and diffused throughout the whole body of it from the first to the last, as also in its concernment unto the whole course of our faith and obedience, that there is sufficient ground whereon to justify a renewed search into the mind of God therein as revealed in his word.

There is no doubt, but the greatest product of Divine Grace, Goodness and condescension, next unto the fending of the only Son of God to take our Nature on him, with the direct effect and consequence thereof, is this of his enquiring into Covenant with the Children of men; nor has any thing a greater tendency unto the advancement of his own glory. God might have dealt with mankind in a way of sovereignty or mere dominion, as he does with the remainder of the creatures here below; but then it must be acknowledged that in such a way of rule and procedure there would not have been that evident demonstration of the divine excellencies, his goodness, righteousness and faithfulness, as ensues upon the supposition of his condescension to take mankind into covenant with himself.

And then it is that he never did not ever would treat with any of that race any otherwise or on any other terms. Wherefore when the first Covenant was broken by the entrance of sin, God had no other relation unto mankind but that of a supreme Ruler and Judge, to reward them according to the penalty threatened, and established in the Covenant. But as for any advantage in a way of Love, Peace and Goodness there was none remaining until he had made and established a New Covenant to that end and purpose. And this fully discovers how great a concern there is of the glory of God in the Covenant which he made with us and proposes unto us, seeing he never declared

or intimated any other way of gracious or acceptable intercourse with him; and the effects of it do issue in eternity.

Moreover this dispensation of God in making a Covenant with our first Parents, was the greatest evidence of the preeminence of that nature wherewith in time we were endowed, and only demonstration of our being capable to be brought unto eternal enjoyment of him. For God herein admitting us into an intercourse with him by a declared Rule of his own Goodness and faithfulness manifested that we were capable of eternal rewards which he proposed unto us in himself. And these things make the investigation of the true nature of the Covenant with God first made with Adam, and the terms whereby it was made, both necessary and profitable.

For although that Covenant is ceased by the entrance of sin, as unto any spiritual or eternal advantage to us; yet is it as revealed, still instructive in the wisdom and goodness of God, as also in the excellency of that state and condition in which we were created, with the honor that God put upon our Nature, whence directions unto true apprehensions of God, and ourselves may be taken or derived. But as to the New Covenant which is in and with us in Christ, and so is comprehensive of the whole work of his Mediation, it is the only instrument of our present relation unto God, of his communicating of himself in a way of Grace, Love and Mercy unto us, of our fixing faith, trust and affiance on him, as also of the bringing of our souls unto the eternal enjoyment of him.

The knowledge hereof therefore is necessary for him to endeavor an acquaintance with God or Christ, the present state of future condition of his own soul. It is therefore a doubtless a labor worthy of acceptance in any whom God has given light unto in this Mystery of his Wisdom and Grace, and ability for the declaration thereof, to endeavor the direction and instruction of others in the Truth and Doctrine hereof, wherein all our faith, obedience, present comfort, and future happiness do depend. But yet further, besides these two solemn state Covenants, the one suited unto the preservation of the state of integrity wherein we were created, and the other to the renovation of the Image of God in us through Jesus Christ which we had lost by sin, there is mention in Scripture of sundry particular intervening Covenants that God made with his Church, or single persons, at several seasons.

Now whereas they did all partake of the Nature of a Divine Covenant in general, so they were emanations from and particular expressions or limitations of one or the other two solemn Covenants mentioned; for a Covenant of another kind absolutely, or more Covenants God never made with mankind. But yet under the Old Testament, while the wisdom of God was to be hid in its own mysteries, and not clearly brought forth into light, there was such a mixed dispensation, revealing for certain ends, the Notion, Sense and Power of the first Covenant and preparative for the introduction of the full

revelation and declaration of the latter by Jesus Christ, who was in all things to have the preeminence, as that it is not easy to discern and distinguish what belongs unto the one in them and what to the other, or from whether of them they are to be denominated.

Here therefore is a blessed field of sacred Truth, wherein humble, sober and judicious persons may exercise themselves, to the great benefit and advantage of the Church of God. To state I say aright the Nature of a Divine Covenant in general, with its Essential Properties, which must be in every one that is so, to manifest the true difference that is between the first and second Covenant which God hath made with us, in themselves, and their Nature, with their different effects and ends, to declare what Properties, Doctrines and Ends of the first Covenant or Covenant of Works, with what of the Nature, Power and Efficacy of the second Covenant or the Covenant of Grace God brought in and declared in that dispensation under the Old Testament, wherein there was a mixture of both, though one only established in power, to manifest what there was of Christ in the Law, and how the whole power and function of the first Covenant was through the Law conferred upon Christ, and in him fulfilled and ended, is a work deserving the most diligent travel of those who are called unto the teaching of the Mysteries of the Gospel.

And in these things with sundry other of an alike importance has this Worthy Author labored, if I am not much mistaken, unto good success. And his design is to extricate things which seem perplexed, to give light into the whole doctrine of the Covenants by declaring the proper Order and Method of the things contained in them, with the respect one unto another, that the grace of God in the Covenant of Grace may be exalted, and his faithfulness with his holiness in the Covenant of Works both in and by Jesus Christ, the end of the one and the life of the other; so the Reader will find I hope that satisfaction in these great and deep inquiries which he will have occasion to return praise and thanks to God for.

John Owen