

# LECTURE XXXVI.

## THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

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### SYLLABUS.

1. What the Scriptural uses of the terms כְּרִיתָהּ and διαθήκη? What the theological uses of the terms, 'Covenant of Redemption,' 'Covenant of Grace'? See Conf. of Faith, ch. 7. Sh. Cat., Qu. 20. Larger Cat., Qu., 31. Lexicons, *sub vocibus*. Sampson on Heb., ix : 16. Southern Presb. Rev., Jan., 1876. Hodge's Theol., Vol. ii, ch. 2 of pt. ii. Hill's Div., bk. v, ch. 5, § 1. Turretin, Loc. xii, Qu. 1. Dick. Lect. 48.
2. Prove the existence of a Covenant of Redemption. How related to the Covenant of Grace, and the Διαθήκη? See Turretin, Loc. xii, Qu. 2. Dick, Lect. 48. Hodge as above. Witsius, bk. ii, ch. 2.
3. Who are the original parties to the Covenant of Redemption? Their motives? for whom is Christ surety? See same authorities.
4. What the conditions stipulated between the Parties? Is any condition required of the believer? What? Faith? or also repentance? Dick, Lect. 48, 49. Hodge as above. Turretin, Qu. 3 and 2.
5. What is the date and duration of the Covenant? Explain, then, the terms "new" and "old" in Heb. viii : 8, or xii : 24. Turretin and Dick as above. Hodge, Com. on 1 Cor. xv : 24-28. See, on the whole, Witsius, bk. ii, ch. 2, 3.

**G**OD having created man upright, and he having sought out many inventions, and thus fallen into sin; our next inquiry must be into the remedy which God's love and mercy found for this fall. This remedy, in its exhibition, was of course subsequent to the ruin; but when we consider it in its inception in the Divine mind, we must go back into the recesses of a past eternity. God ever foreknew all things; and all His works, unto the end, are according to His original, eternal plan. Conceiving of God's eternal decree then in parts, (the only mode

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of conception of it competent to our finite minds,) we must consider that part of His plan formed from eternity, which was implied in that other part of the same plan whereby He purposed to permit man's fall and ruin. This remedial part of God's decree is the thing which the more recent Calvinistic divines term the COVENANT OF GRACE—e. g., Dick.

When it is thus considered, as a part of the Decree, we are enabled to condense much of the discussion and proof concerning it, given by the theologians; and to say in brief: that being such, the Covenant of Grace must of course possess those general properties which we asserted of the Decree; and for the same reasons, viz., eternity, immutability, wisdom, freeness, absoluteness, graciousness.

When we come to the Scriptures, we find a frequent use of the words rendered in our English version, 'Covenant,' 'Testament,' applied to transactions of God with men, through their Surety, Jesus Christ. Before we can proceed farther in the connected evolution of the subject, the proper meaning of these terms must be examined; בְּרִית, *διαθήκη*. The former of these words, both by its etymology and usage, is shown to mean 'covenant,' or 'agreement;' being often used to express theologically, God's covenants with man, and naturally, compacts between individuals. There are also cases in which it means an arrangement or disposition of matters determined on. Exod. xxxiv : 28; Jer. xxxiii : 20. It must be remarked, that the word currently used by the Sept. to render this, is *διαθήκη*. This fact would naturally lead us to attribute to it in the New Testament, the same meaning of disposition or covenant. It is admitted that the meaning so often given to it by our English version of 'testament,' (will,) is the primary etymological meaning in classic Greek. But there is only one case, (Heb. ix : 16,) where that meaning is supportable. Thus, when Christ is said by the English version to be "a surety of a better testament," (Heb. vii : 22,) there is an obvious incongruity between the office and the document. Wills do not have sureties. When the same version says, (1 Cor. xi : 25,) "This is my blood of the New Testament," the words, *καινης διαθηκης*, imply the Old, to which the character of a testament is inappropriate. But in Heb. ix : 16, 17, the meaning of "Testament" is to be retained, (against McKnight, Hill and others.) For, if their rendering be attempted, making the passage allusive to a covenant ratified by an animal sacrifice, three insuperable critical difficulties arise, that if *διαθήκη* means covenant, *διαθέμενον* should mean the "covenanter," i. e., God the Father, (Christ being the ratifying sacrifice.) But the Father did not die; that *νεκρος* cannot be properly used to describe dead animals sacrificed: and that the passage would then be made to

assert too much : for it is not universally true, that compacts were only of force anciently, after the death of a sacrifice to solemnize them. (See Sampson's Com. *in loco*.) Hence we assert that the statement of our Confession of Faith is substantially correct, that the Scripture does set forth the dispensation of God's grace to man under the idea of "a testament;" though perhaps not "often," as is said there. Their assertion refers to the English version.

The terms are used then, in their general or theological sense. 1st, by Theologians, and probably by Scripture, (Hos. vi : 7,) for the Covenant of works with Adam. 2nd, for the Abrahamic dispensation. 3rd, for the Mosaic dispensation. 4th, for the new or Christian dispensation. (Not covenants, but dispensations; for we shall show that there is only one covenant, besides that of works.)

If there is any gospel remedy for sin, then there must have been, from eternity, such a remedial plan in the Divine mind. But the question is, was this part of the eternal decree, in any proper sense a covenant? Has it properly the form of an eternal compact between persons of the Trinity? This is purely a question of Revelation, to be decided not so much by finding the words, covenant, compact, agreement, applied to it in Scripture, as the substance of the thing asserted. Calvinists hold that in the one, eternal decree of the Trinity, which is one in essence and attributes, and harmonious in will and thought, this remedial purpose (or part of the plan) has from eternity held the form of a concert or agreement between the Father and the Son, for the redemption of believers. But here we must carefully avoid confusing the subject, by giving to this immanent transaction of the Trinity all the technical features of a "covenant." Thus some divines have erred, especially of the Cocceian school. Obviously, we must not conceive of it, as though the one party produced in the other a willingness to do what he had not previously purposed, by exhibiting a certain reward or compensation, not before exhibited. Nor must we conceive that the second party produces, by his fulfilment of the conditions, a fixed purpose to bestow the given compensation, the purpose to do so having been hitherto uncertain. Nor, in a word, that there is any contingency on either hand, holding the purposes of either party suspended in doubt on the promissings or doings of the other party. But it has always been certain from eternity, that the conditions would be performed; and the consequent reward would be bestowed, because there has always been an ineffable and perfect accord in the persons of the Trinity, on those points: an accord possessing all the absoluteness of the other parts of the decree. Our limited understandings, of course, cannot fully understand the actings of the divine, triune spirit; seeing its constitution

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a Covenant?

is inscrutable to us. This is perhaps as near as we, can come to the conception designed to be given us.

The Scriptural proof of such an immanent, eternal transaction between the Father and Son, is the following: First. Inferentially, Eternal life was not only purposed to be bestowed, but, "promised, before the world began"—Tit. i : 2. To whom? for man did not yet exist? To Christ, for believers. Compare Eph. i : 4. Again: Christ is clearly implied to bear a federal relationship; as in 1 Cor. xv : 22, 47, 45; Rom. v : 17, 18. Our first federal head entered into covenant on our behalf; we infer that our second has; He would else not fulfill the idea of a federal person at all. Again: Christ is expressly called the Surety of a *διαθήκη*. Heb. vii ; 22. But a surety is one who voluntarily enters under the obligations of a compact on behalf of another. Many other passages would ground a similar inference; the student has now had sufficient examples how to use them. Note all conditional promises: To believers, to Christ. These are of nature of covenants.

Second. Many express passages describe (not always in the use of word covenant *et similia*, but in substance) such an eternal agreement. See Is. xlii : 6, xlix : 8; Mal. iii : 1; especially Ps. xl : 7, 8, as quoted by Heb. x ; 5. This covenant of Christ is unfolded by other Scriptures under the specific heads of His three offices—e. g., Prophetic. Is. lxi : 1, 2. Priestly. Isaiah, liii : 10, 11; Ps. cx : 4; John, x : 17, 18. Kingly. Ps. ii : 7, 8, cx : 6; Luke, xxii : 29, &c. Zech. vi : 13. Witsius somewhat fancifully argues also, that Christ's partaking of the Sacraments of the Old Testament could only have been to seal His covenant of redemption with His Father.

2. I hold that this subject cannot be treated intelligibly without distinguishing the covenant existing from eternity between the Father and Son, from that Gospel promise of salvation on terms of true faith offered to sinners through Christ. Many of our divines have agreed to retain this distinction, and to name the former covenant, for convenience' sake, the "Covenant of Redemption," while they call the Gospel promise to believers, "Covenant of Grace." To these I heartily accede. The Covenant of Redemption between the Father and Son, I hold to be the real covenant transaction, being a free and optional compact between two equals, containing a stipulation which turns on a proper, causative condition, and bearing no relation to time, as it includes no mutable contingency or condition dependent on the uncertain will of creatures. The Covenant of Grace (so called) is a dispensation of promise to man, arising out of and dependent on the Covenant of Redemption. Dr. John Dick seems to use the phrase Covenant of Grace, in a sense comprehensive of both transactions, and to assert that there is no use for the distinction. Turretin, Witsius, and our

Confession employ the same phrase in the sense of the Gospel promise to believing sinners, made through Christ as surety. See Confession ch. vii : § 3 ; Shorter Catechism qu. 20. It is true that the Larger Catechism, qn. 31, verges nearer to the distinction and the recognition of a prior Covenant of Redemption with Christ saying : " This Covenant of Grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him, &c."

Now, I repeat, the distinction which Dick repudiates, and which so many others obscure, is essential. It is true that the covenant with believing men is the consequence and sequel of that eternally made with Christ; and that the promises published in the former are the fruit of Christ's action in fulfilling the latter. In that sense the transactions are intimately connected. But the value and necessity of the distinction are easily evinced, against Dr. Dick, by such questions as these: Is Christ a party to the Covenant of Grace? Or is man the party of the second part? Here Dr. Dick must be fatally embarrassed. In the Covenant of Grace with man, Christ is not party, but surety—True: But unless there is some party to the transaction less mutable, feeble and guilty than believing sinners, man's prospect of deliverance is gloomy indeed! Yet it seems inconsistent to make the same Person both principal party and surety in the same transaction! I can give the solution, which Dick could not: In the eternal Covenant of Redemption Christ is principal party: in the Covenant of Grace, He is surety. Again: Is the Covenant conditioned or unconditioned? Here also, Dick is fatally entangled. Will he say it is conditioned, and thus ascribe to the sinner's faith an efficient merit? Or will he say it is unconditioned: and thus defraud us of hope with an unbought redemption? I can answer: The Covenant of Redemption was conditioned, on Christ's meritorious work. The Covenant of Grace is unconditioned: its benefits are offered to believers without price.

To my view Turretin has given his virtual support, though in a rather inconsistent fashion. After beginning with the one definition, of a Covenant of Grace, eternal and yet made with man in a surety, in Qu. ii § 12, he raises the question whether this Covenant of Grace was made by the Father with Christ as the other contracting party (for man's benefit); or whether it is made with the body of believers as the second party, in Christ as a "*Pars Media*." His answer is, that "the debate is superfluous: because the thing comes to the same." But he adds, just after; "*Certum est duplex hic pactum necessario attendendum esse vel unius ejusdemque pacti duas partes et gradus. Prius pactum est quod inter Patrem et Filium intercedit ad opus redemptionis exequendum. Posterius est, quod Deus cum electis in Christo contrahit.*" Witsius is more lucid, and so more consistent. After stating that God's Covenant of Grace with man is the remedy for the broken Covenant

of Works, he pauses, and begins his 2nd chapter. "*De pacto Dei Patris et Filii.*"

*Ut Fœderis Gratia natura penitus perspecta sit, duo imprimis distincte consideranda sunt. I. Pactum, quod inter Deum Patrem et Mediatorem Christum intercedit. II. Testamentaria illa Dispositio qua Deus salutem æternam electis, et omnia eo pertinentia immutabili fœdere addicit. Prior Conventio Dei cum Mediatore est. Posterior Dei cum Electis. Haec illam supponit, et in illa fundatur."*

The original parties to the Covenant of Redemption are the Father and the Son. It is plausibly urged by Dick, that in this transaction, the Father acted not only for Himself, as one person of the Trinity, but for the whole Godhead, as representative of the offended majesty of the three persons equally. His reason is, that all the persons being similar in attributes and dignity, must be conceived of as all alike offended by man's sin and guilt; and alike demanding the reconciling intervention of a Daysman; the Holy Ghost as much as the Father. It must be confessed that Dick cannot present any scriptural, direct proof of this view; but it seems reasonable. The Father on the one part, then, acts as the representative of the Godhead; Christ as the representative of the elect. The question is raised by Dick: Is Christ surety for man to God only, or for God also to believers? He answers, not for God to believers; because this is derogatory to God, as implying that His fidelity and mercy need or admit of any higher warrant than His own word. (But see Turretin, Loc. cit. § 16.) Does not God make known His fidelity as a promiser of pardon and life, and His mercy, precisely through this surety, as the prophet of the Covenant? Would man be any otherwise warranted to hope for any mercy? Further, the fact that God's goodness to us needs and admits of any certifying by a surety, results from nothing discreditable to God, but from something discreditable to us—our guilty mistrust. That God, who deserves to be trusted on His mere word, should condescend to give us warranty of His fidelity in the message, death and sacraments of His Son; this is His amazing grace and goodness. (See 1 Tim. i: 16.) And are not the sacraments seals? Does not Christ in them act as surety for God to us?

To the question whether believers are also parties in the Covenant of Grace, no better answer can be given than that of Turretin, § 12. In the eternal sense of the Covenant, they were not parties; in the sense of its exhibitions in time, they are parties; i. e., in their surety.

The Covenant of Redemption being, as regards the Father and the Son, but a part of the single Decree, must be as eternal as that Decree. It began in the counsels of a past eternity: and in

The Covenant Eternal.

one sense, its administration will extend (if not in the mediatorial offices of the Surety, at least in the communications of grace,) to a future eternity. In proof of its eternity, see Heb. xiii : 20 ; 1 Pet. i : 20. Hence the Covenant can only be one ; and therefore it can only be spoken of as " first," " second " (e. g., Heb. viii : 7,) or " old," " new," (as Heb. viii : 8 ; xii : 24,) with reference to its forms of manifestation.

Having considered the Godhead (represented in the Father,) and Christ, as the original parties to this covenant, the question naturally arises : What motive prompted them to this dispensation of amazing love and mercy? The only consistent answer is : their own will, moved by their own intrinsic benevolence, compassion and other attributes. To this agree all the passages of Scripture which describe God's electing love as free and unprocured by anything in man ; (Rom. ix : 11, 16,) because our election is but the embracing of us in the Covenant of Grace. Eph. i : 4. This is equally substantiated by the argument that God could not be moved by foreseen good in us, to embrace us in this covenant ; because the only foreseen good in us was that which was to result from the administration of the grace of that very covenant. It cannot be said that man's misery was more than the occasion of God's purpose in forming this Covenant of Grace ; for if we supposed it the procuring, or efficient cause, the misery of non-elect men and angels ought equally to have procured a Covenant of Grace towards them also.

Some have misrepresented the truth hereupon by teaching that Christ's undertaking to satisfy the law in man's stead is the procuring cause of God's purpose of mercy towards man. The error of this view is evident from this consideration, that, then, Christ would be originally more benevolent and merciful than the Father. But they are equal and harmonious originally, in this, as in all other excellencies. The true statement is, that Christ's promise of a vicarious righteousness was necessary to enable the Father's purpose of mercy to be effectuated consistently with other attributes—that purpose being precisely as original and uncaused in the Father as in the Son.

Dick (Lec. 49,) has very happily simplified the question, " What were the conditions bargained by the Son to the Godhead, on behalf of His people ?" by considering Him as placed precisely in His people's room and stead. He bargained to do precisely what they should have done, to supply precisely " their lack of service." The intrinsic righteousness of the rules imposed on man in the Covenant of Works, as being precisely what they ought to have been ; and the immutability of God's nature, show that whoever came forward to be their surety, must expect to have to undertake precisely what was

Motives of God to the Covenant. The Father not persuaded by the Son to it.

4. Conditions pledged by Christ—just what man owed. Ist. Obedience.

incumbent on them in that covenant. The first part of this obligation was to a life of perfect obedience. This life Christ rendered. (See, e. g., Matt. xvii : 5). A class of theologians has rejected the idea that Christ's active obedience was vicarious, and is imputed to His people. While this question will come up more naturally when we discuss the subjects of Satisfaction and Justification, we may briefly remark of it now, that the consideration above offered is obviously in favour of the Calvinistic view. Besides; when the Messiah is represented as saying, "A body hast thou prepared me," &c., (Ps. xl : 6, 8, quoted; Heb. x : 5, 10,) it is surely a very contracted and perverse interpretation, to suppose that He was clothed with humanity only with reference to one and the last act of His humanity; and that the general phrase, "I come to do Thy will," is to be understood only of the single act of offering His flesh. (See also Gal. iv : 4 and 5).

But man, while still bound to perpetual obedience, has already come under penalty, by failing to render it. Hence, our Surety bargained to bear that penalty in His people's stead. This cannot be more clearly stated than in the language of Is. liii : 5, 6; 2 Cor. v : 21. Some have supposed that there is an incompatibility between the first and second condition: that if the penalty for a neglected obedience is paid, law has no longer any claim for that obedience. This represents the relation between the law and penalty, erroneously. God does not accept the penalty as an equivalent for obedience, in the sense that either the one or the other satisfies the demands of the Law and of His nature, alike well. His relation to His rational creatures demands of them, by an inevitable and perpetual demand, perfect obedience: and if that fails, penalty also. But waiving this, does not the believer (having paid for his past delinquency by his surety,) owe a perpetual and perfect obedience for the future? And can he render it in the flesh? Hence his surety must render it for him, as well as pay the penalty.

In the third place, we may say scripturally, that Christ bargained, among all other compliances with His Father's will, to do as Mediator, all those things pertaining to His prophetic and kingly offices, necessary on His part, to the salvation of the elect. He undertook their instruction, guidance, protection and conquest to Himself. Weigh John xvii : 12-14, for instance, where our Saviour speaks of His agency in instructing and guiding His disciples as of a fulfilled compact. (See also, Ps. xxii : 22).

Passing now to the other side of the compact, we may say that the Godhead, represented in the Father, engaged on His side, to the Son, to clothe Him with humanity for the fulfilment of His task, (Ps. xl : 6,) and to endue Christ plenteously with gifts and

2nd. Penalty.

3d. The Offices of Mediator.

Conditions pledged by the Father.

graces therefor, (Is. xlix : 2 ; lxi : 1, 2,) to uphold Him under His heavy task, (Is. xlii : 1-7,) to give Him an elect seed as the sure reward of His labours, (Is. xlix : 6 ; liii : 10,) and to bestow His royal exaltation, with all its features of glory. (Ps. ii : 6 ; Phil. ii : 9, 10). As there is a secondary sense, in which God, in unfolding His eternal Covenant of Grace, bargains with man, so there is a sense in which there are terms proposed between God and believers also. It may be remarked in general, that there is a sense in which a part of the benefits promised to Christ are promised through Him also to His people ; and a part of the blessings covenanted to them, are honours and rewards to Him. Thus His mediatorial graces are their gain ; and their redemption is His glory. Hence, this division between benefits covenanted to His people, and those covenanted to Christ, cannot be sharply carried out.

When we consider the covenant as between God and believers, however, it is evident that there are terms bargained between them. These may be found briefly expressed in the words so often repeated, and obviously intended to be so significant in Scriptures ; Gen. xvii : 7 ; Jer. xxxi : 33 ; Rev. xxi : 3 : " I will be their God, and they shall be My people." In this covenant God briefly bargains, on His part, to be reconciled to believers, and to communicate Himself to them as their guide, light, consolation, and chief good. They, on their part, are held bound to the correlative reconciliation, grounding their weapons of rebellion and exercising the spirit of adoption, to a life of self-consecration and obedience, to separation from the world of His enemies, and conformity of heart and life to God's will: It is true, that the transaction of Gen. 17th is rather ecclesiastical than spiritual ; but the spiritual is always included and represented in the outward.

The full and blessed significance of this formula will not be apprehended, unless we consider that it is not used in Scripture once, but as often as the covenant of grace proposed or renewed. Compare not only Gen. xvii : 7, 8, but Exod. xx : 2 ; xxix : 45 ; Deut. v : 2, 3, 6 ; Jer. xxiv : 7 ; xxx : 22 ; xxxi : 33 ; Ezek. xi : 20 ; Zech. xiii : 9. And in the New Testament, 2 Cor. vi : 16 ; Heb. 8, 10, and Rev. xxi : 3. We thus see from this emphatic repetition, that these words are the summary of all the blessings and duties arising out of the gospel relation. They are common to both dispensations. They re-appear as a grand "refrain," whenever the prophets sing most triumphantly the blessings of the covenant : until we hear them for the last time as the song of the ransomed and glorified Church. This relation thus expressed is to be understood then ; not as the general one of Creator and creature, sovereign proprietor and servant ; but as the special and gracious relation established in the Mediator by the Gospel. In it God promises to be to

believers all that is implied in their redemption and eternal adoption; while the believer is held bound to all that is implied in faith and repentance.

The question then arises, whether all the graces and duties of the Christian life may be accounted as conditions of the Covenant of Grace. If so, is it not reduced again to another Covenant of Works? The answer is, that it is only in a very slight, and improper sense, the Christian's holy life can be called a condition of his share in grace—only as in the order of sequence it is true that a holy life on earth must precede a complete redemption in heaven. So far is it from being true that this holy life is in any sense a meritorious condition of receiving grace, or a procuring cause; it is itself the fruit and result of grace. But when we examine more minutely the account of that gracious transaction in the Scriptures shadowed forth in the ecclesiastical transaction of Gen. 17th, and stated first more simply in Gen. 15th, we find that Abraham's faith only was imputed to him for righteousness. Gen. xv : 6; Rom. iv : 9, 10, &c. This effectually explains the matter. The argument in favour of the position we have assumed, is sufficiently strengthened by adding that all graces and holy living are everywhere spoken of by God, and sought by Bible saints in prayer, as God's gifts bestowed as the fruit of the Covenant of Grace. Citations are needless.

The question has been keenly agitated between Calvinists, whether Faith itself should be spoken of as a condition of the covenant. One party has denied it, because they supposed that the language which represented man as performing a condition of his own salvation would make an inlet for human merit. But it is most manifest that there is a sense in which Faith is the condition, in all such passages as John iii : 16; Acts viii : 37; John xi : 26; Mark xvi : 16. No human wit can evade the fact, that here God proposes to man a something for him to do, which, if done, will secure redemption; if neglected, will ensure damnation—and that something is in one sense a condition. But of what kind? Paul everywhere contrasts the condition of works, and the condition of faith. This contrast will be sufficiently established, and all danger of human merits being intruded will be obviated, if it be observed that Faith is only the appointed instrument for receiving free grace purchased by our Surety. It owes its organic virtue as such, to God's mere appointment, not to the virtue of its own nature. In the Covenant of Works, the fulfilment of the condition on man's part earned the result, justification by its proper moral merit. In the Covenant of Grace, the condition has no moral merit to earn the promised grace, being merely an act of receptivity. In the Covenant of Works, man was required to fulfil the condition in

Faith the only Condition.

May Faith be properly called a condition.

his own strength. In the Covenant of Grace, strength is given to him to believe, from God.

The question now remains, whether, in this instrumental sense, any thing else besides faith is a condition of the Covenant of Grace. (See Cat. Ques. 33). "Received by faith alone." There are two evasions: one, that which makes Repentance a condition along with faith, Luke xiii : 3 ; Acts ii : 38, &c. Contrast with Jno. iii : 16-18 ; Acts xvi : 30, 31. The other is the one common to Papists, (*meritum congruum* of *fides formata*), some classes of New England Divines (justification by faith apprehended as the generative principle of holiness, and inclusive thereof,) and the Campbellites, (justification by the "obedience of faith," viz: immersion). Here is a subtle inlet for works. These perversions have all this common mark, that they desert the scriptural doctrine, which makes faith the instrument of justification solely through its receptive agency, and they claim for faith a purchasing power, or merit of the result. Recurring to the former evasion, which makes repentance a co-condition of the covenant, along with faith, we shall do no more in this place than refer the student to the discriminating statements of Turretin. Ques. 3, § 15, 16, 17. When we come to justification, we shall resume it.

No other Condition.  
Evasions.