

# Of the Everlasting Covenant of Grace, Between the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

by John Gill

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*The covenant of grace is a compact or agreement made among the divine Persons, more especially between the Father and the Son, concerning the salvation of the elect.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 53:10

**Topics:** "Salvation", "Covenant of Grace"

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## Description

John Gill expounds on the Everlasting Covenant of Grace, emphasizing the eternal agreement between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit regarding the salvation of the elect. He explains the significance of the covenant, its etymology, and how it reflects the divine nature and intentions of God. The covenant is characterized as a promise of grace, life, and peace, highlighting the roles of each divine person in this sacred agreement. Gill asserts that this covenant is foundational for the grace and glory experienced by believers, as it was established before the creation of the world. Ultimately, the covenant serves to manifest God's glory and ensure the salvation of His chosen ones.

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## Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 2--Chapter 7

OF THE EVERLASTING COVENANT OF GRACE,

BETWEEN THE FATHER, AND THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The council before treated of, is the basis and foundation of the Covenant of grace, and both relate to the same thing, and in which the same persons are concerned. In the former, things were contrived, planned, and advised; in the latter, fixed and settled. The covenant of grace is a compact or agreement made from all eternity among the divine Persons, more especially between the Father and the Son, concerning the salvation of the elect. For the better understanding these federal transactions between them, before the world was, when there were no creatures, neither angels nor men in being; and which lay the foundation of all the grace and glory, comfort and happiness, of the saints in time and to eternity; it may be proper to consider, 1.

The etymology and signification of the words used for "covenant", in the writings of the Old and New Testament, by which it will appear with what propriety these transactions may be called a "covenant". The books of the Old Testament were written in Hebrew, and the Hebrew word for "covenant", throughout those writings is tyrb "Berith"; which, by different persons, is derived from different roots. There are a set of men<sup>[1]</sup> lately risen up, who derive the word from rrb "Barar", which signifies, to "purify"; and because the word we translate "make", which usually goes along with "covenant", signifies, to "cut off", they warmly contend, that wherever we meet with this phrase, it should be rendered, "cut off the Purifier" by whom they understand the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, though it will be allowed, that Christ is sometimes called a Refiner and Purifier, (Mal. 3:3) yet not by any word or name derived from this root; nor is it likely, that a "Purifier", or "he that purifies", should be expressed by a noun feminine, as "Berith" is; and not by a noun masculine, or a participle belonging to this root; and though such a version of the phrase may happen to suit tolerably well with a passage or two; yet there are many places in which, were it so rendered, no sense could be made of them.

If the word has the signification of purity, as a word of the same letters, though differently pointed has, being twice translated "soap", (Jer. 2:22; Mal. 3:2) which is of a detersive, cleansing, and purifying nature. Rather as this is used for covenant, it may denote the purity of intention, and sincerity of heart, that ought to be in all persons that enter into covenant with each other; and which is most eminently true of the pure and holy divine persons, in their covenant engagements.

But the word "Berith, covenant", may rather be derived, as it more commonly is, either from arb "Bara"; which, in the first sense of the word, signifies to "create"; a covenant being made with man, as soon almost as he was created, which covenant he transgressed, (Hosea 6:7) but the covenant of grace was made before the creation of man; though it was first made manifest quickly after his fall, which was not long after his creation; the sum and substance of which lies in those words, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head" (Gen. 3:15).

The word, in a secondary sense, may signify, to order or dispose of things; as in creation things were disposed and put in an orderly manner, and with this may agree, the words diatiyemai, and diayhkh, used of a covenant in the New Testament, which signify, a disposing of things in a covenant or testamentary way. It is further observed by some, that the same Hebrew word, in another conjugation, signifies to "cut" in pieces and divide, and think that a covenant has its name from hence, because it was usual at making covenants, to slay creatures for sacrifice, and cut them in pieces, and lay them by each other, and the covenanters to pass between them; of which rite (see Gen. 15:9, 10, 17; Jer. 34:18) to which way of making a covenant by sacrifice, the allusion may be in Psalm 50:5.

Or else the word may be derived from hrb "Barah"; which, among other things, signifies to "eat" food; it being usual, when covenants were made and confirmed, for the parties covenanting, to eat and feast together; as did Abimelech and Isaac, Laban and Jacob, (Gen. 26:30, 31:46) and it may be observed, that the Lord's Supper, which is a feast, is a commemoration of the ratification of the covenant of grace, by the blood of Christ, and wherein and whereby the faith of God's people is strengthened and confirmed, as to their interest in it.

But after all, it may be best to derive the word from this root, as it signifies to select and choose, and the rather, since all those roots, rrb, arb hrb have this signification; and which well agrees with a covenant, into which persons, of their own will and choice, enter; choose the persons to be concerned with them, the

terms and conditions on which they covenant with each other, and the things and persons they covenant about; all which entirely agrees with this federal transaction, or covenant of grace we are about to treat of.

The word used in the New Testament for "covenant", is *diaykhē*, by which word the Septuagint interpreters almost always translate the Hebrew word "berith" in the Old, and comes from a word which signifies to "dispose", and that in a covenant way, as in Luke 22:29, where the Father is said to appoint, or dispose, by covenant, a kingdom to his Son, as he also is said to appoint, or dispose by covenant, a kingdom to his people; and the word from it, is used for a covenant in (Acts 3:25) and in other places; and sometimes for a testament, or a man's last will, (Heb. 9:16, 17) and we shall see the use of the word in this sense hereafter, as it may be applicable to the covenant of grace; the word signifies both covenant and testament, and some have called it a covenant testament, or a testamentary covenant; hence the different administrations of the covenant of grace in time, are called the first and second, the Old and New Testament; and even the books of scripture, written under those different dispensations, are so distinguished (see Heb. 8:1-13; 2 Cor. 3:6, 14).

In the next place it may not be improper to observe, 2. In what sense the word "covenant" is used in scripture, which may serve to lead into the nature of it. And, 2a. It is sometimes used for an ordinance, precept, and command; so the order for giving the heave offerings to the sons of Aaron, is called a covenant of salt, a perpetual ordinance, (Num. 18:19) the law for releasing servants after six years service, has the name of a covenant, (Jer. 34:13, 14) and this may account for the Decalogue, or Ten Commands, being called a covenant, (Deut. 4:13) for whatsoever God enjoins men, they are under an obligation to observe, nor have they a right to refuse obedience to it; and, indeed, the covenant of works made with Adam, was much of the same nature, only he had a will, consenting to obey, the bias of it being to the will of God, as well as power to perform. 2b.

A covenant, when ascribed to God, is often nothing more than a mere promise; "This is my covenant with them, saith the Lord, my Spirit that is upon thee", &c. (Isa. 59:21) hence we read of "covenants of promise", or promissory covenants, (Eph. 2:12) and, indeed, the covenant of grace, with respect to the elect, is nothing else but a free promise of eternal life and salvation by Jesus Christ, which includes all other promises of blessings of grace in it; "This is the promise that he hath promised us", the grand comprehensive promise, "even eternal life", (1 John 2:25) and which is absolute and unconditional, with respect to them; whatever condition is in that covenant, lay only on Christ to perform; he and his work are the only condition of it.

And so, 2c. We often read of covenants of God only on one side; of this kind is his covenant of the day and of the night, (Jer. 33:20) which is no other than a promise that these should always continue, without requiring any condition on the part of the creature, (Gen. 8:22) and the covenant he made with Noah and his posterity, and with every living creature, with which latter especially, there could be no restipulation, (Gen. 9:9-17) and so the covenant he promised to make for his, people, with the beasts of the field, could be no other than a mere promise of security from harm by them (Hosea 2:18).

But, 2d. A covenant properly made between man and man, is by stipulation and restipulation, in which they make mutual promises, or conditions, to be performed by them; whether to maintain friendship among themselves, and to strengthen themselves against their common enemies, or to do mutual service to each other, and to their respective posterities; such was the confederacy between Abraham, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; and the covenant between Abimelech and Isaac, and between David and Jonathan (Gen. 14:13, 26:28; 1 Sam. 20:15, 16, 42, 23:18).

Now, 2e. Such a covenant, properly speaking, cannot be made between God and man; for what can man restipulate with God, which is in his power to do or give to him, and which God has not a prior right unto? God may, indeed, condescend to promise that to man, which otherwise he is not bound to give; and he may require of man, that which he has no right to refuse, and God has a right unto, without making any such promise; and therefore, properly speaking, all this cannot formally constitute a covenant, which is to be entered into of free choice on both sides; and especially such a covenant cannot take place in fallen man, who has neither inclination of will to yield the obedience required, nor power to perform it.

But, 2f. The covenant of grace made between God and Christ, and with the elect in him, as their Head and Representative, is a proper covenant, consisting of stipulation and restipulation; God the Father in it stipulates with his Son, that he shall do such and such work and service, on condition of which he promises to confer such and such honours and benefits on him, and on the elect in him; and Christ the Son of God restipulates and agrees to do all that is proposed and prescribed, and, upon performance, expects and claims the fulfilment of the promises: in this compact there are mutual engagements each party enters into, stipulate and restipulate about, which make a proper formal covenant (see Isa. 49:1-6, 53:10-12; Ps. 40:6-8; John 17:4, 5).

Which passages of scripture will be produced, and more fully opened hereafter. 3. The names and epithets given to this federal transaction, or covenant of grace, between the Father and Son, both in the scriptures and among men, may deserve some notice, since they may help to give a better and clearer idea of this transaction. 3a. It is called, "a covenant of life", (Mal. 2:5) for though it is said of Levi, yet of him as a type of Christ; and if the covenant with Levi might be so called, much more that with Christ.

Some divines call the covenant of works, made with Adam, a covenant of life, and so it may be; but then only as it respected that natural happy life Adam then lived, and as it contained a promise of continuance of it, and confirmation in it, should he stand the trial of his obedience; but not a promise of eternal life and happiness, such as the saints enjoy in heaven; for such a life was never designed to be given by, nor could come through a covenant of works (see Gal. 3:21).

But the covenant of grace contains such a promise, a promise that was made by God, that cannot lie, before the world was; that is, a promise made to Christ, in the covenant of grace, from eternity, who then existed as the federal Head of his people, to whom it was made, and in whose hands it is put for them; he asked life of his Father for them in this covenant, and he gave it to him, even length of days for ever and ever; and therefore with great propriety may this covenant be called, a covenant of life (see Titus 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:1; Ps. 21:4). 3b.

It is called "a covenant of peace" (Mal. 2:5, Isa. 54:10). As the transaction between the eternal Three, in which the plan and method of the peace and reconciliation of God's elect was consulted, may be called "the council of peace"; because that was a principal article considered in it; so, for the same reason, the covenant may be called the covenant of peace; for what was concerted in the council of peace concerning it, was fixed and settled in the covenant: as, that the Son of God, in human nature, should be the Peace Maker, and should make peace by the shedding of his blood; and hence, in the fulness of time, he was sent to be the Man, the Peace, according to promise and prophecy, founded upon this covenant, (Mic. 5:2, 5) and had the "chastisement of peace" laid upon him; that is, the punishment for the sins of the elect inflicted on him, whereby their peace and reconciliation was made, (Isa. 53:6) all which was by his own consent, and in consequence of the covenant made between him and his Father, and which, therefore, is rightly called "the covenant of peace". 3c.

It is commonly called by men, "the covenant of grace"; and properly enough, since it entirely flows from, and has its foundation in the grace of God: it is owing to the everlasting love and free favour of God the Father, that he proposed a covenant of this kind to his Son; and it is owing to the grace of the Son, that he so freely and voluntarily entered into engagements with his Father; the matter, sum, and substance of it is grace; it consists of grants and blessings of grace to the elect in Christ; and the ultimate end and design of it is the glory of the grace of God. 3d.

It is by some divines called, "the covenant of redemption"; and very truly, because the redemption of God's elect is a principal article in it: the Father proposed to the Son, that he should raise up, restore, redeem Israel, his chosen ones; the Son agreed to it, and hence he was declared and promised, and expected as the Redeemer, long before he came into this world to do this service; Job knew him as his living Redeemer, and all the Old Testament saints waited for him as such, having had a promise of it, which was founded on this covenant agreement; for as it was proposed to him, and he agreed to it, to be the Redeemer, so it was promised him, that upon the condition of giving himself, the redemption and ransom price for the elect, they should be delivered from all their sins, and the effects of them, and out of the hands of all their enemies; see (Isa. 49:5, 59:20; Job 33:24).

But then, 3e. This covenant is the same with the covenant of grace; some divines, indeed, make them distinct covenants; the covenant of redemption, they say, was made with Christ in eternity; the covenant of grace with the elect, or with believers, in time: but this is very wrongly said; there is but one covenant of grace, and not two, in which the Head and Members, the Redeemer and the persons to be redeemed, Christ and the elect, are concerned; in which he is the Head and Representative of them, acts for them, and on their behalf.

What is called a covenant of redemption, is a covenant of grace, arising from the grace of the Father, who proposed to his Son to be the Redeemer, and from the grace of the Son, who agreed to be so; and even the honours proposed to the Son in this covenant, redounded to the advantage of the elect; and the sum and substance of the everlasting covenant made with Christ, is the salvation and eternal happiness of the chosen ones; all the blessings and grants of grace to them, are secured in that eternal compact; for they were blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, and had grace given them in him before the world was; wherefore there can be no foundation for such a distinction between a covenant of redemption in eternity, and a covenant of grace in time. 4.

The contracting parties concerned in this covenant, are next to be considered more particularly and distinctly. This covenant is commonly represented as if it was only between the Father and the Son; but I see not why the Holy Spirit should be excluded, since he is certainly promised in it both to Head and members; and in consequence of it, is sent down into the hearts of God's covenant ones, to make application of the blessings, promises, and grace of the covenant to them, and to work a work of grace in them; all which must be by agreement, and with his consent; and I think there are some traces, and some footsteps of all the three Persons, as concerned in it, in the dispensation and manifestation of this covenant to the people of Israel (Hag. 2:4,5).

However, as in all covenants the contracting parties are, 4a. Distinct from each other, so in this; a covenant is not of one, but of more than one; no man covenants with himself; at least such a covenant is not properly one; Job is, indeed, said to make a covenant with his eyes, (Job 31:1) but that was no other than a resolution within himself to lay a restraint upon his eyes, not to make use of them in such a manner as might tend to sin. The divine Persons of the sacred Trinity are distinct Persons, as has been proved in

the article on that subject.

And so they appear to be in their federal transactions with each other. He that called his Son to service, and directed him, or proposed the work he should do, "to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the preserved of Israel", &c. (Isa. 49:3, 5, 6) must be distinct from him to whom he proposed all this; and he who in compliance with it said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God!" (Ps. 40:7, 8; Heb. 10:7) must be distinct from him whose will he was so ready to do, and whom he calls his Lord and God, as he was, by virtue of his covenant relation to him: and the Spirit, who was sent by them both, in consequence of a covenant agreement, to be the Comforter of the covenant ones, must be distinct from either. 4b.

As they are distinct Persons, so they have distinct acts of will; for though their nature and essence is but one, which is common to them all, and so their will but one; yet there are distinct acts of this will, put forth by and peculiar to each distinct Person: thus their nature being the same, their understanding must be the same; and yet there are distinct acts of the divine, understanding, peculiar to each Person; the Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father, and they have a distinct knowledge and understanding of one another, and the Spirit knows them both, and they know him.

And as their nature and essence, so their affections are the same; and yet there are distinct acts of them, peculiar to each Person; the Father loves the Son, and has put all things into his hands; the Son loves the Father, and is in all things obedient to him; the Spirit loves the Father and the Son, and they both love him: so their will, though the same, there are distinct acts of it, peculiar to each Person; and which appear in their covenanting with each other, and are necessary to it: there is the Father's distinct act of will notified in the covenant, that it is his will and pleasure his Son should be the Saviour of the chosen ones; and there is the Son's distinct act of will notified in the same covenant, he presenting himself, and declaring himself willing, and engaging himself to be the Saviour of them; which distinct acts of the divine will thus notified, formally constituted a covenant between them; and as the holy Spirit dispenses his gifts and grace, the blessings of this covenant, "severally as he will", (1 Cor. 12:11) this is pursuant to an agreement, to a notification of his will in covenant also. 4c.

These contracting Parties entered into covenant freely and voluntarily, of their own choice, as all covenantors do, or should; hence the Hebrew word for covenant, as has been observed, comes from a root, which signifies to choose; because men choose their own terms and conditions, on which they agree to enter into covenant with each other, not being compelled and forced thereunto. So it is in this everlasting covenant, the Parties were at entire liberty to enter or not into it: the Father was under no necessity, nor under any obligation to save men; he could, in consistence with his justice, and the other perfections of his nature, have destroyed the whole world of men, as he destroyed all the angels that sinned; he was not obliged to make a covenant with his Son to save them; it was of his own choice he did it; who will have mercy on whom he will have mercy: nor was the Son compelled to enter into this covenant; but knowing his Father's will, and agreeing to it, voluntarily engaged in it, and said, "Lo, I come to do thy will": and as the Spirit freely bestows his grace, and the gifts of it in time, so he freely engaged to do it in the covenant in eternity. 4d.

What they agreed in covenant, was what was in their power to perform; if one man enters into a covenant with another, and agrees to do what is not in his power, and which he knows it is not, when he enters into covenant, this is a fraud and an imposition on him, with whom he covenants; and in course the covenant is null and void. But the contracting parties in the covenant of grace, are able to perform whatever they covenanted about: the Father is able to make good all that he has promised in it, either to his Son or to the

elect in him; and the Son is able to do the work he engaged to do; he had power to assume human nature into union with his divine Person, and to lay down his life in that nature, having such a power over his own life, and to dispose of it at pleasure, as no mere man ever had; and so being God, as well as man, was able to work out the salvation of his people, which he undertook; the Father knew he was able to save them, and therefore laid help on him, and called him to this work; and he knew himself to be equal to it, and therefore engaged in it: and the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of power and might, and so able to perform the part he took in this covenant. 4e.

As in all covenants, however, the persons covenanting may be equal in other respects, yet in covenanting there is an inequality and subordination; especially in covenants, in which there is service and work to be done on one side, and a reward to be given in consideration of it on the other; of which nature is the covenant of grace and redemption; and though the contracting parties in it are equal in nature, perfections, and glory, yet in this covenant relation they voluntarily entered into, there is by agreement and consent a subordination; hence the Father, the first Person and Party contracting is called by his Son, his Lord and his God, a phrase always expressive of covenant relation; (see Ps. 16:2, 22:1, 40:8, 45:7; John 20:17) and the Son, the second Person and Party contracting, is called by the Father his Servant; "Thou art my Servant", &c. (Isa. 49:3) hence the Father is said to be "greater than he", (John 14:28) not merely on account of his human nature, about which there could be no difficulty in admitting it; but with respect to his covenant relation to him, and the office capacity he has taken and sustains in it: and the Spirit, the third Person and contracting Party, he is said to be sent both by the Father and the Son, to perform that part which he undertook in it: and this economy and dispensation of the covenant, thus settled in subordination among themselves by agreement and consent, is done with great propriety, beauty, and decency, suitable to their natural relations they bear to each other, as equal divine Persons for who so proper to be the proposer of terms in the covenant, to direct and prescribe them, and to exercise a kind of authority, as he who is the first Person in order of nature, and that stands in the relation of a Father to the second Person; and since here was work and service to be done, the salvation of the elect, and that in an inferior nature, in human nature, who so proper to engage in this service, and to assume this nature, and in it yield obedience to the will of God, than the second Person, who stood in the relation of a Son to the First? and with what congruity is the third Person, the Holy Spirit, sent by both, to make application of the grace of both; who is said to be their Breath, and to proceed from both. 4f.

As in all covenants some advantages are proposed unto, and expected by all parties concerned, so in this; as God's end in all things, in nature, providence, and grace, is his own glory, so it is in this covenant, even the glory of Father, Son, and Spirit; which must be understood not of any addition unto, or increase of their essential glory, but of the manifestation of it; otherwise, as Christ is represented saying to his Father, "My goodness extendeth not to thee"; thou art not the better for my suretyship engagements in covenant, and the performance of them; thou hast no real profit and advantage thereby; no new accession of glory and happiness accrues to thee by it; but the real profit and advantage resulting from hence is, "to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight" (Ps. 16:2, 3).

As for the glory promised to Christ, and which he expected and pleaded on his finishing his work, (John 17:4, 5) this was either the manifestation of the glory of his divine Person, hid in his state of humiliation; or his glory as Mediator, his kingdom and glory, as such appointed to him, and promised him, upon the performance of his engagements, (Luke 22:29; 1 Peter 1:21; Heb. 2:9) of which more hereafter; and yet, even the benefit of this redounds to the advantage of God's elect, (John 17:22, 24) it is their salvation and happiness that is the grand thing in view in these covenant transactions; this is "all my salvation" (2 Sam.

23:5).

As the sum of the gospel, which is no other than a transcript of the covenant of grace, is the salvation of lost sinners by Christ; so the covenant, of which that is a copy, chiefly respects that, and that is the result of it: hence Christ, the Covenantee, has the name of Jesus, because he undertook to save, and came to save, and has saved his people from their sins, in consequence of his covenant engagements.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Called Hutchinsonians.

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