

Of the Properties of the Covenant of Grace.

by John Gill

John Gill's sermon explores the properties of the Covenant of Grace, emphasizing its eternal, free, and unconditional nature as the foundation of salvation for believers.

Scripture: Hebrews 8:7

Topics: "God's Unconditional Love", "Covenant of Grace"

Description

John Gill expounds on the properties of the Covenant of Grace, emphasizing its eternal nature, rooted in God's mercy and love, and established before the foundation of the world. He highlights that this covenant is entirely free and unconditional, relying solely on God's grace rather than human merit. Gill further explains that the covenant is perfect and complete, providing all necessary blessings for believers, and is characterized by holiness and immutability, ensuring its promises are secure and everlasting. He contrasts this with the conditional nature of the covenant of works, affirming that the Covenant of Grace is a divine assurance of salvation and relationship with God. Ultimately, Gill underscores the glory of God's grace as the foundation and essence of this covenant.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 2--Chapter 15

OF THE PROPERTIES OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

I shall close the account of the covenant of Grace with the epithets or properties of it; which may serve to lead more fully and clearly into the nature, use, and excellency of it; and which may in some measure be collected from what has been already observed. And, 1. It is an "eternal" covenant; not merely as to duration, being what will continue to eternity, and so is called an everlasting covenant, but as to the original of it; it was made in eternity, and commenced and bears date from eternity.

The spring of it is the mercy, grace, and love of God; "I said", says God, "mercy shall be built up for ever"; there shall be such a display of it, as shall always abide; and in order to this it follows; "I have made a covenant with my chosen", with Christ, and the elect in him; which is a standing everlasting monument of mercy; and now "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting"; not only as an attribute of God, but in the display of it to sinful miserable creatures; and where is there a display of it so early but in the covenant?

(Ps. 89:2, 3, 28, 103:17) and which mercy is no other than the love and free favour of God exercising itself in such a manner towards sinful men; and which love, as it was bore to Christ, so to his people in him, before the foundation of the world (John 17:23, 24).

The basis of the covenant, is God's election of men to eternal life; the foundation of God, which stands sure, and which laid a foundation for the covenant of grace; it is built upon it; the covenant is made with Christ, God's elect, and with men chosen in him, and who were chosen in him to be holy and happy, before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). The council of peace, which was introductory to the covenant of grace, was of old, from everlasting; as all the counsels of God are; in this Christ was the everlasting Counsellor; as well as in the covenant the everlasting Father: God was in Christ from eternity, forming the scheme of man's peace, reconciliation, and salvation; which prepared and furnished sufficient matter for the everlasting covenant: Christ was set up as the Mediator of it "from everlasting"; from the beginning, or ever the earth was; his goings forth in it, in acts of love and grace towards his people, "were of old, from everlasting"; drawing nigh to his divine Father, and becoming their Surety, interposing between him and them as Mediator, engaging to do everything for them law and justice could require; and receiving on their account, all grants and promises made unto them, (Prov. 8:23; Mic. 5:2).

The blessings of the covenant were put into the hands of Christ so early, and the elect were blessed with them in him, as they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world, and are the "grace" given to them in him, "before the world began" (Eph. 1:3, 4; 2 Tim. 1:9). There were also promises made, particularly the grand promise of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world was; and which promise of life is in Christ, as all the promises of the covenant are, being put into his hands so early; the heirs of them not having an actual being, yet a representative one in him their Head (Titus 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:1).

Now all this, proves the antiquity of the covenant of grace; nor is it any objection to it, that it is sometimes called the "second" and "new" covenant, (Heb. 8:7, 8, 13, 9:15, 12:24) for it is so called, not with respect to the covenant of works made with Adam, as if it was the second to that, and newer and later than that; for it was made long before that, even in eternity, as has been shown; but the distinctions of "first" and "second", "old" and "new", respect the different administrations of the same covenant of grace in time: the first administration of it began immediately after the fall of Adam, and continued under the patriarchs, and under the Mosaical dispensation, unto the coming of Christ; and then a new administration of it took place, which made the first old, and is called the second, with respect to that; and yet both, for substance, are the same covenant, made in eternity, but variously administered in time.

There are several time covenants made with men; as with Adam, Noah, Abraham, the children of Israel, Phinehas, David, &c. But the covenant made with Christ, and the elect in him, was not made in time, but in eternity. It is a notion that commonly obtains, that God makes a covenant of grace with men when they believe, repent, &c. but it is no such thing; the covenant of grace does not then begin to be made, only to be made manifest; it then openly takes place, its blessings are bestowed, its promises applied, its grace is wrought in the hearts of men, when God puts his fear there, gives a new heart, and a new spirit, and puts his own Spirit there, to work faith, repentance, and every other grace; but then the covenant is not new made, but all this is done in virtue and in consequence of the covenant of grace made in eternity, and according to the tenor of that. 2.

The covenant of grace is entirely free, it is altogether of free grace; grace is the moving cause of it; God was not induced to make it from any motive and condition in men. Each of the parties entered freely into it;

the Father, of his own grace and good will to men, proposed the terms of the covenant to his Son; and the Son of God, from his great love he bore to the same persons, voluntarily agreed unto them; and the same love in the blessed Spirit, engaged him to undertake what he did in it; hence we read, as of the love of the Father, and of the love of the Son, so of the love of the Spirit, (Rom. 15:30) which love of the three divine Persons, no where more clearly and fully appears, than in the covenant of grace, and the performance of it.

The act of election, which is the basis of the covenant on which it proceeds, and to which it is commensurate, is entirely of grace, and not of works, and therefore called "the election of grace", (Rom. 11:5, 6) the matter, sum and substance of the covenant is of grace; the blessings of it are all of grace, they all go by the name of "grace", given in Christ before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9). Adoption is owing to the free favour of God; a justifying righteousness is the gift of his grace; pardon of sin is according to the riches of his grace; and so every other blessing.

The promises of it, which are exceeding great and precious, flow from the grace of God: when promises are made, the faithfulness of God is engaged to fulfil them; but it is of his grace and good will that he makes them; he is not obliged to make promise of any thing to his creatures. The grace of God greatly appears in making faith the recipient of all blessings and promises; which itself is not of men, but is the gift of God; and by divine wisdom is put in the place it is, to receive all the blessings and promises of the covenant; "That it might be by grace"; that it might appear that all is of grace; "to the end the promise", and so every blessing, "might be sure to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16).

The end of making the covenant is, the glory of the grace of God; as God has made all things for himself, for his own glory, in nature and providence; so all things in grace, and particularly the covenant of grace, is made and stored with all the blessings of it, to the glory of his grace, (Eph. 1:3-6) and therefore with great propriety may, on all accounts, be called the covenant of grace. 3. This covenant is absolute and "unconditional": the covenant of works is conditional: Adam, according to it, was to continue in that happy state in which he was created and put, while he obeyed the voice of God, and abstained from the forbidden fruit; but if he eat of that, he was to be stripped of his happiness, and die; the language of that covenant is, do this and live; if obedient to it, then blessing and life; but if disobedient, then cursing and death.

The covenant God made with Abraham and his seed, concerning their having the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, was conditional; if willing and obedient, and so long as they behaved themselves well, according to the laws of God given them, they were to possess it, and enjoy the good things of it, (Isa. 1:19) but if otherwise, to be dispossessed of it; and accordingly, when they broke the laws of God, their neighbouring nations were let in upon them, and harassed and distressed them, or they were carried captive by them out of it; as, first by the Assyrians, then by the Chaldeans, and at last by the Romans; in which state they now are.

But not such is the covenant of grace, that is without any conditions on the part of men. Some, indeed, make it to be a conditional covenant, and faith and repentance to be the conditions of it. But these are not conditions, but blessings of the covenant, and are as absolutely promised in it, as anything else; the promise of a "new heart", and of a "new spirit", includes the gift of faith, and every other grace; and that of taking away the "stony heart", and giving an "heart of flesh", is fully expressive of the gift of the grace of repentance, (Ezek. 36:26).

Besides, if these were conditions of the covenant, to be performed by men in their own strength, in order to be admitted into it, and receive the benefits of it; they would be as hard, and as difficult to be performed, as the condition of the covenant of works, perfect obedience; since faith requires, to the production of it, almighty power, even such as was put forth in raising Christ from the dead, (Eph. 1:19, 20) and though God may give men means, and time, and space of repentance, yet if he does not give them grace to repent, they never will.

Christ's work, and the Spirit's grace, supersede all conditions in the covenant, respecting men; since they provide for everything that can be thought of, that is required or is wanting: Christ's work of redemption, atonement, and satisfaction for sin, as has been observed, is the only condition of the covenant; and that lies on the Mediator and Surety of the covenant, and not on the persons for whose sake it is made; "When thou shalt make his soul", or, "if his soul shall make an offering for sin", (Isa. 53:10) then such and such things are promised in the covenant, both to him and to his seed.

Otherwise, the promises to them are absolute and unconditional, and run in this strain, I "will", and they "shall", without any "ifs" or conditions; as, I "will" be their God, and they "shall" be my people; I "will" put my law in their hearts; I "will" forgive their iniquities; they "shall" all know me, from the least to the greatest; I "will" put my fear in their hearts, that they "shall" not depart from me; I "will" sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye "shall" be clean; I "will" give you a new heart, and a new spirit, and an heart of flesh; and I "will" take away the stony heart, and I "will" put my Spirit within you, and "cause" you to walk in my statutes, and ye "shall" keep my judgments, and do them, (Jer. 31:33, 34, 32:38, 40; Ezek. 36:25-27).

The blessings of the covenant are not suspended on any conditions to be performed; they do not wait for any, but take place without them. Redemption by Christ, the great article of the covenant, was not deferred on account of any condition to be performed by men; but Christ, in the fulness of time agreed on in covenant, when men were without strength to do anything, died for the ungodly; while they were yet sinners Christ died for them; and when enemies, they were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; and herein appeared the love of God; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10; 1 John 4:10).

Adoption takes place among men, who were not the people of God; and justification has for its objects the ungodly; and God forgives the iniquities of men, and remembers them no more, though they have done nothing to deserve it, but are guilty of the greatest ingratitude and unkindness; and regeneration finds men dead in trespasses and sins, foolish, disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, without any previous dispositions or preparations in them for it (Hosea 1:10; Rom. 4:5; Isa. 43:25; Eph. 2:4, 5). 4.

The covenant of grace is "perfect" and complete, wanting nothing; it is "ordered in all things"; and if in all things, nothing can be wanting in it, (2 Sam. 23:5). It is full of precious promises; promises of all sorts, promises of things temporal, spiritual, and eternal; so that there is nothing that a believer stands in need of, nor any state nor condition he can come into, but there is a promise of what he wants, and which is suitable to him, (1 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 13:5, 6) it is full of rich blessings of grace; of all spiritual blessings, of blessings of goodness, which Christ, as Mediator, is made most blessed with; of goodness inconceivable and inexpressible, laid up in the covenant, and in the hands of Christ, for the covenant ones: it provides all things pertaining to life and godliness; for the implantation of life itself, and of every grace; for the beginning, carrying on, and finishing the work of grace on the heart; for the food, nourishment, support, and maintenance of the spiritual life in it; for the peace, joy, and comfort of believers; for grace, and spiritual strength to exercise grace, perform duties, bear and suffer all that they are called unto; for their

perseverance in faith and holiness to the end; and for their eternal life and happiness; grace and glory are secured in this covenant; even "all salvation", the whole of it, and all the parts of it (2 Sam. 23:5).

And it is so ordered, as to secure the spiritual and eternal welfare of God's elect, so to advance the glory of God, Father, Son, and Spirit; the Father is glorified in and by Christ the Mediator of it; and Christ is glorified by the Spirit, who takes of the things of Christ, and shows them to his people; and the Spirit is glorified by being the earnest, pledge, and seal of the heavenly inheritance (Isa. 49:3; John 16:14; Eph. 1:14). 5. It is an "holy" covenant; so it is called, (Luke 1:72) where God, by visiting and redeeming his people, and raising up an horn of salvation for them, or by sending Christ to be the Redeemer and Saviour of them, and to be his salvation to them, which is the grand article of the covenant of grace, is said by all this, "to remember his holy covenant".

The contracting parties in this covenant are, the holy Father, and the holy Son, and the holy Spirit, with respect to whom this epithet is thrice expressed in (Isa. 6:3; Ps. 111:9) the matter of it is holy; the promises of it are holy, (Ps. 105:42) the blessings of it are holy; what are called the mercies of David, (Isa. 55:3) are called osia, the "holy" things of David, in (Acts 13:34) and nothing can more strongly engage to a concern for holiness of heart and life, than the promises of the covenant; (see 2 Cor. 6:18, 7:1) yea, the covenant provides fully for the sanctification of all the covenant ones; expressed by writing the laws of God in the hearts of them, putting his fear into them, giving them new hearts and new spirits, taking away the stony heart from them, and putting his own Spirit within them, to enable them to walk in his statutes, keep his judgments, and do them (Jer. 31:33, 32:39, 40; Ezek. 36:26, 27). 6.

It is a sure covenant, firm and immoveable, more immoveable than rocks and mountains; they may depart, but this covenant shall never depart, (2 Sam. 23:5; Isa. 54:10) it is "kept", or "observed"[1], as the word rendered "sure", in the first of those places, signifies; it is kept inviolably by God that made it; hence he is sometimes described as a God "keeping covenant", (Neh. 9:32) his faithfulness, which he will never suffer to fail, is engaged to keep it, and therefore it is he will not break it, and men cannot, (Ps. 89:33, 34) it is secured by the oath of God, and the immutability of that; for as the counsel of God is confirmed by his oath, so is the covenant of God; for it follows in the place now referred to (Ps. 89:35).

"Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David". And that is another reason why the covenant will not be broken; and why the word or promise that is gone out of his mouth shall not be altered. The covenant is also ratified and confirmed by the death of Christ, the Testator, as has been shown in a former chapter; whence the blood of Christ is called the blood of the covenant, which has sealed and confirmed it. The promises of the covenant are Yea and Amen in Christ; that is, sure and firm; and the blessings of it are the sure mercies of David, and the whole of it is confirmed in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20; Isa. 54:3; Gal. 3:17). 7.

It is frequently called an "everlasting" covenant (2 Sam. 23:5; Isa. 54:3; Heb. 13:20). It is a covenant that will stand fast with Christ for ever, with whom it is made, and is what God has commanded for ever, and will be always fulfilling; the effects of it will be always seen and enjoyed, in time and to all eternity, (Ps. 89:28, 111:9). It is a covenant that will never be antiquated, nor give way to, nor be succeeded by another; the covenant of works is broken, and has been succeeded by an administration of the covenant of grace; and that first administration being not faultless, but deficient with respect to clearness and extensiveness, is waxen old, and vanished away, and has given place to a new administration of it; which will continue unto the end of the world, until all the covenant ones are gathered in: but though these two administrations differ in some things, as to some external circumstances and ordinances; yet the matter, sum, and

substance of them is the same, even Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever: he is the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of Old and New Testament saints, who all partake of the same spiritual benefits and blessings, and of the same promises; and both are saved in the same way, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; even by the grace of the covenant, which is invariable and perpetual.

ENDNOTES:

[1] hrmv "servatum", Tigurine Version.

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