

XIII

THE NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION PROVED FROM THE
DIFFERENCE OF THE COVENANTS

The difference between the two covenants stated
— Argument from thence

That which we plead in the third place unto our purpose is, the difference between the two covenants. And herein it may be observed, —

1. That by the two covenants I understand those which were absolutely given unto the whole church, and were all to bring it “eis teleioteta”, — unto a complete and perfect state; that is, the covenant of works, or the law of our creation as it was given unto us, with promises and threatening, or rewards and punishments, annexed unto it; and the covenant of grace, revealed and proposed in the first promise. As unto the covenant of Sinai, and the new testament as actually confirmed in the death of Christ, with all the spiritual privileges thence emerging, and the differences between them, they belong not unto our present argument.

2. The whole entire nature of the covenant of works consisted in this, — that upon our personal obedience, according unto the law and rule of it, we should be accepted with God, and rewarded with him. Herein the essence of it did consist; and whatever covenant proceeds on these terms, or has the nature of them in it, however it may be varied with additions or alterations, is the same covenant still, and not another. As in the renovation of the promise wherein the essence of the covenant of grace was contained, God did oftentimes make other additions unto it (as unto Abraham and David), yet was it still the same covenant for the substance of it, and not another; so whatever variations may be made in, or additions unto, the dispensation of the first covenant, so long as this rule is retained, “Do this, and live,” it is still the same covenant for the substance and essence of it.

3. Hence two things belonged unto this covenant: — First, That all things were transacted immediately between God and man. There was no mediator in it, no one to undertake any thing, either on the part of God or man, between them; for the whole depending on every one's personal obedience, there was no place for a mediator. Secondly, That nothing but perfect, sinless obedience would be accepted with God, or preserve the covenant in its primitive state and condition. There was nothing in it as to pardon of sin, no provision for any defect in personal obedience.

4. Wherefore, this covenant being once established between God and man, there could be no new covenant made, unless the essential form of it were of another nature, — namely, that our own personal obedience be not the rule and cause of our acceptance and justification before God; for whilst this is so, as was before observed, the covenant is still the same, however the dispensation of it may be reformed or reduced to suit unto our present state and condition. What grace soever might be introduced into it, that could not be so which excluded all works from being the cause of our justification. But if a new covenant be made, such grace must be provided as is absolutely inconsistent with any works of ours, as unto the first ends of the covenant; as the apostle declares, Romans 11:6.

5. Wherefore, the covenant of grace, supposing it a new, real, absolute covenant, and not a reformation of the dispensation of the old, or a reduction of it unto the use of our present condition (as some imagine it to be), must differ, in the essence, substance, and nature of it, from that first covenant of works. And this it cannot do if we are to be justified before God on our personal obedience; wherein the essence of the first covenant consisted. If, then, the righteousness wherewith we are justified before God be our own, our own personal righteousness, we are yet under the first covenant, and no other.

6. But things in the new covenant are indeed quite otherwise; for, — First, It is of grace, which wholly excludes works; that is, so of grace, as that our own works are not the means of justification before God; as in the places before alleged. Secondly, It has a mediator and surety; which is built alone on this supposition, that what we cannot do in ourselves which was originally required of us, and what the law of the first covenant cannot

enable us to perform, that should be performed for us by our mediator and surety. And if this be not included in the very first notion of a mediator and surety, yet it is in that of a mediator or surety that does voluntarily interpose himself, upon an open acknowledgment that those for whom he undertakes were utterly insufficient to perform what was required of them; — on which supposition all the truth of the Scripture does depend. It is one of the very first notions of Christian religion, that the Lord Christ was given to us, born to us; that he came as a mediator, to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, and not merely to suffer what we had deserved. And here, instead of our own righteousness, we have the “righteousness of God;” instead of being righteous in ourselves before God, he is “The LORD our Righteousness.” And nothing but a righteousness of another kind and nature, unto justification before God, could constitute another covenant. Wherefore, the righteousness whereby we are justified is the righteousness of Christ imputed unto us, or we are still under the law, under the covenant of works.

It will be said that our personal obedience is by none asserted to be the righteousness wherewith we are justified before God, in the same manner as it was under the covenant of works; but the argument speaks not as unto the manner or way whereby it is so, but to the thing itself. If it be so in any way or manner, under what qualifications soever, we are under that covenant still. If it be of works any way, it is not of grace at all. But it is added, that the differences are such as are sufficient to constitute covenants effectually distinct: as, —

1. “The perfect, sinless obedience was required in the first covenant; but in the new, that which is imperfect, and accompanied with many sins and failings, is accepted.” Ans. This is “*gratis dictum*,” and begs the question. No righteousness unto justification before God is or can be accepted but what is perfect.
2. “Grace is the original fountain and cause of all our acceptance before God in the new covenant.” Ans. It was so also in the old. The creation of man in original righteousness was an effect of divine grace, benignity, and goodness; and the reward of eternal life in the enjoyment of God was of mere sovereign grace: yet what was then of works was not of grace; — no more is it at present.

3. “There would then have been merit of works, which is now excluded.” Ans. Such a merit as arises from an equality and proportion between works and reward, by the rule of commutative justice, would not have been in the works of the first covenant; and in no other sense is it now rejected by them that oppose the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.
4. “All is now resolved into the merit of Christ, upon the account whereof alone our own personal righteousness is accepted before God unto our justification.” Ans. The question is not, on what account, nor for what reason, it is so accepted? But, whether it be or no? — seeing its so being is effectually constitutive of a covenant of works.