

THE FIRST,

MOST SUBLIME

AND USEFUL OF ALL

COVENANTS.

(By W. James Am)



KNOXVILLE,

PRINTED BY

G. WILSON.

1813.

ESSAY

ON THE COVENANT

OF

REDEMPTION.

THAT this all important, yet much disputed subject, may be presented in its proper light, we will enquire,

1st. Whether there be a plurality of persons in the God-head.

2d. Whether these distinct persons perform distinct parts in the great work of redemption. If these subjects be decided affirmatively: then it will follow, that there must have existed an eternal compact between the three sacred persons of the one Jehovah.

In reasoning on the first of these questions it will be conceded by all, ~~atheists~~ excepted, that the divine nature and mode of existence are the most perfect possible. It is equally self evident, that a being existing with every capacity for society, must be a more perfect being, than one incapable of society from the very nature of its existence: thus animals are a more perfect kind of existence, on this very account, than blocks, and stones; and for the same reason, man is a more perfect kind of existence than animals.— Then that God may be the most perfect being possible, he must exist in such a way as to have the most perfect society in himself with all its resulting blessedness independent of any thing extra of himself: therefore God must exist in a plurality of persons to be the most perfect being possible.

Again, it is a perfection of being, so to exist, that there will be infinite obligation to moral rectitude in

the very manner of existence. When such obligation is not furnished from the very nature of the being's existence, there must be less perfection, than when it is. If God exist in a trinity of persons, undivided in essence, felicity, design and council; yet so as to covenant, promise, and perform to each other in the exercise of infinite love: then JEHOVAH must be infinitely holy, in order to be infinitely blisssed; for it is evident, that infinite malevolence, exercised in distrust, hatred to, and breach of covenant and promise between the sacred persons of JEHOVAH, would produce infinite misery, and destroy the blessedness of the God-head. Then God's immense blisssedness depends on the infinite love of the sacred persons to each other in covenanting, trusting, and performing promises to each other, but this is moral rectitude, or infinite benevolence toward the being and blisssedness of the one JEHOVAH. Then deity is under infinite obligations to himself to be infinitely holy, as he could not be infinitely blisssed, unless he be infinitely holy: hence Jehovah, to be the most perfect possible, must exist in such a way, as to lay a ground for infinite obligation to moral rectitude. Existing in a trinity of persons lays this ground; then, God to be the most perfect being possible, must exist in a plurality of persons.

3 lly. To exist in such a manner, as to admit of the most extensive and effectual benevolence, is a perfection of existence. A being, who is limited in the exercise of benevolence from the very nature of its existence, is less perfect, than it would be without such limitation. JEHOVAH existing in a trinity of persons admitted of the gospel atonement; the gospel atonement admits of the pardon of sin, and of restoring rebels to the image and favor of God, also a continual increase in creature blisssedness, approximating to the blisssedness of God himself. These effects of divine grace, through Christ, are infinitely

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pleasing to God's benevolence, and thus perpetuates the divine felicity, while they are of unspeakable advantage to a created system of intelligence. Had not JEHOVAH existed in a trinity of persons, there would have been no gospel atonement, of course no opportunity for the best exercise of divine benevolence: therefore God must exist in a trinity of persons to be the most perfect being.

This last argument would be matter enough for a volume; and to feel its force, the reader must be able to discern, that the atonement was requisite, in order to the best exercise of benevolence, and that the best exercises have taken place in this way.

It may be expected, that, I should here introduce the scripture evidence for a trinity of persons in the Godhead; but this has been done by so many authors, that I must refer the reader to their writings, and especially to an anonymous writer, who entitles his excellent work *Horae Solitariae*.

The next question on this subject is, do the distinct persons of the one Jehovah perform different parts in the great work of redemption?

Reason will go far in deciding this question. We have already shewn, that Jehovah, to be the most perfect being possible, must exist in a plurality of persons. Also that the most perfect blissedness of this mode of existence requires the mutual exercise of infinite love in covenanting, promising and performing, otherwise the felicity would be the mere negation of pain, but not the happiness of an intelligent agent. But if the distinct persons of Jehovah have not done different parts in the great plan of redemption, which in its most comprehensive sense embraces all the events in the divine government, then there is no occasion of covenanting with, promising to, and confiding in each other, it would follow from hence, that God's felicity was less than perfect,

and his obligation to moral rectitude would be weakened, of course less than infinite.

Again, infinite goodness can only be gratified by doing the best possible good to being, the scheme of redemption is the best possible means of doing such good; but this scheme could only have been brought about by the persons of the one Jehovah doing different parts of this great work; therefore it fairly follows that the persons of the one God have done distinct parts of the great work of redemption.

But that the faith of the reader may rest on the firm foundation of God's word, I have exhibited the scripture testimony on this subject in three columns, headed respectively, with Father, Son and Spirit.

FATHER,

SON,

SPIRIT,

As the first person in the trinity possessing a priority of possession in all things, delegated to the son, all power in heaven and earth to be used in subserviency to the designs of redemption. Math. 28. 18. John 17. 2. 1 Cor. 15. 24, 25, 26, 28.— Made a gift of his son, John 4 10. Isai. 42 6, and 49 8. John 3 16. Gives the spirit, John 14, 16, 26. Gave to Christ of the human family to be saved, John 6 37, 38, 39, and 10 29.

Takes into personal union with divinity, a creature of his own forming of the nature of the seed of Abraham, Isaiah 9 6. Luke 1 28—35. Heb. 2 16, 17. Voluntarily took the low place of sinners— Phil. 2 7, 8. Gal. 4 4, perfectly obeyed the law and poured out his soul unto death, Isai. 42. 21 & 55 chapter throughout. Phil. 2 8, the texts on this point are innumerable. He performs the offices of prophet, priest and king, Psal. 110 4.— Luke 24 19. Psal. 2 6, texts on this are innumerable.

Ancients Jesus Christ and consecrates him to his work, Isai. 61 1. Luke 4 18. Act. 10 38, and 4 27. Psal. 42 6. Heb. 1 9. Mat. 3 16. Mark 1 10.— He revealed the will of God to man, 2 Pet. 1, 21. 1 Cor. 2 13. He makes a saving application of the atonement to the hearts of the elect, John 3 3—5. 1 Cor. 6 11. Titus 3 5, and a thousand others. Ezek. 26 36, &c. Sanctifies the people of God and fits them for glory, Rom. 15 16. 1 Cor. 1 2.

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By running the eye along these different columns the reader will see, that the sacred persons of the trinity perform distinct parts in the work of redemption.

Now we are prepared to examine whether there must not of necessity be an eternal compact between the co-essential persons of Jehovah--And here, I promise, that the divine will is one simple uncompounded volition or act without succession or beginning, comprehending all his designs, councils and works: then Jehovah designed the plan of redemption from eternity. We have shewn, that distinct parts of the work of redemption are done by the co-equal persons of Jehovah: hence it follows, that there must have been a mutual consent, that each person perform his own part.* The one Jehovah felt infinite certainty, that the persons of his undivided essence would accomplish the work.

Although the mode of God's existence in a trinity of persons may not be compared to any thing in heaven above or earth beneath; yet we may by a comparison illustrate the sentiment, that there must of necessity be a covenant when the one Jehovah designs a work, & that work is performed by the three distinct persons of his essence. A. B. and C. resolve, that they will build an edifice; but this work is to be effected by A. giving the materials, B. preparing them, and C. fitting and putting them together. Who does not see, that if this edifice be built, A. B. and C. must each perform their own part: But unless there be a previous mutual agreement, B. may resolve that he will furnish the materials, C. may resolve the same thing, and A. too; and thus the building of the edifice be defeated for want of a previous mutual un-

* And this consent is essential to the divine existence, as the will is the existence, and consent in this case belongs to a will, which is simple volition.

Understanding and agreement between these three persons about their respective part of the work.

God the father gives the materials for the spiritual edifice ; God the son lays the foundation, and removes every obstacle ; God the spirit, renews, sanctifies and fits them together, Eph. 2 20—22. 1 Pet. 2. 4, 5.

For the satisfaction of those who may not be able to see the agreement between the premises and conclusion of the above reasoning, who, nevertheless, will yield implicit faith to the testimony of God's word ; we now subjoin the scripture proof of the existence of such a covenant in three separate columns.

Jehovah the father covenants to give all power in heaven and on earth to the son. "All power is given unto me in heaven & earth, Math. 28 18. John 17 2. Thou hast given him power over all flesh.

2d. Agrees to give to the son of the human family, as a reward, until the son should be satisfied, to divide him a portion with the great on the condition, that he bear their iniquity, and then give them eternal life. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied : by his knowledge

Jehovah the son. 1st. Agrees to the proposal. "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire : then said I, Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me ; I delight to do thy will, O my God—Psal. 40 6 7. Heb. 10 5—9.

2d. Came into the world to perform the conditions proposed by the father. "For I came not to do my own will ; but the will of him that sent me." John 6 38.

3d. Agrees to lay down his life at the will of his father.—"I lay down my life for the sheep—

Jehovah the Spirit. 1st. Agrees to appoint Jesus Christ, and consecrate him to his work. Isai. 61 1 Luke 4 18, see page 5, column 3.

2d. Agrees to reveal the will of God to man, 2 Pet. 1 21. 1 Cor. 2 13.

3. Agrees to make a saving application of the atonement to the hearts of the elect. "He shall receive of mine and shew unto you." John 16 15, compared with verses 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14. 1 Cor. 2 10—12. The spirit agreed from eternity to act the above part in the

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Jehovah the Father shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities; therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death. "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given, Isai. 53 11, 12. John 17 2.

3d. Covenants to uphold his son in the work of redemption and destroy his enemies. "Fear not I am with thee. I will strengthen thee, I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness, they that strive with thee shall perish. Behold, my servant whom I uphold, I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the gentiles. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he hath set judgment in the earth. I will

Jehovah the Son. no man taketh it from me, I lay it down of myself.— This commandment I received from my father." John 10 15, 17, 18.

4th. Agrees and determines to give eternal life to all the father gave him. "All that the father giveth me shall come to me." John 6 37.— John 17 24.

5th. Compleats the whole work of redemption. "I have finished the work, which thou gavest me to do.— It is finished." John 17 4, and 19 30.

6th. Agrees to exercise his mediatorial offices forever for the good of the church militant & triumphant. Heb. 4 14, and 5, 6, 9 10. Texts on this point are very numerous.

7th. Agrees to resign his delegated power over the kingdom of nature back to the father, when he, the son, has wound up the purposes of grace in this world. 1 Cor 15 24—28.

Jehovah the Spirit. plan of redemption; for the spirit is very God, and designs to act before he does work; but all his designs as God are eternal; of course his consent or agreement to do the work is from eternity.

Jehovah the Father give thee for a covenant of the people, Isai. 41 10 11, and 42 1—7.

4th. Agrees to give the son a certain number of the human family, as a reward of his obedience and suffering, on condition, that the son certainly save them, and give them eternal life. "This is

Jehovah the Father the father's will, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing. Should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given me."

John 6. 37, 38, 39.— John 17 2.

5th. Agrees to accept the vicarious obedience and sufferings of the son. Isai. 42 21.—

Jehovah the Father Math. 3 17, and 17 5. John 8 29.

6th. Covenant to exalt him to his right hand, and give him a name above every name.

John. "Made himself of no reputation, &c.

Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name. Philip. 27—11.

Whoever will attentively consider the scriptures referred to in these columns, must see that it is a scripture doctrine, that there existed from eternity a compact between the sacred persons of Jehovah respecting man's redemption. It is not necessary that this covenant be formally written, signed and sealed, as among men, in order to be binding; this would be a gross idea of God. The covenant is recorded in the archives of the eternal mind, and published to man by the blessed gospel.

To impress this sublime subject on the mind of the reader, I will now present it in the view of a formal covenant. You will not esteem the attempt too daring, if the language be scriptural. The covenant of redemption between the co-equal persons of the one Jehovah. I, Jehovah the father, of the one part, do covenant and agree to delegate to Jehovah the son, all power in heaven and earth, to be used in promoting the designs of redemption. And I Jehovah the father, covenant and agree to uphold Jehovah the son, by the right hand of my righteousness, while he brings in an everlasting righteousness by obedience and death. I, moreover do covenant and agree to

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give a certain number of the human family to my eternal and co-essential son, as a reward of his obedience and death, on condition, *scilicet*, the son, bear their iniquities, and give them eternal life. I further agree to accept the son's vicarious obedience and sufferings on behalf of lost sinners, and to anoint my son by my spirit, with the oil of gladness, to exalt him to my right hand, and give him a name above every name; on condition that the son undertake and accomplish the work of redemption.

I Jehovah the son, of the other part, do covenant and agree to undertake and perform the above conditions, to become God incarnate, to render perfect obedience to the divine law, and pour out my soul unto death, as a ransom for sinners. Moreover, I do accept as a reward, the exact number the father hath given to me; and do agree and covenant to save them every one; and when I have wound up the purposes of grace, and subdued all enemies, then will I deliver up the kingdom to God, even the father, that God may be all in all.

I Jehovah the spirit, the third person of the one divine essence, as proceeding from the father and the son, do covenant and agree to anoint the son, with an holy unction without measure, and consecrate him to his ministry. Moreover, I covenant and agree to make an effectual and saving application of the atonement to the hearts of all the elect, for the glory of the one Jehovah.

Agreed and entered into from eternity, witnessed and sealed by the three persons of the undivided

I AM, THAT I AM.

In this glorious and immutable covenant, we are to find the true ground of the perseverance of all saints. If one fail of holiness and eternal life, that the father gave to the son, then God the son and God the spirit break covenant. Who would have the hardihood to make so bold an assertion?

God the son has a right to none, but those whom the father gave him; of course he would transcend his power, if he saved others. God the spirit has no right, as the the third person, to regenerate any; but those given to the son; hence it follows, that no others will ever be saved.

The certainty of the existence of the covenant of redemption establishes the doctrine of election beyond all controversy. Who are the elect? Those who were given to the son in this immutable covenant "Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Eph. 1. 4.

It is also evident from the view that we have taken of this subject, that God is self moved in saving sinners; and not from any foreseen good works in them.

This sublimest of subjects, together with the doctrines consequent from it, exhibit God's real character. But it is in the human heart to hate God; and of course the doctrines and objects, that best present his character, just in proportion, as they manifest it clearly. It is not admirable, that this doctrine of the covenant is hated and opposed most of all others, considering the human heart is what it is, full of moral madness and folly. It is more a wonder, that any of Adam's guilty race embrace it at all.

On the covenant of redemption is bottomed the gracious covenant between God and every true believer. 2 Sam. 23. 5. Isai. 55. 3, and Isai. 61. 8.

To get clear of this doctrine of the covenant and its consequences, some deny it by asserting, that God is one, and that an individual cannot covenant with himself. Is not this opposing human reason to God's express testimony of himself.

God looks down from heaven, and beholds the children of men, the willing slaves of sin. He

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knows there is ample provision in the atonement of Christ for all : Therefore he addresses us thus, "Look unto me all ye ends of the earth and be ye saved." He has made and sustains the children of men moral agents ; therefore he addresses them as such. " Let the wicked man forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die. Hear and your souls shall live. Yet none does, or will turn ; but those whom he turns by his grace." Turn us and we shall be turned. Yet in selecting those on whom he bestows this grace, he is directed by the covenant of redemption.

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December, 1812.