

# The Covenant of Redemption:

A Covenant Distinct from the Covenant of Grace

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“As to Mr. Boston’s view of the Covenant of Grace, I have had some opportunity to examine it, and I confess I do not understand the scheme of thought presented in that book”

-Jonathan Edwards<sup>1</sup>

## Historical Theological Statement of the Issue

Thomas Boston (1676-1732), the Church of Scotland minister, advocated in *A view of the Covenant of Grace* that “the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace, are not two distinct covenants, but one and the same covenant.”<sup>2</sup> This novel formulation proved to be significant in the development of covenant theology in reformed thought. It meshed what had previously been kept distinct by earlier theologians.

The Covenant of Grace had been defined by the Westminster Confession of Faith as that covenant,

wherein He [God] freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.<sup>3</sup>

The Covenant of Redemption, on the other hand, had been understood to be,

an eternal covenant between the Father and the Son, according to which the Son became surety for his people, undertook to obey and suffer in their place and was promised everything that pertains to grace and salvation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards and the Covenant of Grace* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing Company, 1975) 110.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston*, 1853; 12 vols. ed. Samuel M’Millan (reprint, Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1980), 8:396.

<sup>3</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith, 7.3.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Macleod “Covenant Theology,” *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 215. For a fuller definition, see *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* under the second heading.

Proponents of Boston's view speak of the one Covenant of Grace being made between God and Christ, with the elect in Him. The one Covenant of Grace, according to them, has two aspects: an eternal and a temporal aspect. The eternal aspect is essentially coextensive with the Covenant of Redemption and the temporal aspect is the unfolding execution of that covenant in time with men.

Proponents of the distinction between the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace during the 1600's included Samuel Rutherford, David Dickson, Patrick Gillespie, Hermann Witsius, and Wilhelmus A'Brakel amongst others.<sup>5</sup> Those that followed Boston after his treatise was published in 1734 included Adam Gib, John Dick and the Secession Church that broke off from the Church of Scotland near the end of Boston's life.

The importance of the issue is two-fold. (1) While recognizing that much of the debate is in terminology and semantics, it is necessary to present Biblical doctrines in clear and precise language which accurately describe the reality set forth in scripture. Is there one covenant or are there two covenants relating to the salvation of men? Is the Covenant of Grace simply the outworking of the Covenant of Redemption in time? (2) Substantial differences arise in the doctrines of the church and evangelism depending on one's view of the covenants. Are there unbelievers in the Covenant of Grace (and hence, the Church)? Is the Covenant of Grace simply an end attained for the believer or is it the primary instrument by which the Gospel is offered to unbelievers in evangelism? If the non-elect are not in the Covenant of Grace, can the promises of the Covenant be offered to them? While it is not within the scope of this paper to answer these questions, Donald Macleod's observation ought to be noted, that Boston's view in effect, "resolves everything into the covenant of redemption and virtually obliterates the covenant between God and the believer."<sup>6</sup> This has been seen in history as several of the covenanter and Dutch denominations that hold to Boston's view lean towards hyper-calvinism.

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A definition as to what constitutes a covenant is essential to determining whether there

<sup>5</sup> For a history of the historical development of the Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Redemption, see chapter seven of Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Macleod, "Covenant Theology," 216.

are one or two covenants relating to the salvation of men. Both sides agree on the constituent parts of a covenant: certain parties (which may be represented by a federal head) make a voluntary agreement concerning a transaction to take place upon certain conditions with a certain design intended, putting themselves under specific obligations, while promising certain rewards or punishments contingent upon the completion of the terms, often being sealed with an oath and signs. *If there are different parties, conditions, obligations, and rewards (being those things which constitute a covenant), then by definition there are different covenants.*

## Differences between the covenants

The Covenant of Redemption differs with the Covenant of Grace in seven respects: (1) there are different parties involved, (2) a difference of mediation, (3) a difference of time in which the covenants are made, (4) different conditions of the covenants, (5) different obligations of the covenants, (6) different promises in the covenants, and (7) different designs intended for each covenant.

(1) The two covenants are made with different parties. A party is defined as one that receives or is obligated to fulfill the condition of the covenant and receives the promises or curses of the covenant. The Covenant of Redemption is made between God the Father, representing God as common to all three persons, and God the Son.<sup>7</sup> The Holy Spirit, though involved in the Covenant of Redemption is not a party to it.

“Neither is there any intimation in scripture of any such thing as any covenant, either of the Father or of the Son, with the Holy Ghost. He is never represented as a party in this covenant, but the Father and the Son

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<sup>7</sup> Edwards calls the Father the “head of the Trinity,” Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings*, ed. Paul Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1971), 81. Witsius speaks of the covenant between God and the Son but then immediately uses the language of the Father and the Son. Herman Witsius, *The Economy of Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (1677; reprint, Kingsburg, CA: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 1:165. Rutherford states, “the parties are Jehovah God as common to all the three.” Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, ed. Dr. C. Matthew McMahon (1654; reprint, New Lenox, IL: Puritan Publications, 2005), 437. Dabney quotes John Dick to the same effect, R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (1871; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 434.

only”<sup>8</sup>

While there is an agreement by the Holy Spirit to do His proper work in the economical functions of the Trinity, there is no condescension by Him any more than that of the Father. There is no humiliation or abasement in the Holy Spirit’s actions. His actions are not meritorious and earn no reward for man or for Himself. There are no promises in the Covenant of Redemption to the Holy Spirit. There is no transaction that takes place with Him. Nor does He function on behalf of anyone else, as does the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit’s role in the salvation of men is no more that of a party in the covenant than His influences amongst elect angels. The Holy Spirit’s role in subjection to the Son is with respect to the honor due to the Son as God, not that of covenant.<sup>9</sup> The Holy Spirit does not fulfill the condition of the Covenant of Redemption or receive it. In short, as Rutherford explains, “every mutual agreement between the blessed Persons concerning their actions without, cannot be called a Covenant.”<sup>10</sup>

The elect, while represented by Christ in the Covenant of Redemption, are not parties because they are not obligated to fulfill the condition of the covenant (which is perfect righteousness) and do not receive the promises of it (sitting at the right hand of God, ruling as King in the mediatorial kingdom, etc.). Christ (not the elect) is the acting party in the Covenant of Redemption.

The Covenant of Grace on the other hand is made with God (all three persons of the Trinity) and all those that profess the true religion and their children, in Christ. That the Covenant of Grace is made with men is seen in Ex. 2:24, 34:27, Deut. 29:12,15, 2 Kings, 23:3, 2 Chron. 15:12, Neh. 9:38, Jer. 32:38, and Rom. 9:4. That the Covenant of Grace is entered into by profession is exemplified in Ex. 19:8, 24:3, and Neh. 10:29. That the Covenant of Grace includes unbelievers is seen from the verses already referenced and from Gen. 17:23, Judges 2:20, Jer. 11:10, 2 Pet. 2:1,20, Acts 8:13,23, 1 Cor. 10:1-11, Heb. 3:8-4:11, 6:4-6, and 10:26-29.

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<sup>8</sup> Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, 92. See Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 432-433 for his arguments on this point. Dabney also implicitly leaves out the Holy Spirit in saying that the Covenant of Redemption is between the Father and the Son,. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 432.

<sup>9</sup> See Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, 91-92.

<sup>10</sup> Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 432.

The Covenant of grace is made with men in Christ in that they are represented by Christ as their mediator. However, Christ is not a party to the Covenant of Grace because He is not obligated to fulfill the condition of the covenant (justifying faith in the Savior). Men must believe, Christ does not do it for them.<sup>11</sup> Christ was not in the Covenant of Grace in His earthly ministry as a man in the same way that we are in the Covenant of Grace.<sup>12</sup>

(2) There is a difference of mediation between the covenants. The Covenant of Redemption has no mediator because there is no one standing between the parties covenanted. Christ and the Father deal directly with each other, they do not go through someone else. The Covenant of Grace, however, has a mediator. Christ stands and intercedes between God and men. It is impossible, on the definition of terms, for a person to be a party and a mediator (standing between oneself and the other party) in the same covenant. One cannot intercede for oneself as one is in the same covenant obligation as oneself. It is not impossible for the same person to be a party in one covenant and a mediator in another covenant between other parties. Dabney's objection to Boston's view is valid, "Yet it seems inconsistent to make the same Person both principal party and surety in the same transaction!"<sup>13</sup>

(3) The two covenants are made and executed at different times. The Covenant of Redemption is eternal precisely because all the parties of it are eternal. One reason why the two covenants cannot be understood as one covenant with an eternal aspect and a temporal aspect is because the Covenant of Redemption itself has an eternal and a temporal aspect. The Covenant of Redemption is executed in the time of Jesus' ministry.<sup>14</sup> Under the guise of two temporal aspects, Bostonians try to bring in much more than a difference in time: such as differences in parties, mediation, stipulations, conditions, promises and designs. If there were only one covenant, then there would be the same parties, mediation, stipulations, conditions, promises and designs, but with two orders of time. But this is not so.

The Covenant of Grace is temporal and not eternal precisely because not all the parties of

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<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Christ is the one that applies the benefits of the Covenant of Redemption to His elect in the Covenant of Grace by giving them faith so that they may fulfill the condition of the Covenant of Grace (Eph. 2:8).

<sup>12</sup> This will be explained more below under the section on Christ's use of the sacraments.

<sup>13</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 433.

<sup>14</sup> See Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 177-179 for a discussion of this.

the covenant are eternal. Humans have a beginning and consent to the covenant's terms in time. The Covenant of Grace had a beginning. As Rutherford argued, "though it was decreed from everlasting, yet it had no being as a covenant, nor could have any, so long as the Covenant of Works did stand."<sup>15</sup> Scripture speaks of the Covenant of Grace as everlasting in that it has been offered to all men that hear it in all generations since the fall and will continue into eternity. This, however, is not to make the Covenant of Grace a-temporal as the Covenant of Redemption is.

(4) The conditions of the covenants are different. The condition required in order to fulfill (make good the terms of) the Covenant of Redemption is perfect righteousness.<sup>16</sup> Christ fulfilled this condition. This obligation is not upon those in the Covenant of Grace, nor is the Covenant of Redemption in any way contingent upon the part of man. The condition of the Covenant of Grace, to fulfill its terms, is justifying faith in the Savior. The Covenant of Redemption cannot be broken by the absence of the condition (perfect righteousness) which fulfills the terms of the covenant, due to the nature of the parties involved. The Covenant of Grace, however, is broken by the contracted parties not providing the condition (justifying faith) required to fulfill its terms.

Both John Dick and John Brown of Haddington say that the only condition in the Covenant of Grace is upon Christ and not man. Hence there are not two covenants because there is no condition for men to fulfill. The response is twofold: (1) This is a fundamental misunderstanding that stems from Boston's view. The condition of the Covenant of Grace (faith) is instrumental and not meritorious, and is necessary for salvation. (2) If Dick and Brown are correct, then the Covenant of Grace is swallowed up into the Covenant of Redemption, and so far from denying the Covenant of Redemption, only the Covenant of Redemption would remain! Because there would be no condition for man to fulfill, there would be no Covenant between God and men!

(5) The obligations of the covenants are different. Christ, entering into the Covenant of

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<sup>15</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 439.

<sup>16</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 433, "The Covenant of Redemption was conditioned, on Christ's meritorious work."

Redemption, was obligated to perform a specific mission unique to His office as the Messiah: to empty Himself, take on our human nature, to come under the law, to suffer for the sins of His people, to act in behalf of His people, and to intercede for His people. Men in the covenant of grace are not obliged to do this, but rather to believe and obey the revealed word of God.

(6) The promises of the covenants are different. It was promised to Christ, upon supplying the condition of the terms of the Covenant of Redemption, to be rewarded by being seated at God's right hand, to rule over the whole world, to have a great seed and be the mediator of his people. None of these rewards are promised to those in the Covenant of Grace. The promises to those of the Covenant of Grace is the remission of sins, being accounted righteous in Christ, the adoption as sons, a new nature, progressing in holiness and many others. These are not promises that Christ received.

(7) The designs of the covenants are different. The design (or scope) of the Covenant of Redemption is that (1) God's justice upon the sins of the elect should be satisfied and (2) they should be brought inescapably into the favor and everlasting kingdom of God. The first part of the design has been completed by Christ and the second part is so promised to Christ in the covenant that it must come to pass. The design of the Covenant of Redemption is to Christ for the elect, but is in no way offered to the elect or man generally. The design of the Covenant of Grace is to provide non-salvific benefits to all those in the covenant (including the non-elect) and offer salvation to all those that meet the condition of the covenant. It is not offered to Christ, nor was He in it as we are.<sup>17</sup>

To summarize, since in the covenant of Redemption there are different parties, a difference of mediation, a different time in which the covenant is entered into, different conditions, different obligations, different promises, and different designs, it is different from the Covenant of Grace. *As the Covenant of Redemption has all of the elements of a covenant, it not only is different, but it is a covenant in and of itself.*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This will be explained further under the section on Christ using the sacraments of the Covenant of Grace.

<sup>18</sup> Dabney describes how the Covenant of Redemption is free-standing, not dependant on the actions of men in the Covenant of Grace, "The Covenant of Redemption between the Father and the 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

## The Covenant of Redemption is a Covenant

Boston contended that scripture is silent concerning any other covenants besides those of works and of grace. The argument is that whatever relations and functions there are amongst the persons of the Trinity in the redemption of man, it is not called a covenant. Dick follows suit and remarks, “that there does not appear to be any ground in Scripture for the notion of two covenants [that is, the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace].”<sup>19</sup>

The response is twofold: (1) a covenant does not need to be termed a covenant in order to be a covenant, and (2) there is clear Biblical evidence that the Covenant of Redemption is termed a covenant.

(1) If one can show by good and necessary consequence that all of the elements of a covenant are present (which has already been done), then the lack of it being labeled a covenant is no argument that the covenant does not exist. For example, the Covenant of Works is not anywhere clearly labeled a covenant, yet the concept is in many places present and necessary to the Biblical system of soteriology.

(2) There are six evidences in scripture which term and necessitate that the Covenant of Redemption is a covenant: (i) Zech. 6:12-13, (ii) the titles of “my God” and “my Servant,” (iii) the oath confirming the Covenant of Redemption, (iv) the Messianic office of king and priest, (v) Christ partaking of the covenant signs, and (vi) Psalm 89.

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dependent on the uncertain will of creatures.” Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 432.

<sup>19</sup> See Brown and Girardeau for the same argument. John Brown, *The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington*, ed. Joel Beeke and Randall Peterson (reprint, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications), 242. John L. Girardeau, *The Federal Theology: Its Import and Regulative Influence*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan, III (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), 16. The reason that the Covenant of Redemption is not mentioned as such in Rom. 5 is twofold: (1) The Covenant of Redemption is inter-Trinitarian and Rom. 5 is only dealing with God’s covenants with man, which are two: the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. (2) The Covenant of Redemption is closely associated with the Covenant of Grace. See below in the paper for a further analysis of this relation.

(i) Zech. 6:12-13 clearly teaches that the Covenant of Redemption is a covenant. It reads,

Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the LORD: Even He shall build the temple of the LORD; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

The “counsel of peace” is between the LORD of hosts and the Messiah, The Branch. This counsel is a purposed agreement entered into and established through the work of the Messiah (who was set apart for this task) in building up the temple of the Lord (the people of God). He is rewarded for His labors with the rule of the people He has taken to Himself. The people of God had been torn down under the judgment of God. But through the Messiah’s intercessory work as priest there is peace restored between them who the Messiah represents and God.

The other main interpretation of this passage is that “between them both” refers to the impersonal concepts of the kingly and priestly offices of the Messiah. Thus, there is a harmonious uniting (counsel of peace) through the Messiah of what used to be two distinctly separate institutions: the kingly office and the priestly office.

The problem with this latter interpretation is that it is grammatically impossible. It claims to be superior in that “between them both” refers to the immediate precedents of the previous phrases, instead of referring all the way back to the beginning of the paragraph. The problem is that there are no immediate precedents besides the Messiah. “Both” cannot be referring to the kingly throne and the priestly throne, because there is only one throne, and in both clauses the throne is part of subordinate prepositional phrases. “Both” cannot refer to the Messiah being a king and priest. “Priest” is not the subject of the prior clause, but is part of the predicate. The Messiah is the subject of the clause. Nor is the Messiah called a king. Three verbs are used to describe the royal functions of the subject of the sentence, the Messiah. The kingly office is not delineated by a simple noun, pronoun, or even a self contained phrase to which “both” could refer. At best this interpretation reads, the counsel of peace shall be between bearing-the-glory-

and-sitting-and-ruling and a priest.

The flow of thought in the passage concerning the two main figures presented should control the interpretation of the text, not a simplistic grammatical principle which is as many times not true as it is true. The change to a third person plural pronoun at the end of the paragraph referring back to the speaker is not uncommon in the prophets and biblical poetry. Nor has the traditional view been recently invented to defend the Covenant of Redemption. Witsius remarks, “Neither is it new, since Jerome tells us, that this verse was understood of the Father and the Son.”<sup>20</sup>

(ii) The titles of “my God” and “my Servant” clearly teach that the Covenant of Redemption is a covenant.<sup>21</sup> That God would be a God to His people is the principle promise of the Covenant of Grace: “This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel... [I] will be their God, and they shall be my people,” (Jer. 31:33). Thus, calling God, “my God,” shows that one has entered into covenant with God. Jacob uses this language in Gen. 28:21, “then shall the Lord be my God.” Ruth does the same: “your people shall be my people, and your God my God,” (Ruth 1:16). Such language implies that one voluntarily puts oneself under the authority of God (as opposed to all the other gods), to live before Him and serve Him by His rules, and seek promises at His hand. This language is used to announce the covenant that was made between God and Israel on Mt. Sinai, “You have avouched the Lord this day to be your God... and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people...” (Duet. 26:17). The surrounding verses speak of the covenant obligations for both parties in the covenant. The language is used to renew the covenant when it has been neglected, “We will serve the Lord for He is our God... So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day,” (Josh. 24:18,25). This language is not used of just any relation or service between God and a people, but only of a binding covenant.

Jesus Christ on the cross, doing that work He was sent to do in that great covenantal transaction, cries out “my God, my God,” (Ps. 22:1, Mt 27:46). In a covenantal context the Messiah declares, “I delight to do thy will, o my God,” (Psalm 40:8) and “Thou art my God,”

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<sup>20</sup> Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 1:169.

<sup>21</sup> See Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 170, and Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 413.

(Ps. 118:28). The Psalmist, in reference to the Messiah, speaks of “God, your God,” in the Messiah’s unique capacity as king of His people, (Ps. 45:7). The same language is used in Isa. 55:5 where the verse before says that He should be a leader and commander for the people which will bestow the sure mercies of David on them. The title “my God” is used four times in Rev. 3:12 by Christ in His bestowal of covenant blessings to those who overcome. This title “my God,” shows a peculiar relation that Christ had to the Father, not by nature, but by the appointment of a covenant.

The Messiah in speaking to God refers to Himself as “your servant” in Ps. 86:2. Isa. 49:5,6 refers to the Messiah as “his servant” and “my servant,” doing the work of restoring the covenant people through His humiliation and being rewarded for His service by ruling over the Gentiles. The most detailed and full passage describing the work of the Covenant of Redemption begins with the abrupt command, “Behold, my Servant,” (52:13). The title “my Servant,” refers to Christ not as a natural servant to God, but as one under a covenant.

(iii) The Father’s oath to Christ clearly teaches that the Covenant of Redemption is a covenant.<sup>22</sup> Heb. 7:21, quoting Ps. 110:4, says:

“For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by Him that said unto Him, The LORD sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Priests entered into their office without an oath. But the Messiah enters into His office as the great high priest by a covenant confirmed with an oath. That covenants are confirmed by oaths is seen in the Covenant of Grace confirmed to David by the same. Ps. 89:34,35 says, “My covenant I will not break... Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.” Ps. 132:11,12 is quoted in Acts 2:30,31 and says, “The LORD has sworn in truth unto David... and if your children shall keep my covenant.” If there were no covenant between the Father and Christ, there would be no need for an oath to seal His priesthood in the covenant.

(iv) Christ being a priest and king clearly teaches that the Covenant of Redemption is a covenant. Christ did not take these offices to Himself, but was called unto them by covenant.

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<sup>22</sup> See Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 425.

Every established priesthood is imposed by a covenant. This is due to the nature of the priestly work, that one party should agree to accept the intercession and offering of a representative for another party through an established set of terms and conditions. So God established Levi's line as a priesthood through covenant: "...that my covenant might be with Levi... My covenant was with him of life and peace," (Mal. 2:4,5). Since Christ was not of the order of Levi, His priesthood had to be established by a different covenant than that of the Covenant of Grace.

Christ's kingship was established by covenant as were human kings (2 Kings 11:17, 2 Samuel 5:3). This is made explicit in Luke 22:29, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." The verb "diatithemi" means to ordain by covenant (see Acts 3:25; Heb. 8:10; 9:16,17; 10:16). Thus Witsius paraphrases the verse correctly: "I engage by covenant unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath engaged by covenant unto me."<sup>23</sup> In Ps. 2:6 the Father calls Christ to the office and calls Him, "my King". Christ is a king by covenant.

(v) Christ partaking of the covenant signs clearly teaches that the Covenant of Redemption is a covenant. Christ partook of the covenant signs of circumcision, baptism and the Passover. However, they did not seal to Him the promises of the Covenant of Grace such as putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by circumcision, the forgiveness of sins through the Lamb of God, or regeneration in being buried with Christ in baptism. As Rutherford notes, "He must be under the covenant, and God must be His God, in some other covenant than sinners are."<sup>24</sup> They sealed to Him, rather, the promises of the Covenant of Redemption as he was earning them.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Christ's baptism confirmed Christ in the righteousness He was performing ("in whom I am well pleased"), reminded Him of the covenant He was under ("my Son") and bestowed on Him more of that Spirit promised to Him in the Covenant of Redemption.<sup>26</sup> The seals of the Covenant of Redemption are the same as the Covenant of Grace due to Christ being the surety and purchasing the benefits of the Covenant of Grace under the Covenant of Redemption, and Christ's union with His people in both covenants. Because Christ took of

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<sup>23</sup> Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 166. Edwards translates the phrase, "I by covenant dispose unto you as my Father by covenant hath disposed unto me a kingdom," Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 418.

<sup>25</sup> Witsius puts the section of Christ using the sacraments under the chapter on the Covenant of Redemption rather than that of the Covenant of Grace.

<sup>26</sup> see Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 172.

covenantal seals, He was under a covenant with His Father, which is not the same covenant that men are under.

(vi) Psalm 89 clearly teaches that the Covenant of Redemption is a covenant. Much of the Psalm is spoken of Christ under the type of David. Ps. 89:3,4 says “I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Your seed will I establish forever, and build up your throne unto all generations.” This cannot be properly spoken of David whose reign and throne was interrupted and temporal. Rather, it is ascribed to Christ, “Your throne O God is forever and ever,” (Heb. 1:8, see also Luke 1:33, Dan. 7:14 and Isa. 9:7). Thus, by “David, my servant” is meant Christ, who is the chosen that the Father has made a covenant with. The Covenant of Grace under David shows itself to be a shadow of the eternal Covenant of Redemption.

Ps. 89:26,27 say, “He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.” While this is said of David and Solomon as a type, it can only be said truly of Christ. Hebrews proves Christ’s divinity from this language, assuming that it could only properly refer to Him: “For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son,” (1:5). Of this Person, Psalm 89 continues: “My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make also to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven... my covenant will I not break,” (28,29,34). Under the shadows of David, it is clear that Psalm 89 teaches that the Father is covenanted to Christ.

These six evidences clearly imply that the Covenant of Redemption is not simply an harmonious undertaking of certain persons of the Trinity, or merely an aspect of another covenant, but is, in and of itself, a covenant and called such in scripture.

## **The Relation Between the Two Covenants**

Perhaps the principle reason why Bostonians hold to the one covenant theory is due to the close relation, and even overlap, between the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace. An examination of the strong union between the two covenants, which traditional theologians have always granted, will show that those things held in common between them are not identical in their relations or functions, and thus do not present a common core of essentially one covenant. The conjunction between the covenants are principally three: (1) the foundation thereof, (2) the satisfaction of Christ, and (3) the union of Christ to His people. Examining these three areas will lay a groundwork for how the verses quoted by the Bostonians to prove their view should be interpreted.

(1) The foundation of the Covenant of Grace is the Covenant of Redemption. The drawing of the elect by means of the preaching of the gospel in the Covenant of Grace, and all the means unto their salvation, are inherently contained within the mediatorial promises given to Christ as a reward for His work in the Covenant of Redemption. To put it succinctly: redemption applied in the Covenant of Grace necessarily flows out of redemption accomplished in the Covenant of Redemption. Thus, Carl Bogue, in summarizing Jonathan Edward's view, can say, "The covenant of redemption, with qualifications, contains the covenant of grace within its boundaries."<sup>27</sup> There could be no Covenant of Grace without the Covenant of Redemption, as there would be no surety to make the Covenant of Grace possible. The Covenant of Redemption was made with a view of establishing the necessary basis of the Covenant of Grace to sinners.

While the Covenant of Grace is inherently within the terms of the Covenant of Redemption, it makes the latter no less of a self-contained covenant; In fact, it necessitates it, that the fulfillment of the terms of the Covenant of Redemption is in no way dependant upon the actions of men in the Covenant of Grace. This relation is not symmetrical: the Covenant of Grace is not the source of the covenant of Redemption, nor contains the Covenant of Redemption fully in it. These differences at the conjunction of the two covenants shows that they are not one covenant.

(2) The satisfaction of Christ is common to both covenants but it stands in a different

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<sup>27</sup> Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards*, 103.

relation to each. In the Covenant of Grace the satisfaction of Christ is the surety laid up by which penny-less sinners stand right with God. While Christ was providing this surety in the Covenant of Redemption (which is often called by the name “the Covenant of Surety” for this reason) for sinners in the Covenant of Grace (Heb. 7:22), it was not a surety for Him. There was no stored up surety that Christ received in the Covenant of Redemption or as He was in the Covenant of Grace. Rather, He was earning the surety. Jonathan Edwards states, “those things that are promises in one of these covenants are conditions in another.”<sup>28</sup> The satisfaction of Christ is a surety for His people precisely because it was not a surety for Him. If the satisfaction of Christ is a condition and a reward at the same time, then necessarily there are two covenants.

The most plausible and influential argument Boston uses is that “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20) is connected with God’s covenant with men in scripture. Thus, the one Covenant of Grace (for only one covenant is mentioned) is inclusive of Christ’s work and is that upon which justified sinners stand bound to God. Heb. 10:29 speaks of “the blood of the covenant” and 1 Cor. 11:25 states that this is, “the New Testament in my blood.” As Boston notes, scripture “never mentions the blood of the covenants [plural].”<sup>29</sup> 1 Pet. 1:19 says that the saints were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ.” The following verses show this covenant was with men: Ex. 24:8 (Heb. 9:20), “Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you,”; Zech. 9:11, “...by the blood of your [the people’s] covenant.”

The reply to all of this is that Heb. 13:20 (“the blood of the everlasting covenant”), and all the other passages, are not speaking of the Covenant of Redemption, but the Covenant of Grace. The blood is the surety of the Covenant of Grace. Why is the covenant, if made with temporal men, called eternal? Thomas Brooks explains, “the covenant of grace is called an everlasting covenant... in respect of the people of God, who are brought into covenant and shall continue in covenant for ever and ever.”<sup>30</sup> Why are the scriptures largely silent concerning the Covenant of Redemption in comparison to the Covenant of Grace? It is because men enter into

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<sup>28</sup> Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards*, 109.

<sup>29</sup> Boston, *Complete Works*, 397.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices and The Covenant of Grace*, (reprint, Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, Inc., 2001), 209. Brooks notes that the covenant of works was not everlasting, but was overthrown by sin, whereas the covenant of grace is not. Other things that make the Covenant of Grace everlasting are: everlasting joy (Isa.35:10), everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24), everlasting life (John 3:16) and the mediator of the covenant is everlasting (Heb. 13:8). Brooks, *Covenant of Grace*, 211.

and have to do with the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Redemption, being in the hidden things of God, only clearly appears where Christ reveals His dealings with the Father (John 14,17).

God's law is also common to both covenants, but functions in different ways. God's law in the Covenant of Redemption is that by which Christ earned our redemption. That same law in the Covenant of Grace is a guide to life for believers and a standard of condemnation to unbelievers.

Due to the overlap of the suretyship of Christ in both covenants (in one providing the surety, and the other being the surety, the same "blood of the covenant" performing different functions), it is to be expected that scriptural language would reflect the close association of the two covenants, one flowing out of the other. Examples of this may include Isa. 49, Heb. 8,10 and 12. Likewise, there is an overlap of the testamentary idea in Heb. 9 and Gal. 3:16. Such an overlap of Biblical language illustrates that "Christ is the fountain and original cause of all the promises: for he merited by His blood, remission, righteousness, perseverance, eternal life, all grace, which the Lord makes ours by free promise."<sup>31</sup>

(3) The union of Christ to His people is common to both covenants, but stands in a different relation to each. John L. Girardeau objects to the traditional position because:

to say that one covenant was made with the Son and another with the elect, is to assume... that it was not made with them in Christ, but apart from Him. But that cannot be admitted. To reply that the covenant, though not made with him, was made with the elect as in him, is to give up the distinction.<sup>32</sup>

The question is not whether Christ is united to His people in the Covenant of Redemption or the Covenant of Grace; He is in both. The question is whether the union functions the same in each. In eternity Christ represents His uncreated people by a legal union as defined by the stipulations of the Covenant of Redemption. There is no organic union. When a man supplies the condition of faith in the Covenant of Grace, an organic union is formed between him and Christ. Upon this organic union, a new legal union, not previously existing, is formed in which

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<sup>31</sup> Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 444.

<sup>32</sup> Girardeau, *Federal Theology*, 17.

the man is transferred from the headship of Adam in the Covenant of Works to the headship of Christ in the Covenant of Grace and is constituted righteous. The man is then a part of, and receives the benefits of Christ's mediatorial kingdom in a way that he had not while being under wrath in the world, though represented by Christ legally in the Covenant of Redemption. Unbelievers in the Covenant of Grace have a certain non-salvific, legally binding union to Christ while remaining at the same time under Adam and the Covenant of Works. Unbelievers are not represented by Christ in the Covenant of Redemption nor have a union to Him with respect to it. The Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace define the nature and function of union to Christ differently.

## **Conclusion**

The Covenant of Redemption is a covenant and is distinct from the Covenant of Grace.

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