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Proofs of a Covenant of Works

A covenant is a free and mutual compact between two parties, on express terms or conditions. By the covenant of works, the reality of which I propose in this chapter to evidence, I understand a free compact or agreement between JEHOVAH and the first Adam as the head and representative of all his natural offspring, in which He promised to him life, in all its possible extent and duration, if he would continue for a limited time to perform perfect obedience to all His commandments, and threatened death, in all its awful extent and duration, if he would in the least instance disobey. To this Adam freely and fully consented.

Now that JEHOVAH, the blessed Three in One did, in the astonishing greatness of His condescension, enter into such a covenant with Adam, whom He had lately formed after His own image, will, I trust, appear evident to the humble and impartial reader from the few following arguments, drawn from the oracles of truth.

1. This contract between God and the first Adam is in sacred writ expressly called a covenant. "These are the two covenants; the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar" (Galatians 4:24). Here are two cove-

nants mentioned, the one of which genders to bondage and the other to liberty or freedom. The covenant of grace, or “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” is the one that genders to liberty, or that makes free from the law of sin and death. The one therefore that genders to bondage must be that law or covenant of works that was republished to the Israelites from Mount Sinai that required perfect obedience to the Ten Commandments on pain of death, and contained a promise of life to the man who would do or perform such obedience. This covenant that “the thunderings, and lightnings, and thick cloud, and voice of the trumpet exceeding loud on the mount” proclaim to have been a covenant of works “gendereth to bondage.” By the awful manner in which it was then displayed, by the strictness of its precepts and the dreadful severity of its penalty, it tends to beget a slavish and servile spirit in all who are under the dominion of it, and to subject them to bondage of the most ignominious kind (Galatians 3:12–13). Now this covenant is here contrasted with the covenant of grace that, for his comfort, was revealed to Adam immediately after the fall, and therefore it must have been made with him before the fall. And, indeed, we cannot suppose that JEHOVAH, to whom infinite goodness as well as infinite justice is always essential, could have published such a covenant of works from Sinai to man in his state of sin, in which he is without strength to obey, if He had not already entered into it with him in his state of innocence.

2. We find mention made in Hosea 6:7 of Adam’s having transgressed a covenant. “But they, like men,” in the margin, “like Adam, have transgressed the covenant.” The original word is found only in two other places, in one of which (Job 31:33) our translators have rendered it “as Adam”; and if they had so translated it in the other (Psalm 82:7) the passage would have been much more plain and striking. “I have said, ye are gods;