

THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION

In the **covenant of redemption** we have an agreement between the Father, as the representative of the Trinity, and the Son, as the representative of His people, in which the latter undertakes to meet the obligations of those whom the Father has given Him, and the former promises the Son all that is necessary for His redemptive work. This eternal covenant is the firm foundation of the covenant of grace. If there had been no eternal counsel of peace between the Father and the Son, there could have been no agreement between God and the sinner. The **covenant of redemption** makes the covenant of grace possible.

A. The Scriptural Basis for the Covenant of Redemption. The **covenant of redemption** is frequently called *the counsel of peace*, a name that is derived from [Zech. 6:13](#). The doctrine of this eternal counsel rests on the following Scriptural basis:

1. Scripture clearly points to the fact that the plan of redemption was included in the eternal decree or counsel of God, [Eph. 1:4 ff.](#); [3:11](#); [2 Thess. 2:13](#); [2 Tim. 1:9](#); [Jas. 2:5](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#), and other passages.
2. There are passages which point to the fact that the plan of God for the salvation of sinners was of the

nature of a covenant. Christ speaks of promises made to Him before His advent, and repeatedly refers to a commission which He received from the Father, [John 5:30](#), [43](#); [6:38–40](#); [17:4–12](#). Moreover, in [Rom. 5:12–21](#) and in [1 Cor. 15:22](#) He is clearly represented as a covenant head. The parallel between Adam and Christ leaves no doubt on this point.

3. The elements of a covenant are clearly indicated, such as contracting parties, a promise, and a condition. In [Ps. 2:7–9](#) the parties are mentioned and a promise is indicated (comp. [Acts 13:33](#); [Heb. 1:5](#); [5:5](#)). In another Messianic passage, [Ps. 40:7–9](#) (comp. [Heb. 10:5–7](#)) the Messiah expresses His readiness to do the Father's will in becoming a sacrifice for sin. Christ repeatedly speaks of a task which the Father has entrusted to Him, [John 6:38](#), [39](#); [10:18](#); [17:4](#). Moreover, [John 17:5](#), [6](#), [9](#), [24](#) (cf. also [Phil. 2:9–11](#)) refer to a reward which He receives from the Father.
4. There are two passages in the Old Testament, which connect the idea of the covenant immediately with the Messiah, namely, [Ps. 89:3](#) and [Isa. 42:6](#), which refers to the Servant of the Lord. The connection clearly shows that this servant is

not merely Israel. Moreover, there are also passages in which the Messiah speaks of God as *his God*, which is covenant language, [Ps. 22:1, 2](#); [Ps. 40:8](#).

B. The Son in the Covenant of Redemption. There are a few things that should be stressed in connection with the place and work of Christ in the covenant of redemption.

1. THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF CHRIST IN THE COVENANT. Christ is both surety and head of the covenant of redemption. He is called "surety" in [Heb. 7:22](#). A surety is a person who takes upon himself the legal obligations of another. Christ stepped into the place of the sinner and undertook to atone for sin by bearing the necessary punishment, and to meet the demands of the law for all His people. By taking the place of delinquent man He became the second or last Adam, and in that capacity is the head of the covenant, the representative of all those whom the Father has given Him.
2. THE COVENANT WAS FOR CHRIST A COVENANT OF WORKS. The covenant of redemption is indeed the eternal basis of the covenant of grace, and for sinners also its original pattern. But for Christ it is a

covenant of works rather than a covenant of grace. For Him the law of the original covenant, the covenant of works applies, namely, that eternal life can only be obtained by meeting the demands of the law. As the last Adam, Christ obtains eternal life as a reward for faithful obedience, and not at all as an unmerited gift of grace.

3. CHRIST'S WORK IN THE COVENANT IS LIMITED BY ELECTION. The covenant of redemption has sometimes been confused with the decree of election, but the two are not identical. The decree of election determines the number of those who are destined to be heirs of eternal glory in Christ, while the covenant of redemption represents the way in which grace and glory are prepared for sinners. Logically, election precedes the counsel of redemption, because the surety of Christ in the covenant is particular and not universal. Christ undertakes to save only those who are given Him by the Father.
4. THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION AND THE USE OF THE SACRAMENTS BY CHRIST. Christ used the sacraments of both the Old and the New Testament. Clearly they could not

mean for Him what they mean for believers; they could not be symbols nor seals of saving grace; neither could they be instrumental in strengthening saving faith. In all probability they were for Him signs and seals of the **covenant of redemption**. He used them in an official capacity, as the representative of His people. He was burdened with the guilt of His people, and the sacraments could signify and seal for Him the removal of this burden and the fulfilment of the promises of the Father. And in so far as He in the capacity of Mediator was called upon to exercise faith (not saving faith), they could also serve to strengthen this faith as far as His human nature was concerned.

C. Requirements and Promises in the **Covenant of Redemption**.

1. REQUIREMENTS. The Father required of the Son as the surety and head of His people:
 - a. That He should assume human nature by being born of a woman, and should assume this nature with its present infirmities, though without sin, [Gal. 4:4, 5](#); [Heb. 2:10, 11, 14, 15](#); [4:15](#).
 - b. That He should place Himself

under the law, in order to pay the penalty for sin and to merit everlasting life for the elect, [Ps. 40:8](#); [Matt. 5:17, 18](#); [John 8:29](#); [9:4, 5](#).

- c. That He should apply His merits to His people by regenerating them, leading them to conversion, endowing them with faith, and sanctifying them, through the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, thus securing the consecration of their lives to God, [John 16:13–15](#); [17:19–22](#).
2. PROMISES. The main promises of the Father, which correspond to the demands of the Son, were:
 - a. That He would prepare for Him a body uncontaminated by sin, [Heb. 10:5](#), and would anoint Him by giving Him the Spirit without measure, thus qualifying Him for His Messianic offices, [Isa. 42:1, 2](#); [61:1](#); [John 3:34](#).
 - b. That He would support Him in the performance of His work, and thus enable Him to accomplish the destruction of Satan and the establishment of the kingdom of God, [Isa. 42:6, 7](#); [Luke 22:43](#).
 - c. That He would deliver Him

12, 14.

- from the power of death, and exalt Him to His own right hand in heaven, committing to Him all power in heaven and on earth, [Ps. 16:8–11](#); [Acts 2:25–28](#); [Phil. 2:9–11](#).
- d. That He would enable Him, as a reward for His accomplished atonement, to send out the Holy Spirit for the formation of His spiritual body by regeneration and sanctification, and for the instruction, guidance, and protection of the Church, [John 14:26](#); [15:26](#); [16:13](#), 14.
- e. That through the operation of the Holy Spirit all those given unto the Son would really come unto Him, so that none of them would be lost, [John 6:37](#), 39, 40, 44, 45.
- f. That a multitude which no man can number would thus be made partakers of redemption, so that ultimately the kingdom of the Messiah would embrace all the nations of the earth, [Ps. 22:27](#); [72:17](#).
- g. That in and through this wondrous work of redemption the glory of the divine perfections would become manifest to men and angels, and God would receive all the honor, [Eph. 1:6](#),

Questions for Review:

What is the [covenant of redemption](#)? How is it related to the covenant of grace? By what other name is it known? What Scriptural evidence is there for the [covenant of redemption](#)? What is the official position of Christ in this covenant? Is it for Christ a covenant of works or a covenant of grace? Whom does Christ represent in this covenant? What was the significance of the use of the sacraments by Christ? What did the Father require of Christ in the [covenant of redemption](#)? What did He promise the Son?

References for Further Study:

Berkhof, *Reformed Dogmatics*, I, pp. 247–256; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, pp. 359–362; Dabney, *Theology*, pp. 432–437.