

## TWO LETTERS

WHICH PASSED BETWEEN THE REVEREND MR JOHN GOODWIN AND THE AUTHOR,  
CONCERNING  
A CHURCH COVENANT.

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*To the Reverend Mr Thomas Goodwin.*

My dear friend, whom I love and honour, if not enough, yet (certain I am) exceeding much in the Lord. I am sorry, there being differences between us otherwise, that in this we should so long agree neither to send so much as the smallest piece of his mind to other in writing for a token. Upon which of us the law of love and Christian acquaintance rather imposed it to have first appeared in breaking this agreement, the same law prohibits to dispute. Whether it will ease the burden on my part or no, I leave to your ingenuity to consider and determine; but this I may truly say unto you, that I have had many thoughts from time to time since your departure from us that have dearly longed after your bosom, and would hardly have been kept from their longing till now, but by a strong hand of indispensable occasions and employments otherwise. And if my respects to you did not command me to entreat you the more gently in this behalf, I might truly charge upon yourself (in part) the occasion of my silence hitherto. Your authority, grace, learning, parts, judgment, and example have holpen to make the stone of separation so massy and heavy, that we are constrained to be at double pains and labour in removing and rolling it from off the consciences of our people. A great part of our employment is to stanch the issue of that fountain of blood, which you and some others of your conformity have opened in the womb of our churches here. We, hoping again your re-union with us and return unto us, through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is able to give you light to comprehend your darkness in those things which yet lie under dispute between us, are willing to save you what sorrow we can against your return, and for this purpose endeavour ourselves to make your mistakes as innocent as may be (in respect of execution), by keeping as many as we can from stumbling or falling thereby. Dear brother, that there were a heart in us to lay our heads together for the finding out of some course (if possible) that the sword may not always thus devour! Doubtless there are waters to be digged that would much assuage the heat, if not wholly quench the flames of these contentions and divisions. How deeply is it to be lamented, that he by whom God hath reconciled the world to himself should be made a means of dividing this reconciled world in itself! The heavens (I doubt not) will

accord us; yet were it our greater comfort and glory if the earth herein might prevent the heavens. I verily believe it would go far, and strike a great stroke in compromising between the parties at variance, if the great men and chief leaders on both sides could be persuaded but to take fast hold upon this ingenious, free, and noble resolution (which yet I suppose we all pretend to do), τῆ ἀληθείᾳ θύειν μάλλον, ἢ δουλεῖν ὑποθέσει, rather to do sacrifice to the truth than to be servile to suppositions. I know not how to open my mouth wide enough to shew you the whole enlargement of my heart unto you. If we saw the truth clearly with you, you should not reign alone; we would doubtless (at once) divide such a kingdom with you and reign too. Many indeed of your party are ready to say (in effect), that as it is heaven that separated you from us, so it is the world that separates us from you; but if you have the truth with you (which indeed if you have, at least in many of your best-beloved maxims, woe be to my wits, reason, and understanding; never poor man so strangely misused by such friends in this world), it will never be a debtor to such interpreters or agents for it. As for the world, if it be as little on that side of the sea as it is on this, it will never be so much as a mote in your eye to hinder you from seeing any truth of God clearly. But as little as it is with us, we think it too great and too good to be sacrificed upon the service of an error at any time (if yet those that forsake us do it not rather out of a desire and intent to spare the world than to sacrifice it), otherwise I doubt not but the servants of God in England tread as light upon the earth as you do in Holland, and are as ready to buy the truth and give as good rates for it as the best merchants amongst you. But however, I know that this left-handed spirit rules much in men of your party, who, not content to make our standing nought, labour much to make us worse than our standing; yet I make no question but your anointing teacheth you more Christian thoughts concerning us; and if we judged it any advantage to the truth or cause we maintain against you, we durst vie moral imputations with you, and are confident that we could assign and suggest against you both as many and as likely indirect and fleshly grounds for your departure from us, as you can against us for keeping our first standing and profession. But the truth will never be made great by such demonstrations as these on either side. Sometimes the truth is there where a man for many reasons would think there were least hope to find it; and again many times the fairest overtures and pleasingest inducements will but deceive and disappoint in this kind. And as for that kind of truth which we inquire after and toil in the fire of contention to find out, viz. spiritual and divine, there is no substantial or satisfying means for the discovery of it but by a holy, humble, and impartial consultation with the oracles of God about it; yea, if it be of that species or special kind of divine truth which is not spread (as manna was) upon the face of the Scriptures, but lieth low amongst the deep things of God, 1 Cor. ii. 10 (as it seems the truth in those questions depending between us doth), now it is not sufficient simply to consult or ask the Scriptures concerning them; but they must be examined and re-examined again and again, both solitary and in concert; they must be put home to it, and urged and pressed close together before they will speak their mind plainly in this case, or deliver out any of this treasure; yea, in many cases a man must be content to go to the one end of them to know what they mean in the other; yea (that which is much considerable, and I fear much wants that which belongs to it), they may seem to deliver many pleasing and plausible answers, under the shadow whereof the judgment and conscience of a man may be much refreshed for a season, so that they may be ready to shout for joy, and congratulate themselves with

his acclamation, that cried ‘εὕρηκα, εὕρηκα,’ he had found, he had found; and yet none of these answers be the τὸ ζητούμενον, true, direct, and bottom meaning of them. As Samson gave Delilah answer upon answer to her question or demand, which pleased her for a time, carrying a plausible semblance and reality of truth in them, but still her experience discovered the insufficiency of them, and then she rejected them, and would not give over till she had the true answer indeed, Judges xvi. 7, 8, &c.; so (doubtless) the Scriptures may in many places to our apprehensions affirm many things, and deliver out many notions of choice approbation to us for a time, the weakness and defects whereof notwithstanding further time and experience and a clearer light may discover; yea, there may from the very same Scriptures rise up many meanings and interpretations before us one after another that may be in our eye as Eliab, Jesse’s eldest son, was in Samuel’s (when he was sent to anoint one of his sons for king), ‘Surely’ (saith he, looking on Eliab) ‘the Lord’s anointed was before him;’ but he was yet a great way off from the Lord’s anointed. There was Eliab, and Abinadab, and Shammah, and more than as many more presented before him before David came in sight (who was the Lord’s anointed indeed); he was behind, and a great way off in the field, and must be sent for before he comes; so the anointed sense and meaning of the Scriptures may be yet far off when we persuade ourselves with the greatest confidence that it is before us. And as he said of benefits, *multa perdenda sunt, ut semel ponas bene*, a man must bestow many amiss, that he may bestow one well; so many times a man must be content first to take up and then to cast away many interpretations of Scripture (and those sometimes such which otherwise he would not willingly part with), that he may interpret at last as he ought to do. I make no question but you have had experience of these things in yourself more than once. For my part, I confess it hath been a frequent thing with me, in the course of my studies and meditations, to meet with, both from the pens or mouths of others, and from mine own conceptions also, several interpretations which have much affected me upon the first greeting, yea, which for a time I have nourished in my bosom and made treasure of, and yet afterwards have apparently seen that ὁ θησαυρος, ἀνζακες ἦσαν, my rejoicing was not good, and by a strong hand of superior conviction have been compelled to call that darkness, and to cast it from me, which sometimes I called light, and kept close unto. Wherefore I beseech you, by the tender mercies of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and (if it be fitting so to engage you) by the glory of those many talents given unto you, the strength whereof (methinks) should work through a napkin, and disdain so weak and contemptible an enclosure, once more to survey with a single, impartial, deliberate, and disengaged eye (if you can get out whether it be mote or beam that is gotten into it), your present thoughts and apprehensions concerning those things that have removed you from off an English table, and put you under a Holland bushel. Confident I am that there is a light beyond your light in these matters, if your eyes by long slumber be not over heavy to open, and that your rods will make but the enchanter’s serpents, which Aaron’s serpent will devour. I profess in the sight of God, and in as great singleness and simplicity of heart as ever man in this world spake word unto you, that I do as clearly apprehend error and mistake throughout the greatest part of your way as I do truth in this conclusion, that twice two makes four. The necessity of your covenant, prolix Confession of Faith, putting men to deliver their judgments in points of doubtful disputation upon and before their admission into your churches; the power of the keys and of ordination of ministers to be the right and inheritance of the whole body of the congre-

gation, and of every member promiscuously and indifferently; the divine institution or peremptory necessity of your ruling elders, the necessity of widows as of officers in the church; the absolute necessity of one and the same government or discipline in all particulars whatsoever, in all churches, in all times and places; a full and peremptory determination of all things whatsoever appertaining to the worship of God, with divers like positions (which are the very life, soul, and substance of your way); I am at perfect peace in my thoughts that you will never be able to demonstrate or prove from the Scriptures to any sober-minded and considering man. I am loath to overcharge you with words and writings. To desire you to return and to repair the breach you have made upon us, I confess were a hard motion, and of slender hope to be obtained, were it not made to a truly great and noble spirit; and, *cæteris paribus*, the request from you to me, and others with me, to come over unto you, were more reasonable than that they should desire you to return back again unto us, because you have suffered already (at least in the thoughts of many) under the disparagement of some unconstancy; and equal it is, where there is not some over-ruling reason to the contrary, that burdens should not be doubled, but rather divided. But herein I beseech you consider, your advantage is the greater, that you have by this means *πλείονα θυσίαν*, the greater and better sacrifice to offer upon the service of the truth than we, if you can apprehend the truth with us, and deny yourself the second time in turning back again unto us. And yet give me leave to say this unto you, though your restitution to us be one of the first-born of my this-world's wishes, and the day thereof would be above the rest of the days of the year, yet had I rather mourn over your absence still, than bring you back again any otherwise than by the hand of an angel of light. I relish no satisfaction from any man to any request, but what I purchase more by reasoning than requesting. And for your part I know that, in the motions of this nature, a friend and a feather are both alike, except reason makes the difference. I have made bold upon some words of encouragement from your mouth, related to me by Dr P., to propound a query unto you concerning the head of your way, your church covenant, with some reasons of my scrupling, partly the lawfulness, but especially the necessity, of your indispensable exaction thereof. If you be willing to treat with your old friend in a way of this commerce, I shall hereafter (God willing), as health and liberty will agree, desire like satisfaction from you in some other particulars of your way; but if the motion dislikes you, neither have I any further pleasure in it. If you shall suspend your answer, give me leave so far to please myself as to interpret your silence a ground of hope that your own coming is not far off; or otherwise, if your answers be too strong for me, and able to remove my mountains out of my way, they are not the seas that shall keep friends asunder any longer. I am yours (if you care to own me). Send me over the silver and bright shining wings of truth, and upon these I come flying over to you out of hand. I would be as glad of a bargain of truth at any rate as another, God having taught me how to drown the world in the least drop of the water of life. Only this I desire may be the law of this dissertation between us, that since the strength of your confidence in your way is such as to break out into a departure from us (and I conceive double light to be requisite for a separation in any kind, whereas single light sufficeth for any man's continuance in his standing), you will go to work as a prince and not as a beggar, and commend the truth of what you hold and practise in opposition to us by a high hand of pregnant and express Scriptures, and not beg anything by any loose or faint interpretation

or supposition. We look for from you letter for letter, word for word, tittle for tittle, for the proof of all you maintain against us, and otherwise cannot but judge it somewhat hard to be so forsaken, only because our logic is more dull and less piercing than yours. I have used the more liberty of speech unto you, because I know you are well able to bear it. The queries and objections which I offer against your church covenant are these.

We doubt by what warrant of Scripture, or otherwise, any church of Christ can impose any such express and formal covenant upon all those that desire membership with them, as a peremptory condition of their admittance, as is now generally practised in all your churches. We conceive the Scripture will nowhere justify these proceedings, but rather judge there is much evil, and a manifold inconvenience, in the urging and exacting such a covenant.

1. Confident we are (as confidence itself can make us) that there is no command given to the churches for exacting any such covenant of those that are to be admitted into church fellowship with them. So that we conceive any such exaction to be a mere human invention, and a strain of that wisdom that desires to exalt itself not only above all that is practised by men, but above that which is written by God himself; yea, though instances and examples could be produced of such covenant, both demanded and given, yet this may stand without any warrant of lawfulness, much more without the imposition of any necessity upon churches at this day, to make the like demand of their intended members; and most of all it may stand, without any necessity upon churches to make the demand as of a duty of absolute necessity, or as a part of the worship and service of God. Because (1.) no example bindeth but by virtue and in the strength of some commandment. And if there were any thing necessary to be done which is not commanded by God, then must there be found weakness and imperfection in his law. Therefore, to make any thing necessary which the law of God maketh not necessary, is not to keep the law, but (as James saith) to judge it. (2.) There may be examples found of many things done by Christians (yea, by whole churches) in the primitive times, not only lawfully, but with high and special approbation; the doing whereof in these times is not only no ways necessary, but liable to much question, whether lawful or convenient. The selling of lands and houses by those that were the possessors of them, and bringing and laying money at the apostles' feet, was practised (we know) in the apostles' times, Acts iv. 34, 35; and, as Tertullian witnesseth, continued two hundred years together in the church. But I know no man now pleads for the necessity of any such practice; yea, whether it would not be much more inexpedient for the gospel (and consequently in some degree unlawful) if now put in practice, a few thoughts would sufficiently discover. (3.) And, lastly, there is no question to be made but that many times the diversification of circumstances and aspects of things in the world, and course of God's providence, have not only a lawful power of dissolving the binding force and authority of many examples, but of suspending our obedience to many rules, and precepts, and exhortations. As, for example, that kind of salutation between men, mentioned Gen. xxvii. 26, 1 Sam. xx. 41, and oft elsewhere, being generally left and out of use. Those injunctions of Paul, Rom. xvi. 16, 1 Cor. xvi. 20, and elsewhere, 'Greet ye one another with an holy kiss,' impose no such literal tie upon the saints in these days, as when they were written; neither do I conceive (nor, I suppose, you) that the elders of the church are now bound to anoint the sick with oil, because this is commanded, James v. 14. Neither do I conceive that the French churches lie under any guilt of sin, for suffering their teachers to have their heads covered

in their public ministry, notwithstanding the rule or direction of Paul: 1 Cor. xi. 4, 'Every man praying or prophesying, having any thing on his head, dishonoureth his head;' because that topical custom among the Grecians, upon which Paul built this rule or assertion, is wholly disused by their nation, and the contrary generally practised among them. Though I do not think this scripture is to be restrained to the teachers only, but to concern as well the whole assembly of men present, who are all here said to pray or prophesy in a passive sense (as women also are, ver. 5), that is, to partake of these ordinances with the teachers. Other like instances might be given. And doubtless the rule that Cameron gives (who was a man of as much learning, sharpness of wit, and happiness in opening the Scripture, as any of the reformed churches in France, yea, I may say, in any part of the world, have enjoyed of latter times) is most true.\* There are many things commanded in Paul's epistles whereof there is no use at this day (viz., as touching the literal and precise observation), as is that of prophesying, 1 Cor. xiv., and concerning the habit of women prophesying, which belong not to our times; but concerning prophesying, we shall (God willing) move some special queries afterwards. And I verily believe, that one main reason and grand occasion of all separation from us (on that hand you are gone) is, because the words of the sacred text fitted to particular occasions, and to the condition of the times wherein they were written, are taken and applied by such men to themselves and others as they find them, without due respect had to those weighty and material differences that are between the one and the other (as might be demonstrated at large if it were any part of our present purpose). In the mean season, it is evident by what has been said, that though particular instances could be produced, that the covenant so much magnified, so indispensably urged by your churches (generally) upon their members before their admission, yea, by some great masters of your way, defended in writing as the very form and essence of a true church (the writing whereof hath gone a long time under your own name, but of late I hear you have disclaimed it), hath been practised by former churches, and put upon those that desired membership with them, yet this is no sufficient ground to conclude a necessity now lying upon all churches to do the like, except there be a precept or command found for the doing it; no, nor yet to prove a lawfulness of doing it, except all circumstances be clear and fair for the doing it; nay, a precept or command itself will not evince a necessity hereof, if any master or grand circumstance be now changed or altered, upon which the precept was first given.

2. But yet, notwithstanding, I add in the second place, neither do the Scriptures afford any instance or example wherein any such covenant hath ever been demanded or exacted by any particular church, of those who desired fellowship with it. But many instances there are, wherein only upon a sober profession of their faith in Christ, and entertainment of the gospel, men have been received into churches, without the least noise or mention of any such covenant: Acts ii. 41, 'They that gladly received his word, were baptized: and the same day there were added (viz., to the church) about three thousand souls.' Some of your judgment strongly conceit that they espy their covenant in these words, *were added*; but surely if they were assisted by the same imagination, they might as soon discover it in those words, Gen. i. 1, 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth;' for to any reasonable and disengaged apprehension, that word *προσσεπίθευτο*, with the number of Christians joined with it, only expresses the exceeding great work of God in making so great an enlargement or addition to his church in so short

\* Myrothec. in cap. v. Jacobi.

a time ; and doubtless a man must get a dispensation for his understanding, to enable him to think or believe, that within the compass of half a day, or a little more at the most (perhaps somewhat less, for the former part of the day was well spent before Peter began his sermon, and how long he continued preaching is uncertain ; it seems he was not very brief, ver. 40), three thousand persons should particularly and distinctly, one after another, in the same place, and before the same persons, be examined and tried, take a solemn covenant, repeating your contents and words thereof. Doubtless the art and method of such dispatch is utterly lost and perished from the world at this day. Either the covenant they made was very brief, and but an ace to yours, or else the motion of their tongues, in speaking, much swifter than our thoughts. You must favour yourself beyond all reason, in both these suppositions, or else suppose your covenant no longer here. Besides, evident it is, that those that were added to the church were baptized, before this is affirmed of them. Now, being baptized, and that in an orderly and right way (as you will not deny), this did immediately qualify them for church fellowship according to your own grounds, and the truth itself ; therefore they needed not the mediation of a covenant to make them capable hereof, so that you see an impossibility of any covenant to be implied here. And if you be not relieved at this door, there is little hope to find more charity in this kind at others. Philip required no other covenant or condition of the eunuch to qualify him for baptism, and thereby to give him entrance into the church, but only to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart, and to profess it to him, Acts viii. 37. When Paul essayed to join himself with the disciples at Jerusalem, Acts ix. 26, the reason why they declined him for a time, was not because they tendered a covenant to him, and he refused it, but because they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple, implying, that had they believed this concerning him, that he had been a disciple, *i. e.* a believer, they would have received him without more ado ; yea, upon Barnabas his mere testimony of him, without any covenant subscribed, confession made, or word spoken by himself, he was received, ver. 27, 28. So again, Acts xi. 24, there is mention made of many that were joined to the Lord, *i. e.* were immembered into the church ; but no more words of any such covenant as you urge than a deaf man may hear. If you propose the passages of the New Testament further, you will desery many more stars of this constellation. Neither here can you have recourse to those covenants mentioned in Old Testament, Ezra x. 3, Neh. ix. 38, &c., to pattern yours withal ; for then you fly to a sanctuary which yourselves have polluted, by destroying all sympathy and agreement between a national church, and that which you have instituted in particular. And besides, to forsake the guidance of the Spirit of God under the New Testament, to seek to make out our thoughts by the Old, is to ask the twilight in the evening, whether it were light at noon-day. Moreover (if desire of brevity for the present did not bind my hands), it were easy to demonstrate unto you, what a solemn disagreement there is many ways between these covenants and yours, and particularly in that precise circumstance which must have relieved you.

3. To me there is no imaginable use or necessity of this your covenant, because believers, willing or agreeing to live together in the same body, are bound by greater bands a thousandfold than any covenant they can make between themselves, to perform mutually all manner of Christian love, service, and duties whatsoever. Christ himself is the greatest of all bands, and of all manner of obligements and engagements whatsoever, both to knit and hold Christians together, to make them of one heart and of one soul,

and to keep them so; by whom (*i. e.* by Christ) all the body being coupled and knit together, &c., Eph. iv. 16. And where the Scriptures speak of other bands with him, and besides him (yet all relating to him), endearing and binding Christians together as close as ever their hearts and souls will pack or work into one, amongst them all your covenant cometh not into any remembrance. 'There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your vocation. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.' Surely, if they had been joined and jointed together by any such covenant as you speak of, and this covenant been of divine institution, and of that high and sovereign consequence, as to give them their life, being, and substance, as a church or body; the apostle could not so far have forgotten himself as not to have mentioned it amongst its fellows, especially there being no place (that I can readily call to mind) more commodious throughout all his writings, to have made a particular and express mention hereof than here. And, for my part, I freely and ingenuously, and in the simplicity of my heart, profess to you that I neither know what further or greater duty or service of love, in any kind I can desire or wish, of those my brethren in Christ, upon whom the providence of God (together with my own voluntary election) either hath or hereafter shall cast me in church fellowship, than what they stand bound by the common band of our mutual interest in the same God, in the same Lord, in the same baptism, in the same hope, to exhibit, and tender, and perform unto me, without the express of any such covenant made with or unto me. Nor yet can I conceive how possibly I should have any better, richer, or stronger assurance from them for the performance hereof unto me, by the virtue or aid of any such covenant, above what I have by the power of that grace or godliness which (as far as I am able to judge) worketh effectually in them, and subjecteth them to all the said bands and obligations. Nor can I think that he whose strength to do evil will serve him to trample under foot the blood of the Lord Christ, to cast the commandments of the glorious God behind his back, to betray the hope of his own peace and glory, will ever be kept in a Christian compass towards me, by any promise, band, or covenant of his own. I know not how to think it a sin in me not to desire or exact a greater security for my portion in the saints than God himself hath given me and established me in. If here your answer be, that your covenant respecteth as well every man's faithfulness towards God, as discharge of duty one towards another; and therefore in this regard (at least) there may be a necessity of it; to this I answer (in few words), 1. why is not the unnecessary part (at least) of your covenant (which I conceive to be the greatest), viz., that which concerns the covenanter's duty towards his fellows, struck off? 2. If such a covenant as this, with or towards God, be so necessary a duty, why is the place of it nowhere to be found amongst all the commandment of God? Doubtless God requires it not at our hands to be either more provident or jealous for his glory than he is himself. 3. And, lastly, this covenant is neither lawful before baptism, nor necessary after; therefore the necessity of it falls to the ground, and is not defensible. That it is not lawful before baptism, is evident, because it is not lawful for a church to receive the unbaptized into fellowship with them, as members of their body, neither is there example or appearance of warrant in Scripture for such a thing. As evident it is, that after baptism it is altogether unnecessary, because baptism doth immediately qualify for church fellowship (as hath been said, your own principles not gainsaying), and your church itself, by admitting any to her baptism, *ipso facto*, admits into her fellowship. Therefore, I add,



4. That the requiring and exacting of such a covenant of men, and the imparting of church fellowship upon it, I conceive to be an unchristian usurpation upon the consciences of men, and a tempting of God, by laying such a burden upon his people, which he must give strength (more than otherwise were necessary) to bear, or otherwise they must suffer (at least) if not fall under it. And I believe, I know some, worthy every ways of the honour (according to the line of men), who, desirous of entrance into some of your churches, were turned back by a dislike of that new door of your covenant.

And, lastly, we conceive the exacting and giving such a covenant is not only a thing unnecessary, and a *ὑπερ ὃ γέγραπται*, a something above anything that is written, but of worse inconvenience also (at least, as many of those that are engaged in it are wont to draw and interpret the importance thereof). For many look upon the covenant they have made with a particular church as a partition wall, wholly to separate them in care, affection, dependence, &c., upon all other churches, and the saints of God throughout the world; and take it for an authentical discharge and release from heaven, from troubling themselves any ways with the affairs of other churches, or ministering unto their necessities at any time. It was not much short of this, which a great defender of your faith professed plainly unto me not long since, and that before some witnesses. Calvin well observes, upon Rom. xvi. 16, that Paul's study and desire was, by his careful remembrance, and sending the mutual salutations of one church to another, *quantum in se est, mutuo amoris nexu devincire inter se omnia Christi membra*, as far as lay in his power, to bind all the members of Christ wheresoever in one and the same mutual band and affection together. Now if Paul herein did the will and commandment of God (which I cannot think you will deny), then as our Saviour charged the scribes and pharisees that they made the commandment of God of no effect (*i. e.* they had taken a course to do it, done that which directly tended thereunto), by their tradition, so (we conceive) we may justly challenge your covenant, for an ill look or malignant aspect upon that part of the will of God, wherein he desires that all believers, all the world over, should desire to maintain a free intercourse of the dearest love and tenderest affection one towards another. The mighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ teach us how to make something of nothing, and by the use of a miserable, distracted, and broken world, to compass and fetch in the day of eternity. Grace, peace, and truth be multiplied to you and yours from the great fountain of the heavenly treasures.

I am, yours in the Lord for the greatest services of Christian love and acquaintance,

JOHN GOODWIN.

COLMAN STREET, LONDON, *October 25. 1639.*

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*To the Reverend Mr John Goodwin.*

My ancient friend and dear brother in the Lord, and work of the Lord, I received from you now about ten weeks since a letter, together with an enclosed confutation of the church covenant (as you suppose it is) practised amongst us. Your letter is full enough of provocation to an answer, which you needed not to have seemed so much to doubt. And yet further to provoke unto it, and to get ground of us in it too, I hear that copies either of your letter or query, or both, as by you sent to me, were dispersed everywhere abroad, and some afore the time they came to my hand. Your letter bears date from you October 25.; I received it about the 20th of November. You had indeed

used liberty of speech enough in your letter to me, as yourself excuses it, because (as you say) you know I am well able to bear it, yea, and this also. And whereas now you, or at least those who had yours so long afore myself, may think it high time to expect a full answer, I must ingenuously tell you, what perhaps in most men's eyes will yet add to that advantage you have already taken, that I do but now begin to consider by way of study to answer your objections. You then took me in the very midst of many other notions upon another subject, which both my own heart and promises had engaged me in. And truly I resolved that this of yours should not take me off, notwithstanding all those urgencies, until I had quitted myself of that which hath so much took up my thoughts, that (God knows) I have not cast a thought, more than what arose in the very first reading of it, upon this of yours. And besides other reasons for this, I thought it a little unnatural to extrude what I was then a-going with, or to entertain any other conception that might weaken or abortive it, and I have not strength enough to go with two together. But now that I am delivered of that burden, I shall, as health, and many other ministerial labours, which my heart is much more in, will permit, apply myself, through Christ, to satisfy you in this, and I long and am straitened till I have accomplished it. But now I must further tell you, to your greater advantage still for the present, that I foresee the true and right stating this one particular query, which you have singled out of the drove as the weakest (which you thought to hunt and pursue to death), together with the clearing of it according to your mind, will necessarily require yet a longer time than happily may be expected. It was wisely done to begin to set down first before this small fort, which being thus singly set upon, and alone, you made account to carry with an easy and glorious conquest; for indeed it lies somewhat high and remotely up in the regions of those other fundamental opinions about church fellowship wherein we differ from you. So as, to speak truth, I cannot so fairly come at you to raise your siege until I have forced you to give up truths of greater moment, which, when I shall have done, this about a church covenant shall fall into our hands again with few or no blows. I could for the present make out an answer sufficient to your arguments, as in your discourse you will needs state the question, by nothing but a bare relation of what is our common practice and judgment here at Arnheim in this particular, which, had you informed yourself of afore you fell upon us, I am confident you would never have begun the quarrel with us here, and have made this the great seat of the war. For as to the putting any to deliver their judgments in points of doubtful disputations, upon and before admission into our church (I speak it in the words of the charge in the letter, and by some expressions in the arguments, I perceive it one ground of this quarrel, supposing that this is the manner of our covenant), we know not what you mean. Look what knowledge and light agreeing with ours any one voluntarily holds forth, we take and hear with rejoicing in the unanimity; but profess in rigour to exact no more assent and light (I speak in matters of church fellowship) than of being convinced that church fellowship is an ordinance of Christ, for saints to enjoy other ordinances in together, which is no more than what is essentially and absolutely necessary to that very act of joining in it, and is in effect to profess they understand what they are about to do, that so we may be sure that a name and ordinance of God is not taken in vain by them. And for any such covenant (which you blame so for length, that the apostles their dispatch was but an ace to this covenant of ours, and for tyranny as unchristian usurpation upon the consciences of men, and a tempting of God by laying such a burden upon his people. And for schism, you would accuse it as a par-

tion-wall wholly to separate men in care, affection, dependence upon all other churches and saints of God throughout the world) it is no more with us than this, an assent and resolution professed (by them to be admitted by us), with promise to walk in all those ways pertaining to this fellowship, so far as they shall be revealed to them in the gospel.

Thus briefly, indefinitely, and implicitly, and in such like words, and no more or otherwise, do we apply ourselves to men's consciences, not obtruding the mention of any one particular upon them before or in admission, but wholly leaving before and after their spirits free to the entertainment of the light that shines, or shall shine, both to them and us out of the word, and unto the sweet guidance of the Holy Spirit of Christ to lead both them and us unto all truth, without either our halting or driving them. Indeed, we that are to admit, do it upon a conviction and persuasion of the party's true grace, some way made forth visible to us. And we think any Christian man may blush to name (now under the New Testament, when types and shadows are fled away, and the body of the truth is come) a body, and church, and members of Christ our Head, and not mean saints, and by saints understand at least such as, by the rules of the word, given by God himself to judge others by, are visible saints. And we find confession with the mouth of the work of faith in the heart, a means among other sanctified by God to make any one's grace evident and visible to others; and the judgment we make hereupon to admit our members, is no other or more rigorous than what the word holds forth as meet for us to judge of others by, and but such as I know your conscience carries about with you, and which you can never lose, and which, as occasion is given, you do use to judge of the differences of men by; and we know that in us it is righteous judgment, being squared by the rule given us, although it is not infallible judgment, for men may deceive us in our applications of it. Thus we do and have practised, and this is all for matter of covenant or confession in use with us, and that from the beginning. And thus much in effect you grant, or seem to grant, whilst about confession in the beginning of the second argument you use these words, 'Many instances there are wherein only (say you) upon a sober profession of their faith in Christ, and entertainment of the gospel, men have been received into churches,' speaking of Scripture instances in the apostles' times. And in the beginning of the third argument you add these words, Believers, willing and agreeing to live together in the same body with you, afterwards instancing in your own, you do call church fellowship. Well, let them be believers, willing and desirous upon knowledge of each other to be such upon a profession of their faith, and also what this fellowship is, and let them withal but agree, by mutual consent and assent expressed to each other (or how else do they agree to live together in a fellowship and body?), so to live in that relation, and all the duties, and you and I are agreed. And now suppose unto this agreeing of yours we join covenanting and promise, yet still but with those indefinite expressions mentioned, assuredly whatever you and I mutually agree to do, if it be a matter of moment, we may as well and as lawfully promise and covenant to do. And therein what do we more than tie a double knot where you tie a single one? And yet, that you and I may still agree, if you or any believer comes to be admitted among us upon the terms aforesaid, and did scruple the word covenant and promise, we would take your single agreement without such double security. And this knot and band, thus firmly by a covenant made to tie us among ourselves as to the duties of this relation, is yet so far from being a wall of partition (as you would fain charge both us and it) from all saints and churches else, whom we love, pray for, hold communion with, and honour as the spouse and churches of Christ, and

yours also (only give us leave to have our churches not separated, divided, though in some things differing from yours, which therefore we could not be permitted to enjoy in our own land); it is so far, I say, from being a wall of separation from all others, that we count it not indissoluble among ourselves (as that of marriage is), but only obliging us to live together in this fellowship and the duties of it as becometh saints, whilst we are cast to live together as men by our outward calling and conditions, which cohabitation, the first, though remotest ground of church fellowship, and almost of all fellowship else, wherein, if providence maketh any alteration requiring a just remove, they may lawfully seek, and we do willingly grant a dismissal from us to any other church, notwithstanding this our covenant obliging us to this particular fellowship; but whilst we live together, a covenant, and that made afore God, and an oath unto God, are both and alike ordinances which may warrantably be used in all affairs human and divine, wherein there passeth *mutuus compactus*, a mutual agreement between men, or any special relation made up among men by agreement. Thus, if you marry, you make a solemn covenant of it to perform the duties of that relation; if you enter into any new league, even of friendship, you may bind it by a covenant, as did Jonathan and David. Thus, to be admitted into any body or polity civil, men make not only a covenant, but do often add thereto an oath, and such is called the covenant of God, as that of marriage, and the oath of God, as that between prince and people in a commonwealth. Now, if this church fellowship be a body, and that to be entered into by believers agreeing to live in the same body, as your words and the truth express, and such a body as superadds anything of a special relation mutual between each other of that church more than that more common communion and relation of and unto all saints in the church catholic (and if it did not so, there were no need of any such act of agreement to live in the same body, for they were members of the catholic church without it and before it), why, then, should not such a covenant, and the use and benefit of it, be allowed to this body, and special relation of church fellowship, to form up and knit fast the agreement of it, as is common to all bodies and societies and particular relations made up in the world? not any of which you can well make up, or not so well, without a covenant, or at least an agreement, and that passed by way of words mutually expressing consent, and must needs be confessed most suiting with and nearest to the very dictate of nature, whilst these societies shall be made up of men to whom, to that very end that they might be sociable, their speech was given them. And so this comes to be argued not barely from the faint illustration of a lifeless and lame similitude and resemblance, but from the true and real analogy and like interest and correspondence with the nature of the thing itself, which this divine society, body, and relation of men doth in common hold and retain in this common bond of all such societies for their making up, namely, an agreement expressed in words, and a solemn covenant, and this *jure naturali*, even by a right which both God and the nature of the thing itself hath endued it withal.

*First*, Nature doth evince it, the laws and rules of which doth run along with and are alike common to things spiritual and human, so far as both are said to agree in one common nature together; for as when God made speaking to men in a public assembly (as that of preaching and prophesying) a sacred ordinance, instantly did all the laws of nature and right reason, that seem to regulate and covenantly concur to all orderly speeches and orations of men in public assemblies made, fall upon this ordinance also, as to speak aloud, not to speak in an unknown or strange tongue which the assemblies understand not, not to speak confusedly two or three at once, but one by

one. Even so when God made this fellowship of saints, and this special relation of a few in a church fellowship and ordinance, instantly doth this of making up this relation by a joint agreement, and constantly expressed in words, present itself as the natural and common way of knitting all sorts of men together in all other relations else in the world.

*Secondly*, God hath ordained it ; for, if God hath thus lent in common (as we may so speak) a solemn covenant, as before himself made, unto all other relations and societies of any importance unto mankind, which, when in such civil affairs used, is to be esteemed sacred and an ordinance of God, a covenant with God (as was said) and an oath with God, hath he not with that same breath much more allotted and allowed the practice of such a covenant to have place in the obligation of this divine society and relation, which is itself an ordinance, and so of the two the more proper element for such a holy covenant ? so as this is so far from being an ὑπερ ὁ γηγραπται, anything above what is written (as you speak of it), that it rather comes within the compass of the apostle's *χρῆσιαν* [*ουκ*] *ἐχρετε γραφειν*, yea, indeed, which needed not at all to have been written ; for (as he then speaks of love) ye are taught it of God in a law of nature spiritualised, who also hath fully, roundly taught us to acknowledge, if we be spiritual, yea, but reasonable, such dictates of nature and right reason in things wherein divine ordinances and human do alike partake in common, to be no less than the commands of God, for of such like rules (even the same we but now instanced in) doth the apostle there speak. Nor yet is this covenant the renewing that solemn general covenant of grace entered into at conversion, where the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper are the seals which you mention as band sufficient ; but this covenant is but a particular covenant, and so a branch of that general one, and but to oblige unto the duties more properly and specially pertaining unto this fellowship, though all this in the virtue of the general covenant ; and therefore although (as you say truly) the common band of our mutual interest in the same God, in the same baptism, &c., do bind us to all those duties, yet that hinders not a special particular covenant to be made upon some special duties upon various occasions, even as particular leases and compacts use to be made out of some general charter ; for example, baptism, and all those common interests in the same Lord, &c., do oblige man and wife, master and servant, friend and friend, and also societies, unto all the duties belonging unto these several relations as they are laid down in the word, and yet particular and solemn covenants do and may pass between men for the performance of all these, or (to take your own instance which in your third argument you have used) for the confirming those duties and services of love to be performed towards yourself by those your brethren in Christ, upon whom the providence of God, together with your own voluntary election, either here or hereafter, shall cast you into church fellowship with. To maintain ministers for their labour and work of the ministry is (to go on to use your own words) one duty and service of love to which they stand bound by the common band of their mutual interest in the same God, in the same baptism, in the same hope, to exhibit, tender, and perform unto you, and which you may expect from the power of grace which worketh effectually in them, and subjecteth them to all the same bonds and obligations, and yet I believe you did, at least you might, expressly have covenanted with them that they should perform it ; and yet what is this but a duty and a branch of church fellowship you have a statute for in the New Testament ? And doth not the like reason hold for all other duties of that whole fellowship ? And of this sort were those covenants which, besides the obligation of the general covenant in the law in Horeb, and in circum-

cision, were made of old by the people of God, the Jews, namely, special covenants upon special occasions made to engage them more expressly unto some special duties unto God or one another, whereof two instances you cite, but withal do shut the doors of those sanctuaries upon us, if we should thither fly for refuge, by alleging the forfeiture of our privilege therein, 'ourselves having (as you speak) polluted them by destroying all sympathy and agreement between a national church and that which we call instituted or particular.' But we affirm with all orthodox divines, that all the moral equity of these covenants do still hold under the New Testament as much as ever, as all things that were moral under the covenant also do, as a seventh-day-Sabbath, infant baptism, &c. And the ministers' maintenance is argued from that of not muzzling the ox's mouth; and we have destroyed only that sympathy with what was but typical then, which part of this sanctuary God himself both polluted and abandoned, whilst we deny those wonted arguments drawn from the mould and pattern of the national church then, and from the universal mixture of all Israel therein, to prove the like now in any whole national church in the world. And we affirm the dedication of all that people to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, and so generally to be members of that church, to be done but in a type and shadow, as most things else were, although a real holiness was commanded then as now, and required by God of all then as now; as were their temples also types of that royal nation, and true priesthood, and living stones, of saints in truth, and visibly such in reality, as Peter expoundeth it, of whom alone a particular church, the only instituted church we can find mentioned in the New Testament succeeding that national, is to consist, as the only truth and reality of that type. And as God made persons and actions unclean in the type, that morally were not unclean, so on the contrary, in the like type all the nation holy, who yet morally were neither such, nor by the saints in those times were judged such; but the moral part of this sanctuary, which is still to continue, yourself shall defile and destroy, if you either affirm the ground of making those special covenants, not to have been moral, or being moral, not to hold for pastors for a church or society, or society of men together, to enter into the like now. But I resolved not to write a scripture, which yet confirms all this, but do now only leave you unto your own reason, spiritualised, to answer you out of what hath been said, in all that is materially objected by you, yea, even to that same reason that tells you that twice two is four, as yourself speaks of, there appearing so clearly error in the greatest part of our whole way. And now you know both our judgments and practice, although the difference between you and us in this particular can prove but small, to have answered all the material things in the query, so far as they relate unto this covenant, would be but an easy and no long work; yet, for their sakes, to whom you have made this challenge against our whole church fellowship so public, and endeavoured to make as odious as public, who yet are ignorant of it, I shall, God willing, put myself to further pains, yet to shew more largely the foundation of our church work, and so of this practice; and in doing this, I shall take the larger compass, and require the more time, because I see you will not allow me so much as a stick or a stone unto this building, yea, I am to fight for the very ground I am to build upon; for notwithstanding what I have took hold of in your discovery as granted by you, yet I cannot assure myself of any one principle from you about church-fellowship, but that there is a catholic church, and a communion of saints in the creed, which we all acknowledge; for otherwise, when we speak of a particular instituted church, you seem to make it a matter of our making, and not as of God's institution. And besides,

if I should go about to beg any one of these principles, even the lowest about a particular church, I know not what, nor indeed how large I may be denied. You have enacted a supreme law, as you call it, against all such beggars in this dissertation; and if the foundation should be denied, what can we do till we have established them? I am resolved, therefore, and must be at the more pains, and expense of time, who yet am able to take but little pains in much time, to satisfy and make good, as I go along, all those principles which you slight as loose and faint suppositions. And therein I have but one request to make to you, and by you to make to others, to whom you have made your letter and objections so common: let not this, my taking a longer day, add one hair to the stature of your confidence, which is full high and tall enough already in any man's view, even in the very first words of your arguments, neither unto your own, or any of their opinions of the strength of these their arguments. But above all, I beseech you not to draw so hard a consequence from the suspension of a more full answer, as to expect me sooner with you than an answer; for I assure you, did not the merit of the cause itself, and the condition of it, not being understood by most, require it, that men may come to a right understanding of us, I should not have needed any more time for the clearing of any scruple or doubt, which all this your discourse had any way begotten in my own reason or conscience, than simply when I was a reading it first over. And in this my answer, I shall not go about to contend with you, either in rhetoric, or subtilty of answering, but in solidity and faithfulness, through the grace of Christ. To say I shall so answer thus or thus soon, I make account is but the credit of the answer, which I have learned not to strive with you about, but to give you, as you see, all the fair advantages; but to answer you with words of truth and soberness, that may, through Christ, convince you and others, shall be my only aim; and then I know, although I should be long in doing of it, yet delays and charges will therein be paid with interest and advantage unto the cause and truth, which I expect more than what I am else in this world. Neither yet will I undertake to answer you as you expect, letter for letter, tittle for tittle, word for word, in some things in your letter. I know such retractions are affixable to any person or cause, and never decided controversies; much less will I begin to vie moral imputations with you; no, though you should begin, and we fear not what you can beside; but my endeavours shall be to return you matter for matter, and in that business alone, through Christ that strengthens me, to give you measure for measure, pressed down and running over; and withal, which shall be unto me the supreme law of this dissertation, to give a new consideration to every grain that addeth weight in anything you say, yea, and recall and retract also whatever I shall find that we are out in. And this kind of inconstancy, however you should blemish me for, yet I count one of the greatest perfections of us imperfect men, imperfect in knowledge here below. And all this I shall do with the greatest candour and simplicity, and which shall also be sacred to me along this dispute, so to handle matters as to be sure to part good friends. And, in the mean time, let this be laid up in your bosom, to sweeten these waters of strife between us, viz., an assurance from me, that you still hold in my heart as high and full esteem of so great worth, learning, and piety, as ever you did; and how much you did, yourself knows, and many others; and withal, that I retain as candid a judgment of the truth of your church state and calling in the ministry, for the essentials of it, as is in any of your best hearers. Account but of me as the servant of Christ, the unworthiest, and one of your most faithful, loving friends,

THO. GOODWIN.