

Covenant Theology 101

I. Intro: What is a covenant?

- A biblical covenant is a solemn contract or agreement that binds two parties in relationship. There were terms associated with the covenant that often included blessings and curses.

Q. What is "Covenant Theology"?

The distance between God and His creation is so great, that, although reasoning creatures owe Him obedience as their creator, they nonetheless could never realize any blessedness or reward from Him without His willingly condescending to them. And so it pleased God to provide for man by means of covenants. (WCF 7.1)

- God initiates relationship with His image bearers through **covenants**. I.E. They are the means through which God condescends to His people.
- There are two overarching covenants in Covenant Theology—the *Covenant of Works* and the *Covenant of Grace*.

II. The Covenant of Works

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works. In it life was promised to Adam and through him to his descendants on the condition of perfect, personal obedience. (WCF 7.2)

Q. What were the terms of God's covenant with Adam?

- Adam was required to perfectly obey all of God's commands—he was to tend the garden and abstain from partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2)

Q. What was at stake for Adam and his posterity?

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—... ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:12, 17)

- The fact that we are declared righteous based on our Federal head (Christ) and not what we have done *parallels* the reality that we are declared sinners based on our Federal head (Adam) and not what we have done.
- In the same way that Adam brought death to all, he could have provided life! Q. What were Jesus' last words on the cross? Implications?

III. The Covenant of Works and The Law

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Galatians 4)

Q. What does it mean to be "under the law"? Who is born "under the law"? How does this relate to the Covenant of Works? How does it make you feel?

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ... ²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. (Romans 3)

IV. The Covenant of Grace

By his fall, man made himself incapable of life under that covenant, and so the Lord made a second, the covenant of grace. In it He freely offers sinners life and salvation through Jesus Christ. In order to be saved He requires faith in Jesus and promises to give His Holy Spirit to all who are ordained to life so that they may be willing and able to believe. (WCF 7.3)

- After Adam violated of the Covenant of Works, God provided a “second Adam” who 1) would bear the curses of the covenant and 2) fulfill its legal requirements.

¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." ... ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (Galatians 3)

¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5)

- We see the first promise of that Redeemer in Genesis 3:15:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

V. Covenant Theology and the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments

This covenant was administered differently in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel. Under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances give to the Jewish people, all foreshadowing Christ. For that time the covenant administered under the law through the operation of the Spirit was sufficient and effective in instructing the elect and building up their faith in the promised Messiah, by Whom they had full remission of their sins and eternal salvation. This administration is called the Old Testament. (WCF 7.5)

- Rather than viewing God's dealings with His people over time as being unrelated to one another—we see that all His work is *organically* related—via covenants.

Flower analogy: The initial seed of the gospel was planted in Genesis 3:15 with the Covenant of Grace. The stem was composed of God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. The flower and fulfillment is the New Covenant in Christ. Gen. 3:15 is *progressively* fulfilled.

- Covenant Theology reveals the unity and purpose of God's Redemptive plan.

VI. Covenant Theology in Action: The Sacraments

- Just as the New Covenant with Christ was not something totally new, but found its roots in the Old Testament, the same is true for sacraments. The **sacraments** of the New Testament were preceded by **signs** in the Old Testament.

The Lord's Supper fulfills Passover as bloodless sign:

And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ...¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (Luke 22:15-20)

- In the same way, the sacramental sign of circumcision was replaced by the sacramental sign of Baptism:

Baptism fulfills circumcision as bloodless sign:

"In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." (Colossians 2:11-12)

- This is Paul's shorthand way of saying, “you were circumcised when you were baptized.”