

DECIPHERING COVENANT THEOLOGY

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INGENIOUS & ERRONEOUS

The Genius of Covenant Theology

- Coherent
- Christocentric
- Teleological

Three Primary Covenants of CT

- **Covenant of Redemption**
- **Covenant of Works**
- **Covenant of Grace**

All the Biblical Covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Priestly, Davidic & New) are understood as iterations of the above – esp. the Covenant of Grace

A Summary

“Within the triune decreed plan of salvation, the persons have a covenantal arrangement whereby the Father appointed Christ as mediator from eternity, the Son assumes a human nature in history so rendering perfect obedience, and the Spirit rests upon Christ to anoint him as the Messiah and applies his messianic work to the elect.”

– Harrison Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology*, 122.

KEEPING SCORE: a Trinitarian “covenantal” arrangement for the elect lies at the heart of CT

Three Extra-Biblical Covenants

Covenant of Redemption:

“[A] pretemporal agreement between the persons of the Trinity to plan and carry out the redemption of the elect” – Guy Richard in Guy P. Waters, J. Nicholas Reid & John H. Muether, eds., *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, 43

Covenant of Works:

“a covenant that God made with Adam, offering reward based on Adam’s perfect obedience.” - Harrison Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology*, 7

Covenant of Grace:

“God’s way of saving his people from their sin by Christ’s work, which is applied to believers in history through each biblical covenant.” – Ibid, 8.

KEEPING SCORE: Three theological covenants are freighted in to drive the interpretation.

Exegetical Warrant?

Covenant of Redemption: Psalm 2:7; Zechariah 6:13; John 6:37; Ephesians 1:4 with 2 Timothy 1:9-10

Covenant of Works: Hosea 6:7

Covenant of Grace: Genesis 3:15; 12ff.

“The covenants of God are one... All the dealings of God with man since the fall must be seen as possessing a basic unity...Diversity indeed exists in the various administrations of God’s covenants... But the diversity ultimately merges into a single purpose overarching the ages...The various administrations of the covenant of redemption [i.e., grace] relate organically to one another...” – O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 52, 55, 61, 63 (my emphasis).

Covenant Theology as a Hermeneutic

[W]hen CT's expound the covenants with Noah, Abraham, David, and the New covenant, they are expounding them as progressive revelations of the one covenant of grace.

“The covenant of grace...is announced after the fall and develops from Seth and his line, leading to Abraham and the messianic Seed, in whom “all the nations will be blessed.” That covenantal line is persecuted from within and without and narrows progressively until it is reduced to a single individual: Jesus Christ. In his wake, it widens again to become even broader than before, embracing people “from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9)”

– Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 166-167 (my emphasis).

KEEPING SCORE: Eisegetical “covenants” provide the hermeneutic for biblical exegesis!

This reveals the inferential nature of CT as a hermeneutic!

The Inferences of Covenant Theology

1. Three extra-biblical Theological Covenants.
2. A Trinitarian “covenantal” arrangement for the elect lies at the heart of CT.
3. The Covenant of Grace is **the** Covenant in Scripture.
4. Hence, the actual covenants of Scripture are subsumed beneath the extra-biblical Covenant of Grace.
5. The “Proof-texts” of CT are Eisegetical.
6. The NT (specially interpreted) has priority over the OT.

Covenant Theology is Heavily Deductive

The Eschatology of Covenant Theology

- Since CT holds to one people of God under the Covenant of Grace there cannot be an Israel-Church distinction.
- This means any passages pointing to an Israel-Church distinction must be reinterpreted to teach one people of God.
- The tools available to do this are spiritualization (transformation), typology, and genre. Great swathes of the Bible succumb to these hermeneutical “tools.”

Eschatological Options Open to CT

Amillennialism

Postmillennialism

Covenant Premillennialism

If there is no covenant of grace, there can be no *prima facie* conclusion that Scripture teaches only a single people of God, with its logical demand that the Bible's eschatology must yield that one people. Without the covenant of grace, we are free to derive biblical eschatology *from* the Bible instead of imposing it upon it.

Summary: The Heavily Deductive Character of Covenant Theology

- **CT is a mainly deductive approach to reading the Bible.**
- **CT starts its reading of the Bible in the wrong place.**
- **CT relies upon covenants found nowhere in Holy Writ.**
- **CT deals with everything it meets in the pages of Scripture using these false covenants.**
- **CT is not open to follow the covenants of God where they lead.**

The Heavily Deductive Character of Covenant Theology

- **By assuming, without sufficient warrant, that the New Testament must be used to [re]interpret the Old Testament, CT in practice denies to the OT its own perspicuity, its own integrity as inspired revelation, and creates a “canon within a canon.”**
- **By allowing their interpretations of the NT to have veto over the plain sense of the OT this outlook creates massive hermeneutical discontinuities between the wording of the two Testaments. This is all done for the sake of a contrived continuity demanded by the one-people of God concept of the Covenant of Grace. It employs different hermeneutics depending on how a given passage needs to yield to preserve the driving assumptions**
- **CT’s way of reading the Bible (as above) creates a major problem philosophically in that it strongly implies that God equivocates. More seriously still, the manner of equivocation means that equivocation belongs to the essential nature of the Godhead.**

The Heavily Deductive Character of Covenant Theology

- CT reads Christ into passages where He is plainly not in view and employs Him (particularly His first coming) as the lens through which Scripture must be understood.
- **CT is implicitly supersessionist in its eschatology.**

Test CT's (and PC's) on Matthew 21:43:

“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”

A Final Word From Our Covenant GOD

“Have you not considered what these people have spoken, saying, ‘The two families which the LORD has chosen, He has also cast them off’? Thus they have despised My people, as if they should no more be a nation before them.” – Jeremiah 33:24.

This is in a section which alludes to five Divine covenants:

Jeremiah 33:14-16 (Davidic & New), 17-18 (Davidic & Priestly), 20 (Noahic?), 22 (Abrahamic), 26 (New).