

Covenant Theology and Paedobaptism

The implications

What is covenant theology?

It is a way at understanding the Bible in its entirety in the forms of covenants. The Bible has a covenantal structure.

Three major covenants are spoken of.

The covenant of redemption,

The covenant of works and

The covenant of grace.

Covenant of redemption.

The covenant formulated in eternity in which the elect were given to the Son by the Father whom Jesus agreed voluntarily to give his life for as a ransom for many.

Scriptural proofs- John 17:2, 6, 11; John 6:37-45 et al.

Covenant of Works

God's agreement with Adam that if he would obey God and not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, after a period of time not specified he would have given him and all of his descendants eternal life upon the condition of perfect obedience to the explicit command of God.

But also containing a threat of punishment of death for him and all of his descendants upon the condition of disobedience.

Scriptural proof. Romans 5:12-21.; Genesis 2:15-17; Hosea 6:7;

Covenant of Grace

The Covenant whereby God promises eternal life to all those who repent of their sin and believe in the messiah for everlasting life. See chapter 7 of Westminster on the covenant of Grace.

All of the biblical covenants in the Bible are an administration of the covenant of Grace in its many differing forms. Thus the covenant of grace is first revealed in the first gospel in gen 3:15 and then is manifested via types shadows, prophecies and promises throughout the rest of scripture.

Westminster Chapter 7 on the Covenant of Grace

I. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant. [\[1\]](#)

II. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, [\[2\]](#) wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, [\[3\]](#) upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. [\[4\]](#)

WCF Chapter 7 Continued...

III. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, [\[5\]](#) commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, [\[6\]](#) and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. [\[7\]](#)

IV. This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed. [\[8\]](#)

WCF Chapter 7 Continued...

V. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the Gospel: [\[9\]](#) under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; [\[10\]](#) which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, [\[11\]](#) by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament. [\[12\]](#)

WCF Chapter 7 Continued...

VI. Under the Gospel, when Christ, the substance, [13] was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: [14] which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, [15] to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; [16] and is called the New Testament. [17] There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations. [18]

The New Covenant

The New Covenant is the fullest manifestation of the covenant of grace.

See Heb 8; 10 and Jeremiah 31:31-34.

So what?? How does this affect baptism?

Presbyterians say there is one substance of the covenant of grace administered in differing ways or administrations. If Children were included in the covenant previously i.e. Abrahamic and Mosaic and they received the covenant sign then why are they somehow excluded in the New which seems to be more inclusive.

I.E. Meaning it was not only for Jews but the entire world. Jews and gentiles.

The covenant sign

The question then becomes if children are in the covenant, should they not receive the covenant sign which is Baptism. The covenant sign in the old was circumcision while the covenant sign in the new is baptism.

Baptism has replaced circumcision as the covenant sign therefore infants should be included in the covenant and receive the sign of the covenant. Col 2:11-12

Why is this wrong?

Well first of all let's look at the New Covenant.

First of all we ask who are the recipients of the new covenant. They are the house of Israel and house of Judah- Heb 8:8 is this only for the Jews. Answer is no of course not. Certainly the remnant of Jews who believe in the messiah are included as well as the saved gentiles (cf. Romans 11:1-5 and Ephesians 2:11-15). That is why reformed theologians will call this group the Israel of God (Gal 6:16)

What is the nature of the New Covenant

- First it is not like the covenant that God made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. This means it was not like the Old Covenant.
 - So there are points of discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.
 - This is key to understanding the issue of paedobaptism.
1. First issue is that Old Testament Israel broke the covenant that YHWH had made with them. Verse 8
 2. Thus the Old Covenant could be broken. The recipients of the Old Covenant could break the covenant with God.
 3. It is the Baptist's opinion that the New Covenant cannot be broken.

Can the New Covenant be broken?

WE say no, the new covenant cannot be broken. Why is this?

1. First it is because the recipients of the new covenant receive a new nature (see Heb 8:10).
2. They have an intimate fatherly relationship with God that cannot be broken. Notice the wording ; I will be their God and they shall be my people (v. 10). Also correlate this with Heb 13:5...
3. There is an intuitive knowledge of God given to the recipients of the new covenant (see Heb 8:11). This is a saving knowledge as Paul calls it the mind of Christ (see 1 Cor 2:16).

Can the New Covenant be broken (continued)

This intimate knowledge of God also reminds one of 1 John 2:27.

4. Also the New Covenant cannot be broken because it promises forgiveness of sins. God will never again bring our sins against us because Christ paid for them. In fact our sins and lawless deeds he will remember no more.

So these are some reasons that we do not think the New Covenant can be broken. Because the NC cannot be broken; those who are recipients of the New Covenant must be believers and therefore the covenant sign (baptism) should only be given to the believers since they are the only recipients of the new covenant.

The infants of believers are not included in the cov.

If the covenant promises regeneration, an intimate filial relationship with God, intimate knowledge of God and forgiveness of sins, this does not apply to the children of believing parents but only those who can give a credible testimony of saving faith. Thus only believers receive the covenant sign of baptism.

Conclusion.

I know that presbyterians will come up with answers to this but this is where we will stop. We cannot answer all the objections one would ever have in one session but I am content with what has been presented here