

# History of the Reformation

## Covenant Theology: Presbyterian and Baptist

- Historical Theology
  - How does theology develop in a socio-historical context?
  - The question: What is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament? How much continuity, how much discontinuity?
    - What is the transition between a nation (Israel) and believers in Jesus (the Church)?
    - How does a believer understand the commands of the Old Covenant?
    - Does the organization within Judaism translate to the church?
  - This has been a problem since the Apostle Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles
    - Acts 15 – the Jerusalem Council
    - Romans 9 – 11
    - Galatians
    - Ephesians 1
    - 1 Timothy 1
  - Three systems have arisen within the Evangelical community to address this
    - Dispensationalism (developed early 19<sup>th</sup> Century)
      - Begins answering Continuity/Discontinuity question from an Eschatology perspective
      - Land promises to national Israel in the OT
      - Develops a hermeneutic to fit those answers
    - Covenant Theology (developed 16<sup>th</sup> Century)
      - Begins answering Continuity/Discontinuity question from an Ecclesiology perspective
      - Infant baptism and the doctrine of the church required the development of Covenant Theology
    - New Covenant Theology
      - Begins answering Continuity/Discontinuity question from a Soteriology perspective (particularly Sanctification)
  - How do we look at the law? How do we “love thy law” yet not be under the law?
    - All 3 of these have implications which extend into much of theology
    - All 3 have much in agreement with each other (Trinity, Christology, Justification, etc.)
    - All 3 systems work out their system into a hermeneutical method which colors how each reads the entire bible.
- Review of Dispensationalism
  - Classic Dispensationalism
    - Divides redemptive history into totally unique time periods where God deals differently within each period
    - Israel and the Church exist in different time periods, therefore have different plans
    - The final dispensation is the Millennium
  - Revised Dispensationalism
    - Divide redemptive history into “stewardship era’s” (distinguishable economies where God works out His program differently)
      - There are some things carried over from dispensation to dispensation (10 cmds, covenants, etc)
    - Israel and the Church have totally different plans – both related to God’s glory
      - The Church (with Gentiles) is a temporary setting aside of Israel
      - At the Rapture, the Church will be taken away and God will resume His plan for ethnic Israel (into the Millennium until the end of time)

- The bible must be interpreted with a literal hermeneutic
  - Progressive Dispensational distinctives
    - Now but Not Yet
      - Christ is reigning on the throne of David in heaven now but will be on earth during the Millennium
      - The New Covenant is already inaugurated, but Israel will experience its fullness in the Millennium
      - The Church is redeemed humanity *in this dispensation* prior to the coming of Christ
    - Yet, there is still a distinction between Israel and the Church
    - Complementary hermeneutics are needed in addition to a strict literal interpretation
      - Previous revelation has added or expanded meaning alongside of the original meaning
      - i.e. “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” in Jer. 31 are applied to all believers as the New Covenant is unfolded
      - “Less land-centered and less future-centered”
- Covenant Theology
  - Covenant Theology was not developed in reaction to Dispensationalism
    - It was developed in reaction to both Roman Catholicism and the Anabaptist movement
    - CT needed to justify baptism of infants and the integrity of the family within the Church
      - But acknowledge that (contra Roman Catholicism) baptism did not actually take away original sin.
    - Since it included unregenerate members into the Church (children of believing parents)
      - Some way of establishing the rules of life needed to bleed over from the Old Covenant
  - Because the Biblical covenants were such a prominent feature of God’s Word
    - A system of “covenants” must be theologically deduced
    - This system addresses these two problems
      - Infant children of Church members are to be baptized
      - There is a distinction between Law and Gospel (Grace)
      - Moral commandments from the Mosaic Covenant can be carried over into the New Covenant
  - As a result, the seeds of CT were planted by Zwingli in the 1520’s
    - Baptize infants because Abraham circumcised his male children
    - Contra Luther, not all law was done away with in the Gospel
    - Use Thomas Aquinas’ 3 parts of the Old Covenant law to discern which parts of the law were discarded in the New Covenant and which were kept as commandments for believers
  - “Covenant” in Covenant Theology does not refer to biblical covenants (Noah, Abraham, Moses, New, etc.)
    - But to a theological framework of non-biblical covenants
      - Which helps to give an understanding to the redemptive flow of the Bible
  - Three theological covenants
    - Covenant of Redemption – the agreement before Creation among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the process to be done to save the elect
    - Covenant of Works – the requirement upon Adam to “do this and you shall live, do not and you shall die”
    - Covenant of Grace – the authority of God to save the elect based on His graciousness, in
  - Covenant Theology was developed and refined from the 1520’s (Zwingli)
    - Into the late 1500’s, early 1600’s (Coccius and Witsius)
    - Put down more formally in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)
    - WCF was copied and modified by the Congregationalists as the Savoy Declaration (1658)
      - Chapter on the Gospel was added, along with other modifications
      - John Owen

- The Savoy Declaration was copied and modified by the Particular Baptists (1677/1689)
        - Called the 2<sup>nd</sup> London Baptist Confession it includes “cut and paste” features from all three
        - Probably by Nehemiah Coxe, son of Benjamin Cox who probably wrote the 1644 London Baptist Confession
    - Various understandings of Covenant Theology came forward from the 17<sup>th</sup> Cent.
      - Congregational – through Jonathan Edwards, B. B. Warfield, J.G.Machen to present
      - Baptist – through John Gill (18<sup>th</sup> Cent English) to Reformed Baptists (20<sup>th</sup> Cent)
        - A second group has arisen in the late 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century called 1689 Federalists
- 20<sup>th</sup> Century Covenant Theology
  - In reaction to the Modernism of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century
    - As well as reaction to the growing Dispensational movement
    - There developed more interest in Covenant Theology
  - Basically, the groupings in the last ½ of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are addressing the issues of the Continuity/Discontinuity conflicts
    - Baptism
    - The Mosaic Law in the life of the Believer
  - Dispensational teaching
    - Baptism is only for the Church Age, therefore the circumcision analogy is not appropriate and only believers are to be baptized
    - The Mosaic law code is not for this dispensation, therefore we are to look to the New Testament for our “legal marching orders”
      - Remember that Chafer/Scofield were influenced by the Keswick movement and the necessity of a 2<sup>nd</sup> work of grace, which would motivate believers to life in the Spirit
  - However, many who were coming to faith in Christ within the Dispensational Churches, yet seeing
    - that the New Testament did not make such a “two plan” distinction between Israel and the Church
    - They was that ethnic Jews and Gentile believers in Christ were all comprising one body, the “Mystical” Body of Christ (Eph 2)
  - Therefore, those believers were leaving Dispensationalism as a system and turning to Covenant Theology as an alternative in order to understand the whole plan of God to redeem sinners.
    - Yet, Covenant Theology was developed to justify infant baptism
    - So, instead of understanding God as working in separate dispensations
      - Covenant Theology was needed
    - Yet because infant baptism was nowhere taught in the New Testament
      - These believers came to a position called Reformed Baptists
  - Reformed Baptists used the 1689 London Baptist Confession and the Americanized version, the Philadelphia Baptist Confession (1742)
    - Philadelphia Confession added two sections on Praise singing and Laying on of hands
    - Due to the influence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening
  - So what is the difference between the various versions of Covenant Theology?
- 3 Versions of Covenant Theology
  - Westminster (Presbyterian)
  - Reformed Baptist
    - Presbyterian concept of Covenant of Grace/Covenant of works
    - Yet without infant baptism
  - 1689 Federalism Baptist Theology
    - Goes back to 1660’s for the understanding of Covenant Theology
    - Note: not back to 1644 – 1<sup>st</sup> London Baptist Theology (not Covenant Theology, but has covenantal words)

- For our understanding, I'd like to attempt to show the similarities and differences
- Generic Covenant Theology
  - Framework is the 3 theologically derived covenants
    - Covenant of Redemption – The Trinity covenants within Itself to
      - To create a cosmos with mankind as its supervisor,
      - To allow man to fall into sin,
      - To elect not to allow all to perish but to save some
      - To send the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity to accomplish that redemption
    - Covenant of Nature/Creation/Works
      - To establish a relationship (covenant) with man
      - To offer him the reward of eternal life if he is obedient
      - To curse him forever if he is disobedient
    - Covenant of Grace
      - To freely offer sinners life and Salvation
      - To save those ordained to eternal life if they have faith in Christ
      - To send the Holy Spirit to make the elect willing and able to believe
      -
- Covenant Theology
  - All 3 positions agree that there is a Covenant of Redemption
  - Covenant of Works
    - Made with Adam (all 3)
    - Adam violated, therefore, his disobedience justly passed to all his progeny
      - Adam was the “Federal Head”
    - Exists for any biblical covenant where “Do this and you will be blessed, Don’t do it and you will be cursed” (1689)
  - Covenant of Grace
    - All Biblical covenants are subsets of God’s gracious covenant
      - Without it, no one could be saved
    - Therefore Biblical covenants are simply different administrations of the Covenant of Grace
    - Note: Presbyterians baptize children of believers because they are “covenant children”
      - “Covenant Children” are in the Covenant of Grace, not the Old or New Covenants
    - This is how that any person, Old Covenant or New Covenant can be saved in the same way
      - Old Covenant – by faith in the coming Messiah
      - New Covenant – by faith in the having come Messiah
    - Reformed Baptist
      - Circumcision is in the Old Administration (Covenant)
      - Baptism is in the New Covenant and circumcision is done away with
      - Baptism is only defined in the New Testament as a sign for believers
    - 1689 Federalist
      - The Covenant of Grace IS the New Covenant
        - Inaugurated in Adam and following, yet not implemented fully until Christ
      - Circumcision was in a Covenant of Works, therefore does not apply to those in the New Covenant
  - Sanctification in the Covenant of Grace - Once a person is in the Covenant of Grace, how then shall he live
    - Covenant is nomo-centric with regard to Christian living
      - “If you love me, you will keep my commandments”
      - All three positions agree with this
    - “Once you are saved by Grace, you are sanctified by keeping the Law”
      - Not as a Covenant of Works (i.e. for works salvation – “Do this and you will live”) but as a requirement for the Christian life
    - The Law of God is both done away and is eternal for all men at all times

- The “done away” part is the Jewish Ceremonial and Civil part
    - There is a branch of Presbyterianism which ways only the ceremonial, but we are still to implement the civil part (Theonomy)
  - The eternal part is the Moral Law
    - The Moral Law is written on Adam’s heart (and hence all men’s hearts)
    - The Ten Commandments of the Old Covenant ARE the Moral Law of God
- Conclusion
  - Is the Bible organized Dispensationally?
    - God has two different plans for two different Peoples of God (Israel and the Church)
    - Physical fulfillment of Israel to the land of Palestine
  - Is the Bible organized Covenantally?
    - There is only administrative details which make Old Covenant and New Covenant different
    - Physical children of Spiritual Believers are “in the Covenant”
    - New Covenant believers are required to fulfill the details and spirit of the Old Covenant law, but only if it is in the Ten Commandments
  - There is another option, which we will discuss during our next class