

Covenantalism and Dispensationalism

Lesson Outline

Session 1 (12/4/2013)

- a. Terms and definitions
- b. History
- c. Covenant Theology
- d. Covenantalism Adherents

Session 2 (19/4/2013)

- a. Quiz
- b. Terms and definitions
- c. History
- d. Dispensational Theology
- e. Dispensationalism Adherents
- f. Doctrinal differences of the 2 Systems
- g. Implications

Session 3 (3/5/2013)

- a. Quiz
- b. Calvinism
- c. TULIP

Session 4 (10/5/2013)

- a. Quiz
- b. Current trends
- c. Bible Presbyterian Distinctive

Covenantalism and Dispensationalism

Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology are the two major theological systems. Many may have heard about them, some have a vague idea of what they are, and others may not have any clue. It is important that believers have an understanding of these theological systems, and especially so for Bible Presbyterians because of the unique distinctiveness of our belief. The aim of these four sessions in BPCWA is to provide such an understanding of the differences of these systems and the BP faith.

Terms

Covenantalism

- The term covenant occurs frequently (292 times in 272 verses) throughout the KJV Bible.
- Involves parties, promises, agreement, conditional terms.
- Covenant Theology also known as Federal theology
 - o Latin noun *foedus* from which we get ‘federal’ means covenant, treaty, compact etc
- *Berith* (Hebrew) and *Diatheke* (Greek)

Berith

- Noahic covenant (Gen 9)
- Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15)
- Mosaic covenant (Ex 19)
- Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7)
- All traced to one covenant in Gen 3:15

Diatheke

- Diatheke was always the word they used for making a legal will. The one who makes the will has complete authority over the disposition of his property. He can give it to whomever he pleases; he can establish whatever terms he wants. The one who makes the “arrangement” has total power; the one who receives the “arrangement” may accept it or reject it, but he cannot alter it.” [Greek Word Study, Ozark]
- Barne’s notes:
- Diatheke occurs in the New Testament thirty-three times. It is translated covenant in the common version, in Lu 1:72; Ac 3:26; 7:8; Ro 9:4; 11:27; Ga 3:15,17; 4:24; Eph 2:12; Heb 8:6,8,9,10; Heb 9:4; 10:16; 12:24; 13:20.
- In the remaining places it is rendered testament: Mt 26:28; Mr 14:24; Lu 22:20; 1 Co 11:25; 2 Co 3:6,14; Heb 7:22; 9:15-17,20; Re 11:19.
- In four of those instances, Mt 26:28; Mr 14:24; Lu 22:20 and 1 Co 11:25, it is used with reference to the institution or celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Definition

Covenantalism

“The theological system which rests upon the conception that before the fall, man was under a covenant of works, wherein God promised him (through Adam, the federal head of the race) eternal blessedness if he perfectly kept the law; and that since the fall man is under a covenant of grace, wherein God, of His free grace, promises the same blessings to all who believe in Christ (the federal head of the church)” [Webster’s Dictionary quoting Oliver Buswell]

In short, Covenant Theology is also known as Federal theology. Adam is the sinner’s federal head, while Christ, the second and last Adam, is the believer’s federal head. There are 2 key covenants – Before the fall is the Covenant of Works and after the fall is the Covenant of Grace. The Old and New Testament saints lived under the same Covenant of Grace. But God gave different administrations in the OT and the NT.

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History

Though unsystematized, the early church fathers (late 300s and early 400s) had a theology of the covenant. This can be seen in how they stressed the unity of the divine plan of salvation. Augustine of Hippo (354-430AD) evidently outlined the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, the key elements and cornerstone of what would become Reformed theology. The Puritans chimes “In Adam’s fall, sinned we all”.

John Calvin (1509-1564), the shining star of the Reformation, was “the first to integrate the covenant concept extensively into his theological system” in his work *Institutes* in 1559 (The Unity of the Covenant, The different Administration of the Covenant, Progressive Revelation of the Covenant). Calvin brought forth the clarity of the unity of the OT and the NT.

Covenant Theology

- 1) Also known as Federal theology (Romans 5)
 - a. Adam = sinner’s federal head (Rom 5:12-14)
 - b. Christ = Last Adam =believer’s federal head (Rom 5:15-19, 1 Cor 15:45-47)
- 2) Covenant of works – Gen 2:16,17
 - a. Promise = sealed with eternal life and obedience
 - b. Condition = absolute obedience
 - c. Penalty = Death physically, spiritually, eternally, separation from God
 - d. Presently = perfect obedience still expected for those who reject Christ’s righteousness. But for those who receive Christ’s righteousness, this no longer holds because Christ has met the demands of the law on their behalf.
- 3) Covenant of Grace – Gen 3:15
 - a. The parties :
 - i. God the first party (Gen 3:15, Gen 17:7, 22:17, Ex 6:7, Lev 11:45)
 - ii. He establishes the covenant and defines the relation of the second party
 - iii. Legal agreement
 - iv. With believers and their children (Gen 17:7; Acts 2:39, Rom 9:1-4)
 - v. Christ our surety (Heb7:22) who took on our guilt, paid our penalty, fulfilled the law, and reconciled peace.
 - b. The promises
 - i. Blessings for obedience (Deut 11:26,27)
 - ii. Cursings for disobedience (Deut 11:28)
 - iii. Justification (Rom 3:24)
 - iv. Seal of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13)(OT indwelling and infilling proof: John 3:3 -10, Acts 7:51, Rom 8:9, 1 Pet 1:11; Ex 31:3, Judg 6:34,11,29, 13:5, 2 Kings 2:9, Micah 3:8, Eze 2:2, Eze 36:26-27)
 - v. Final glorification (Rom 8:17,30)
 - vi. Familial (Noah Gen 7:1-7, Lot Gen 19:12, Rahab 6:17, Phil jailor Acts 16:25-31, Lydia’s household Acts 16:15, 1 Cor 7:14)
 - c. The conditions
 - i. Accept the covenant by faith (saved by grace through faith Eph 2:8)
 - ii. Consecration to God in obedience (Eph 2:10)
 - iii. Note : condition of salvation is faith alone, and blessings in believers life is contingent upon obedience. Titus 3:5-8,14 best explains this. Test of true

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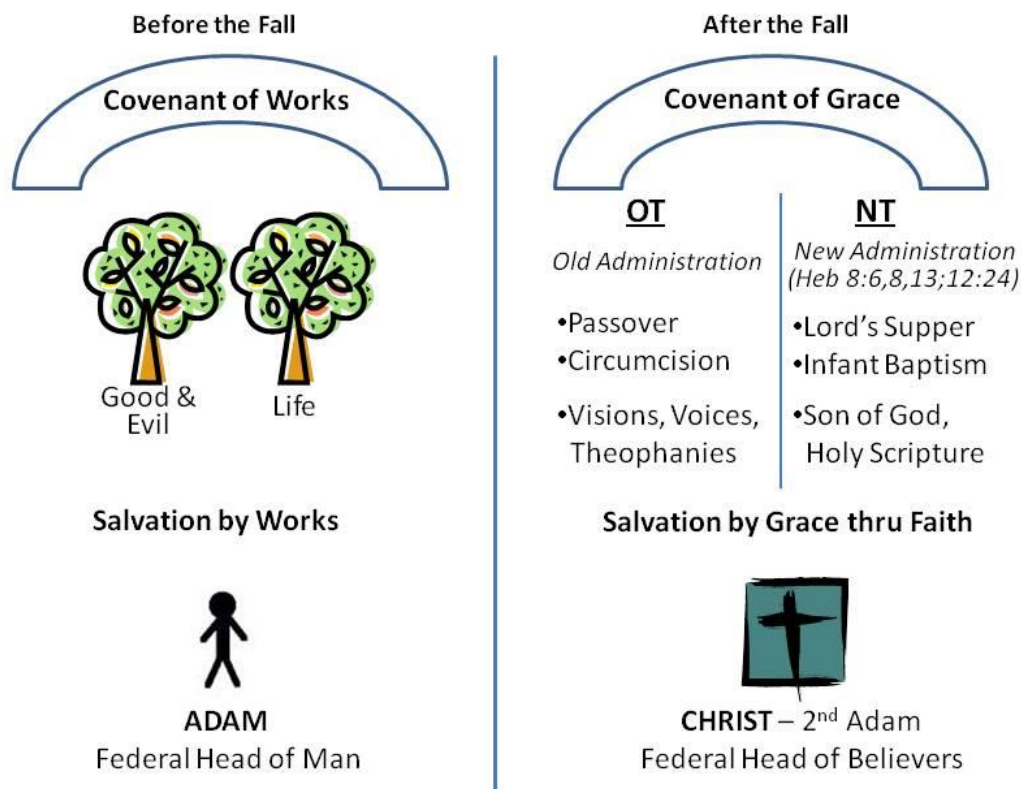
saving faith is in James 2:14-26. Non covenantalists who accuse covenantalists of teaching “salvation conditioned upon works” fail to understand this Biblical distinction Covenant Theology makes.

- d. The qualities
 - i. Everlasting
 - ii. Same One (Gen 17:7, Heb 8:10, Gal 3:6-8)
- 4) Administration of OT Covenant of Grace (complex)
 - a. Ceremonial Rites
 - i. Sacrifices and offerings eg circumcision; burnt, peace, grain, sin offerings in Leviticus 1-6
 - b. Festivals and feasts
 - i. eg Feast of weeks, tabernacle, and Passover
 - c. Revelation
 - i. Types eg Lamb of God (Gen 4:4), Bronz Serpent (Nu 21:9), Shewbread (Ex 25:30), Manna (Ex 16:35), Rock (Ex 17:6) etc
 - ii. Remarkable ways eg God speaking directly by own Voice (Ex 19), visions and dreams (Num 12:6), angels (Gen 19:1), theophany (Gen 18:1) etc
- 5) Administration of NT Covenant of Grace (simplified)
 - a. Holy Communion (Lu 22:19-20)
 - b. Baptism (Col 2:11,12)
 - c. Revelation
 - i. Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-2)
 - ii. The Bible (2 Tim 3:16)
 - d. Notes
 - i. The New and Old Covenants described in Heb 8:13 is the same Covenant of Grace but administered differently.
 - ii. the word “New Testament” – The Greek word for “new” is not new as in different but new in sense of quality.
 - iii. In the NT, the administration of the Covenant of Grace is better
 - 1. because it is of a better priesthood of Christ’s vs Aaron (Heb 7)
 - 2. because no longer shadows and types in tabernacle (Heb 8)
 - 3. because direct access to God through Christ (Heb 9)
 - 4. because no need for repeated bloody sacrifices (Heb 10, 12:24)
- 6) Unity of Scriptures
 - a. Salvation is by grace through faith for both OT and NT believers
 - b. The New Covenant is better in administration but is the same Abrahamic Covenant
 - c. “Covenant Theology is a continuous (unified) system, it uses a needle with a scarlet thread to tie up the whole Bible” [Khoo, Theology for every Christian]
 - d. Sacraments share the same significance though differ in form or mode.

| OT | NT |
|---------------------------|----|
| Feast of Passover Lamb | |
| Circumcision | |
| Types, Visions, Theophany | |

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Simplified Diagram of Covenant Theology



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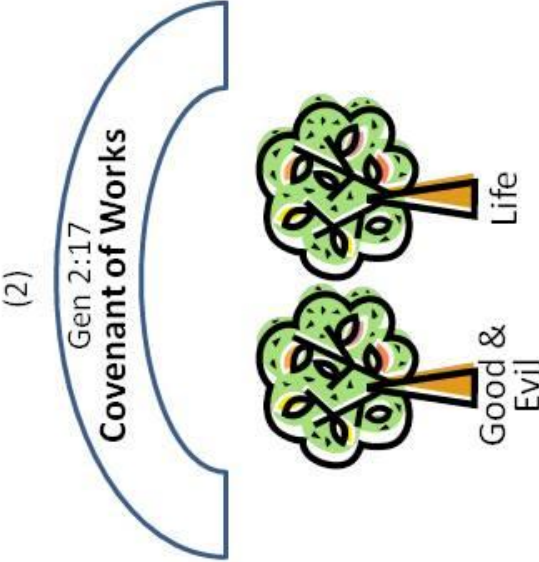
Covenantalism and Dispensationalism

Adherents

Well known Reformed Covenantalists theologians and Bible commentators include

- Louis Berkhof (1873-1957)
- Charles Hodge (1797-1878)
- William Hendriksen (1900-1982)
- J Gresham Machen (1881-1937)
- Lorraine Boettner (1901-1990)
- J Oliver Buswell (1895-1977)
- Timothy Tow (1920-2009)
- Commentators :John Calvin (1509-1564) John Gill (1697-1771), Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

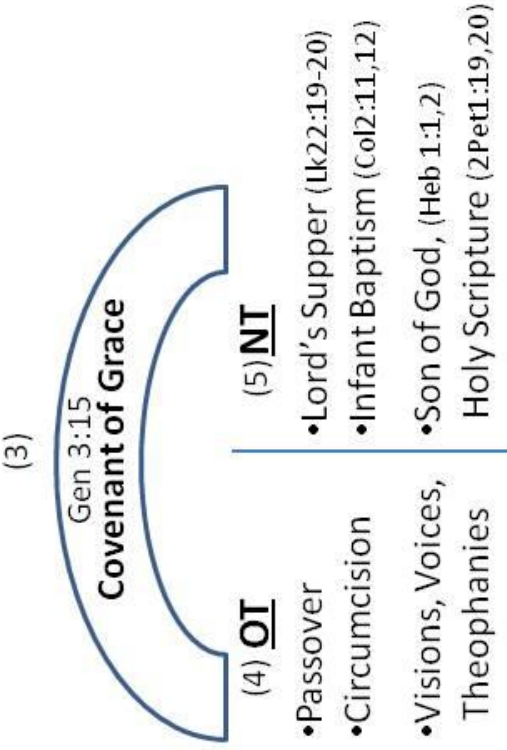
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Salvation by Works



ADAM (1a)
Federal Head of Man
(Rom 5:12-14)



Same Covenant in OT and NT (Gal 3:29)(6)

Salvation by Grace thru Faith

(Eph 2:8,9; Gal 3:6-9)
(6a)



OT Saints looked forward to Christ (Jn 8:56)

NT Saints look backward at Christ (Gal 3:14)

CHRIST – 2nd Adam (1b)
Federal Head of Believers
(Rom 5:17,18; 1Cor 15:45-47)