

# Covenants — Covenant of Grace (Critiqued)

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"This formulation became the occasion of ardent dispute when it was applied to the Covenant of Grace. This dispute concerned particularly the matter of condition, the question being: Is the Covenant of Grace to be construed as conditional or unconditional? The controversy continues up to the present time, and it is not apparent that a solution can be obtained without a reorientation in terms of a revised definition of the Biblical concept of covenant."

— John Murray, *Covenant Theology*, in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4: *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 217.

"Admittedly, this concept of a single, overarching 'covenant of grace' helpfully serves to keep the continuity and theological relationship between the various divine-human covenants clearly in focus. Unfortunately, however, some of the terminology that has thus been introduced into the discussion has proved problematic and potentially misleading. Moreover, superimposing a covenantal framework on the entire canon is not without its difficulties, not least of which is the somewhat hypothetical nature of the major theological construct (i.e. the covenant of grace). Therefore, while fully acknowledging that all the divine-human covenants ultimately serve the same overarching divine purpose (see below), it seems preferable in a biblical-theological investigation to articulate that purpose as simply and unambiguously as possible. Thus, rather than speaking in terms of a single, overarching 'covenant of grace', the unity and continuity of the various divine-human covenants will be explored in terms of God's universal purpose - a purpose that is given clear expression in the Genesis creation narratives, and that finds its ultimate fulfilment in the new creation inaugurated through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ."

— Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: A Biblical Theology of Covenant* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2007), 30-31.

"We agree that the Bible is structured around two covenants. However, the two covenants that you [Covenant Theologians] keep talking about, namely, a covenant of works with Adam in the garden of Eden and a covenant of grace made with Adam immediately after the fall, have no textual basis in the Word of God. They are both theological covenants and not biblical covenants. They are the children of one's theological system. Their mother is Covenant Theology and their father is logic applied to that system. Neither of these two covenants had their origin in Scripture texts and biblical exegesis. Both of them were invented by theology as the necessary consequences of a theological system."

— John Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds*. (Frederick, Md.; New Covenant Media, 1998), 129. Brackets are Mine.

"Strangely enough, despite the overwhelming importance given to it, the covenant of grace is nowhere found in the Scripture. An agreement between God and man regarding salvation in the Garden of Eden could conceivably have been made, but its existence as a covenant proper is based on inference. Such an agreement is conceivable but it is not clearly revealed."

— Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, (Rockville, Md., Assurance, 1984), 239.

"Nevertheless, it now seems clear that a mistake has been made in speaking of this purpose as "the Covenant of Grace." We may agree in asserting the unity of God's purpose through the ages, but the selection of the word "covenant" to describe this unity has lent itself to important misunderstanding."

— Tom Wells and Fred G. Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, Md.: New Covenant Media, 2002), 45.

"Owen thought of the Old Covenant as being neither the Covenant of Works nor the Covenant of Grace; this is why Ferguson says that Owen's position was mediating. From what we can tell, this mediating position was also endorsed by the Baptists, something we will see later. Owen rejected the model of a covenant of grace under two administrations. While other paedobaptists saw the Old Covenant as being different in circumstance, but identical in substance to the New Covenant, Owen considered that the Old Covenant was different from the New Covenant both in circumstance and in substance."

— Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 2014, 31.

"And he [John Calvin] justifies the baptism of believers' children on the basis of their belonging to the Covenant of Grace."

— Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 2014, 36.