

Covenants — Covenant Theology

Covenants — Covenant Theology (Baptist/Presby)

The difference between the Covenant of Grace in the Presbyterian model and the Baptists was on the topic of Unity between the Old and New Covenant.

Baptists / 1 Covenant, Concluded Under New Covenant
Westminster Federalism (Presbyterians) / 1 Covenant, 2 Administrations

“The Baptists saw a unity of substance in the Covenant of Grace from Genesis to Revelation, but they didn’t see this same unity between the Old and the New Covenants. They therefore did not accept the idea that those two covenants were two administrations of a same covenant.”

— Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 2014, 66.

“By rejecting the notion of a covenant of grace under two administrations, the Baptists were in fact rejecting only half of this concept: they accepted, as we have previously seen, the notion of one single Covenant of Grace in both testaments, but they refused the idea of the two administrations. For the Baptists, there was only one Covenant of Grace which was revealed from the Fall in a progressive way until its full revelation and conclusion in the New Covenant.” Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 2014, 68.

“[...] the Old Covenant and the new differ in substance and not only in the manner of their administration.”

— Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants*, 30.

“Here then arises a difference of no small importance, namely, whether these [the Old and New Covenants] are indeed two distinct covenants, as to the essence and substance of them, or only different ways of the dispensation and administration of the same covenant.”

— John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews 8:6-13*, 179.

“[...] we may consider that Scripture does plainly and expressly make mention of two testaments, or covenants, and distinguish between them in such a way, that what is spoken can hardly be accommodated to a twofold administration of the same covenant.”

— John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews 8:6-13*, 186.

Baptists did not believe that the Covenant of Grace was formally given to Adam.

“It must also be noted that although the Covenant of Grace was revealed this far to Adam, yet we see in all this there was no formal and express covenant transaction with him. Even less was the Covenant of Grace established with him as a public person or representative of any kind. But as he obtained interest for himself alone by his own faith in the grace of God revealed in this way, so must those of his posterity that are saved.”

— Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants*, 57.

“It lacked its solemn confirmation and establishment, by the blood of the only sacrifice which belonged to it. Before this was done in the death of Christ, it had not the formal nature of a covenant or a testament, as our apostle proves, Heb. 9:15-23. For neither, as he shows in that place, would the law given at Sinai have been a covenant, had it not been confirmed with the blood of sacrifices. To that end the promise was not before a formal and solemn covenant.”

— John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews 8:6-13*, 185.

Covenants — Covenant Theology (Calvin)

“Calvin’s major contribution does not lie in the development of the covenant concept as an overarching structure.”

— William VanGemeren, *Theological Systems and the Testaments, Systems of Continuity, in John Feinberg’s, Continuity and Discontinuity (Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.): Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*. 0 ed., e-book (Crossway, 1988), 37.

“The inception of “covenant” as a unifying concept is not Calvin’s major contribution to theology. Calvin (1509-1564), the leader of the Reformation in Geneva, is best to be remembered for his contribution to biblical exposition and for his eschatologically and christologically oriented contribution to theology.” — William VanGemeren, *Theological Systems*

and the Testaments, Systems of Continuity, in John Feinberg's, *Continuity and Discontinuity (Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.): Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*. 0 ed., e-book (Crossway, 1988), 36.

"Westminster theology, then, represents a substantial departure from the thought of John Calvin. . . . Westminster theology hardly deserves to be called Calvinistic—especially if that term is to imply the thought of Calvin himself."

— Kendall, R. Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649: (*Studies in Christian History and Thought*). Revised ed., (Wipf & Stock Pub, 2011), 212.

Covenants — Covenant Theology (Origins)

"[Covenant Theology] was not the expressed doctrine of the early church. It was never taught by church leaders in the Middle Ages not even mentioned by the primary leaders of the Reformation."

— Cornelius Van Til, *Covenant Theology*, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), I, 306. Brackets added by me.

"This does not mean it was not Biblical, but it does dispel the notion that covenant theology has been throughout all church history the ancient guardian of truth, which is only recently being sniped at by dispensationalism."

— Cornelius Van Til, *Covenant Theology*, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), I, 306.

"Covenant theology cannot claim much more antiquity than dispensationalism. If lack of antiquity is detrimental and refinement is disallowed for dispensationalism, then by the same two criteria covenant theology is discredited. And, if these matters are nonessential for covenant theology, then they are likewise irrelevant in the evaluation of dispensationalism."

— Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 183.

"It is clear that from an early stage in the Christian era the significance of the covenant concept in biblical theology was recognized. Such is noticeably reflected in the canonical nomenclature applied to Christian Scripture: the Old and New Testaments. Apparently, it was not until the Reformation period, however, that anyone constructed a biblical theology around this particular concept. This was done by Johannes Cocceius (1603-69), whose attempt to interpret the Bible holistically by giving central place to 'covenant' not only laid the basis for federal or covenant theology (e.g. as presented in the 1677 magnum opus of H. Witsius), but also anticipated more recent emphases by identifying covenant as the major biblical-theological trajectory that could be traced through- out salvation history."

— Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: A Biblical Theology of Covenant* (Downers Grove, IL, Intervarsity Press, 2007), 19.

Covenants — Covenant Theology (Variations)

"There are several opinions about the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace, to the great disturbance of many Christians; some hold that there are four covenants, two of works, and two of grace. The first two is one with Adam before the fall, and the other with Israel at their return of Egypt. The covenants of grace are the first to Abraham, and the other at the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This is what Mr. Sympson affirmed before a committee of the Assembly of Divines in my hearing. Others hold that there is but three covenants; the first with Adam, the second with Israel at their going out of Egypt, and a third with Jesus Christ. The first two are of works, and the last is of grace. This is what Mr. Burroughs delivered in his exposition sermon in Cornhill in my hearing. Others hold that there is but two covenants, the one of works, and the other of grace. Yet, the first they hold was made with Israel at Mount Sinai, and there were no covenants of works before that, and now it is vanished away, and the other a Covenant of Grace yet not made until the death of Christ the testator, and this is affirmed by James Pope, in a book entitled, *The Unveiling of Antichrist*. Others hold that the Law at Mount Sinai was a Covenant of Grace, implying that there is more than one Covenant of Grace, and this is affirmed by Mr. Anthony Burgesse in his vindication of the moral Law the 24th lecture, chapter 4 of *Deuteronomy*. Others with me hold that there are but two covenants. The first is a Covenant of Works, which had the tree of that covenant as a sacrament (or sign) and token of it. This was made with Adam before his fall and to all his posterity who come under it as soon as they take on his nature. Adam bore an image for himself and all his posterity so that if he had stood in his integrity he would have conveyed his righteousness and holiness to all his posterity. But since he by sin defiled his nature, the whole race of mankind was polluted by him, and also he received a covenant both for himself and all his posterity. If he had been faithful to it, all his posterity would have stood with him, but in breaking that covenant he brought not only guilt on himself but on all his posterity with him. As a result, there is none clean, no not one, "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4). In this way man's nature is polluted, and in regard of the covenant, let every mouth be stopped, "For all the world is become guilty before God," (Rom 3:29). And, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:23). And, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned,"

(Rom 5:12). So then, all men by nature lie under the pollution and guilt of Adam's sin, and liable to all the curses and penalties due to them for breach of that covenant. But then, secondly, there was a Covenant of Grace which God the Father made with Jesus Christ from all eternity to save some of the posterity of Adam. Had not this covenant been prepared and readied against the fall of Adam to take place at the very moment of his fall, the justice of God would have immediately seized on the whole creation under heaven, and consumed them, rendering them nothing. But then came Jesus Christ with the covenant in his hand saying, be gracious unto him, and deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom, (Job 33:24). Now I shall prove that the Covenant of Grace was made with Jesus Christ from all eternity, and this was a contract (or plot) of God the Father with God the Son from all eternity as mediator for the salvation of the elect."

— Edmund Calamy, *The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace*, (Puritan Publications and A Puritan's Mind, 2014), 15-16.

"The covenant idea has been attacked from without and within, has undergone philosophical developments beyond biblical recognition, has been the basis for the progression and the setback of Reformed doctrine, and is still being used as a way of distinguishing Reformed from non-Reformed systems of theology."

— William VanGemeren, *Theological Systems and the Testaments, Systems of Continuity*, in John Feinberg's, *Continuity and Discontinuity (Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.): Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*. 0 ed., e-book (Crossway, 1988), 37.