

Covenants — Covenant of Redemption (Critiqued)

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"We do not believe that it is wise to refer to God's plan to save a people in eternity past as a "covenant." But we do believe that our one God who is three co-equal and co-eternal persons did make a perfect plan that He would save a people from their sins. But if this plan is not called a covenant by the authors of Scripture, we must think twice about describing it by that name ourselves. ... The danger of calling something a covenant that Scripture does not refer to as a covenant increases the likelihood of making something a cornerstone of our theology that in fact is not an emphasis in Scripture. This of course would lead to an unbalanced and unbiblical theological system."

—— Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questioned Answered* (n.p.: Steve Lehrer, 2006) 37.

"The passages that support the eternal counsel of redemption and the messianic covenant do not mandate a viewing Christ's redemptive mission as a formal compact. I do not deny Christ's eternal commission. I only question whether scripture ever presents it as a formal compact."

—— Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed Baptist Perspective on God's Covenants*, (Solid Ground Christian Books, Birmingham, Alabama, USA), 36.

"As noted earlier, some covenant theologians argued for a covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son as the basis for the covenant of grace but Boston denied the need for a separate covenant of redemption. He argued that it was simply another way of looking at the covenant of grace. This again is consistent with the WCF which does not speak of a covenant of redemption."

—— A.T.B. McGowan, Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology, (APOLLOS: An Imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, London England, 2016), 19.

"Fourth, Barth was right to insist that there is no intra-trinitarian covenant. This is a weakness in covenant theology which demonstrates a failure properly to integrate its understanding of covenant with its doctrine of the Trinity."

—— A.T.B. McGowan, Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology, (APOLLOS: An Imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, London England, 2016), 36.

"This particular "covenant" (Covenant of Redemption) finds no specific development in the classics creeds of the Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it has been recognized broadly among Covenant theologians since that time. The intention of God from eternity to redeem a people to himself certainly must be affirmed. Before the foundation of the world God set his covenantal love on his people. But affirming the role of redemption in the internal counsels of God is not the same as proposing the existence of a pre-creation covenant between Father and Son. A sense of artificiality flavors the effort to structure in covenantal terms the mysteries of God's eternal counsels. Scripture simply does not say much on the precreation shape of the decrees of God. To speak concretely of an intertrinitarian "covenant" with terms and conditions between Father and Son mutually endorsed before the foundation of the world is to extend the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety. It should be noted further that most of the discussion in this area built on the assumption that a covenant was to be defined as a mutual contract, not as a sovereignly administered bond. In view of more recent light on the character of the biblical covenants, the feasibility of a "covenant" among members of the Trinity appears even less likely."

—— O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 54. Brackets added by me.

"Despite this past consensus, Reformed theologians in our day are not unanimously persuaded that the eternal decree can be formalized as a covenant on the basis of exegesis."

—— Michael S. Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Books, 2009), 80.

"But, further, why must the "covenant" concept be called into service to describe the "eternal purpose" of God in Christ? Why not be satisfied with the Biblical delineation? As far as I can tell, the Bible nowhere calls the precreation commitments in the Godhead—among themselves or to elect sinners—a "covenant.""

—— Jon Zens, *Is There a Covenant of Grace?* 48.

"Apart from its intended recasting of covenant theology, Smith's teaching does grave damage to the doctrine of the Trinity. Smith, following James Jordan, argues that the form of unity within the Trinity is covenant. This is a serious departure from orthodox Trinitarian theology, falling into a tacit tritheism. Instead of the classic view that the Trinity is

three persons united in one being, this view argues that the Trinity is three divine persons united by a social bond...But the damage is done: if the three divine persons of the Trinity have an ontological union of essence -- one based on a shared being and mutual indwelling -- then it is hard to see how one being is joined together by covenant, unless we totally redefine the meaning of the word covenant, which is the whole point of Smith's exercise."

—— Richard Phillips, Covenant Confusion, <http://www.alliancenet.org/covenantconfusion>