Semper Reformanda (Always Reforming)

Introduction to New Covenant Theology

COVENANT THEOLOGY

Definition

"Covenant theology is the Gospel set in the context of God's eternal plan of communion with his people and its historical outworking in the covenants of works and grace (as well as in the various progressive stages of the covenant of grace). J. Ligon Duncan, *What is Covenant Theology*, p. 1.

Major Themes

1. God's relation to His creatures is covenantal – covenant of redemption, covenant of works, and covenant of grace.
2. Covenant of grace – the single overarching covenant that unifies all post-fall Biblical covenants.
3. Covenant community – one people of God, the Church in both OT and NT.
4. Covenant ethic – God's law innate in man at creation, codified in the 10 commandments, and written on the heart in regeneration. The OT law of Moses is tripartite: moral, ceremonial, and civil. O. P. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*

DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

Definition

"A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God. Seven such dispensations distinguished in Scripture". *The Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 5.

Major Themes

1. Distinction between the Church and Israel – two purposes of God expressed in the formation of two peoples of God who remain distinct for all eternity.
2. Literal interpretation of the Bible
3. Abrahamic covenant as an unconditional covenant – the covenant with Abraham is to be fulfilled literally with the Jewish people in a future Millennium. C.C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*

NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY

Definition

God's eternal purpose progressively revealed in the promises of the historical covenants of the OT is fulfilled in the New Covenant established by Jesus Christ.

Major Themes

1. God's plan of salvation is revealed and administered through biblical covenants.
2. Interpretation – the OT is consistently interpreted in light of the NT
3. People of God – only one people of God, the elect; the believing elect of OT Israel was made into the Church only at Pentecost, and not before.
4. Law of God – is both the innate reflection of God's character in the image of man and the covenantal expression of His will. The first is immutable, not the second.

APPLICATIONS

1. Baptism, more than any other Biblical practice, exposes the deep doctrinal divide which has existed among Protestant Christians since the days of the Reformation.

2. New Covenant Theology affirms the truth that covenants structure all Biblical revelation. However, it challenges the notion that a non-biblical covenant, the Covenant of Grace, is the single unifying category of Biblical revelation.

3. New Covenant Theology affirms the basic distinctions between the OT economy and the NT. However, it challenges the notion that these distinctions presuppose two redemptive purposes of God worked out in terms of two peoples of God through out all of redemptive history.

Killeen Bible Church

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