

History of the Reformation

Covenant Theology and 17th Century Development Of Baptist Confessions 1644 – 1689

- Reformation in England
 - Last week – Puritans in England
 - Originally a movement to fully reform the Church of England
 - Became a “whole of life” movement
 - Adapted and expanded a new hermeneutical approach to reading the Bible called Covenant Theology
 - Initially developed by Ulrich Zwingli in order to justify infant baptism
 - Purpose was to answer the objection by the Anabaptists that infant baptism was found nowhere in the Word of God
 - Yet, infant baptism was needed to maintain the linking of church and state in Zurich

- History of Covenant Theology
 - Augustine taught, with Paul, that there were two covenant heads, Adam and Christ, who represented their people.
 - 1 Cor 15:21-22 – For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive
 - The concept was “fulfillment in contrast”
 - For the 1,000 years between Augustine and the Reformation, very little emphasis on covenants.
 - Zwingli, the Swiss reformer in Zurich concluded infant baptism was unscriptural, because it was thought to bring regeneration.
 - In 1522, he realized that independent churches practicing believers-only baptism would threaten the whole church-state structure.
 - Needing to retain infant baptism, he adopted a completely new hermeneutical approach to Scripture as a whole
 - Zwingli invented a concept of the unity of the eternal plan and purpose of God called “the covenant of grace”
 - One “overarching” structure of all of the bible
 - Since there was one covenant of grace, children of believers were included in that covenant just like Israelites’ children were in the Old Testament.
 - As the children of those in the covenant in the Old Testament received circumcision as the sign of the covenant, so children of believers should receive baptism.
 - He appealed to Colossians 2:10-12 to argue that baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the one covenant of grace.
 - He also taught a covenant of works before the fall, and the covenant of grace after the fall.
 - Covenant theology was virtually unknown before Zwingli used it to defend infant baptism.
 - Danger – be careful what you bring *a priori* to the Scriptures rather than what you glean *a posteriori* from them.

- Teaching of Covenant theology
 - (See the Trinity Hymnal, p. 852, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter VII.)
 - Man is always in covenant relationship with God (VII, I)
 - The whole of Scripture is covered by two covenants
 - The covenant of works (VII, II)
 - The covenant of grace (VII, III)
 - The promised blessing was life, which Adam was given the ability to earn by his obedience to the terms of the covenant. (VII, II and XIX, I, p. 859)

- The content of the covenant of works was the Ten Commandments (XIX, II)
- Adam, by his failure to obey, lost the opportunity to earn life by works. (VII, III)
- God made a second covenant, the covenant of grace. (VII, III)
- All other covenants are but different administrations of this one covenant of grace. (VII, V)
- The covenant of grace is now in its final administration, the New Covenant. (VII, VI)
 - The implications of all this
 - No higher law than the Ten Commandments
 - Baptism, being the sign of the covenant, should be administered to infants.
 - The Sabbath commandment is still in force and the day has been changed to Sunday.
- 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith
 - 1643 – Parliament commissioned “learned, godly and judicious Divines” to meet at Westminster Abbey
 - To provide advice on issues of worship, doctrine, government and discipline for the Church of England
 - Met over 5 years, 121 Puritans produced a Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism
 - Scotland adopted it without amendment 1647
 - House of Commons required a list of proof texts, then adopted it as “the Articles of Christian Religion” in 1648
 - 1660 – nullified during the Restoration
 - Monarch to the throne and episcopacy to the Anglican Church
 - 1690 – William of Orange gave Scotland permission to ratify it for the Church of Scotland
- 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith
 - Systematic exposition of Calvinistic orthodoxy
 - Doctrines common to all of Christianity
 - Trinity, Jesus’s sacrificial death and resurrection
 - Doctrines common to Protestantism
 - *Sola scriptura, sola fide*
 - Doctrines from Puritanism/Presbyterianism
 - Covenant Theology
 - Nomo-centrism – 10 Cmds = the Moral Law of God
 - Assurance of salvation is not necessarily present with faith
 - Minimalist concept of worship
 - Strict Sabbatarianism.
 - 1658 – Congregationalists modified the WCF as the *Savoy Declaration*
 - John Owen was a key leader
- English Baptist Background
 - Early 1600’s – Baptists return from exile in Holland
 - General Baptists
 - Disagree with Infant Baptism (unbiblical)
 - Episcopal form of government (unbiblical)
 - Monarch has no business determining the affairs of the Churches
 - Particular Baptists
 - From 1633
 - Roots in Calvinistic independent/separatist churches
- 1644 London Baptist Confession
 - Charles I and Parliament were “jousting”
 - Long Parliament
 - Archbishop Laud imprisoned 1641
 - Civil War 1642 - 1649

- 7 (+ 1 French) Particular Baptist Congregations in London
 - Took advantage of the civil unrest to differentiate their beliefs
- Written to justify to those in Church of England that their theology was completely scriptural
- 1644 London Baptist Confession
 - 52 Articles
 - Clearly Christ-centered in its approach
 - Fully Calvinistic in its soteriology
 - Identifies Covenant of grace, the everlasting covenant, and the New Covenant as the same thing
 - Clear on the gospel
 - “terrors of the law” nor preparation for grace is required
 - Gospel alone is effectual
 - Grace, not law, is the power that sanctifies the believer
- Commonwealth & Restoration
 - Oliver Cromwell – Independent Puritanism was a core of his life
 - Independents and Baptists flourished in the New Model Army
 - 1660 – with the restoration of the Monarchy, the situation reversed
 - Clergy not accepting the return to episcopacy were forced to leave their posts
 - Not until 1689 with the Act of Toleration, did the persecution cease
- 1677 Baptist Confession of Faith
 - New statement of faith, “forasmuch as that Confession is not now to be had”
 - Believing that “the substance of the matter is the same”
 - Wanted to “express [themselves] more fully”
 - Used the WCF as the basis (even word for word)
 - “wherein our faith and doctrine is the same with theirs, and this we did, the more abundantly, to manifest our consent with both, in all the fundamental articles of the Christian Religion, as also with many others, whose orthodox confessions have been published to the world”
 - Persecution and secrecy kept the 1677 document from being officially endorsed by Particular Baptists, though it was obvious that many Baptist church leaders were able to make its contents known to church members
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- 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith
 - 1689 – the Toleration Act of William and Mary was passed (allowing religious freedom and plurality to co-exist alongside the established churches of England and Scotland)
 - 3 – 11 July – Representatives from 100 Particular Baptist churches met in London to discuss, edit and endorse the 1677 Confession
 - Adopted with the official date of 1689
 - Became the dominant Calvinistic Baptist confession
- 1689 BCF/WCF Differences
 - Made clear that Baptist polity was clearly stated
 - Associations are authorized, but have no power to implement judgments over any particular congregation (26:15)
 - Made clear that infant baptism was not biblical
 - Trinitarian in formula (29:2)
 - For “those who actually profess repentance” (29:3)
 - “Immersion or dipping . . . Is necessary” (29:4)
 - Modified the WCF Covenant Theology
 - Identified the Covenant of Grace as the New Covenant “Inaugurated or revealed, yet not consummated until Christ”

- Added chapter on the Gospel (20)
 - Outward call the means, effectual work of the Holy Spirit necessary
- Yet retained the “law-centered” nature of sanctification
 - The 10 Commandments ARE the Moral Law of God
- 1644/46 and 1689 Differences
 - So what’s the big deal?
 - Why is there animosity between those who prefer the Second London Confession (1677/89) and those who prefer the First London Confession (1644/46)?
 - The answer is pure and simple, yet deep rooted
 - The 1689 adopts the WCF/Puritan system of theology called Covenant Theology
 - First invented by Zwingli in 1520’s as a way to justify infant baptism
 - Covenant of Works, Covenant of Grace, etc.
 - Kept the Nomo-centric nature of Covenant Theology
 - The 1644, while not an extensively developed system, places emphasis on the Christ Alone and His New Covenant
 - Any view of the Old Covenant (Testament) must be viewed through the “spectacles” of the Christ of God
- Summary
 - Covenant Theology
 - Teaches that men have been under only one covenant from the fall of Adam thru the rest of time, the Covenant of Grace
 - The Biblical covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New, Everlasting) are all subsumed under that as “Administrations”
 - The distinctions between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant are blurred
 - Nothing was changed unless explicitly changed
 - Circumcision
 - Particularly at issue is the place of Law of God
 - Covenant Theology (CT) teaches that the Law of God is eternal and unchangeable
 - Dealing with the fact that Jewish Temple practices (sacrifices) are clearly no longer used, yet not all explicitly “repealed”,
 - CT uses a 3-fold division within the Mosaic Law (from Thomas Aquinas). (Ch 29; p. 859 Trinity Hymnal)
 - Moral
 - Ceremonial
 - Civil
 - Thus it is convenient to determine by category what is binding and what is not
 - CT elevates the 10 Commandments given at Sinai to BE (*a priori*) the Moral Law of God (eternal and unchangeable)
 - The problem, of course, is that while 9 of the 10 uphold general moral principles, one, the Sabbath, has both natural and ceremonial aspects
 - New Covenant Theology
 - Those who see the 1644 as more biblical, do so for this reason
 - The New Covenant which Christ inaugurated, is for believers, giving them peace with God, reconciliation (Ch 30)
 - “Jesus Christ only is made the Mediator of the New Covenant, even the everlasting covenant of grace between God and man (Ch 10)
 - It holds them to the Law of Christ, greatly amplifying the moral nature of the eternal law of God, yet freeing them from the specifics of the Mosaic Law
 - “The same power that converts to faith in Christ, carrieth on the soul through all duties, temptations, conflicts, sufferings; and whatsoever a believer is, he is by grace, and is carried on in all obedience and temptations by the same” (Ch 26)

- It rejects any preaching of “the terrors of the law” or “preceding ministry of the law” as necessary in the preaching of the gospel to the conversion of sinners (Ch 25)
 - 1644 London Baptist Confession vs 1689 2nd London Baptist Confession
 - Problem:
 - Those who hold to the 1689 see a denial of the perpetuity of the Sabbath commandment as a “breaking of the Moral Law of God”, hence feel free to hurl the accusation of “antinomian”.
 - Those reject infant baptism, the “law-centered” view of the gospel and the strict Sabbatarianism of the Puritans (WCF, 1689) see that the problem is in Covenant Theology as a whole.
 - That problem is the lack of a fully developed system
- Plea:
 - Continue to seek “*Semper Reformata*” without feeling the need to label and hurl invectives at the opponent
 - Seek the Lord, Seek faithfulness to His Word,
 - Seek Christ as “All in All”