

Covenant Theology in a Dispensational Culture

Lecture 2: God and Covenants

By Kevin Morris, taught at Ortega Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, Fl. 3-1-20

1. The Starting Point of Covenant Theology is Our View of God

When the Bible first introduces us to God, it is vital that we take our cue of the way in which He is conveyed to us, namely, by way of the covenantal name Yahweh.

- **God's Unified Purpose in the Trinity-**

John 17

- As the Triune God, God is always in unity and agreement within Himself and always at peace, not enmity. The persons of the Trinity are not seeking antithetical goals over against one another.
- The New Covenant is an evidence of this- that it is accomplished by the mutual work of each person of the Trinity.
 - Jesus' mission is the plan between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - This is seen expressly in **John 17**. While the focus is of the Father and the Son, John 14-16 has just focused upon the work of the Holy Spirit in this unified plan.
- It is the three-fold witness of God and the *fullest* expression of His person
 - This is in part why the New Covenant is *eternal* in scope; there is no additional witness that could ever be given.

- Redemption/salvation is what we sing of in heaven (see Revelation for example)
 - redemption is therefore focal, not parenthetical.
 - **This presupposition is absolutely critical when we start thinking about the covenants and God's purposes.**
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- Covenant, Covenant and More Covenant-
Westminster Confession 7.1, Romans 1
 - Admittedly, 'covenant' is perhaps the most overused word in all of Presbyterianism. It has become a buzz word in many camps, but for good reason: it is the proper understanding of reality in God's world.
 - **(Romans 1:19-20** and condescension in natural revelation).
 - This condescension on God's part is required for us to have any type of relationship whatsoever. This is evident in the first way that God is revealed in relation to mankind
 - **Genesis 2** and The "LORD" God's activity.

2. Two Covenants Only

In order to rightly understand dispensationalism as a theological system, it will be helpful to look at it in relation to the backdrop of covenant theology. Frankly, this is the easier place to start rather than developing the entire dispensational system first. Why? Because covenant theology is actually a much simpler system and organization of scripture's teaching.

- EVERY HUMAN IN COVENANT WITH GOD-

Westminster Confession 7.2, Genesis 2:26, Romans 5:12-21

- Our confession states that the covenant of works (or Covenant of Creation) was given to Adam and “all his posterity” (**WCF 7**).
 - Why does it say this? It is because Adam represented the entire human race and all those who are in Adam share in that covenant, along with its outcome.
 - **See additionally 1st Corinthians**
- This covenant of works is both the condition of man before the fall and the context of all mankind after the fall (and outside of Christ).

- The Curse Does Not Come Without a Promise-

Westminster Confession 7.3, Genesis 3:15

- After Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed mankind, but He didn't do so without making a promise. **Genesis 3:15** is the foretelling of the gospel message- the good news of promise
 - **Genesis 3:15** promotes the need for the right offspring
- This aspect of covenant theology leads to that which is called the covenant of grace. That's it. No other ones
 - Of course, we don't deny the covenant God makes with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc.... instead, they are all seen within the covenant of grace.

3. Why is This Pertinent to Contrasting Dispensationalism?

Seeing the way that Covenant Theology understands history quickly shows the difference between dispensations and dispensationalism.

- History of Redemption

Westminster Confession 7.5-7.6

- The basis of Covenant Theology is that there is one purpose being shown throughout the “history of redemption.” That is, God is working one plan over time from the point of the fall to the New Heavens and the New Earth.
- All of History is redemptive history, from the shadow of **Genesis 3.15** to the full bloom and substance of special revelation. (**Col. 2:16-17**).
 - But Christ’s advent and work is designated as the fullness of time and the last epoch of history (**Galatians 4:4, Eph. 1:10**).