

PRESBYTERIANISM

Covenant Theology

DEFINITION

- “After the fall, God made the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus” (WCF 7.3)
- “God’s covenant is the way he relates to human beings in general and to his chosen people in particular” (Lucas 2006, 52)
- “A divine covenant is a sovereign administration of grace and promise” (Murray 1988, 31)
- God’s covenant refers to his story of redemption

COVENANT IS A STORY OF REDEMPTION

- A Covenant of works, which Adam failed to keep
- A Covenant of grace, which Jesus established in his death and resurrection
- Two phases: Law and Grace or Old covenant or New covenant
- The story is moving toward a climactic ending, in which God's Kingdom is manifested over the whole world
- That's why we pray, "Your kingdom come"
- Covenant is rooted in God's promises (Gen 3:15; 12:1-3; Gal 3:6-9)

GOD'S COVENANT PROMISE OF A SEED

- “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3:15)
- “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:1-3)

GOD'S COVENANT PROMISE OF A SEED

- “So also Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’” (Gal 3:6-8)
- “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ” (Gal 3:16)

CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

- Continuity: Covenant theology focuses on the **unity** in the story of redemption in terms of promise and fulfillment (old covenant and new covenant)
- Discontinuity: Dispensationalism stresses **discontinuity** between the two phases—two peoples of God (Israel and the church, earthly and heavenly people)
- Point: there is **one story** in Scripture—the redeeming activity of God for his people

ONE STORY IN FIVE ACTS

- God creates—then man's subsequent fall (Gen 1-3)
- God calls Abraham—Israel as a blessing to the nations (Gen 12)
- God incarnated—Jesus Christ (Matt 1:1)
- God pours out the Holy Spirit—the birth of the church (Acts 2)
- God the returning King—restoration and recreation (Rev 20-22)

ONE STORY OF THE ONE AND ONLY GOD

- The Creator God (Gen 1:1-2; 2:2-3)
- The Calling God (Gen 12:1-3; Gal 3:7-9)
- The Redeemer God (Ex 1-2; 3-15)
- The Gracious and Merciful God (Ex 33:18-19; 34:5-7)
- The One God (Deut 6:4-9)
- The Triune God (Matt 28:18-20)
- The Forgiving God (Lu 24:44-47)
- The Consummator God (Rom 8:18-25; Rev 20-22)
- The Speaking God (Ps 19; Heb 1:1-4)
- The Worthy God (Jn 4:24; Rev 4-5)

GOD'S COVENANT AND HIS KINGDOM

- God's promise of a redeemer is tied to his kingdom
- “After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mk 1:14-15)
- “Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again’” (Jn 3:3)

CONCLUSION

- “God intends for his people to inherit the earth in its full development as a City of God (Heb 11:13-16), completely renovated by the judgment and mercy of God. Until that final manifestation of God’s reign on earth, which we do **not yet** see, his reign is **already** present and most obvious in the church... While there are other ways in which God’s reign is made manifest in our lives individually—as we work in our vocations, engage in the arts, and raise our families—his reign is most obviously manifest when we come together as the church and his will is done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10). And God’s will in heaven is that his people worship him, adoring him as the king who alone is worthy of our praise (Rev 4-5)” (Lucas 2006, 65)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does understanding covenant as story help you in reading the Bible?
- How should thinking about God's kingdom impact one's Christian life?