
WHAT IS REFORMED THEOLOGY?

Session 3: God's Covenants

GOD'S COVENANTS WITH MAN

- Reformed theology *is* covenant theology.
 - Covenant theology is a lens through which to interpret the Scripture.
 - Covenant theology is *unrelated* to the Biblical covenants (Abrahamic, Noahic, Moasic, New Covenant, etc.).
- Reformed theology teaches that “The distance between God and the creature is go great” that if there were not “some voluntary condescension on God’s part” then man could never please God. This “condescension on God’s part” has been shown by God to man “by way of covenant” (Westminster VII, paragraph 1).
- God has established two covenants, according to Reformed theology.
 - “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” (ibid., paragraph 2).
 - After Adam failed in the second covenant by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved...” (ibid., paragraph 3).
 - This all sounds “evangelical,” ...until you read the next statement.
 - ...” and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.” (ibid).
 - Note: the Second London Confession (also known as “The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689” has the same wording).
 - Reformed theology has “Calvinism” at its core. They are inseparable. Reformed theology believes that the Holy Spirit (through election) will “make them willing and able to believe,” and that only the elect are “willing and able.”
- Reformed theology is the source of teaching that Old Testament believers *looked forward* to Christ and New Testament believers *look back*, and the direction of the look is the only difference.
 - Dispensational theology, by and large, has failed to separate itself from this flawed eisegesis.
 - Before the cross, “under the law, it [the covenant of grace] was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come: which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called, the Old Testament.” (Westminster V).
 - Note that the “sacrifices, circumcision,” etc., were “sufficient and efficacious” (i.e.: required works) for the instruction and building up “of the elect” and that the Messiah (who at this time was totally unknown and had done no work of propitiation) had given the elect “full remission of sins, and eternal salvation.”
 - After the cross, “when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory; yet, in them, it is held forth in more fulness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament.” (Westminster VI)

- Now, according to Reformed theology, “the covenant is dispensed” through “the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments.”
- Reformed theology and *leaky dispensationalism* maintain that “There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations” (Westminster VI).
 - Their only dispensations are “looking forward” and “looking back.”
 - This was largely maintained by dispensational theology because most of the early dispensationalists came out of the Westminster confession.
- Thoughts on the covenant aspect of Reformed theology:
 - It is a doctrine in need of evidence...a doctrine based on assumption.
 - It is a doctrine that creates the need for the TULIP scheme. Thus TULIP is a scheme built upon a scheme, none of which have a Biblical foundation.
 - Because the scheme is not found in Scripture, schemes of the original scheme have been developed.
 - While making imaginary doctrines, the theologians then got together to imagine the order of the imaginary, and the “lapsarian” issues were devised. Lapsarianism concerns *when* God supposedly made His covenants with Himself. (The word *laps...* has to do with man’s fall, or his *lapse into sin*).
 - An analysis of lapsarianism at www.gotquestions.org/lapsarianism.html shows the insanity of the argument (and the fact that gotquestions will rush headlong into foolishness). See <https://www.gotquestions.org/lapsarianism.html>
- Two Recommendations to dispensationalists:
 - Dispensationalism needs to reject the premise of the covenants of Reformed theology as totally fabricated and unbiblical.
 - Charles Ryrie: “We do not know the answer to the question of what prompted God to choose as He did, but we do know that He never acts contrary to His character. Election is more than just foreseeing who would eventually believe; it is action of choosing those who would believe.”¹
 - Statements like this grow from an acceptance of Covenant theology, and this acceptance should be rejected on Scripture.
 - Dispensationalism needs to build a more Biblical doctrine concerning Old Testament salvation (one that distinguishes itself from Reformed theology).
 - Sadly, dispensationalism seems reluctant to address these issues because:
 - They were taught by respected dispensationalists, especially of the recent era.
 - They are overly concerned about the political consequences of rejecting reformed theology in totality.
- The effect of Covenant theology on Scripture interpretation:
 - It makes all of the Bible to be chiefly about the salvation of the elect.
 - The matters of Kingdom are necessarily intertwined in the matter of the salvation of the elect.
 - The restoration of the original condition becomes secondary, if not impossible (for to restore Eden would mean to restore the supposed Covenant of Works).

Next Session: The Reformed doctrine of the church and its ordinances

¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).