

A Credobaptistic Exposition of Covenant Theology

by

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Introduction

“Covenant Theology” is the term used to describe a system of thought that came to prominence through the Reform movement of the sixteenth century. It was developed over the years through the work of men such as Bullinger, Turretin, and Witsius, to the present day where it is firmly established as the *de facto* understanding of God’s dealing with men in history within the Reformed tradition.¹

It is undeniable that God has dealt with man in terms of a covenant since the early chapters of Genesis. The concept of a covenant is both mentioned and exemplified in Genesis 6:18, where God presents His plan to Noah, making promises based upon certain stipulations with which Noah had to comply. The fact that God used the term “covenant” (בְּרִית) to Noah without explanation implies that it was familiar to him.²

While even those that deny the validity of Covenant Theology affirm the fact that God is a covenanting God, such dissent from this view has given rise to competing systems that view God’s historical workings with man in different ways, most notably Dispensationalism. It must be stated that neither Covenant Theology nor Dispensationalism can be found set forth in their entirety in any single passage of Scripture. Rather, they are hermeneutical systems that are drawn from the whole text of Scripture, and then re-applied so that the patterns and structures become more recognizable.³ Dispensationalism sees God’s work through history in the form of distinct and separate eras—“dispensations”—during which He dealt with His people in a particular way. In the Dispensational system, there is little, if any, continuity between each era, and each succeeding era is necessitated by the failure of the previous.⁴

¹ It is featured in both the Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter 7) and the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (chapter 7).

²This paper will later explore covenants that were evidently covenants though not named as such.

³J. I. Packer says of Covenant Theology: “Not only does it spring from reading the Scriptures as a unity, it includes in itself specific claims as to how this should be done. Covenant theology offers a total view, which it is ready to validate from Scripture itself if challenged, as to how the various parts of the Bible stand related to each other.” (J. I. Packer, “Introduction: On Covenant Theology,” in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (Phillipsburg, Nj: P & R Publishing, 1990), Section III.

⁴This is a very broad summary, since there are various forms of Dispensationalism. Most Dispensationalists, however, would agree with this general perspective.

Covenant Theology, on the other hand, views God's dealings with His people in terms of successive covenants within a broader covenant that build upon one another culminating in the coming of Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant in His blood. Where Dispensationalism sees discontinuity (between the various covenants and between Israel and the Church), Covenant Theology sees continuity in God's overarching plan to save a particular people for Himself.

This paper is not intended to be a defense of Covenant Theology, nor a critique of Dispensationalism. Rather it is a positive presentation of the covenantal view of biblical history from the perspective of a credobaptist. Most adherents to Covenant Theology are paedobaptist, which colors certain aspects of their presentation, leading to—in this author's view—inconsistencies and weaknesses in the overall structure. The author hopes that in presenting Covenant Theology from a baptistic viewpoint, not only will Covenant Theology be presented at its strongest, but also at its most consistent.

Overview of Covenant Theology

In general, a covenant is an agreement between two parties with certain stipulations, and blessings or curses as a result of either keeping or breaking the covenant. The seventeenth-century theologian Herman Witsius said regarding the nature of covenants between God and man that such a covenant is

an agreement between God and man, about the way of obtaining consummate happiness; including a combination of eternal destruction, with which the contemner of the happiness, offered in that way, is to be punished.⁵

Further, such a covenant requires of God

1st. A *promise* of consummate happiness in eternal life. 2dly. A *designation* and *prescription* of the condition, by the performance of which, man acquires a right to the promise. 3dly. A *penal sanction* against those, who do not come up to the prescribed condition.⁶

⁵Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, p. 45.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 46.

It is important to note, however, particularly when discussing the structure of covenants made between God and man, that there is no standard Scriptural template given. Within secular literature, there are plenty of examples of treaties and other such arrangements that demonstrate a consistent pattern in ancient covenantal agreements, and the Old Testament certainly reflects this.⁷ However, when discussing covenants as presented in the pages of Scripture, there is no divinely-mandated format, and hence one cannot say that a covenant between God and man *must* contain certain elements for it to be a legitimate covenant. While one can take what Witsius presents, for example, as a general rule, without an inspired proclamation on the subject, one must allow a certain amount of flexibility and permit God to determine for Himself each covenant arrangement.

Covenant Theology traditionally divides the history of God's dealings with mankind into three distinct parts: "the covenant of redemption," "the covenant of works," and "the covenant of grace."⁸ The covenant of redemption refers to the agreement made in eternity between God the Father and God the Son to redeem a people for Himself. The covenant of works is that arrangement made by God with Adam in Eden to place him in the Garden and require of him obedience to His commands, particularly not to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If Adam would obey the command of God, in return he would not suffer death (Genesis 2:15-17).

After the Fall, since man no longer was able to work and please God due to his sin, God instituted a covenant of grace to make provision for man, sustaining his life, enabling him to please God, and ultimately providing for his salvation. The term "covenant of grace" should not be understood to suggest that grace was not operational during the covenant of works; in the same way, one should not think that works were no longer required under the covenant of grace. Rather, these titles refer to the means by

⁷For example, the covenant format of Deuteronomy bears great similarity to ancient Hittite treaties. See Paul House's discussion of this as evidence in favor of Mosaic authorship in Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998) pp. 171ff.

⁸The terms used to describe each covenant can vary from theologian to theologian. What one theologian may call "the Mosaic covenant" another might call "the Sinaitic covenant." This author has chosen his terms based on what appears to him to be the most common usage, and has tried to be consistent with them throughout.

which man derived his ability to please God under each economy. They emphasize the requirements for right standing before God: pre-Fall Adam was able to obey God and please Him with his works; post-Fall, man is only able to please God by means of God's gracious work in his heart.

It would, therefore, be true to say that Covenant Theology seeks to explain man's culpability for sin, his inability to do anything about it, and hence his need for a Saviour. It also looks to demonstrate how the Fall and redemption of man was part of God's eternal plan, worked out by means of covenants, so that His mercy, and justice might both be evident to His creation. Covenant Theology is not merely a way of explaining the purpose of covenants in the Old and New Testaments; it is a description of God's sovereign plan for the salvation of His people.

The Covenant of Redemption⁹

Berkhof defines the covenant of redemption as "the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given Him."¹⁰ Hodge claims that the covenantal nature of this agreement is plain enough that one does not need to belabor the Scriptural citations:

When one person assigns a stipulated work to another person with the promise of a reward upon the condition of the performance of that work, there is a covenant. Nothing can be plainer than that all this is true in relation to the Father and the Son. The Father gave the Son a work to do; He sent Him into the world to

⁹Not all treatments of Covenant Theology, and certainly not all covenant theologians, accommodate this covenant into their system. According to Robertson it "finds no specific development in the classic creeds of the Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," and indeed counts himself as one who does not see this as a covenant (p. 54). It must be pointed out, though, that the London Baptist Confession of 1689 speaks of an "eternal covenant transaction which was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect" (7:2). While there is dispute whether this can strictly be called a covenant, it is included in this treatment for a two reasons: a) completeness in presenting Covenant Theology, since it is accepted as such by respected covenant theologians; and b) because even if one does not wish to view God's plan of redemption in covenantal terms, it is important to see that God did intend from eternity past to save a people for Himself. In other words, there is no doubt that the basic doctrine is biblical; the question is over whether it is strictly a "covenant."

¹⁰Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, Pa: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958; reprint, 2000), p. 271.

perform it, and promised Him a great reward when the work was accomplished. Such is the constant representation of the Scriptures. We have, therefore, the contracting parties, the promise, and the condition. These are the essential elements of a covenant.¹¹

Scripture does indeed indicate that the work of redemption was one that was conceived and planned by God from the foundation of time (e.g., Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:1-2). The words of Christ Himself also figure among the passages that point to the fact that the work of redemption He was doing was according to the purpose of God, and was one in which He was acting as an obedient Son to the Father (e.g., John 5:30, 43; 6:38-40; 17:4-12; Ephesians 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Those who hold to this being evidence of a covenant see in these passages an agreement between God the Father and God the Son from eternity to send the Son into the world to do the Father's will, which is to lose none of those given to Him, but to bring salvation to them (John 6:39). Accomplishing this requires that the Son live a life in which He does everything the Father tells Him to do (John 5:30), and eventually die a sacrificial death by crucifixion. The death He died voluntarily for the sins of His people (Philippians 2:8-9) was in accordance with the will of God, which the Son was willing to perform (Matthew 26:39).

Berkhof and Hodge both indicate that the promises attached to the covenant were "in keeping with His requirements."¹² By this is meant that everything the Son needed to accomplish the will of the Father would be given to Him, including a sinless body, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the support of the Father, numerous followers who would spread the gospel and form the Church, and so forth.¹³ Also, Philippians 2:9-11 says that as a result of Christ's obedience to death, God exalted Him, and gave Him the name above all names such that everything that has breath would declare that Jesus is Lord.

¹¹Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, Ma: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), Vol. 2, p. 360.

¹²Berkhof, p. 269.

¹³Ibid, p. 270; Hodge Vol. 2, p. 362.

The Covenant of Works¹⁴

The Edenic Covenant

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:15-17)¹⁵

The first chapter of Genesis recounts God’s act of creation, from the celestial expanse and all that is contained therein through to the most meager insect that crawls on the ground. The apex of creation occurs on the sixth day, when God creates man in His image and gives him the breath of life. He then places the man in a luscious garden where his every need is provided for.¹⁶

It is in this context that God enters into covenant with His new creation. The term “covenant” is not used in Genesis 2, but it is clear in Scripture that covenants can exist even when the term בְּרִית is not applied, as long as the basic elements of the covenant are present (promises, conditions, and penalties).¹⁷ In the first place, the covenant is

¹⁴ One of the differences between the Westminster and the London Baptist Confessions in their respective versions of chapter 7 is the omission of the “covenant of works” in the London Baptist Confession. One might expect that since this is a credobaptistic presentation of Covenant Theology, this author would likewise omit this covenant. However, for the reasons cited below (see note 17), this author is, in fact, inclined to see God’s pre-lapsarian arrangement with Adam in covenantal terms, and regard this as a “covenant of works.” Objection to the term “covenant of works” usually points to an implied belief that man was able to earn salvation by some kind of legalistic adherence. One must remember, however, that there was no sin in the world at this point, and so there was not any sense in which Adam was trying to “earn” God’s favor, or that he was in need of salvation. He already had God’s favor, and just had to maintain obedience to all that God commanded him to do, which in his pre-Fall condition was quite within Adam’s ability.

¹⁵ All Scripture quotations are from the NASB translation.

¹⁶To be precise, God places man in Eden in Genesis 2:8, but this is at the end of a brief recap of the creation of mankind. Contrary to the view that Genesis 2 is an alternative creation account, these initial verses simply provide a more detailed account of the events covered in only a few verses of the previous chapter.

¹⁷Without question, God makes a covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, yet the term בְּרִית is nowhere to be found. Indeed, Psalm 89:28 refers to God’s dealings with David as a “covenant.” There are two other arguments for the existence of a covenant here that must also be considered. First is the reference in Hosea 6:7, “But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me” (NASB). The Hebrew phrase rendered “like Adam” in the NASB is כְּאָדָם which could be rendered “like a man [or ‘mankind’],” or could be a reference to a place near Jericho mentioned in Joshua 3:16. The problem with regarding “Adam” as a place is that there is no mention of an event whereby Israel

contracted between God and man, with God initiating and setting the terms of the covenant. Covenant theologians recognize that the implicit promise of the covenant was eternal life.¹⁸ They base this on the fact that the penalty for breaking the covenant was death (Genesis 2:17), and the severity of the death penalty that resulted in chapter 3 was such that it resulted not just the decay of the flesh, but also in separation from God symbolized by Adam hiding from God in the garden, and the expulsion of the man and the woman from the garden.¹⁹ Indeed, since they were prohibited from eating of the tree of life that they might “eat, and live forever” (Genesis 3:22), it is reasonable to presume that prior to the fall this fruit was available to them, and it was their disobedience that led to this means of eternal life being withdrawn.

transgressed a covenant in a place called Adam—and one would imagine that for Hosea to prefer to speak of this over other major covenantal transgressions (e.g., worshiping the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai) that it would be a significant offense, yet this would be the only reference to it. One should also note that the Hebrew does not say “at Adam” but “like Adam.” “In Adam” could be conjectured by emending the *kaḥ* (כָּה) to a *bêḥ* (בְּה), but this is a conjecture unsupported by the documentary evidence, and, again, looks to an event that the Old Testament does not mention. The proposal that this should be translated “like men” (using the plural form, when the Hebrew is singular) or “like mankind,” which both the King James and New King James versions adopt, is dismissed by Reymond as an “inanity” (Reymond, p. 430). If this translation is to be adopted, however, it does not really solve the problem. What does it mean that Israel broke the covenant “like men,” generally, not referring to a specific instance of covenant-breaking, and not specifically with Israel? Surely the only time recorded in Scripture that a covenant existed between God and a non-Israelite man in whom was represented mankind as a whole was with Adam in the Garden of Eden. And this breach of covenant would be significant enough to warrant the comparison.

The second argument in favor of seeing a covenant in Genesis 2 looks forward to the comparison Paul makes in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 between Christ, the head of the New Covenant, and Adam. While not explicitly stated, the passages in question demand a correlation between the role played by Christ as the “federal representative of a covenant arrangement,” to use Reymond’s words (p. 430), and the role played by Adam with regard to the initial covenant between God and man.

¹⁸See, for example, Berkof, p. 216, and Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology* (Nashville, Tn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 431:

Most commonly today [the Genesis 2 covenant] is called either a covenant of works... or a covenant of life... the former characterization emphasizing that the confirmation in righteousness which God would give Adam upon the latter’s successful sustaining of his probationary test he would necessarily give to Adam in *justice* and that what Adam would receive he would receive as *reward* or *merit* for his obedience, the latter characterization specifying the nature of the reward which Adam and his posterity would receive if he obeyed God.

¹⁹The expulsion from the garden can be seen as a sign of the breach of trust brought about by man’s sin, since the concern raised is that the man might take from the tree of life, something God clearly did not want to happen. In his fallen state, man could no longer be relied upon to obey and respect the desires of his Creator.

The command issued by God not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil provides the needed covenantal condition. However, as Robertson points out, this was not man's sole responsibility in the garden, and was in fact simply the focal point of God's test of Adam's obedience to His commands.²⁰ Already at this point in Genesis 2, God had established the Sabbath rest, marriage, and the need for meaningful labor. Of course, it can be argued that the entirety of the Moral Law (as later inscribed on stone for Moses) was in force from Creation, but these will suffice to demonstrate that there were God-given commands to obey beyond his choice of fruit tree. Yet in the simple command to refrain from one tree out of all the trees in the garden lay the biggest test of man's submission to God's sovereign rule.

The penalty of this covenant has already been mentioned: death, which would encompass both spiritual and physical death. From the fact that the tree of life would have provided fruit by which man could live forever, one can deduce that man's state of death would be eternal. The spiritual death came instantly as observed by the broken relationship between God and His creation. A delay was apparently introduced for physical death, as Berkof explains:

Undoubtedly the execution of the penalty began at once after the first transgression. Spiritual death entered instantly, and the seeds of death also began to operate in the body. The full execution of the sentence, however, did not follow at once, but was arrested, because God immediately introduced an economy of grace and restoration.²¹

The Covenant of Grace

The Adamic Covenant

And the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly shall you go, And dust shall you eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." (Genesis 3:14-15)

²⁰Roberson, pp. 67-68, 81-87.

²¹Berkhof, p. 217.

In the aftermath of the Fall, God pronounces curses upon the guilty parties: the serpent, the woman, and the man. Genesis 3:14-19 hardly seems to contain a trace of covenantal language, but unlike the covenant of works, which encompassed only one administration, the covenant of grace encompasses multiple administrations over which the full nature of the covenant is conveyed, leading up to its fulfillment in Christ.²²

Genesis 3 presents the *protoevangelium*, or the first indications of the gospel, and how God planned to redeem fallen man and restore him to communion with his Creator. It is noteworthy that the curses pronounced apply not only to the serpent and to the woman, but also to their respective “seed” or descendants, and then ultimately to a singular “seed” of the woman (3:15). The three layers of meaning are evident in the fact that God’s words address first “you and the woman,” then “your seed and her seed,” and finally “he shall bruise... you shall bruise...” In the first place there is enmity between Eve and Satan²³, then between Eve’s offspring and Satan’s “offspring.” Given the character of Satan revealed in Genesis 3 as one who opposes God, one could reasonably presume that Satan’s offspring would be those who likewise oppose the work of God. This identification is made quite clearly by Jesus in John 8:44, where He identified the Pharisees as being “of your father the devil.” Then, thirdly, Satan himself bruises the seed of Eve, but he crushes Satan’s head. The shift to the third person singular here is important: Eve’s seed in this act in a person, not a people. Robertson sees in this an attempt by both parties to fatally wound each other, an attack on the heel being fittingly subversive for one known as the “Deceiver.”²⁴ He goes on:

If the heel may be regarded as the object of subversive attack and partial wound (despite fatal intention), the head represents the object of open attack and mortal

²²“This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament.” (London Baptist Confession of 1689, 7:3)

²³While it is not unreasonable to see this as the beginning of mankind’s seemingly natural disdain for snakes, first such disdain is by no means universal, and second, the personification of evil in the form of serpents is clear in Scripture that it is most likely that the serpent here is merely the mouthpiece of Satan himself, and it is largely to Satan that God addresses Himself. The penalty inflicted upon the serpent can be seen as its just reward for being the vessel of the Tempter.

²⁴Robertson, p. 100.

wound. The seed of the woman shall crush the serpent's head. Satan shall be bruised mortally, defeated totally.²⁵

Satan did indeed bruise the heel of Eve's seed through Christ's suffering on the cross. But in the divine plan of salvation, that attack was not fatal, and indeed provided for Satan's downfall in Christ's victory over death, in which the serpent's head was finally crushed (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14).

It is this promise of redemption that is the promise of the Adamic Covenant, and the parties to the covenant are God and man. The provisions of the covenant are as they were under the previous covenant: man is still required to work, and he is still required to obey God. Labor, however is now more burdensome, and obedience has become impossible without God's gracious aid due to man's fallen condition. It is only as man clings to the grace and mercy of God that he is able to obey and please Him, and that mercy and grace has its promise in the seed of Eve, and its fulfillment in Christ (Romans 5:15-19).

The Noahic Covenant

As noted earlier, the first occurrence of the Hebrew word בְּרִית ("covenant") is at Genesis 6:18, where God presents to Noah his plan to cleanse the earth by means of a flood. Once again, the covenantal structure of what God says to Noah is not clearly spelled out as if this account were a treaty or some kind of legal document; however, the parties, terms, promises, and penalties are evident:

"But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark-- you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every *kind* into the ark, to keep *them* alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every *kind* shall come to you to keep *them* alive. And as for you, take for yourself some of all food which is edible, and gather *it* to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them." (Genesis 6:18-21)

²⁵Ibid., p. 101.

First of all, this is a covenant between God and Noah, along with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives. God has already declared His intention to wipe out all life upon the earth, and so the promise is that God will spare Noah and his family, along with the animals Noah takes with him onto the ark. The stipulation is that Noah obey God by constructing the ark exactly to His specifications, and then gather all the animals according to God's instructions. The penalty for disobedience is not stated, perhaps because it is self-evident: they will all perish with everyone and everything else.

It should be noted that God was under no obligation to establish this covenant with Noah, and yet He chose Noah and his family to be preserved. Also, this covenant is particular to Noah: it has stipulations and penalties that apply only to Noah at this particular time. However, in chapter 9 God broadens the scope of the covenant:

“Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. And I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.” (Genesis 9:9-17)

The parties to the covenant are now God and all that is alive upon the earth. God promises never to destroy the earth by flood again, and sets a bow in the sky as a sign of the covenant. This is the first time a sign accompanies a covenant, which has led many theologians to search for signs to accompany other covenants. While occasionally signs are provided (e.g., circumcision given to Abraham), this is not always the case (e.g., the

Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7 did not have an accompanying sign).²⁶ At the beginning of chapter 9, God gives commandments to Noah with regard to respecting life: do not eat the life-blood of an animal (9:4), and the murderer must pay with his own life since he has destroyed that which has been made in God's image (9:6). Further, Noah and his family are to propagate life, filling the earth with their offspring (9:1, 7).

This covenant with its promises and commands for preservation and sustenance of life was more than just salvation for Noah and his family. As Nehemiah Coxe pointed out:

The salvation of the whole church was included in it and wholly depended on it since the promised seed which would break the serpent's head was not yet brought into the world. Therefore, if all mankind had now been destroyed, the first and great promise (which was a revelation of the sum of the covenant of redemption) would have failed, and so the whole covenant to which it belonged would have been evacuated and made of no effect.²⁷

Indeed, Robertson characterizes this covenant as a "covenant of preservation,"²⁸ since in it God graciously saves humanity through His sovereign election of a particular family, and therefore keeps hope alive in the one to come who will finally put an end to sin and death. Peter makes the correlation between the preservation of souls in Noah's ark, and the salvation through Christ (1 Peter 3:18-22), and the association is appropriate since the ark of salvation for Noah and his family indeed foreshadows the one who was to come and redeem a people for Himself.

Just as the grace of God is evident in His desire to save Noah and his family from God's righteous judgment, so His grace to His people will persist. Robertson points out that the judgment seat in Revelation 4:3 upon which Christ sits in judgment is encircled

²⁶Witsius devotes a whole chapter to the sacraments of the covenant of works (Witsius, Volume 1, pp. 104-117), for example, identifying four items in the garden of Eden that would serve as signs. It is the view of this writer that looking for such signs is not necessary, especially when the Scriptural model for covenants does not require them, and the text itself does not associate signs with a particular covenant.

²⁷Nehemiah Coxe, "A Discourse of the Covenants," in Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, Francisco Orozco (eds.), *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ* (Palmdale, Ca: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), p. 65.

²⁸Robertson, pp. 109 ff.

by a rainbow. “What a joy it should be to the true sharer of God’s covenantal grace in Christ that the sign and seal of God’s good purposes arches the place of his final disposition.”²⁹

The Abrahamic Covenant

And He said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.”

He said, “O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?”

So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror *and* great darkness fell upon him.

It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, *there appeared* a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite" (Genesis 15:7-12; 17-21).

Abraham had just come out from Egypt, having separated from Lot, and was making his way with Sarah to the land that God intended to show him. In a vision, God promised to Abraham that He would make his descendants to be numerous, to which Abraham pointed out that he was childless and hence all that was his would go to Eliezer of Damascus. God assured him that this would not happen, and that Sarah would indeed give him an heir. To solidify this promise to Abraham, God makes a covenant with him. What is particularly striking about the covenant God makes with Abraham is the fact that God puts Himself in the position of the lesser party by passing between the pieces of the animals laid out by Abraham at God’s instruction (15:17), thus binding Himself to Abraham by a blood oath.³⁰ God will, without doubt, fulfill His promise to Abraham that

²⁹Robertson, p. 124.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 130: “By dividing animals and passing between the pieces, participants in a covenant pledged themselves to life and death. These actions established an oath of self-malediction. If they should break the commitment involved in the covenant, they were asking that their own bodies be torn in pieces just as the animals had been divided ceremonially.”

his descendents will be as numerous as the stars and they will possess the land that God will give them. Both of these promises were temporal in nature, but, as was to be seen, would find spiritual, not earthly fulfillment. His physical descendents would certainly be numerous, but his spiritual descendents through the old and then the new covenant would be more than he could ever have counted. As for the land promise, Hebrews 11:13-16 indicates that neither he nor his children came into possession of the land, and it was, indeed, a “better country, that is, a heavenly one” that they sought.³¹

While Genesis 15 records the institution of the covenant with Abraham, the seal of the covenant is not given until Genesis 17. Robertson suggests that it was Abraham's failure to trust God and produce a son by Hagar that precipitated the need for a permanent reminder to Abraham of God's covenant with him and His faithfulness.³² The seal given to Abraham was the act of circumcision, which was to be performed on all his male offspring and his servants—any boy born into his household—when they reached eight days old (Genesis 17:1-14). This would induct them into the covenant, making them participants in the promise given to Abraham.

The fact that the covenant sign is given not just to Abraham, who clearly had faith (Genesis 15:6), but to his infants and those born under his roof who could not express faith, is seen as significant in terms of the new covenant. That topic will be addressed below; for now, it is sufficient to acknowledge that circumcision was the given sign of entry into God's covenant family.³³ The importance of this covenant cannot be

³¹ See Hebrews 11:7-16, and also Reymond's note on this (n. 19, pp. 513-515). Berkof states: “The covenant with Abraham already included a symbolic element. On the one hand it had reference to temporal blessings, such as the land of Canaan, a numerous offspring, protection against and victory over the enemies; and on the other, it referred to spiritual blessings. It should be borne in mind, however, that the former were not co-ordinate with, but subordinate to, the latter. These temporal blessings did not constitute an end in themselves, but served to symbolize and typify spiritual and heavenly things. The spiritual promises were not realized in the natural descendants of Abraham as such, but only in those who followed in the footsteps of Abraham.” (Berkof, p. 296)

³²Robertson, p. 147.

³³Circumcision also becomes symbolic of spiritual cleansing, renewal, and insight, though it must be noted that the circumcision spoken of in this way is one of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; et al.). Unbelievers and the ungodly are referred to in the Old Testament as “uncircumcised of heart” (see, for example, Leviticus 26:41 and Jeremiah 9:26). So, as Paul indicates in Romans 4:10-11, physical circumcision was for Abraham, not just a sign of God's covenant faithfulness to Abraham and his seed, but it was also a seal of the faith that was Abraham's prior to being circumcised.

overstated. Abraham is considered the father of “those of the Law” as well as those “of the faith of Abraham” (Romans 4:16), and “our forefather according to the flesh” (Romans 4:1). He was the father of the Old Testament patriarchs (Acts 7:8), and through them the covenant promise made by God to him was passed down, memorialized in the physical act of circumcision.

While it is true that those who received the sign of circumcision were recipients of the covenant, one must acknowledge that not all the circumcised were heirs of Abraham’s promise. Paul Jewett cites the examples of Ishmael, born to Abraham through Hagar, and the sons Abraham had with Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2), in this regard. Genesis 25:5 says that Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac, and sent these others away to the east. One would presume that if God made no distinction to Abraham with regard to which of his sons he was to circumcise (that is to say, He did not say “only your children with Sarah”), therefore, all of these sons were given the covenant symbol of circumcision. Yet, the families and nations that they bore were not included in the covenant promise.³⁴ Further, the Old Testament does not know of someone who received the sign of the covenant that then forfeited his right to that sign by apostasy or some other sin. As descendants of Abraham, every child had a right to be circumcised, regardless of their own faith or the faith of their parents.³⁵ And yet it was not circumcision that made the person righteous in the sight of God, but their faith.

The Mosaic Covenant

Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. ‘Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” So

³⁴See Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978; reprinted 1980), pp. 99-101. Indeed, in Galatians 4:22-31, Paul uses this very point to draw his readers’ attention to the fact that the children of the free woman are children of promise, born according to the Spirit, and not children of the outcast bondwoman who shall not be an heir with the son of the freewoman.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 101.

Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. (Exodus 19:3-7)

God has just delivered the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh and miraculously transported them through the Red Sea. He now calls Moses to Himself on Mount Sinai where He re-establishes the covenant with His people, and sets forth the commandments by which they are to live.

The centerpiece of the Mosaic covenant is, without doubt, the Ten Commandments. While it is tempting to regard these as being a new set of stipulations beyond what was given under Abraham, this set of instructions was, however, already known and required.³⁶ The foundation for the Mosaic covenant was, in fact, the Abrahamic covenant, since it was because of this that God heard the cries of the Israelites in the first place (Exodus 2:24). Robertson points out that the concept of covenant is always the larger one, “always taking precedence over law. Covenant binds persons; externalized legal stipulations represent one mode of administration of the covenantal bond.”³⁷

The Mosaic covenant was not, however, merely an affirmation of existing covenant promises, nor was it a re-stating of existing legal requirements. Berkhof lists the following distinctive features of the Mosaic covenant: a) the binding together of, for want of better terms, “Church” and “State”—to be a part of the religious community was to be a part of the political entity; b) the formalizing and centralizing of the law of God, both the “Moral Law,” as set in stone by the finger of God,³⁸ and the various ceremonial and judicial laws that would guide and govern the community³⁹; c) the organization of

³⁶See, for example, Genesis 35:2-3; Genesis 4:8-12; Genesis 20:3; Exodus 16:22-23; Genesis 44:8.

³⁷Robertson, p. 171. Berkhof makes the same point (Berkhof, p. 298).

³⁸Deuteronomy 5:1-22 indicates that while God gave numerous laws to Moses on Sinai, it was only the Ten Commandments that He wrote on stone. This is not without significance, since all the other ceremonial laws and judicial laws would pass away with the coming of the new covenant; these ten sayings, however, would endure, as they had since the beginning of creation.

³⁹Berkhof also points out that the conditional element added to the laws did not pertain to one’s standing with regard to salvation, but with regard to the covenant community and the enjoyment of the external benefits and blessings that came with obedience. In this regard, it would be wrong to consider this a re-institution of the covenant of works (Berkhof, p. 298).

ceremonies, the institution of priests, and the introduction of the various external ceremonies that marked Israel's religious observance; d) the establishment of the moral, judicial, and ceremonial laws as the rule of life for God's people.⁴⁰

Unlike the covenant of works, the Mosaic covenant sees God dealing with a sinful people who need God's law spelled out to them. The laws and ceremonies are to serve to the people as reminders of their sinful condition, and to serve as types of the redemption to come (Galatians 3:24). The previous covenants were neither superseded nor abrogated; God's gracious dealings with Abraham were not forgotten. The Mosaic covenant was essentially the same as the Abrahamic covenant, just with a different form.

⁴¹ Obedience to God had been a covenantal requirement from the time of Adam, so the fact that there are laws associated with the Mosaic covenant is not surprising. What is unique is the nature of those laws, and what they meant in terms of the development of the covenant community, and the fact that in summarizing God's will the Mosaic Law "advances positively the revelation of God's purposes in redemption,"⁴² in that it shows man his sin, and helps him to recognize his true standing before God.

The Davidic Covenant

"Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Berkof., 297.

⁴²Robertson, p. 186.

him, as I took *it* away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.””” (2 Samuel 7:8-16)

As already noted, there is no mention of the term “covenant” anywhere in this covenant’s inauguration passage (2 Samuel 7), however Psalm 89:3 and Jeremiah 32:21 certainly refer to it as such. For this reason, there can be no argument that, Scripturally speaking, God is here making a covenant with David. At this point in his life, David had been crowned king of Israel, taken Jerusalem, and brought the ark of Lord to rest there. An unprecedented period of peace reigns as God binds Himself to David in a way that is both important to David, and to those who would receive the benefits of the promise in generations to come.

First God reiterates to David how He has been with him, and will continue to be with him, making his name great and establishing His people, so they will no longer fear either having to live a nomadic existence as they had in the wilderness, or the threat of enemies invading and taking over their land. God then tells David that He will make him a house—an unexpected turn-around, especially since David had just expressed guilt that he lived in a cedar house while the ark of the Lord dwelt in a tent (2 Samuel 7:2). David wanted to be the one building a house for the Lord, but the Lord’s intention was to establish for David not a brick-and-mortar structure, but a dynasty where David’s throne will last for eternity. The structure for the Lord would be completed by David’s offspring, who shall also reign. God will have a father-son relationship with the kings of David’s line,⁴³ experiencing parental chastening, but never wanting for His love.

The covenantal structure in this passage has God and David (and the seed of David) as the parties. The covenant promises from God have to do with the establishment of David’s line and kingdom, and the relationship between David’s house and God. As always, the assumed requirement is obedience, with a stated penalty of chastisement. Interestingly, God affirms His love for David’s line even in the midst of sin, and this is exemplified when Solomon sinned and God punished him by giving his throne to someone not of David’s line—but He gave one of the tribes to Solomon’s son to

⁴³See also Psalm 2:7.

rule so that God's covenant promise would not be broken (1 Kings 11:13). Again and again, God brings judgment and punishment upon the line of David for their sin, but He consistently protects David's line and Jerusalem, David's royal city (e.g., 1 Kings 15:1-4; 2 Kings 8:16-19; 2 King 19:29-34).

Manasseh's reign appeared to be the final straw, and despite the fact of God's covenant promises regarding the line of David and the city of Jerusalem, God finally declared that He was going to remove Judah and cast off Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:26-27). While it is true that David's line at that point had reigned for over four hundred years—a remarkable achievement in the ancient world—God's promise was for a perpetual kingdom. Had God failed to keep His covenant promise?

One must bear in mind the fact that God is the covenant maker, and the covenant promises He made to David stretch back to the Garden of Eden, and through the promise made to Abraham where He would extend his seed throughout the earth. Psalm 2, which parallels 2 Samuel 7 in speaking of the Davidic rule, appears to provide a spiritual backdrop to this covenant. While in 2 Samuel 7 God speaks of David and his successors, Psalm 2 refers to one named as God's son to whom will be given all the nations. Just as Abraham really sought a city whose foundation is God (Hebrews 11:10), so the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant was not to find a temporal fulfillment. That the earthly manifestation of the rule of David would one day end could be seen, perhaps, as inevitable. However, there would come One from the line of David who would establish His throne eternally, and gather to Himself an innumerable people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. As Peter announced to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost:

“Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,

“SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.” Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:29-36)

The New Covenant

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Jeremiah lived toward the end of the seventh century and beginning of the sixth century B.C., just prior to the Babylonian exile and the end of the Davidic line. This fact alone makes the prophetic words of Jeremiah 31:31-34 that much more intriguing. The prophet is looking forward to a coming day when a new covenant will be established between God and His people, one that is not like the one He made with Moses (and presumably Abraham). In this new covenant, the law will not be external, written on stone, but will be inscribed upon the hearts of His people. There will be no need to teach God’s people to know Him, because they all will. There will be forgiveness of sin, and a lasting relationship between those in the new covenant and their God.

As one looks at the words of Jeremiah 31, it is easy to think that by “new covenant” the prophet foresees simply a replacement covenant. It is important, however, to recognize that there is continuity and discontinuity between the “old covenant” and the “new covenant” spoken of here.

For the points of continuity, one needs to recall primarily the promises made. God’s intention throughout the scope of the covenant of grace has always been the same: the redemption of His people. In Eden He promised the crushing of the serpent by the

seed of Eve; through Noah He promised preservation and grace to His own; with Abraham He promised a multitude of offspring and the establishment of a people for Himself; with Moses, He underscored the sinfulness of man, their need to look to their Lord for salvation, and He provided types and shadows of that salvation. In David, God raised up a king after His own heart, through whose line would come the promised Savior, and gave promises that applied to David, but pointed beyond him. Running through all of this was the thread of God's love and care for His people, and His gracious dealings with them. Throughout it was their faith, not their righteous works that indicated their devotion to God. Many within the covenant did not have such faith: indeed, "[f]or every David, there were a dozen Ahabs, though all were part of the Old Covenant."⁴⁴

It is here that the major discontinuity between the old covenant and the new rests. For all the promises and blessings of God's former covenant dealings with His people, these covenant administrations had a major failing that Jeremiah draws attention to in 31:32. Through the prophet, God declares that the new covenant would be "not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them." God's covenant people were habitual covenant breakers. The cause of the problem is indicated by the solution:

"...I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."
(Jeremiah 31:33-34)

The problem with old covenant Israel was that they did not truly know God. That is not to say none of them did. Indeed, Moses, Joshua, David, and others could claim to know God. David declared that the law of the Lord was in his heart (Psalm 40:8), and God,

⁴⁴James R. White, "The Newness of the New Covenant (Part I)" in Reformed Baptist Theological Review, 1, no. 2 (2004): 159.

through Isaiah, addressed the righteous as “a people in whose heart in My law” (Isaiah 51:7). However, as noted above, for every one righteous person for whom these things were true, there were many for whom they were not true. The bearers of the covenant sign were predominantly those who did not know God, and for whom the law of God was simply a set of rules and ceremonies with no personal significance.

In the new covenant, says Jeremiah, every participant will have the law in his or her heart; they all will be God’s people, and all will know the Lord. Also, forgiveness of sin will be for each of them, “from the least to the greatest”—in fact, this forgiveness of sin is the basis upon which they will know God. As alluded to in Genesis 3, the sin issue will be finally dealt with for all those in the new covenant.

The writer to the Hebrews uses this passage in the broader context of establishing the main thesis of his letter: the superiority of Christ over “every aspect of the old Judaism,”⁴⁵ in order to combat Judaizers trying to tempt those within the church back to the old ceremonial practices and judicial laws of the old covenant. According to the writer, Christ has “obtained a more excellent ministry” than the old covenant priests, “by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.”⁴⁶ Jeremiah 31 explains why the new covenant is better than the old, and why the promises are better.

Verse 13 of Hebrews 8 says that “He has made the first [covenant] obsolete.” This must be understood within the context of Hebrews 8 and the apologetic issue the writer is addressing. The ceremonial and judicial requirements of the old covenant no longer apply; they have passed away with the coming of the new covenant. Christ is a better mediator than the old covenant priests, and His ministry is a more excellent one. The new covenant is enacted on better promises, not that God’s covenant promises were empty, but that in Christ, the promise of the new covenant is the fulfillment and guarantee of that which was promised throughout all manifestations of the covenant of

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 146.

⁴⁶The Greek term for “better” in both instances here, *κρείττων*, means better by kind, not simply by degree. The new covenant is not just an upgrade to the old covenant, substantially the same but expanded in scope; it is substantially new.

grace: “I will be your God and you shall be my people.”⁴⁷ Unlike the old covenant, every member of the new covenant can claim this promise as an absolute fact.

The new covenant is mediated by Christ. At the Last Supper, He presented the cup to His disciples and declared: “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). The significance of these words must not be overlooked. It is Christ’s blood that He was about to shed that guarantees the new covenant promise. All those entering into the new covenant do so through the blood of Christ; and if the blood of Christ is sufficient to save, then all those who participate in the covenant are saved. In other words, all those that are Christ’s (Matthew 1:21)—all who are counted among His elect—are those for whom He died (John 6:37; 10:14-15). These and these alone belong to the new covenant, since the promises held out in Jeremiah 31:33-34 could apply to none other than these.

Conclusion

The biblical doctrine presented in Covenant Theology has major implications for one’s theology as a whole. Covenant Theology presents Adam as the federal head of mankind,⁴⁸ in covenant with his Creator, charged with obedience. Since Adam failed to keep that simple commandment, he fell, and along with him all of his posterity. This means that all of mankind is in a broken covenant relationship with God, which is the foundation of the hostility that now exists between the unrepentant sinner and his Lord. In subsequent covenants, the righteous requirements of God are spelled out, as is His love for those who show their love for Him through their faith. The depth of man’s sin is severe, requiring the coming of a Mediator who would repair the damage done by Adam by keeping the commandments he failed to keep, and by substituting the disobedience of

⁴⁷As Samuel Waldron points out, this phrase gives thematic unity to the covenants, and is used in Genesis 17:7-8; Exodus 25:8, 6:6-7; 2 Samuel 7:14; and 2 Chronicles 23:16. See Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 3rd ed. (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1999), p. 109.

⁴⁸The statement Paul makes in Romans 5 where he parallels Adam and Christ, and the fact that through Adam all sinned, just as in Christ all in Him receive salvation (10-14) to this writer is very compelling Scriptural proof of Adam’s federal headship of mankind. It is interesting to observe that many of those that want to deny Adam’s federal headship with regard to sin and the Fall nevertheless want to claim Christ’s federal headship with regard to righteousness and salvation. According to Romans 5, one cannot have one without the other.

His people for His obedience and taking upon Himself the punishment for their disobedience. By doing this, Christ becomes the federal head of all those who put their faith in Him. Simply put, as stated before, Covenant Theology is just the gospel.

Another theological implication of Covenant Theology is that there is no such thing as a separation between Israel and the Church. If God had planned from eternity past to save a people to Himself, and if, as Covenant Theology teaches, each successive covenant in the Old Testament builds upon the previous covenant, re-affirming and adding to previous promises, then it makes sense that the new covenant in Christ is the fulfillment of those covenants, and all that was intended in the Old Testament is realized in the New.⁴⁹ God's plan was what we know today as "the Church"; the nation of Israel was simply part of God's means to arrive at this end.

A final implication of Covenant Theology, especially as it has been presented above, is that the progression of God's covenantal outworking with His people has refined His covenant people from a national body consisting of believers and unbelievers, to an international body consisting solely of believers—the elect. In light of this, only those who profess faith in Christ should be considered part of the covenant people of God. If one considers the sign of entry into the new covenant to be baptism,⁵⁰ then one should not administer the sign of the new covenant upon those who have not professed faith in Christ. To do so is to undermine the significance of the new covenant promises, since one is declaring that someone who is not regenerate has been purchased by the blood of Christ and is now in a position where he knows God, and has forgiveness of sin. Only those who know the Lord, as explained in Jeremiah 31, are part of the new

⁴⁹In any case, if one believes in a sovereign God who has foreordained all that is to happen, the Dispensational "parenthesis" that is the Church Age makes no sense. Indeed, the whole idea of God inaugurating new covenants because the previous ones "failed" seems to mitigate against the notion of a God for Whom "all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28) and for whom "the king's heart is like channels of water" in His hand, and "He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1).

⁵⁰One could argue that the "seal" of the new covenant is actually, biblically speaking, the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Technically there should be no argument that when the Spirit regenerates a person's heart, and that person professes faith in Christ, they are part of God's covenant people even before any external sign has been applied (Luke 23:42-43). However, baptism is a biblically mandated act that is to be performed on those who profess faith (Matthew 28:19), and as such, can be looked upon as an external sign of reception into the new covenant.

covenant, and are, therefore, the only eligible candidates for baptism, lest one cast the blood of Christ so broadly that it promises redemption to all, and fails for many.

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