

*"Covenant theology at the utmost, is forgiveness of sins and divine favor enjoyed; and all that concerns their new position in the Lord Jesus Christ is ignored, or alas! guarded against as dangerous.*

*"Men are placed under the New Covenant which does not go beyond remission of sins and the law written on the heart. But being new creations in the Lord Jesus, and knowing it by the Holy Spirit, and what it involves now, has all but dropped out of their creeds." -- J.N.D.*

*"We are to come 'to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant' (Heb. 12:24). We are not come to the New Covenant, but to Jesus the Mediator of it. We are associated with Him who is the Mediator; that is a much higher thing than if merely come to the Covenant. The Lord Jesus will make this New Covenant with Israel and Judah on earth." -- H.H.S.*

# The Subtle Errors of Covenant/Calvinist Theology

*Dan R Smedra*

Many regularly write us asking for a brief explanation of **Covenant Theology**. A *brief* explanation is no easy task. The following is provided as an introduction for those desiring to be a serious student of the Word. Keep in mind that a great deal of diversity, including disagreement and confusion, surrounds what constitutes the covenant system of theology—even amongst those who consider themselves *Covenant* in orientation. No few civil wars have occurred over the meaning of *sola fide*. As one well-known, modern-day Covenantist writes:

*...covenant theologians are wandering in a fog—that is to say, for four hundred years; they have wandered in a fog. Although covenant theology as a separate field is as old [young] as the Reformation, and specifically the Calvinist wing, it has never been definitively outlined before. [1] [bracket inclusion mine]*

## In the Beginning

As with all efforts to systemize biblical revelation, **Covenant theology** is a method for organizing and understanding the Bible based on certain *presuppositions*. A *presupposition* is a conscious or unconscious assumption about reality, and these assumptions are antecedent to our normal reasoning processes, as well as emotional responses. Without exception, for good or ill, we all have our presuppositions.

For example, the most popular and false presupposition is the *autonomous* nature of man. The public is repetitively told they have "free will" and this assumption autonomous freedom results in a gross misinterpretation of Scripture. However take heart, based on Christ's promise recorded in John 14:26, the Holy Spirit sovereignly sees that the growing, new-creation Christian progressively receives a changed perspective. False presuppositions are displaced with God's perspective. The Apostle Paul encourages us to "...not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing" of our mind. (Romans 12:2).

With all varieties of Covenant theology, there is an obsession for an **overriding continuity** or **unified purpose** for the sixty-six books (Canon) which comprise Holy Scriptures. Rather than having wisdom to discern the real difference among things which resemble one another, the Covenantist is driven to find an "integrating" principle to produce theological uniformity, all in the hope of discovering "what the Bible is really all about." Their "key" is the concept that absolutely every relationship between God and man must take the form of a *covenant* or *legal agreement*, without exception. From this notion, however logical, has

arisen their apocryphal and overarching *Covenant of Works* and *Covenant of Grace*. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote:

*The theological terms, Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace, do not occur in Scripture. If they are to be sustained it must be wholly apart from Biblical authority. What is known as Covenant Theology builds its structure on these two covenants and is, at least, a recognition—though inadequate—of the truth that the creature has responsibility toward his Creator. Covenant Theology has Cocceius (1603-1669) as its chief exponent. "He taught that before the Fall, as much as after it, the relation between God and man was a covenant. The first was a Covenant of Works. For this was substituted, after the Fall, the Covenant of Grace..." Upon this human invention of two covenants, Reformed Theology has largely been constructed. [2]*

It must be said that *covenant* plays a very important role in the Old Testament (OT), as well as the Synoptic Gospels. However, biblical covenants pertain to the earth, and God's dealing with his earthly people, Israel. Where covenant theology goes seriously wrong, is their effort, even obsession, to stuff the remainder of the Canon into the straight-jacket of the *covenant* framework. Read that sentence again slowly.

The Gospel of John, Acts, the Epistles, as well as the Book of Revelation, are seen as unfolding OT prophecies of Israel's promised kingdom and nothing more. Thus, the mystery of the Church, the Body of Christ, and other mysteries spoken of by the Apostle Paul, revelations given directly from the Risen Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-12) to the Apostle Paul, cannot for them, be either new or previously unknown—on account of their erroneous presupposition! All Scripture must conform to the Jewish vision found in the OT. Listen to a description of this vision by scholar John W. Cooper of Calvin Theological Seminary:

*The Old Testament is resoundingly this-worldly. The fullest possible existence for a human being is to live an earthly life as God created it to be lived. Health, sufficient material goods, enjoyment of marriage and family, meaningful work, standing in the community, freedom from one's enemies, and above all walking in integrity with the God of the covenant—the Israelite who enjoyed these blessings could exclaim, "It doesn't get any better than this!" When the prophets look forward to the eschatological future, they do not envision heaven for the individual. Their hope is for a New Jerusalem and a new earth, a place where the existence of the Lord's people will again be what it was created to be in the beginning. Human life is tied to the earth. [3] [Underline emphasis mine.]*

Both the Covenant theologian and Covenant system adherent truly believe they are being fair in limiting the NT to the OT. They even have a mantra, "Interpret the New in light of the Old" which they repeat frequently. For many, the New Testament seems to introduce a foreign Greek Platonism—a false dichotomy of *earthly* versus *heavenly*, *flesh* versus *spirit*, etc. Some even go so far as to see this portion of the Canon as corrupted by such Platonism.

Further, a corollary to Covenant theology is **Calvinism**. While Calvinism holds to several biblical tenets, such as unconditional election and sovereign grace, it misinterprets the following Genesis 2:17 passage:

"...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Historically Christendom, to its ruin, has largely minimized the sin consequences of the Fall. However in reaction, the Reformed/Calvinists have also developed and teach an inaccurate theory for the biblical truth of mankind's spiritual death—the death inherited from the first man, Adam. The Calvinistic emphasis often portrays our post-Fall, pre-New Birth condition (Total Depravity) as a state of *total unconsciousness and passivity* (similar to physical death: Lazarus is frequently cited as an example.) rather than *a conscious rebellion and alienation* from God. Later, we'll examine this area of confusion in more detail.

## Historical Roots

As most scholars agree, Covenant theology is a product of the 16th-17th century Reformation. Early leaders such as Johann Heinrich (Henry) Bullinger (1504-1575), Kasper Olevianus (1536-1587), Johannes Wollebius (1586-1629), William Ames (1576-1633), Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), and Hermann Witsius (1636-1708) were instrumental in developing the Covenant view and incorporating it into various creedal confessions. These include the First (1636) and Second (1566) Helvetic Confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Thirty-nine Articles (1571), and the landmark, Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). Dr. Kenneth H. Good remarks:

*The Westminster Confession represents a culmination or perfection of the "Reformed Faith" after it had been tested by and reacted to Romanism, Lutheranism, Arminianism, Anglicanism, and Anabaptism. It speaks with the precision and depth of Puritanism, and it incorporates the full-grown flower of a developed Covenant theology. [3]*

While Covenant theology is typically deemed synonymous with Calvinism, Reformed, or Puritanism; similar covenant constructs can also be found in Catholicism, Anglican/Episcopal, Methodism and other Anglo-Catholic denominations. Amongst the Reformed/Calvinists there are numerous variations and sub-groups: e.g, Princeton, Dutch Reformed, Southern Reformed, Reformed Baptist, New Covenant, Reconstructionist, to name just a few. At present, major civil wars rage amongst these Calvinists. See this insider's explanation: [\*\*TOWARD A CATHOLIC CALVINISM.\*\*](#)

## The Two Overarching Covenants

Covenant theology views God's revealed Word through the presuppositional lens of two overarching covenants.

*Covenant theology is a system of interpreting the Scriptures on the basis of two covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Some covenant theologians specify three covenants: works, redemption, and grace. Covenant theology teaches that God initially made a covenant of works with Adam, promising eternal life for obedience and death for disobedience. Adam failed, and death entered the human race. God, however, moved to resolve man's dilemma by entering into a covenant of grace through which the problem of sin and death would be overcome. Christ is the ultimate mediator of God's covenant of grace. [4]*

However, there is a very serious downside to this approach. Hear Dr. Chafer again:

*A theology which penetrates no further into Scripture than to discover that in all ages God is immutable in His grace toward penitent sinners, and constructs the idea of a universal church, continuing through the ages, on the one truth of immutable grace, is not only disregarding vast spheres of revelation but is reaping the unavoidable confusion [fog] and misdirection which part-truth engenders. The outworking of divine grace is not standardized, though the Covenant idea of theology would make it so...*

*A form of Covenant Theology which would thread all of Jehovah's purposes and undertakings upon His one attribute of grace could hardly avoid confusion of mind [fog] in matters related to His varied objectives. Covenant Theology, in consistency with its man-made premise, asserts its inventions respecting an Old Testament church, which, it is claimed, is an integral part of the New Testament Church and on the ground that, since God's grace is one unchanging attribute, its accomplishments must be the realization of one standardized ideal.*

*A Covenant Theology engenders the notion that there is but one soteriology and one eschatology, and that ecclesiology, such as it is conceived to be, extends from the Garden of Eden to the Great White Throne. The insuperable problems in exegesis which such fanciful suppositions create are easily disposed of by ignoring them.*

*Covenantism, which has molded the major theological concepts for many generations, recognizes no distinction as to ages, therefore can allow for no distinctions between law and grace. This dominating attitude of Covenantism must account for the utter neglect of life-truth in all their works of theology. No more representative theological dictum from the Covenant viewpoint has been formed than the Westminster Confession of Faith, which valuable and important document recognizes life-truth only to the point of imposing the Ten Commandments on Christians as their sole obligation, this in spite of the teachings of the Pauline Church Epistles which assert that the law was never given to Gentiles or Christians, and that the latter has been saved and delivered from it--actually dead to it (Gal. 2:19). [5]*

For additional lucid comments by Chafer, see [Dr. Chafer on Covenant Theology](#) compiled by Miles J. Stanford.

## **A Flawed Foundation**

For nearly four centuries, the Reformed/Calvinist tradition has faithfully battled the insidious errors of Christian humanism and [philosophic indeterminism](#)--the theological foundation of the entire [Anglo-Catholic tradition](#). The Protestant Reformation's rejection of these Enlightenment-based views laid the groundwork for a [more](#) accurate and biblical view of grace and redemption. However, serious flaws still exist in the Calvinist's soteriological [emphasis](#) which in turn result in deficient and unscriptural views. [NOTE: These generalizations serve an important purpose but are not meant to suggest that the issues are clearly black and white. I have met several Reformed/Calvinists who favor the more "moderate" views of compatibilism. See [Human Freedom and the Sovereignty of God](#).]

1) The various creeds of the Reformed/Calvinist realm [e.g., Westminster Standards] rightly mention the "corruption" of man's nature. However, the [focus](#) of this tradition is overwhelmingly upon *transgression of law, individual sins, and justification by imputed righteousness* to the exclusion of the believer's union with Christ. For example, hear the words of a contemporary "Reformed" Episcopal minister:

*Romans 5 basically says that we become Christians in essentially the same way we became sinners: By having the merits or demerits of one covenant head imputed to all those who are in him as their representative. The funny thing is that I never hear any complaints about our sin being imputed to the innocent Christ, or Christ's righteousness being imputed to the guilty sinner. We like that just fine. But we don't like Adam's sin being imputed to us. But if we are not to be regarded as in Adam, we cannot be regarded as being in Christ, either, for the principle of imputation is the same.*

While this minister is correct as far as he goes; he doesn't go far enough. The curse of Sola Imputation is its failure to see the *ontological* effects of the Fall upon the First Adam, and subsequently upon us. Their doctrine of so-called "Total Depravity" is not really [total](#)!

*In the Reformation there was, through grace, a great deliverance. The ground-work of Christianity was recovered; namely, justification by faith. But though this was restored, it was not maintained that the old Adamic man was crucified on the Cross, and hence they only refused the exaction of Popery, but considered the flesh as still before God. Refusing the*

*exaction was right; but the retention of that on which the exaction could be made, the old man was and is the weakness of the Reformation. JBS*

Romans 5:13 and 14 state that "before the law was given, SIN was in the world" and "death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses." God's adding of a legal or forensic dimension (law) to amplify man's responsibility and our understanding of the gravity of depravity does not fully deal with the problem of our SIN. SIN is the source of our sins—it is the fallen, animating life-force ("flesh") inherited from the first Adam.

"When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image..." (Genesis 5:3).

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men..." (Romans 5:12).

2) Many Reformed/Calvinists portray humanity's post-Fall, pre-New Birth condition (Total Depravity) as a state of *total unconsciousness and passivity* rather than *separation* from God. This erroneous emphasis is reactive in origin and largely a carryover from their century-old battle with Roman Catholic and Arminian heresies. Consequently, it creates serious problems relative to: a) the true condition of lost sinners and the preaching of the Gospel, b) differences between the effectual calling, the New Birth, and the role of faith, and c) the believer's relationship to his indwelling nature of sin (flesh).

a) In Ephesians 2:1, the Apostle Paul tells us, "As for you, you were *dead* in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to *live* when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are *disobedient*." How is it that the words "dead," "live," and "disobedient" can be used in the same sentence to simultaneously describe our prior lost condition, if the meaning of *dead* carries the idea of being *unconscious* or *passive*? More to the point, Miles Stanford remarks:

*Their [Reformed/Calvinist] illustration of this total inability [depravity] is a man physically dead, who cannot see, hear, speak or move.*

However, "Although the sinner is dead in sins, he is not an unresponsive corpse, he is not annihilated; rather, he is separated from God. He is certainly alive enough to adamantly reject the Saviour! [8]"

As mentioned above, the reason our Calvinist brothers overstate their case is due to the manipulative way their (and our) humanistic adversaries have argued in favor of "free will" and their loyalty to defend the biblical truth of the "grace of God." Nevertheless, this emphasis has proven to progressively cause an imbalance which over time undermines the Scriptural truth of both volition and responsibility. Further, their deficient view of sin opens the door to religious self-righteousness and pride and also closes the door to considering possible error on their part. To suggest that a Calvinist loosen his grip on his theology is like asking King Edward I ("*Longshanks*") to relinquish control of Scotland.

In time, preaching the Gospel to *unconscious* sinners makes less and less sense to the logical Calvinist. If he doesn't pull back, he will assuredly slide into *hyper-Calvinism* and may decide to give up communicating the Good News altogether. But Romans 1:18-23 and others teach us that those who are "dead in transgressions" have retained a level of both *consciousness* and *conscience* about God and His creation. His separation from God (spiritual death) and bondage to sin renders him a rebellious inhabitant in a lonely and silent cosmos, a slave to sin and self, but not a cadaver.

b) All Christians who adhere to sovereign grace affirm the truth that "No one can come to Me [Christ] unless the Father who sent Me draws him." (John 6:44). However, Reformed/Calvinists incorrectly view the



action of the Father *drawing* the sinner to the Savior as *evidence* of regeneration—i.e., the New Birth. No room is allowed for any human response before regeneration, lest some religious humanist get a meritorious 'toe in the door'. Representative of this emphasis Dr. Bob Wright states:

*Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, all are born spiritually dead in their sin nature, and therefore require regeneration to a life they do not naturally possess.*

*The doctrine of total depravity states that fallen human nature is morally incapable of responding to the gospel without being caused to do so by divine intervention (1 Cor. 2:12-15). [OK, so far] Once the soul is sovereignly regenerated, it willingly responds in saving faith to God's command to repent and believe the gospel, but not before. [Now, not OK]*

*He regenerates the human heart, infusing divine life into it, thus enabling the wicked to believe, even though they were formerly enslaved to the habit of rebellion.*

*God regenerates each elect person so that he or she invariably responds willingly to the gospel. [9]*

In spite of many examples from both Old and New Testaments of God controlling the actions of the unregenerate, the Reformed/Calvinists require an "*initial infusion of the resurrection life of Christ into the human soul*" for John 6:44 to be effective. But think for a moment about the 22nd chapter of Numbers. The false prophet Balaam heard the Lord speak, his ass spoke, and both he and his ass saw an angel all without the benefit of Calvinistic regeneration. Supernatural? Yes! New Birth? No. Strangely, while the Calvinist prides himself in being a stalwart defender of God's sovereignty, he limits what God the Father is capable of doing. He erroneously requires that the doctrine of effectual calling be made synonymous with the New Birth. Cannot the Father's enablement of the sinner to "*believe the Word in order to accept the Savior*" be seen as separate while related, and not confused with the New Birth itself?

c) Given his presuppositions, anemic understanding of sin, and exaggerated view of spiritual death, the Reformed/Calvinist is nearly guaranteed to misinterpret the Apostle Paul's teachings in the New Testament. Often, Paul's epistles are viewed as speaking exclusively to the subject of the believer's justification, while his teaching regarding identification with Christ is ignored, twisted, or treated as an addendum. To help rectify the serious deficiency, the Reformed/Calvinist has invented the doctrines of "the third use of the Law" as well as "Lordship Salvation". The essence of Reformed/Calvinist regeneration is that of *change*, rather than the biblical view of *exchange*--the life inherited from the first Adam displaced by the life of the Lord Jesus Christ--the Last Adam. Thus, they claim believers have only one nature (one life changed from old to new) rather than two natures (the old and new animating life-forces, co-resident).

3) Thus, the Reformed emphasis in regeneration (drawn from prophetic Scriptural references to the Millennial Age) focuses the new-creation Christian largely upon *justification* and *forgiveness of sins*. Their concept of *sanctification* is one of change (as the Law is written upon the heart) and the goal is keeping the Ten Commandments—albeit supernaturally. Paradigmatic of all Reformed theology, David Wendt quotes Greg Bahnsen as saying,

*"There is also a greater confidence to approach God and the glory of the New Covenant is permanent not temporary like that of the Old [Mosaic]. As for power, the New provides 'further and stronger motivation to obey the law', and that obedience is empowered by God."*

Also, due to its eschatological amillennial perspective, Reformed theology to one degree or another sees the Body of Christ fulfilling Israel's New Covenant. Consequently, they attempted to apply the future *millennial regeneration* promised under that covenant to members of the Body of Christ--now! Their non-dispensational theology demands it!

To the degree that they embrace law as their "rule of life", they reject the Lord Jesus Christ's teaching via Paul's in his Epistles regarding *SIN* and *identification*. In spite of their doctrinal superiority over both Romanists and all-flavors of Arminians, the Calvinist's impoverished view of depravity, together with the misapplication of Israel's New Covenant regeneration, seriously cripples believer's walk in the Spirit.

From time-to-time, a Calvinist will loosen his grip on his theology or maybe his theology loosens its grip on him. Reformed pastor Leonard Verduin became suspicious of this deficiency. Regarding the central tenet of the Reformation, he wrote:

*We meet in Luther, to put it theologically, a very heavy emphasis on the forensic aspect of salvation and a correspondingly light emphasis on the moral aspect. Luther was primarily interested in pardon [for sins], rather than in renewal [of life]. His theology [Reformation] was a theology that addresses itself to the problem of guilt [of sins committed], rather than to the problem of pollution [of life inherited from the first Adam]. There is an imbalance in this theology... [6]*

Dr. L. S. Chafer stated it even more precisely:

*The holy character of God is the final and only standard by which moral values may be accurately judged. To the one who disregards God, there are no moral standards other than social custom, or the dictates of an uncertain and perverted conscience. And even these, it will be observed, though indirect, failing, and feeble, are nevertheless reflections of the standards of God. Sin is sinful because it is unlike God. The Larger Catechism (Westminster) declares: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature." However, inasmuch as the law of God may not incorporate all that God's character is and inasmuch as anything will be sinful which contradicts God's character, whether expressed in His law or not, this definition is strengthened when the word character is substituted for the word law. It is true that disobedience of God's law is sin, but it does not follow that sin is restricted to disobedience of law.*

*There is a justification for the fact that the two great doctrines--sin and redemption--go hand in hand. It is sin that has drawn out redemption from the heart of God, and redemption is the only cure for sin. These two realities, in turn, become measurements of each other. Where sin is minimized, redemption is automatically impoverished since its necessity is by so much decreased. The worthy approach to the doctrine of sin is to discover all that is revealed about the sinfulness of sin and then to recognize that God's provided Savior is equal to every demand which sin imposes. It is one of Satan's most effective methods of attack upon the saving work of Christ to soften the voice which is set to proclaim the evil character and effect [and extent] of sin. [7]*

Is it any wonder why the Reformed/Calvinist tradition reduces the Christian life to "law as a rule of life"? Since sin is limited to the concept of law-breaking, the antithesis—holiness, take the logical form of law-keeping. Add to that, their reinforcing concept of Millennial regeneration--i.e., law written on the heart, and it all seems so right!

Further, their non-dispensational, even anti-dispensational, bent guarantees a law-bound experience. In their fleshly effort to keep the law, various forms of ascetic discipline or humanistic psychology are added in hopes of reaching the goal. Thus, the popularity and truck loads of Puritan, neo-Puritan, and behavioral writings in the realm of Christian living.

However, as Paul clearly states, "the strength of sin *IS* the law". Placing Christians under law only results in a protracted Romans 7 experience or even descent into the blatant hypocritical realms of Romans 2:17-24. For a more detailed discussion, see our article entitled [The Law](#).

Also, the following links to these articles written by Christian author, Miles J. Stanford will help clarify the issue.

[The Tragedy of Romans 5:12](#)

[The Adamic Natures](#)

[Our History in the First Adam](#) & [Our History in the Last Adam](#)

For the past 50 years, [Miles J. Stanford](#) has written and published extensively on this and related subjects. Much of his analysis is contained in many published critiques and polemic papers which are available to you on these websites. For a comprehensive account of the believer's relationship to his indwelling sin nature, we invite you to visit Miles' web site--linked to his name above.

### Israel's Covenants and the Apostle Paul's "Mystery"

The devastating consequences of Covenant theology are far-reaching and will not be covered within the brief scope of this paper. However, in addition to problems of this system's foundational presuppositions and erroneous concepts of *sin* and *death*, we wish to touch upon the fact that the Covenant approach totally negates the distinction between earthly Israel and the heavenly Bride of Christ. Hear Roy A. Huebner:

"...instead of the [Covenantist's] mythical 'covenant of grace' being the unifying truth, dispensational truth shows that what unifies Scripture is the unfolding of the nature and glory of God in Christ, manifested in two spheres, the earthly and the heavenly.



By contrast, rather than two separate peoples of God which in a certain sense *mirror* each other, Covenant theology only sees an earthly "spiritual" Israel into which elect Gentiles are grafted, thus eliminating the heavenly position and possessions of the Body of Christ. The heavenly Body of Christ (true Church) becomes "Kingdomized", and her primary role becomes one of bringing 'reformation' to the Earth.





Lewis Sperry Chafer remarked:

*The Covenant theory does retain Israel as such to the time of Christ's death. The Church is thought to be a spiritual remnant within Israel to whom all Old Testament blessings are granted, and the nation as such is allowed to inherit the cursings.*

*The fact that the Bible recognizes an Israel within the nation itself--sometimes termed "the remnant"--has been seized upon by Covenant theologians as a ground for their contention that the Church is the true Israel of the Old Testament. [10]*

Suffice to say, and contrary to Covenant theology, Israel was not, is not, nor ever will be the Church. There exists a substantial antithesis between these two separate entities. Miles Stanford provides bracketed commentary on the Apostle Paul's statements:

*"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my Gospel [1 Cor. 15:3,4] and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the MYSTERY which was kept secret [Israel's New Covenant was well know from the eighth century B.C.] since the world began." (Rom. 16:25).*

*"But I make known to you, brethren that the Gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man [progressively], nor was I taught it [by Jeremiah or Ezekiel], but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ [glorified]." (Gal. 1:11,12). [11]*

Regarding the "mystery," one writer points out:

*...Christians are to be made "joint heirs\* " with Israel. How? Not by displacing Israel or even making the Church a partaker in the EARTHLY promises [physical or spiritual], but by granting the Church the heavenly counterparts of Israel's earthly promises.*

*So now, what do we have? A Church that has replaced Israel? - by no means! Rather, two entities, one heavenly - the Church; and one earthly - Israel, which complement and mirror the other; both of which reflect the glory of God, each in its own respective sphere.*

\* Heirs of the benefits of the Eternal Covenant of Hebrews 13:20.

And along a similar line, Dr. Chafer said:

*It has been indicated, also, that there is in Israel's relationship to Jehovah a truth which parallels whatever may be revealed respecting Christ and the Church.*

*A parallel between the Church as the Bride and Israel's relation to Jehovah is seen in the fact that Israel is said to be the apostate [divorced] wife of Jehovah who is yet to be restored.*

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1. Gary North, "Publisher's Preface," in *That You May Prosper*, Ray R. Sutton, (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987) p. xiv. Mr. North believes that the contents of *That You May Prosper* is very, very unique. He states, "We have waited over three millennia for someone to say plainly: "This is what the Bible is really all about." The author and graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, Ray Sutton has since traversed theonomic realms and has settled in (for the moment-1999) as an ordained Bishop in the Reformed Episcopal Church. [\[Return\]](#)
  2. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Volume IV* (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948) p. 156. [\[Return\]](#)
  3. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000) p. 37, 38. [\[Return\]](#)
  4. Kenneth H. Good, *Are Baptists Reformed?* (Lorain, Ohio: Regular Baptist Heritage Fellowship, 1986) p. 86. [\[Return\]](#)
  5. Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1989) p. 503. [\[Return\]](#)
  6. Chafer, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 156, 311; Vol. VI, p. 167. [\[Return\]](#)
  7. Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1964) p. 12. [\[Return\]](#)
  8. Chafer, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 227, 224. [\[Return\]](#)
  9. Miles J. Stanford, *Sovereignty Plus Responsibility* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: 1998) p. 1,2. [\[Return\]](#)
  10. R.K. McGregor Wright, *NO PLACE for SOVEREIGNTY, What's Wrong with Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996) p. 112, 111, 103. [\[Return\]](#)
  11. Chafer, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 311,312. [\[Return\]](#)
  12. Miles J. Stanford, *Dispensational SALVATIONS* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: 1994) p. 4 [\[Return\]](#)
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Regularly, we receive questions regarding the meaning of Romans 9-11, and in particular 11:17-24. To help readers avoid being drawn into the covenantal spin, we have provided some condensed interpretational comments. See [The Apostle Paul's Olive Tree Analogy](#).

To temporarily wrap up, we hope the foregoing has helped answer your original question about **Covenant Theology**. With the Apostle Paul, our concern is that you not turn "to a different gospel--which is really no gospel [good news] at all," but see the life of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ "formed in you". (Galatians 1:6,7; 4:19). If you would like to provide feedback or comments, please contact us through our [email link](#) <- here. In addition, we've posted a few interesting letters below.

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## ☰ *Letters of Interest* ☰

Dear Dan:

I was given a copy of *The Complete Green Letters* some years ago by a pastor in FL. It didn't say much to me then. However, I successfully turned him into a Calvinist. That caused a split in that Independent Baptist Church.

I moved away and called down there recently to find out that this minister friend of mine divorced his wife and ran off with someone else deserting 3 children. When confronted he said it was God's "sovereign choice." He still pastors but obviously at a different location.

I am sick and tired of the legalism in Calvinism. I have come to realize that I have bought into a "system" rather than what the Bible teaches. I am unimpressed with the Puritans and their prolific writings. They were spiritual naval watchers by and large. Most of my friends in the PCA are leaning toward "high church" liturgy and are quite friendly with Episcopalianism and even Romanism. I have an article from a Catholic source "Sursom Corda" that lists over 50 Protestant ministers trained at Reformed Theological Seminary and Gordon Conwell who have defected to Romanism. At least Romanism is a more consistent place for one who is using legalistic means to secure their salvation. I am sure you have heard the story of Scott Hahn.

I have a hard time with dispensationalism since it says that God literally offered the kingdom to the Jews and that God quickly had to bring the church in to punish Israel, etc, etc. Also, CI Schofield taught that Jews were saved by Lawkeeping. I found all that very confusing and inconsistent.

Is there a paper that clearly lays out a Dispensationalist perspective that shows God as consistent in the area of soteriology? Also, what is "hamartiology"?

Thanks  
[signed]

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Dear Dan,

Through a series of personal trials I have been pressed hard into the Word of God. This began some months before Miles' homegoing. I have never in my whole Christian life of 36 years had such a hunger for His Word as I now have. For this I am thankful. I am continuing to become established in the truth, so I am reading everything that I can possibly find in the "evangelical camp" to ground me in Him and His Word. I of course corresponded with Miles several months before his death, and I have read many of his books, including *THE COMPLETE GREEN LETTERS*. May I add at this point that I am a graduate of Columbia Bible College in Columbia, SC (graduated in 1968), and did some graduate work at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana, so I am much aware of the confusion that exists in the theological world. Especially, am I aware of Covenant Theology and its depressing law-oriented teachings. I suffered under this for many many years. It has been through Miles' teaching, and your website that I have been set free from this error. Thank you so much for your continued and consistent "holding forth the word of life".

Continuing in His Grace,  
Frank J

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Thanks Dan,

You know I see a huge momentum toward Covenant/Reformed Theology today. The Law perspective is appealing to the natural man and fits in well with self improvement and other kinds of hype-oriented, works-based attainment theories -- no different than Dennis Waitly, Earl Nightingale, or Tony Robbins.

The Covenant people are extremely prolific in their writings (just look at Gurnall's 1200+ pages on the *Armour of the Christian*; Richard Baxter's 70+ volumes; John Owen's endless elaborations where he digresses almost in every paragraph to rhapsodize about our state as "worms, worthlessness, etc, etc." This kind of writing chews up reams of paper and gallons of ink.

This is not surprising as law-orientation by nature is quite voluminous, since it spirals and diverges on endless elaborations regarding degrees of holiness or measures of goodness. The Talmud is a huge expansion of the Torah's 613 or so discrete commands. Law-prose can literally go on forever and this level of production tends to intimidate the believer. Faith encourages an outward look and a heavenly perspective. Law insists upon spiritual naval watching, constant measurement and pulse-taking; the search for goodness and power from within (which is impossible) and endless "to-do's" -- all of course through the power of the Holy Spirit -- the typical tack-on slogan to avoid the kind of conclusion that readers might draw, which is the dreaded leaven of the Pharisees -- legalism.

Paul said he knew nothing except Christ and Him crucified. He could have quoted from his own considerable storehouse of knowledge, his own Puritanical John Owen's or Thomas Goodwins if you will, in the form of the Rabbinical teachings but he counted those perspectives as worthless and a distraction to the illustrious work of Christ. He wrote 14 succinct letters in themes of doctrine, instruction; reproof of practical failure, correction of error.

Paul's kind of writing is what is in demand in the business world and for those in highest level of responsibility. It is consistent with our calling as eventual rulers in the next age. Mountains of detail and elaboration are quickly dismissed by executives as worthless speculation. The correspondence that leads to action and production is what drives the business world and the Bible message to the servant-king believers is no different.

It appears that Reformed theologians are increasing and the great light of dispensational teaching from the mid 1800's to the late 1900's is about to go out. After Ryrie and Walvoord, then who? MackIntosh, McClain, Kelly are out of print. Chafer is slandered as an antinomian even though his scholarship and insights are [almost] impeccable. Scofield is branded a heretic while loud-mouthed legalists like Gentry, Rushdoony, DeMar, Sproul, flood the channels with their spiritual cyanide which is the message of works wrapped in irrationalism and antinomies ("you are saved by faith alone, but a faith that is not alone;" "Works are not meritorious but they are essential;" "You are completely dead in sin and a spiritual corpse, but you must pray (that is perform an operational act as a 'lively' corpse) to receive the new birth; "You have only a new nature that loves God, but sinning comes from a beachhead/remnant/flesh/humanness/members kind of source that was fully eradicated but not quite...." "Biblical Law is the road to holiness (regardless of the testimony and demonstration of Israel's failure)." All of these incomprehensible theories are distributed in a scholastic presentation format to unwitting people who gorge on spiritual husks and pods, fill their bellies, then die of spiritual malnutrition. Heavy weight but no nutrition.

I have a friend, Dr. John Robbins of the Trinity Foundation who thinks he is Reformed. Yet, he rails against this irrationalism and calls justification a result of believing the Gospel. He also absolutely dismantles reconstructionism, yet he clutches to his Covenant theology and supralapsarian presuppositions. He doesn't realize that Rushdoony, Bahnsen, Beeke, and others are consistent. Robbins' lucidity is in direct proportion to his own inconsistency with the suppositions of Westminsterism.

Thanks for your ministry Dan. I guess the Lord's rhetorical question "Will the Son of Man find faith in the earth..." is the answer to the patterns I see. Faith will be rare and works-theology will abound.

[signed]

Les:

As you testified...

You *were* wrong in your Wesleyan Arminianism.

As you testified...

You *were* wrong in your Ultradispensationalism.

You rightfully rejected the religious humanism and error, and were led by the Holy Spirit to discover sovereign grace. However, in the process, you picked up something extra-biblical--Covenant theology. In His time, you hopefully will come to see the harmful effects of this interpretational approach.

You say,

"I beg to differ on your preface. Paul, in writing to the Roman church, was writing to a chiefly Gentile church."

Based on the widespread use of OT quotations, together with verses such as 4:1, 7:1, etc., nearly all scholars agree that a) Jews constituted a substantial minority within the congregation, b) Gentiles were highly knowledgeable regarding Judaism, or c) both. Before answering your question regarding one or two "peoples of God", let me focus upon a very subtle Covenantal presupposition in your statements. You write:

In referencing the roots as "the patriarchs", my intent was the *promise of blessing* which flowed down from Abraham through the patriarchs (Isaac and Jacob) to Jacob's children, national Israel, from which came the Christ, through whom we all receive *the blessing*.

The *promise* to the Gentile masses is the same to Israel... [emphasis mine]

Your presupposition is a **unitary** "promise of blessing"; thus you're logically led to see a **unitary** "people". But this covenantal presupposition is neither stated or inferred in any of the OT texts which speak of the Abrahamic promises. In the NT, Paul states that "the promises [plural] were spoken to Abraham and to his Seed." (Gal.3:16).

In Galatians, the Apostle Paul's explains the relationship of the Abrahamic promise of *imputed righteousness* to the Mosaic law covenant. That's the issue there. Similar to his epistle to the Romans, he seeks to maintain that the CAUSE of personal salvation was always election and grace, while the MEANS was always faith. These passages DO show the commonality of the BASIS for redemption of either Jew or Gentile. But they DON'T show the need for a common result or outcome, nor the need to eliminate the Church (the Body and Bride of Christ) as a separate people of God.

I believe: 1) the Church was neither prophesied nor revealed in OT Scriptures, 2) the Church was a complete mystery until revealed doctrinally by Paul, 3) that the suspension of Israel's corporate election was also not revealed in OT Scriptures (Romans 11:25), and 4) Paul, in the Church Epistles, was the minister of Church truth. Yes, I believe in two peoples of God (redeemed Israel and the Church) which complement and mirror one another, and have differing *roles* in God's plan for the future.. Regarding this "mystery," S.R. Shearer writes:

... in some "peculiar" way, Christians are to be made "joint heirs" [in the future plans of God] with Israel. How? Not by displacing Israel or even making the Church a partaker in the EARTHLY promises [physical or spiritual], but by GRANTING THE CHURCH THE HEAVENLY COUNTERPARTS OF ISRAEL'S EARTHLY PROMISES.



So now, what do we have? A Church that has replaced Israel? - by no means! Rather, two entities, one heavenly - the Church; and one earthly - Israel, which complement and mirror the other; both of which reflect the glory of God, each in its own respective sphere.

What WAS revealed in OT Scripture [but often overlooked by the Jews] was that “God would justify the Gentiles *by faith*” (Gal. 3:8) and that this PORTION of the Abrahamic promises would extend to the sphere of the entire world (i.e., “all nations”). This promise is fulfilled both in the Church AND in elect individuals living amongst the Gentile nations and under Israel’s rule during the Millennium.

What WASN’T revealed in the OT (but was with Paul) was the truth of Israel’s heavenly counterpart—the Church, the Bride of Christ; and fact that Israel (the apostate and divorced wife of Jehovah) would experience a “hardening in part” for a period of time, but would later be restored.

In my opinion, the reason so many believers are attracted to and obsessed with the Covenant theological presupposition of the “one people of God” is two-fold. 1) Like Roman Catholicism, we’re enthralled with, envious of, and desire to usurp Israel’s earthly blessings (witness the flood of current Reformed graduates joining Romanism), 2) we’re frightened by the Cross of Christ, suffering, and the life-out-of-death principle which is the new-creation believer’s portion in this world. Like the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, our initial reaction is to flee from Paul’s statements in 2 Cor. 4:11,12; Col. 1:24; and Phil. 3:10.

11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...

Dan S