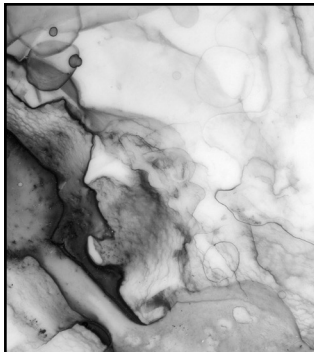


LEARNING HOW TO TALK ABOUT SIGNIFICANT THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

**The Importance of Listening Well to
What is Said:**
Covenant Theology and Dispensational
Theology in Their Own Words

*Wheelerburg Baptist Church
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Learning How to Talk About Significant Theological Differences

*The Importance of
Listening Well*


2

LISTENING WELL TO ONE ANOTHER

- We must remember to **Listen** to **Understand**.
- **Understand:**
- Their method for interpreting the text of the Scriptures.
- Their own statements and explanations about what they believe.
- The way that they structure their explanations of what they believe.



3



WHAT IS COVENANT THEOLOGY? Michael Horton

"We were not just created and then given a covenant; we were created as covenant creatures – partners not in deity, to be sure, but in the drama that was about to unfold in history. As covenant creatures by nature every person has a relationship with God.

My goal for this brief survey is to show the richness of this covenantal web and its centrality to the organization of the Bible's diverse teaching. 'Reformed theology is simply covenant theology,' according to L. John Hesselink. In other words, Reformed theology is guided by a concern to relate various biblical teachings to the concrete covenants in Scripture as their proper context."

• Michael Horton, Introducing Covenant Theology, pp.4-5.


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THE HERMENEUTIC OF COVENANT THEOLOGY

R. C. Sproul Sr.

"The Bible is not interpreted arbitrarily. Fundamental rules of interpretation must be followed to avoid subjectivistic or fanciful interpretation, rules developed by the science of hermeneutics. . . Perhaps the most crucial and central rule is the *analogy of faith*. This is the rule that Scripture is to interpret itself. . . We are to interpret Scripture by Scripture."

• R.C. Sproul Sr. What is Reformed Theology, pp. 64-65, Emphasis his.




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THE HERMENEUTIC OF COVENANT THEOLOGY

Michael Horton

"Reformed theology at least attempts to interpret the whole counsel of God in view of the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture."

• Horton, p. 12.



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THE HERMENEUTIC OF COVENANT THEOLOGY

R. C. Sproul Sr.

"One of the Reformation's chief accomplishments is the principle of literal interpretation of Scripture. . . . The actual principle, called the *sensus literalis*, is that the Bible must be interpreted according to the manner in which it is written. . . . *Sensus literalis* was designed to seek the plain sense of Scripture to focus on one meaning. Though a text may have a multitude of applications, it has only one correct meaning. . . . In a broad sense this method means that the Bible is to be interpreted like any other book. . . . In the Bible verbs are verbs and nouns are nouns. The normal structure of literature applies."

• R.C. Sproul Sr., pp. 66-67.



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The Three Covenants of Covenant Theology (R.C. Sproul Sr., p. 132)

	Covenant of Redemption	Covenant of Works	Covenant of Grace
Parties	The Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit	God and Human Beings	God and Chosen, Sinful Human Beings
Initiator	God the Father	God	God
Time	In eternity past	At Creation	After the Fall
Condition		Perfect obedience	Faith in Christ (who satisfied the condition of the covenant of works)
Reward		Life	Spiritual Life
Penalty		Immediate Death (physical and spiritual)	Spiritual Death

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COVENANT OF REDEMPTION THE ETERNAL COVENANT THE FATHER / THE SON / THE HOLY SPIRIT

Covenant of Works - Creation

God / Mankind

- Obedience - Life
- Disobedience - Death

The Fall

Death reigns in all relationships

Spirit / Soul / Body

God / Fellow People / Earth

- No longer blesses but stipulations still abide.

Covenant of Grace

God / Mankind

- Unilateral - Relationship Restored

Biblical Covenants

- Edenic - Hosea 6:7
- Noahic - Gen. 9:8-17
- Abrahamic - Gen. 12:15; 17
- Mosaic / Sinai - Ex. 20; Dt. 5
- Davidic - 2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17
- New - Jer 31:31-34; Heb. 8:1-13
- Peace - Ezekiel 34:25-30

- **Messiah** who suffers that the world will be saved.

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THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION

Michael Horton

"Most biblical covenants are historical pacts God has made with creatures. The covenant of redemption, however, is an eternal pact between the persons of the Trinity. The Father elects a people in the Son as their mediator to be brought to saving faith through the Spirit. Thus, this covenant made by the Trinity in eternity already takes the fall of the human race into account. . . The covenant of redemption is the opening act in this drama of redemption."

• Horton, p. 78.



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THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION

J. Ligon Duncan

"The phrase, The Covenant of Redemption . . . Refers to the intertrinitarian covenant, especially the covenant between the Father and the Son before the foundation of the world. It took place in eternity and is the plan by which election would be elective. . . Now where in the world did the Covenant Theologians get this?"

• J. Ligon Duncan, "History of Covenant Theology", p. 8.



11

Charles Hodge -

"God having created man after his own image in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience, forbidding him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil upon pain of death. . . This statement does not rest upon any express declaration of the Scriptures. It is, however, a concise and correct mode of asserting a plain Scriptural fact, namely, that God made to Adam a promise suspended upon a condition, and attached to disobedience a certain penalty. This is what in Scriptural language is meant by a covenant, and this is all that is meant by the term as here used."

• Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol 2*, p. 117.

THE COVENANT OF WORKS



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Michael Horton

"It is within this framework, then, that Reformed orthodoxy understood the active obedience of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the significance of his humanity in achieving redemption for his covenant heirs. His active obedience refers to the thirty-three years of perfectly obeying the Father in order to 'fulfill all righteousness' (Matt. 3:15; 5:17, NRSV). The priority of law in the covenant of creation establishes the fact that God cannot acquit the guilty; nor can he simply forgive sinners. In the context of the covenant of creation, the law must be perfectly satisfied, either personally or representatively."

THE COVENANT OF WORKS



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Michael Horton

"... Thus all humans are created in God's image — and remain so, in fact, after the fall — precisely because they are *ex pacto* participants in the covenant of creation by their very existence. To be created in God's image is to be in covenant with God. Though vitiated by human rebellion, this covenant is still in effect. One is either 'under the law' or 'under grace' — that is, bound to either the covenant of creation (Adam) or the covenant of grace (Christ)."

· Horton, pp. 92-93

THE COVENANT OF WORKS



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THE COVENANT OF GRACE

Charles Hodge

"As Christ is a party to the covenant of redemption, so he is constantly represented as the mediator of the covenant of grace; ... He guarantees the fulfillment of all the promises and conditions of the covenant. His blood is the blood of the covenant. ... So that Christ answers both for God and man. His work renders certain the gifts of God's grace, and the perseverance of his people in faith and obedience. He is therefore, in every sense, our salvation."

· Hodge, Vol.2, p.264.



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THE COVENANT OF GRACE

J. Ligon Duncan

"The Covenant of Grace is the overflowing of the Covenant of Redemption in time after the fall. . . Adam miserably failed as the federal head in Genesis 3 and so God acts for the first time in a manner of grace towards humanity. And it is so important for you to understand that strictly speaking here, that grace does not exist where there is no sin. Sin is always prior to grace."

• Duncan, p. 9.

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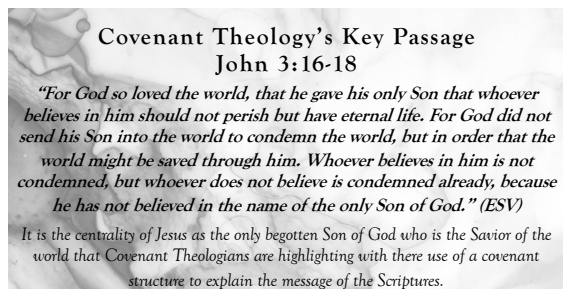
THE COVENANT OF GRACE

R. C. Sproul Sr.

"Though the covenant of grace is different from the covenant of works, it cannot be totally separated from it. In one important sense the covenant of works remains intact. God still exercises his judgment on lawbreakers. The second covenant is an addition to the first. It does not annul the first covenant. . . We are all under the sanctions of the covenant of works, and we are in desperate need of a covenant of grace."

• Sproul Sr., pp. 132-133.

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Covenant Theology's Key Passage
John 3:16-18

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." (ESV)

It is the centrality of Jesus as the only begotten Son of God who is the Savior of the world that Covenant Theologians are highlighting with there use of a covenant structure to explain the message of the Scriptures.

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A Summary of Covenant Theology

These covenant theologians see covenants as the primary organizing structure being used by God in the unfolding of His progressive redemptive revelation over time to people in the Bible. For them everything in the Bible is given to mankind under the structure of covenant whether or not the text explicitly refers to covenant or not.

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WHAT IS DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY? Thomas Ice

"Based on their literal interpretation of Scripture, dispensationalists believe that God has administered history in successive stages, during each of which man is tested, fails, and suffers judgment. This linear progress of history began in innocence, continued with man's fall, was punctuated by the cross of Christ, and moves toward the second coming and the millennium."

• Thomas Ice, "A Short History of Dispensationalism" (2009), https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/37, p. 1, Accessed 6 October 2018.

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THE HERMENEUTIC OF DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

Charles Ryrie

"Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation. This means interpretation which gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking. This is sometimes called the principle of grammatical-historical interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations."

• Charles Ryrie, pp.86-87.



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THE HERMENEUTIC OF DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

Michael Vlach

"Dispensationalism is a system of theology primarily concerned with the doctrines of ecclesiology and eschatology that emphasizes the historical-grammatical meaning of Old Testament prophetic passages and covenants."

· Michael Vlach, Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths, Kindle Location 835.



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WHAT IS A DISPENSATION?

C. I. Scofield

"A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God." (The Scofield Reference Bible, p.5)

Charles Ryrie

"A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purposes." (Dispensationalism Today, p. 22)



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WHAT IS A DISPENSATION?


Paul David Nevin.

"A dispensation is God's distinctive method of governing mankind or a group of men during a period of human history, marked by a crucial event, test, failure, and judgment. From the divine standpoint, it is a stewardship, a rule of life, or a responsibility for managing God's affairs in His house. From the historical standpoint, it is a stage in the progress of revelation."

"Some Major Problems in Dispensational Interpretation", (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1963) p. 97.



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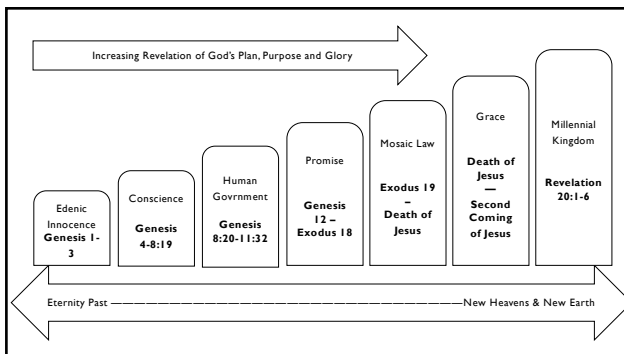
**THE DISTINGUISHING
CHARACTERISTICS OF
DISPENSATIONALISM**

Renald Showers – 3 Indispensable Factors.

- “The recognition of the distinction between the nation of Israel and the Church.”
- “The consistent use of a single hermeneutic (a single method of interpreting the Bible) – namely, the historical-grammatical method.”
- “The recognition that the ultimate purpose of history is the glory of God through the demonstration that He alone is sovereign God.”

Renald Showers, There Really is a Difference, pp. 53-53.

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C. Ryrie	R. Showers	S. L. Johnson	L.S. Chafer
Innocency or Freedom	Innocency	Age of Innocence	The Dispensation of Innocence
Conscience or Self-determination	Conscience	Age of Conscience or Self-determination.	The Dispensation of Conscience
Civil Government	Human Government	Age of Human or Civil Government	The Dispensation of Human Government
Promise or Patriarchal Rule	Promise	Age of Promise	The Dispensation of Promise
Mosaic Law	Mosaic Law	Age of Law	The Dispensation of the Law
Grace	Grace	Age of Church	The Dispensation of Grace
Millennium	Millennium	Age of Kingdom	The Dispensation of Kingdom Rule

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Dispensational Theology's Key Passage Romans 11:33-36

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."
(ESV)

It is the way that the Scriptures reveal that glory that dispensational theologians are attempting to mine as they use the literal principle of interpretation to understand the Bible.

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A Summary of Dispensational Theology

Two Observations:

- 1) Dispensational theologians see the theme of God's sovereign rule over the affairs of this world, not matter how and when it is displayed in the events of history as the glorious overarching theme of the Bible. It is God's glory displayed in the administration (working out) of His purposes and His plan that is set forth as the chief organizing theme and there the basic message of the Scriptures.
- 2) In doing that they give freedom for differences in human understanding of the exact details of God's plan to exist among them. In giving this freedom to one another they humbly confess that the only One who knows exactly how all the details of God's revelation of His Glory fit together is God Himself.

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