

COMMENTARY ON  
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 16)

16. *In Reformed theology the covenant of grace is a Gospel covenant having precisely the same terms and conditions as the Gospel.*

This thesis well illustrates the superfluous nature of the speculative constructions of traditional Covenantalism, which he here equates with “Reformed theology,” as if NC theologians could not be real Calvinists. The New Covenant *is* “the Gospel covenant” from the moment it was announced by Jesus in the upper room, because it is the stated basis of the Gospel, the good news of salvation for Jew and Gentile in the Messiah, as proclaimed from Acts 1-4 onwards. The term “gospel” just means “good news” of whatever kind, the content at any moment needing to be defined by the context. The fact that other things (such as the continuity of his descent promised to David in 2 Sam 7:12-16) might be good news at the time they are announced, does not mean that good news has exactly the same content at all points in history. The fullness of the gospel depends on the degree of revealed content.

17. *Justifying faith may be said to be the only proper condition or instrument of the covenant of grace.*

If Dr. Clark means the New Covenant, he is correct, but justifying faith was the only instrument of salvation under the Mosaic system too, as stated in Thesis 3:15 above. NCT would equate “the covenant of grace” with the New Covenant in this thesis. The New Covenant believer is justified by faith alone, but it is belief in *more and different revealed content* than was available to Abraham.

18. *The covenant of grace was inaugurated post-lapsus and is to be distinguished sharply from the covenant of works.*

Aside from the fact that there is no mention in Genesis of such a covenant (neither promises nor commands *per se* require a “covenant”), it should be pointed out that in the history of this topic, some past Covenantalists think there was no covenant “of works” at all, some think it existed once but is no longer operative, some think it was incorporated into the covenant of grace, then into the Mosaic Covenant, and some think it is absorbed in some sense also into the New Covenant, others that it does not operate after the Cross. Modern Covenantalism such as that of Dr. Clark is just one selective formulation of a highly variable tradition.

19. *The covenant of grace is monopleurial in origin and dipleurial in administration, i.e., the Gospel offer is unconditional in origin, but the reception of its benefits is conditioned upon justifying faith, which is itself only God's free gift to the elect.*

The terms “mono- or di- pleural” mean “one or two-sided.” The theory is that the covenant of grace originates with God alone, while its reception is conditioned on the faith of the recipient. This is technically correct *for the New Covenant*, but it needs to be recalled that in the history of traditional Covenantalism, elements of the Mosaic Law were introduced into the NC as “moral law,” which resulted in the NC being treated as a two-sided *pactum* between two parties. This gave the Reformed state-church leadership the legal leverage to control the whole community morally. Clark is right to notice that, the condition of faith is sovereignly supplied by God himself as a supernatural grace-gift. NCT teaches that there is no “administration” of the New Covenant, just the historic covenant itself.

20. *Monocovenantalism or refusal to distinguish between the covenants of works and grace implies a confusion of Law and Gospel.*

Actually, the theory that the two covenants, the Mosaic and the New are just “administrations” of their one supra-historical “covenant of grace” *guarantees the confusion of Law and Grace*. This is the real reason why such covenantalist statements as the Westminster and the 1689 *Confessions* impose (say) sabbatarianism on NC believers. They abstract “the moral law” (as exemplified by the Ten Commandments) from the Mosaic system and include it in the over-arching covenant of grace and then claim that it must be applied also to the NC, on the grounds that as “the moral law” of God, it is eternal and cannot change. When this argument is written out, it can easily be seen that several steps are missing, and the conclusion is not warranted by the premises.

21. *The slogan “in by grace, stay in by works” sometimes associated with the “New Perspective on Paul,” is nothing less than the Galatian heresy condemned by the apostle Paul.*

This is correct as stated, but *any attempt* to re-introduce works as a life-principle into the New Covenant is a form of “Galatianism.” The “new perspective” notion that justification is not about “entering” the covenant, but about “staying in” the covenant is clearly a Galatian heresy. NCT teaches that justification is the only way to enter the NC, and sanctification is predestined for all in that covenant (Rom 8:29-30). Nobody in the New Covenant can lose his salvation. That would be Arminianism.

22. *Faith receives the benefit of the covenant of grace because of God’s grace and the virtue of its object (Christ) not because of its qualities, virtues, or sanctity.*

Change the phrase “covenant of grace” to “New Covenant” and this statement is correct. Faith is itself a super-added gift.

23. *It is unnecessary to juxtapose the legal and relational aspects of covenant theology. In all three covenants personal relations are premised upon just legal relations.*

Since we do not believe in “all three covenants,” this statement is about covenantalism as a system, and we would change it to say that man’s relation to God is always predicated on his Law being satisfied either by man or God. Under the Mosaic system, the human partners could never satisfy God’s Law, and were saved through faith in God’s temporal provision through sacrifice, while under the New Covenant, God has already satisfied his own Law by sending his Son. Righteousness imputed is righteousness earned by Christ on the believers’ behalf.

24. *Sanctity is the second benefit of the covenant of grace and flows from justification.*

Better, “Sanctification (or ‘sanctity’ as personal holiness) is one of the main benefits of the New Covenant, and it flows from justification as the expression in time and eternity, of the justice of God.” In fact, both justification *and* sanctification are acts of divine grace on behalf of the elect, and flow in eternity from the Decree, and in history from the Cross. As we have said, justification is an event, while sanctification is a process. Both are secured by Christ the Surety under the New Covenant. The New Covenant is “better” because it can make its subjects “perfect” (Heb 7:22, 10:9-14), which the Old (the Mosaic) could not.

**AQUILA AND PRISCILLA STUDY CENTER, (423) 434 – 2188. E-mail, [rkwjc@charter.net](mailto:rkwjc@charter.net)**