

**COMMENTARY ON
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 24)**

9:6. *Dispensationalism*

I presume this is just a heading, since it contains no Thesis, and the following theses seem aimed at the Dispensational construct. Since NCT arose as an alternative to Dispensationalism, NC theologians have no objection to criticizing it, but we will offer our comments on each of these issues.

7. *Of the three stages in the history of Dispensationalism (classic, modified, progressive), the first two are inimical to covenant theology.*

This is correct. The degree to which “progressive” Dispensationalists (such as Saucy) are kinder towards Covenantalism may be their desire as Calvinists to seem more “truly Reformed,” and may involve simply adding covenantalist ideas to their own scheme. Imposition of a unified covenant construct on the usual dispensational divisions and ages would certainly require a blurring of “dispensational principles” as (say) Darby or his disciple Cyrus Scofield held them. Once it is realized that God can work with both Israel *and* the Church *in the same era*, much of the motivation for a pre-tribulation rapture evaporates, and pretribulationism is (barring Premillennialism) the most distinctive feature of the usual (classical) scheme, as seen in the Scofield Reference Bible, or Clarence Larkin.

8. *Classic and modified Dispensationalism tend to a radical (Marcionite) disjunction between Moses and Christ.*

This is weird criticism; no Dispensationalist known to me is a Marcionite, or imagines that any part of the orthodox canon should not be there. Dispensationalists are invariably very positive towards Israel and are the least likely of all Evangelicals to be anti-Semitic in their attitudes. Many strongly support the present Jewish State, and believe the West should protect it. Two tendentious propaganda terms appear here, “tend to,” and “radical.” The NT’s “radical disjunction” between Moses and Christ is really the disjunction between Law and Grace as principles of holiness, as signaled in such passages as John 1:17, Acts 15:10-11 and 23-29, Rom 3:28, 5:20-21, 8:3-4, Gal 2:16 and 20-21, 3:21, 4:31-5:6, *etc.*

The complaint that some opinion “tends to” something else should be supported by examples or at least an argument to show the “tendency,” but these are theses or statements of a position, not arguments, and examples could no doubt be given. What they would prove about a vague notion like “tendency” is not clear. I would say that this thesis is designed to condemn by a misleading association, so as to discourage Presbyterian students from taking other positions than Covenantalism seriously.

9. *Like Theonomy, Dispensationalism wrongly makes the Mosaic covenant the goal rather than a temporary, typical arrangement.*

But Dispensationalism is so *unlike* Theonomy that it has been accused elsewhere by Clark of “antinomianism.” Now he wants them to be twins? But no Dispensationalist imagines the *conditional, imperfect, obsolete*, and now *disappeared* Mosaic Covenant to be a “goal.” That makes no sense from either a NCT *or* a dispensational standpoint. And many dispensational texts teach a detailed typology of the *temporary* Mosaic system (think Clarence Larkin or the Scofield Reference Bible). Nobody denies that the Mosaic system is largely typical of later realities. How could the Law be “a goal” of history when every Dispensationalist known to me deems it abolished and replaced by an “age of grace”?

And if Clark thinks that the Millennium of the Dispensationalists is just a return to the Mosaic Covenant, he has another think coming. The classic Dallas position is represented by Pentecost's *Things To Come*, in which sufficient reasons are given (pages 517 *fol.*) why the Temple worship described in Ezekiel *cannot possibly be a return to the Mosaic system*. Similarities do not mean identity. If the Mosaic system had a "goal" beyond preservation of the Nation it was *the Cross*, which *abolished it*.

10. By positing two peoples, Dispensationalism resurrects the dividing wall, which Christ abolished in his flesh.

This is false for several reasons. *First*, it was God who "posited" the difference between Israel and the Gentiles, a distinction maintained consistently by Paul in Romans 9-11, and still existing today. *Second*, the Kingdom prophecies make it clear that the difference will still exist *in the coming Kingdom*. *Third*, in the church however, there is no such distinction (Gal 3:28-29), and in the future age under the New Covenant, regeneration will continue to create that same unity described in Eph 2:11-22, 4:3-7. None of this however, will prevent God from using the regenerate and restored *nation* of Israel in distinctive ways (Ezekiel 36-48). *Fourth*, no matter what I am as a converted Gentile, now grafted into the Remnant stump of believing Israel that first celebrated the Supper in the Upper Room, I will never be a Levite (Jer 33:17-22), much less a Zadokite (Ezek 40:46, 43:19, 44:15, 48:11). The very same prediction in Jeremiah that promises a permanent man to sit on David's throne (33:14-17), *also states* that the *Levites* will never lack a priest to offer sacrifices (verses 17-22). Jesus could not fulfill both, as he was not a Levite, and his Melchizedekian work of oblation was completed forever on the Cross. *Fifth*, in the coming Kingdom, whatever else it contains, believing Jews and believing Gentiles will be united in the resurrection life of their Savior, *whatever other things they may do* in obedience to God's many commands. Amillennialists (or Postmillennialists) need to give a serious explanation of who the Prince is in Ezekiel 44 and following (fifteen references), that doesn't fall back on mere allegorism.

11. Because the civil and ceremonial laws were specifically and intentionally tied to the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, they were fulfilled in the Kingly and Priestly work of Christ, and are therefore no longer binding on the Christian.

This thesis presupposes that the Mosaic Law is really divisible into moral, ceremonial and civil laws, but this is false. The Law is a seamless unity of obligation, and the over 600 laws cannot be so glibly classified. Thus the Sabbath is moral, ceremonial *and* civil, as are many others. The entire Law went to the Cross and was nailed there permanently, the Sabbath particularly being mentioned as being abolished, along with circumcision, appointed feasts, new moons, and special days. *Nothing* in the Mosaic Law is "*binding* on the Christian," but *everything* in the ethical content of the New Covenant documents *is* binding. This is the main reason why the charge of "antinomianism" is so inappropriate.

12. The Mosaic civil law because it was specifically and intentionally tied to the temporary and typical Old (Mosaic) Covenant, was never intended to serve as norm for any other state than Mosaic-Davidic theocracy.

This thesis repudiates the Theonomy ideas of Rushdoony and North called Reconstructionism, and does not concern us here. But if the Law is correctly understood as *a unit*, the "moral" elements cannot be singled out as applying today while other parts do not. In fact, OC Law has been replaced *entirely* by NC Ethics, and that is unified and animated by the believers' union with the risen Christ.

"The Law made nothing perfect (maturely holy)" (Heb 7:16-19).