

Introduction to Baptist Covenant Theology

January 6, 2019

What's in a name?

Grace Covenant Baptist Church

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph 2:8-9)

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And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. (Luk 22:20)

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And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mat 28:18-20)

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And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Mat 16:18)

"The biggest point of issue between the Baptist position on baptism and the Presbyterian or the paedobaptist position on baptism is not in our doctrine of the sacraments. It is in our doctrine of the church". Ligon Duncan

From Merriam-Webster: **Definition of federal theology**

: the theological system which rests upon the beliefs (1) that before the Fall man was under a covenant of works by which God through Adam promised man eternal blessedness if he kept his commandments and (2) that since the Fall man has been under a covenant of grace by which God by his grace promises the same blessings to all who believe in Christ

— **called also covenant theology**

During our study, we will determine whether this is an adequate definition from a Baptist perspective. Other questions that will be considered include:

- 1. Who is in the New Covenant?**
- 2. Should infants be baptized?**
- 3. Are the Church and Israel two groups or one?**

In answering these questions, we will demonstrate the key differences between Baptist and paedobaptist views of Covenant Theology, the makeup of the Church, and the proper candidates for baptism.

Concerning the Covenants: Westminster vs Charleston (1689)

Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 7 – Of God's Covenant with Man

I. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant.

II. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

III. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.

IV. This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.

V. **This covenant was differently administered** in the time of the law, and in the time of the Gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

VI. Under the Gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.

Charleston Confession of Faith – Chapter 7 – Of God's Covenant

1. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to him as their creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant. (Luke 17:10; Job 35:7,8)

2. Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace, wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe. (Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 3:20, 21; Rom. 8:3; Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:16; Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 6:44,45; Ps. 110:3)

3. **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;** and it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect; and it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocency. (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 11:6, 13; Rom. 4:1, 2, &c.; Acts 4:12; John 8:56)

Concerning the Church: Westminster vs Charleston (1689)

Westminster – Chapter 25

- I. The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.
- II. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

Charleston – Chapter 26

1. The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.
2. All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are and may be called visible saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted. (1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 11:26; Rom. 1:7; Eph. 1:20-22)