

Welcome to a Reformed Church

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Review

- Last week, we saw that the major dispute of the Protestant Reformation was not whether the Bible had authority, but whether Scripture or Tradition has *final* authority for Christian faith and life.
 - We saw that the Roman Catholic Church gives Tradition – through the Magisterial teaching office of the Church – the final authority over the interpretation of Scripture.
 - By contrast, we saw that the Protestant Reformers insisted that Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) has final authority in the Church. “The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.” (WCF 1.10)
- We saw that *sola Scriptura* is *taught in Scripture* itself – in both the OT and the NT:
 - *Explicit*: Deuteronomy 4.1-2, 12.29-32, 32.47; Proverbs 30.5-6; Revelation 22.18-19
 - *Implicit*: Psalm 19.7-9; 2 Timothy 3.16-17
 - *Danger*: Mark 7.1-13 (citing Isaiah 29.13)
- We looked at several key terms used in Protestant/Reformed Christianity to describe the Bible:
 - *Canonicity*: the list of books accepted as authentic Scripture.
 - *Inspiration*: authentic Scripture, in its very words, is *theopneustos* (lit. “God-breathed”).
 - *Authority*: because it is God’s book, Scripture is self-authenticating. Both its character and content give evidence of “a supernatural intelligence” (A.A. Hodge) in its Authorship. Yet our final assurance comes only from the inward witness of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16.13, 1Jn 2.27).
 - *Perspicuity*: the things necessary for salvation are sufficiently clear in Scripture to be understood by all.
 - *Sufficiency*: everything needed for faith and life is either stated in, or logically implied by, Scripture.
 - *Revelation*: Scripture is God’s self-disclosure to us for the purpose of establishing covenant relationships.
- Finally, we saw that the real question is not whether we *confess*, but whether we *practice, sola Scriptura*.

Chapter 4 – “Covenant: God’s Story”

- For those interested in practicing *sola Scriptura*, a natural challenge arises:
 - In coming to terms with the whole book, the question naturally arises: is there any unifying principle?
 - The Bible is a big, diverse book – written in 66 books by ~40 authors over 1500+ years.
 - “So what is the Bible all about anyway? If you listen to surveys of what our culture thinks about the Bible or even listen to politically conservative talk-show hosts, you will conclude that the Bible is a book about how to be a good person and how to do unto others what you want them to do unto you. As a 2000 survey of American religious beliefs showed, seventy-five percent of Americans believe the Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves.” (51-52)
- As they studied the Scriptures, the Protestant Reformers *rediscovered*¹ that the unifying concept in Scripture was the idea of covenant.
 - A covenant is “a relationship that God establishes with us and guarantees by his Word.”²
 - “As we think of the story of Scripture through the concept of covenant, we need to recognize that while the Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*, is used two hundred and eighty-seven times in the Old Testament, reading the Bible through the lens of this concept has come to be a distinctive feature only of Reformed Protestantism. This is why some have said that Reformed theology is ‘covenant theology’ and that to be Reformed is to be covenantal.” (52)
 - In other words, Scripture is unified by an unfolding sequence of God-established relationships with men.

¹ Hyde provides a citation from the writing of the ancient church father, Augustine, demonstrating that the Reformers’ emphasis on covenantal theology was not an innovation, but rather a restoration.

² *First Catechism* (Great Commissions Publication, 2003-2004), Question #24.

- The unfolding of God’s covenants in Scripture can be traced using two distinct motifs:
 - Historical – dividing history into four great movements: *creation, rebellion, rescue, consummation*.
 - Theological – three overarching arrangements: *covenant of works, of grace, and of redemption*.

| Theological | | Historical | Scripture | Shorter Catechism |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Covenant of Redemption | Covenant of Works | Creation | Genesis 1.1-2.25 | 1-12 |
| | | Rebellion | Genesis 3.1-13 | 13-19 |
| | Covenant of Grace | Rescue | Genesis 3.14 – Revelation 20.15 | 20-36, 39-107 |
| | | Consummation | Revelation 21-22 | 37-38 |

- We can define the theological terms as follows:
 - Covenant of Works (“...the one who does them shall live by them...” – Lev 18.5)
 - “When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.” (SC 12)
 - Covenant of Grace (“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do...” – Rom 8.3)
 - “The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which he hath appointed them to salvation.” (WLC 32)
 - Covenant of Redemption (“...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...” – Eph 1.4)³
 - “Standing behind these two great covenants in history, the covenant of works before the fall and the covenant of grace after the fall, is yet another, the covenant of redemption. From all of eternity, even before there was a covenant of works or a covenant of grace, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit covenanted to share Their eternal love and fellowship with Their creatures. In human terms, God the Father covenanted to create a people, whom He knew would sin; to choose from this fallen mass ‘a great multitude that no one could number’ (Rev 7.9); and to give them to Christ (Jn 17.24), whom He would ‘crush’ on the cross according to His eternal will (Is 53.10). The Son covenanted to accomplish their redemption: ‘I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do’ (John 17.4). The Holy Spirit covenanted to apply the work of the Son to those the Father chose, ‘until we acquire possession of it’ (Eph 1.14).” (61)
- The great rediscovery of covenant theology was that all of salvation history unfolds a single story:
 - “The essence of the covenant of grace is the same throughout the Old and New Testaments-God saves sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But its historical administration has varied by time and place.” (58)
 - In other words, the OT covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc. are all part of the gospel story.
 - From Genesis 3.15, each successive covenant *develops* – not *discards* – the previous covenant as follows:

| Name | Emphases ⁴ | Theatre Element | Description | Key Scriptures |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------|---|--|
| Adamic | Commencement | Plot | God-imposed enmity, delivery by supernaturally provided Seed, substitutionary sacrifice | Gen 3.15, 21, Gen 4.4 |
| Noahic | Preservation | Stage | Stable environment for subsequent unfolding; Japheth in Shem’s tents | Gen 9.8-17, 20-27 |
| Abrahamic | Promise | Dynamic | The “quad promise,” emphasis on federal principle, circumcision rite; promise of Judah’s scepter | Gen 12.1-3, Gen 15, 17.1-14, Gen 49.10 |
| Mosaic | Law | Structure | Kingdom of priests & holy nation, Legal system under which Christ obeyed and was cursed | Ex 19.1-6, Ex 20, Dt 27 |
| Davidic | Kingdom | Hero | Mediator king from Davidic line, Davidic city a figure of the church, Messiah’s deity & suffering foretold | 2Sam 7.9-17, Ps 2,22,48,72,110 Is 9.6-7, Is 53 |
| New | Consummation | Denouement | Full accomplishment at cross, Outpouring of Holy Spirit, Church fulfills Jerusalem & Israel, Final consummation at return | Jer 25.5-6, Jer 31.31-34, Joel 2.28-32, Heb 12.22,1Pet 2.9 |

³ The doctrines of predestination and reprobation flow out of God’s eternal plan, and “although there is much misunderstanding and mystery surrounding this doctrine... our approach needs to be that of the apostle Paul.” (62, cf. Eph 1.3-4).

⁴ The terms under this column come from O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980).