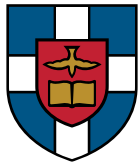
THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 29 · Number 3 Fall 2025



COVENANT THEOLOGY AND SCRIPTURAL REFLECTION

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Vol. 29 • Num. 3
Fall 2025

Covenant Theology and Scriptural Reflection

Editorial: Discussing Differences among Covenantal Views

Stephen J. Wellum

Stephen J. Wellum is Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and editor of *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*. He received his PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and he is the author of numerous essays and articles and the co-author with Peter Gentry of *Kingdom through Covenant, 2nd edition* (Crossway, 2018) and *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Crossway, 2015); the co-editor of *Progressive Covenantalism* (B&H Academic, 2016); the author of *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (Crossway, 2016) and *Christ Alone—The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Zondervan, 2017); the co-author of *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Zondervan, 2018); and the author of *The Person of Christ: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2021), *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept*, vol. 1 (B&H Academic, 2024), and *It is Finished* (Union, 2025).

At the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2023, there was a session devoted to Baptist covenant theology. Harrison Perkins, as a Presbyterian, began the session as an "outsider" looking in, as he represented traditional Reformed covenant theology. Harrison offered his assessment of two Baptist covenantal views represented by progressive covenantalism (PC) and 1689 federalism respectively. His analysis was helpful in that it allowed Baptists to hear how non-Baptists view, understand, and evaluate Baptist covenantal viewpoints. In addition, Richard Lucas, who represented the PC view, offered a helpful analysis of the similarities and differences between 1689 federalism and the PC view. Daniel Scheiderer represented the 1689 federalist view, offering reflections on his view, his analysis of the PC view, and overall thoughts regarding Baptist covenant theology. After these three presentations, a panel discussion ensued with all three presenters

along with me, as a representative of the PC view, and Robert Howell, who also served as a representative of the 1689 federalist view.

Overall, the discussion was irenic, constructive, and helpful for all those involved. In this issue of *SBJT,* we have published the presentations of Harrison Perkins and Richard Lucas, along with two articles by Zach Maxcey, who writes from another Baptist view, namely New Covenant Theology (NCT). Zach's articles were presentations given at a conference in Franklin, Tennessee in 2023, where Zach sought to discuss the similarities and differences between NCT and PC. We have published Zach's articles here in order to further the conversation between various Baptist covenant theologies, seeking to show a range of viewpoints among Baptists. Alongside these articles, I have included a fine article by Everett Berry on the temple theme across the canon that is crucial in thinking of the continuity and discontinuity of the covenants. In addition, Ranald Macaulay has written an important article on creation, Genesis, and biblical hermeneutics, and Ben Cotrell has offered some important reflections on the problem of evil. Lastly, we have included an updated article by David Howard on his assessment of various Joshua commentaries, including his own, which is forthcoming from Holman Reference in 2026. My prayer is that all of these articles will help us think deeply about Scripture as we seek to bring all of our thought captive to Christ and his word. There is nothing more important than rightly reading and applying Scripture to our lives and to our churches. What we desperately need today is faithful biblical and theological exposition of the whole counsel of God. My prayer is that in some small this issue of *SBJT* will lead to this important end.

In the remainder of this editorial, I will offer a few reflections on the articles regarding the biblical covenants, especially from a PC view — a view that I and others have sought to develop in various articles and books. Specifically, I want to comment on Harrison's article articulating and evaluating the state of Baptist covenant theology, and Zach's articles comparing and contrasting NCT and PC. Let me start with Zach's articles.

When Peter Gentry and I wrote *Kingdom through Covenant* in 2012, I said that PC was a species of NCT. Primarily, I did so because some of my theological teachers were advocates of NCT, and I did not want to dismiss them since I learned much from them. Yet, I quickly discerned that this statement was not helpful, and as such, I corrected it in the second edition

in 2018, thus clearly distinguishing PC from NCT. Why? For the simple reason that NCT is not a monolithic view, and that some within the view hold to views that are antithetical to PC. For example, as Zach makes clear, some within NCT reject a creation covenant or a covenant of works, the imputed righteousness of Christ, i.e., Christ's active obedience, and the use and application of the Mosaic law for Christians today, etc. No doubt, not everyone within NCT rejects these points, but the fact that some do, requires that we distinguish PC from NCT. Zach does an excellent job describing both the similarities and differences between NCT and PC, and in his second article, he asks whether there can be brotherly disagreement on these issues. I agree that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. However, for myself, the rejection of a creation covenant or covenant of works, the active obedience of Christ imputed to us, tied to the larger law-gospel contrast, and the proper application of the Mosaic law-covenant to the church, are non-negotiables. For this reason, I can no longer identify PC as a species of NCT. For NCT advocates who affirm a creation covenant, the active obedience of Christ, and the application of all of Scripture to our lives, I would strongly encourage you to distinguish yourselves from other NCT advocates who reject these crucial biblical and theological points.

Regarding Harrison's helpful article, much could be said. Let me offer three reflections.

First, in developing the view of PC, we never intended to create a "new" system in complete contrast to historic, Protestant, and Reformed theology. Instead, our intent was simply to modify or nuance some points, especially regarding the relationship between the biblical covenants and how they reach their fulfillment in the new covenant. Harrison is correct that PC is closer aligned with historic Reformed theology than even some aspects of 1689 federalism, yet our focus was not on the similarities but the differences between Reformed paedobaptist covenant theology and Reformed, Baptist covenant theology. This is why our discussion often focused on ecclesiology, including the ordinances, since this is where most of our differences lie. Yet, our differences in ecclesiology also reflect larger hermeneutical differences on how we understand the relationship and progression of the biblical covenants culminating and in Christ and the new covenant.

Second, Harrison is correct to note that PC's view of the creation covenant is basically the same as the best treatment of the covenant of works within

Reformed theology. But he also fails to acknowledge that there are debates within traditional Reformed theology regarding the precise nature of the covenant of works, hence our initial hesitation with the terminology. Yet, what Harrison affirms in terms of the covenant of works is what PC affirms. However, we also want to make the point that although Adam and all humans cannot gain eschatological life by obedience to that covenant, many features of creation, tied to the covenant, such as our image-bearing role, marriage, the creation mandate, etc. continue throughout the biblical covenants reaching their fulfillment in the new covenant. Also, Harrison is correct that PC affirms the law-gospel contrast as theologically foundational, but we are more hesitant to identify specific covenants solely in terms of this distinction. No doubt, the creation covenant is conditional, yet in all post-fall covenants God continues to demand perfect obedience from us (which we cannot provide), and he also acts in grace to provide salvation through type and shadow that ultimately culminates in the only perfectly obedient covenant-keeper — our Lord Jesus Christ. What I appreciate about Harrison's article is the care he has taken to actually understand the PC view, in contrast to some within his tribe who continue to make statements that are false regarding our view.

Third, Harrison rightly wants to press the substance-administration understanding of the covenants, which in theory, PC does not reject. Furthermore, Harrison's comments about 1689 federalism on this point, along with his observation that 1689 federalism makes too strong a separation between creation and covenant, are very astute. I will let 1689 federalists respond to them, but for myself, I agree with his comments and critique. In contrast, PC does not reject the substance-administration distinction, but our point is that one has to account for this distinction consistent with the specific biblical covenants in question. This is why PC has argued that God's one plan of redemption, grounded in God's eternal covenant of redemption, is the new covenant progressively revealed through the biblical covenants. In this sense, the substance of Christ is in the OT through the covenants and their various promises, types, and shadows. Yet, the debate is over how to understand each covenant in its own redemptive-historical context and how each covenant progressively reveals, anticipates, and is fulfilled in Christ. This is why we cannot argue that circumcision under the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants signify exactly the same realities as

baptism does under the new covenant. Circumcision is a covenant sign but under the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants it not only externally distinguishes Israel from the nations, but it also reveals the need for a new heart, which only some in those covenants had, but it was not true of the entire covenant community. However, as we walk through the OT, the Prophets anticipate a day when Christ will ratify a new covenant that brings to fulfillment all of God's promises, specific types, etc. in a specific way that is not exactly the same as under the OT covenants. No doubt, Christ is the substance given in God's covenant promises, types, and shadows, but the OT itself anticipates that fulfillment will result in some changes in the new covenant that, in my view, traditional Reformed covenant theology does not account for. This is where the debate lies, and I am thankful for Harrison furthering this debate.

As noted above, my prayer is that this issue of *SBJT* will encourage us to examine our views in light of Scripture. Our understanding of the covenants must be true to how Scripture presents them, not merely our theological system, hence why we must return again to God's word for correction, instruction, and proper application to our lives and the life of the church.

Peering Over the Fence: Presbyterian Reflections on Baptist Neighbors Doing Covenant Theology[1]

Harrison Perkins

Harrison Perkins is pastor of Oakland Hills Community Church (OPC), Farmington Hills, Michigan. He earned his PhD from Queen's University, Belfast, UK. Dr. Perkins also serves as a senior research fellow at the Craig Center for the Study of the Westminster Standards, online faculty in church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, visiting faculty at Birmingham Theological Seminary, and visiting lecturer in systematic theology at Edinburgh Theological Seminary. He is the author of several books, including *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works: James Ussher and the Reformed Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2020); *Reformed Covenant Theology: A Systematic Introduction* (Lexham Academic, 2024); *Righteous By Design: Covenantal Merit and Adam's Original Integrity* (Mentor, 2024); and *A Penitent People: The Doctrine of Repentance* (Focus, 2025). He is also the author of numerous articles, and he posts at *Modern Reformation*, The Heidelblog, and *Christ Over All*.

Introduction

My wife and I are in the process of looking to buy a house. Property, houses, and neighborhoods have, therefore, been much on my mind recently. In regard to developing theological currents, thinking about it like navigating life with interesting neighbors might have some value. Reformed theology has long lived on a street called "Covenant Theology." In some ways, it used to feel like a somewhat secluded street. As I imagine life on this street, my backyard is complete with a stone birdbath.

After some time on my secluded covenant street with my birdbath, a new neighbor moves in. I can imagine looking over the fence into my

new neighbor's yard and seeing what I think is a big above-ground swimming pool. One day, I get to talk to my new neighbor over the fence. Obviously, I commend his lovely pool. To my surprise, he says, "No, no, that's a birdbath." Then he directs me to a small sign by what I thought was a pool, which reads, "birds must be fully immersed to be truly bathed." It dawns on me that not everyone on our covenantal street might see eye-to-eye about how to get things done.

After time goes by again, we finally get a neighbor on the other side of me. This neighbor seems very exciting because he builds a full waterslide with an above ground pool at the bottom in his backyard. On our first meeting, I certainly commend his amazing slide. As you probably guessed, however, he replies, "No, no, that's a birdbath." Readers are free to allegorize those neighbors as representatives for my two conversation partners if and as you see fit. The point is that, even if other parties feel like they've owned property on Covenant Theology Street, Reformed people rightly feel like no one else has been interested in living on it for some time. As a host of neighbors are moving in – whether purchasing property for the first time or finally building on a vacant plot that they have owned for a while is another question – we on the Reformed side are in the process of sussing out our new neighbors.

Baptist theology is witnessing a burgeoning interest in covenant. On the one hand, "progressive covenantalism" (hereafter PC) is developing in mainstream Baptist thought.[2] On the other hand, "1689 federalism" has a growing contingent in minority confessional Baptist circles.[3] This article argues that both systems of Baptist covenant theology have incorrectly stated their relation to traditional Reformed covenant theology.[4] More pointedly, PC is closer to Reformed covenant theology than it has suggested but 1689 federalism is further from us than its proponents often claim.[5] This brief paper cannot provide wholesale critique of either position with any sort fairness to their arguments, nor is it worthwhile to take a hard, quick crack at some particular doctrine within their systems. Rather, the focus is on big-picture perceptions — mainly pertaining to methodological issues — to increase clarity and charity within our discussions. The goal is that we all might recognize a birdbath when we see it, even if it's different from our own.

Two blanket admonitions for Reformed covenant theology, PC, and 1689 federalism might help us refine our discussion going forward. First, we should all put a moratorium on asserting that our view is "more biblical."

The claim, which inevitably irritates readers among the alternative systems, thoroughly begs the question since we are all striving to be biblical and each needing to demonstrate our position's biblical grounding. Second, the discussion needs to prioritize other issues besides ecclesiology and baptism. At least from the perspective of covenant theology, our emphasis on the unity of the covenants primarily concerned soteriology. My contention is that the baseline concerns in covenant theology's affirmation of one substance administered through various covenants should not be controversial. Until we clarify if and how we agree on foundational issues such as the one gospel delivered differently throughout redemptive history, any debate about the nature of church membership and sacraments hardly has a point.[6] In other words, the discussion must come to terms with the categories of systematic theology before the redemptive-historical contours of biblical theology matter.

Progressive Covenantalism (PC)

Good theological interaction cannot be just an onslaught of criticism if it is going to be constructive but must include appreciation and critique. For that reason, we first need to account for the positive. So, for what am I most thankful in PC?

- They consistently land profound and substantive criticisms against dispensationalism.[7]
- Their commitment to the unity of redemptive history, including one people of God.[8]
- Their perceptive insight about how typological structures drive the progress of revelation and redemptive history.[9]

These areas represent clear aspects of PC that seem emphatic and mostly uniform throughout its published corpus.

What would I change about PC? The question might seem like it inevitable leads to all the major points of disagreement. The answers posed here, however, do not aim at any specific views affirmed in the PC system. Rather, these desired changes suggest what seem to be genuinely feasible methodological adjustment that would improve discussions with

Reformed covenant theology by helping us to understand the PC system more fully and more clearly.

1. PC tends to state disagreements with Reformed covenant theology when many instances seem to be a rejection of terminology rather than the substance of the doctrine.

This change is needed because it creates confusion on the Reformed side followed by consternation on the PC side. When PC advocates have claimed to have developed a completely new system including differences about soteriology, Reformed covenant theologians have believed that it is truly on a totally other paradigm. Then, however, PC advocates become frustrated that we are criticizing their soteriology and have clarified that they are assuming the same *ordo salutis* as traditional Reformed theology, including how basically the same *ordo salutis* applied to OT believers as applies to NT believers.[10]

We need to work to avoid speaking past each other in these ways. Many conversations with Stephen Wellum and Richard Lucas have clarified for me that they are focusing their differences on matters of the *historia salutis*. Still, we could have avoided much confusion had PC either stated that it assumes a Reformed *ordo salutis*, including how that relates to OT soteriology, or simply not claimed to be developing an entirely different paradigm altogether—unless they very explicitly then outline points of agreement. Rightly or wrongly, when I read that PC is claiming that their view is a new paradigm, then I assume no agreement.

The issue driving this misunderstanding is the difference between rejecting and modifying existing doctrine. PC modifies several key Reformed doctrines but does not reject them. Wellum has outlined PC's basic thesis: "Progressive covenantalism argues that the Bible presents a *plurality* of covenants that *progressively* reveal our triune God's *one* plan for his *one* people, which reaches its fulfillment and terminus in Christ and the new covenant."[11] At least from the Reformed side, that thesis itself is not controversial and in no way differentiates PC from our view. The difference is in how they see the shape of the OT covenants pressuring the contours of redemptive history toward regenerate-only membership in the new covenant.

The paradigm is arguably a modification of a Vossian approach to redemptive-historical interpretation of the covenants without

rejecting the Reformed view of what covenants *do* in redemptive history. For example, *Kingdom through Covenant* argues: "Central to our purpose is that God's *saving* kingdom comes to this world *through* the covenants in a twofold way."[12] Further, "*Covenantalism* emphasizes at least two points: first, that *covenants* are theologically significant and the means by which God relates to his creatures and creation and establishes his kingdom, and, second, that God's plan is unfolded *through the covenants*, which are all brought to their fulfillment in Christ."[13] On the other side, even as far back as 1576, Caspar Olevianus (1536–87) argued, in his commentary on the Apostles' Creed, that kingdom and covenant are necessarily and inextricably linked.[14] More recently, Meredith Kline, one of the most prominent covenant theologians of the twentieth century, argued: "Taking the kingdom of God as our central, organizing theme, we inevitably find ourselves fully involved with the divine covenants of Scripture; for to follow the course of the kingdom is to trace the series of covenants by which the Lord administers his kingdom."[15] Further, "covenants function as administrative instruments of God's kingly rule."[16] Greater interaction with traditional Reformed covenant theology would help PC make things clearer for Reformed readers by helping us all see that their different inflections on this theme might amount to modifications of an idea but not rejection of a common notion.

A more pointed example is God's covenant with Adam. Reformed theology has, since the mid-seventeenth century, most commonly named it "the covenant of works." The specific designation should not occupy much debate. Even as Wellum's more recent works attest, at least he is becoming more comfortable with nearly full-throated affirmations of what we basically mean by the covenant of works (and the pre-temporal covenant of redemption).[17] *Kingdom through Covenant* says: "In contrast to a covenant of works, which tends to create too sharp a disjunction between creation and the subsequent redemptive covenants, it is better to view the covenant of creation in more continuity with later covenants, as *foundational* to them and not as their foil."[18] Although there are proponents who fail to represent the point cogently, consistently, and clearly, the *best* articulations of PC actually do affirm the same truth concerning *how* this covenant is a foil to all the postlapsarian covenants.

The specific issue of agreement is that this first covenant demanded perfect obedience to obtain eschatological reward but the only way to eschatological

life after the fall is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.[19] Inasmuch as proponents of PC are willing to affirm that OT believers were saved because the features of their covenants taught them about Christ, and that those believers trusted in Christ to receive all his benefits in advance but in their time, PC advocates agree with the Reformed regarding the dogmatic core of the substance of the covenant of grace being the same in every covenantal administration. At least *to some degree,* PC seems to be on similar ground with the Reformed when *Kingdom through Covenant* argues: "Thus it is clear, from even a few texts in the New Testament, that the covenant with Abraham is the basis and foundation for the gospel message announcing forgiveness of sins and justification through Jesus Christ."[20] Further, PC seems to argue that the grace of Christ was communicated during the OT period in a way similar to how Westminster Confession 8.6 affirms that Christ's work was applied to believers through the ordinances of the old economy, but they also argue similarly to how Westminster Confession 7.5–6 says this substance was fully exhibited.[21] Two examples:

> No doubt, OT saints were forgiven of their sins and justified before God (Gen 15:6), but only in terms of God's ultimate provision in Christ.[22]

> For example, under the Old Testament covenants, God's people were saved by grace through faith in the promises of God, and the same is true under the new covenant, yet now there is greater knowledge and clarity regarding how God's promises reach their terminus and fulfillment in Christ (Gen. 15:6; Luke 24:25–27; Rom. 4:9–12; Gal. 3:6–4:7; Heb. 11:8–19).[23]

If I correctly understand PC to be saying that, before the fall, Adam could obtain eschatological reward by perfect obedience, but, after the fall, all eschatological and saving blessings come from Jesus Christ as believers received him through the promises and ordinances of the former covenants as they were ultimately about Christ, then PC agrees with traditional covenant theology about the main way that the covenant of works is a foil to the covenant of grace in establishing the law-gospel distinction.[24] The affirmation of the law-gospel distinction among the best proponents of PC should not be quickly overlooked, since it is a key piece of Protestant theology that unites us in clearly teaching the good news of Christ.

Even as PC elaborates their view of the creation covenant, its similarity to at least some Reformed constructions confirm that they have at most modified the Reformed view rather than rejected it. Two examples:

> We affirm that Adam is created as God's image-son, a priest-king, and humanity's representative head, to rule over creation and to put everything under his feet (Gen. 1:26–31; Psalm 8). We also affirm that God, as Creator and Lord, rightly demands perfect obedience from his covenant partner.[25]

The Westminster Confession 7.2 states:

> 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.[26]

In his book *Christ Alone*, Wellum remarkably united these themes with the gospel by tying Christ's fulfillment of the law and completion of his active obedience to creational structures, which left me thinking that he undoubtedly believed in the covenant of works even if he had not named it as such.[27] Second, furthermore, Wellum explained the continuity of creation and covenant: "The command, then, given to Adam in Genesis 2:16–17 did not create a 'covenant of works' relationship subsequent to creation; instead, Adam, by virtue of his creation as God's image-son, was already in filial relation with his Creator-covenant Lord."[28] Johannes Cocceius argued the same idea in 1669: "Man, therefore, by the very fact that he was made according to God's image, has been constituted as in a covenant with God."[29] The upshot is that, using the covenant of works as an example, PC has often articulated versions of Reformed doctrines with at most modifications made, entailing that their stated disagreement with Reformed covenant theology is often overstated, concerning primarily terminology.

In *Reformed Covenant Theology*, I argued that the omission of the category of natural law in the discussion of *Kingdom through Covenant* makes it unclear *how* PC affirms the abiding validity of God's moral law while denying that the decalogue is distinct within the Mosaic law.[30] In traditional Reformed theology, the decalogue summarizes the natural law so remains the abiding rule of righteousness for Christians, not as Mosaic but inasmuch

as it summarizes our moral obligations from the natural law. Wellum has clearly affirmed the natural law, and perhaps my criticism for his lack of clarity in *Kingdom through Covenant* on this point might be overstated or be in need of refined precision.[31] My point, however, was not to deny that PC has a place for natural law but simply that, from the perspective of traditional Reformed theology, the affirmation of natural law is difficult to understand in light of the rejection of the decalogue as the summary of the moral law.[32] Reformed covenant theologians will be helped to know what PC holds as the summary of the natural and moral law if not the decalogue. This instance seems to be one where the revision of terminology is causing confusion about an issue where PC wants Reformed theology to understand their basic agreement with us.

2. Clarify the systematic implications of their positions.

Sometimes PC argues for biblical-theological positions without fully spelling out the systematic implications. Reformed covenant theology would be helped by greater and more thorough explanation of what two of PC's positions mean in terms for soteriology. It is hard to accept the basic claim without knowing how that claim lands and plays out.

First, PC rejects that the Holy Spirit indwelled believers during the OT period.[33] My point is not presently to critique the idea but to ask what its ramifications are. How does this affect the doctrines of regeneration and perseverance? How does it not suggest a different *ordo salutis* for OT believers? Why is this an important feature of difference within the dynamic contours of redemptive history? What does it mean about the guarantee of an inheritance in Christ for OT believers? Does this view hold any wider systematic relevance that affects other aspects of the PC paradigm, meaning that it carries dogmatic weight outside itself? These questions do not insinuate any answers.

Second, PC argues that every covenant is conditional and unconditional.[34] This point needs elaboration for both the *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis* ramifications of the covenants. It is not clear in some ways what value this view has in the overall system. The discussion of conditionality might, in some ways, be tired and fit to be discarded, since too often scholars are debating the question of whether covenants are conditional without defining what that means in concrete terms. PC could help readers from the

perspective of Reformed covenant theology by explaining a few implications. Does a covenant's conditionality mean that works are part of the condition for our right relationship with God? Is the demand for obedience general, broad, and typological thereby showing our need for Christ? Or is it specific, narrow, and personal meaning that individual believers in the covenant are under conditions to render obedience in order to enter everlasting life? Further, what sort of conditions are in view? For example, the distinction of antecedent conditions (those necessary *for* salvation) and consequent conditions (those following *from* salvation) has historically played a significant role in how Reformed theology has explained conditionality in relation to the law-gospel distinction.[35] Are these sorts of conditions in view in PC?

The discussion of conditions can become rather winding. That potential is exactly why Reformed readers need further clarification for understanding precisely what PC is after in their affirmation that every covenant is conditional and unconditional. From the Reformed side, the most point question for this issue concerns its relation to soteriology. In other words, how does PC's use of this category relate to the doctrine of justification by faith alone? This issue is one where Reformed readers need help and clarification in relating this discussion to our cherished law-gospel distinction so that we can see how PC does not undermine this important premise. Again, the questions are requests for clarification, not insinuation of error. Further, the point that our potential understanding that this position might undermine the law-gospel distinction is a request for clarification on the assumption that clarification can be made unto satisfactory resolution concerning how the best proponents of PC argue their views.

3. Use real and trustworthy Reformed sources.

PC sometimes uses infelicitous sources for engaging Reformed covenant theology. On a minor level, *Kingdom through Covenant* engages a Sydney Anglican theologian concerning the threefold division of the law.[36] Without assuming that the cited theologian disagrees with the tradition of covenant theology on this issue, Sydney Anglicanism hardly best represents the core trajectory of classic covenant theology when there are plenty of published works on the moral law from within the Reformed perspective.[37]

At the major level, alongside representatives of mainstream, classic, confessional Reformed covenant theology — which does contain legitimate diversity — *Kingdom through Covenant* cites theologians whose theology has been rejected by denominational reports from the major NAPARC communions as out of accord with the Reformed confessions.[38] In other words, PC arguments lump confessional covenant theology into the same group as if we cited — at least as some of us see it — the absolute worst of Baptistic thought as representing PC ideas just because it was Baptistic. I would rather see believers sitting under the ministries of the pastors whom I know in the PC and 1689 federalist camps than to see them in the churches of a few writers cited in *Kingdom through Covenant* as though they represent the view I too hold. Given that PC has objected to being confused with so-called "new covenant theology" — even though the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant* itself identified progressive covenantalism as a species of new covenant theology — it seems fair to ask that PC would distinguish classic and confessional covenant theology from deviant versions that have been rejected in formal capacities.[39] The starting point for correction on this issue is perhaps to engage covenant theology *first* through its formulation in the Reformed confessions.

1689 Federalism

Again, we should balance appreciation and critique. So, for what am I most thankful in 1689 federalism?

- They seem to be clearly and consistently committed to the law-gospel distinction, especially as it relates to soteriology.[40]
- Their commitment to the abiding validity of God's moral law, including the sabbath.[41]
- It grows within a commitment to doing theology in accord with confessional standards.[42]

In some ways, the clear and uniform affirmation of the law-gospel distinction among 1689 federalists ought to be the note that resounds the loudest in this whole discussion. Baptist and Reformed theologians might easily lose sight of this crucial bond of unity in the gospel amidst our other disagreements.

We ought not to lose sight of this foundational shared commitment even as we attempt to reckon with areas of difference.

What would I change in 1689 federalism? Reformed theology's interaction with 1689 federalism is more complicated and often produces more frustrations among conversation partners because of much agreement. Sam Renihan, 1689 federalism's most able teacher, is a dear friend. 1689 federalism agrees with traditional Reformed covenant theology about the basic notions of the covenant of works, the covenant of redemption, and that the covenant of grace is the one source of salvation across redemptive history.[43] Difficulty arises because some representatives of 1689 federalism use some different methods to explain what are in some ways some very similar ideas. These wished-for changes then address methodological features that seem to complicate the discussion. I understand in light of their strong application of the law-gospel distinction that advocates of 1689 federalism clear understanding and explanation of the gospel itself, meaning the reservations below regard the *clarity* of explanation concerning the OT saints' experience of the gospel. Admittedly, this issue is niche but is the area of most focused disagreement between traditional Reformed covenant theology and 1689 federalism.

1. The concept of covenants.

1689 federalism relies on the contention that covenants are entirely positive constructions, arguing that they are something fully *post hoc* to nature and, therefore, not mutually informing. Renihan writes, "That which God does beyond nature is supernatural. Covenants fall into the latter category. They are not part of the natural created order" and "Covenants, therefore, are not natural arrangements."[44] We should all agree that covenant is not identical to nature, as if creation and covenant can be completely conflated.[45] All the same, Renihan leans heavily on this distinction to emphasize further the distinctions of natural law from positive law and natural religion from instituted religion.[46]

It is worth noting already the 1689 federalism is at odds with both traditional covenant theology and PC at this point. Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1–2 states that "God gave to Adam a law, as covenant of works," which was later delivered in the Decalogue as a rule of righteousness, and Westminster Confession 4.2 already clarified that it was "the law of God

written on their hearts."[47] In other words, the natural law was the basis of the covenant of works, which is exactly why some Reformed theologians have called it the covenant of nature.[48] In other words, Reformed theology saw continuity between creation and the covenant of works, rather than a strictly positivist relation. Similarly, PC argues: "Creation, then, with a pre-fall and post-fall distinction sets the context for subsequent covenants which ultimately find their fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant."[49] PC recognizes the demand for perfect obedience *as grounded in creation* as driving the tension within the covenants forward toward Christ.[50] Considered from the vantage of strictly the *historia salutis*, this point is fully compatible with Reformed covenant theology.

1689 federalism parts ways with both camps on this issue. This difference emerges even in the Second London Baptist Confession as it omits the full-orbed discussion of the covenant of works that was contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith. As they revised the Westminster Confession for their use, the framers of the Second London Baptist Confession omitted the explicit statement of the covenant of works entirely from their chapter on the covenants.[51] This omission does not set the Second London Baptist Confession at odds with the covenant of works, and proponents of 1689 federalism have readily defended that doctrine as compatible with their confession.[52] Even though the covenant of works is mentioned elsewhere in this confession (20.1), its omission — for whatever historical reason — under the direct discussion of the covenants is striking.[53]

1689 federalism's difference with traditional Reformed covenant theology is not limited to a mere omission of an explicit statement of the covenant of works in our confessional chapters on the covenants. The difference is arguably clearest in the confessional statements about creation. Westminster Confession 4.2 outlines how God created man "endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts and the power to fulfill it." After this description of the natural law, it affirms in the same paragraph that "Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures."[54] Westminster's formulation then certainly relates the command about the prohibition against the tree of knowledge as an additional, positive command to the

natural law but keeps them together as the natural and positive aspects of the covenant of works. The act of combining our description of that positive law so closely to our formulation of the natural law suggests, as was commonplace in Reformed theology, that the tree command was simply a symbolic representation of our natural obligations for the period of Adam's covenantal probation.[55]

In contrast, the Second London Confession makes a hard separation of these ideas. Its formulation makes two paragraphs where Westminster had only one. Second London 4.2 somewhat follows Westminster's position on natural law but does rework it:

> After God made all other Creatures, he created man, man and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, rendering them fit unto that life to God, for which they were created; being made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; having the Law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change.[56]

The broad contours align with Westminster 4.2, but significant details differ. This natural law rendered Adam "fit unto that life to God, for which they were created." Is that life merely continuation in the natural but upright state or is it eschatological? As we will continue to see, the combination of concepts in Westminster Confession 4.2, 7.2, and 19.1 suggest that the Reformed perceived at the confessional level that Adam was naturally oriented toward eschatological life with God, which the covenant of works as founded in the natural law with a symbolic positive law enabled Adam to attain.

The Second London Confession 4.3 then separates the positive law about the tree from its formulation of natural law.

> Besides the Law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; which whilst they kept, they were happy in their Communion with God, and had dominion over the Creatures.[57]

The wording follows the end of Westminster Confession 4.2 exactly, but the paragraph break has wider implications. For this Baptist formulation, the condition of maintaining communion with God was located specifically in

the positive command about the tree. Reformed theology bound natural and positive law together in covenantal union whereas early-modern Baptist theology was separating them to tie covenants to the positive laws alone.

A comparison of the confessional discussion of God's law continues to reveal that deeper rift between the Baptist and Reformed confessional formulations of the covenants. Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1 states:

> God gave to Adam a law, *as a covenant of work*, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.[58]

The Second London Confession 19.1 reads:

> God have to Adam a Law of universal obedience, written in his Heart, and a particular precept of not eating the Fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; by which he bound him, and all his posterity to entire exact and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the bread of it, and indued him with power and ability to keep it.[59]

The notable omission in the Second London Confession is that the law written on Adam's heart was given to him *as the covenant of works*. Although Second London 20.1 explicitly mentions the covenant of works, its formulation of the law refused to equate the natural directly with the covenant of works.[60] Given that Second London 4.3 tied the maintenance of communion with God exclusively to the positive law, the aspects of the covenant of works affirmed after the semi-colon in 19.1 should also likely be tied exclusively to that positive law. After all, in comparison to Westminster 19.1, the framers of the Second London Baptist inserted this description of the positive law as the direct antecedent to what they accept about the covenant of works.

At the confessional level, Baptists historically articulated a greater divide between nature and covenant than Reformed theologians have. Given my argument above, we should then be clear that early-modern Baptists were not following Reformed theology directly or identically about the relationship of covenant to creation. 1689 federalism has picked up that

difference to emphasize the positivist nature of covenants wherein, as positivism accentuates, the singular and conventional is stressed to the exclusion of relations that are inferred according to some other principle than sense experience.[61] Its formulation — inasmuch as voluntarism emphasizes what is chosen over what has an underlying reason — propounds a more voluntarist notion of covenants, especially the creation covenant than either traditional Reformed covenant theology or PC. Why is this issue so important?

First, it affects how we think of our covenantal anthropology. Certainly, the *distinction* between creation and covenant is commonplace in Reformed theology.[62] Nonetheless, 1689 federalism's *separation* of creation and covenant presses their position toward a Roman Catholic anthropology, wherein the doctrine of pure nature divides our supposedly natural and supernatural ends according to what belongs to our base nature and what is superadded to our nature by grace. That Roman doctrine draws heavily upon the distinction of natural and supernatural religion, especially concerning how we are ordered to a supernatural end in the beatific vision and how to attain that superadded end. Regarding our eschatological orientation, Renihan writes: "Confirmed eternal life and immutable perfect communion with God were not part of Adam's natural constitution."[63] On this point as such, everyone agrees so far as it goes. The real question, however, is whether God had created Adam *naturally* oriented toward that eschatological life. If yes, then the covenant is not *entirely* positive or disconnected from nature. If no, then God had to add that eschatological orientation to Adam's base constitution, producing the Roman Catholic doctrine of pure nature. Renihan's best published formulations of this consideration of orientation are ambiguous:

> The attachment of the promise of the reward of life to Adam's obedience establishes the identity of this covenant. Adam's obedience would not have been meritorious for any reward at all, not to mention the 'reward of life,' were it not for an arrangement established by God to arrange it. The only reason that Adam's obedience to the positive laws would be meritorious for eternal life, was because God condescended to make it so according to covenant.[64]

The claim, however, that "in God's dealings with Adam, God advanced him beyond his created state" might suggest something along the lines of the pure nature idea.[65] The problem is that in Reformed theology, we are fundamentally a religious creature even naturally ordered toward a relationship with God in consummate, eschatological communion. In traditional Reformed covenant theology, the covenant was often the judicial mechanism enabling Adam to attain his eschatological end for which God had created him.[66] For PC to seek reproachment with 1689 federalism on this point of the relationship of creation and covenant would seem to entail a wholesale repudiation of their paradigm, which gravitates away from positivist principles.

This positivist concept of covenant has serious bearing on how 1689 federalism relates the various biblical covenants. Renihan connects it to a methodological concern:

> The all-important connection of these truths for the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology is that because covenants are not natural arrangements, "not found in nature's garden," there are certain senses in which they are not the proper subjects of consequential, or inferential, arguments. And thus, one must be careful not to over-systematize or draw connections and proportions from that which is what it is only by virtue of sovereign institution. To put it another way, necessary consequences don't work for covenants because there is no necessity in covenants. Covenants are not natural. They are not part of the created order.[67]

Other statements confirm a consistent implementation of this premise: "And thus, what one covenant is has no necessary connection to what another covenant is. This clarifies the connection of the distinction between creation and covenant to the distinctions between natural law and positive law, as well as natural religion and instituted religion."[68] "The point is simply that they are not *necessarily* true because the features of one covenant cannot be used to determine the features of another covenant. There is no natural necessity, inference, or proportion between things instituted, things positive, things supernatural, things covenantal."[69] 1689 federalism then denies that the various covenants are mutually informing.

The positivist notion of covenant means that no covenant has any integral relation to another covenant. This point is, first, at odds with the redemptive-historical outlook of PC that argues that patterns, structures, types, and foundations built into creation itself establish the forward motion of Scripture's narrative through the covenants.[70] Methodologically, 1689 federalism and PC move opposite directions about the baseline concept of a covenant, especially in how mutually informing they are, and how covenants press toward their fulfillment in Christ. Philosophically, the positivist premise that covenants cannot be used to understand the features of other covenants, as a dismissal of inferential interpretation, entails that every covenant is a particular simply designated as a covenant, but no real universal category of covenant exists. Hence, the 1689 federalist notion of covenant is nominalist. As Matthew Barrett has effectively shown, nominalism ran contrary to the main thrust of Reformation doctrine, which is clearest in soteriology.[71]

Although no 1689 federalists have applied their positivist principles to the conditions of justification before God, the insistence upon entirely positivist conditions as the terms of each covenant unintentionally opens the door for a possibility to introduce works in soteriology. Emphatically, the potential liability to an error is not the same as making it, and no 1689 federalists, at least insofar as I am aware, have made this error — their conscious commitment to the law-gospel distinction is a hard guardrail against it. Nonetheless, no reason is immediately obvious why, if covenantal conditions are purely positive, God could not assign the performance of imperfect works as the terms for obtaining salvation. If the condition for eschatological life is not grounded in the natural demand according to humanity as God made us undamaged and with original righteousness, then why could not accept the imperfect performance by sinners of some positively stipulated condition? After all, some 1689 federalists have posited that sinners could earn access to the substance of covenants that had works as the condition when the substance pertained to earthly blessings.[72] Given this voluntarist basis, 1689 federalism needs to clarify — according to their system — what real principle inherently prevents the same sort of positivist grounds of merit from applying to sinners concerning heavenly rewards. This call for clarification and consistency in no way suggests that 1689 federalists have made the error that is a possibility within their system's operative principles.

That connection to nominalism traces out in how 1689 federalists interpret the covenant formula of God's repeating promise that "I will be God to you" (e.g., Gen 17:7; Exod 6:7; 19:5–6; 29:45–46; Jer 7:23; 24:7; 31:1, 33; Ezek 34:24, 30; 2 Cor 6:16–17; Rev 21:3, 7). For 1689 federalism, God's promise "to be God to you" does not mean the same thing in every covenant but is the summary of whatever blessing belongs to that covenant.[73] On the one hand, Renihan implements this point concerning 1689 federalism's understanding of how the revealed terms of a covenant determine if it is a covenant of works or grace, articulating how the grounds for God to be God to his people change the basis for how the people experience that blessing.[74] On the other hand, Pascal Denault draws upon the nominalist principle of refusing to let any covenant have necessary relation to another by applying the same argument to what the blessing itself is:

> In other words, what having God as one's God implies must be determined based on the terms of the covenant by which God commits to being God for his people. As the Creator, is not God the God of all men (Ps. 24.1; Mal 2.10; Mt 5.45; 1 Tim. 4.10; 2 Pet 2.1)? As the redeemer of Israel, he was the God of all people without all people necessarily benefitting from the grace of salvation (Rom. 9:6–8; nevertheless, this same people is often called the people of God (Deut. 27.9; 2 [sic] Rom 9.6; Ps.50.7). By committing to being the God of Israel, the Lord was promising her superiority over other nations, protection, the possession of Canaan, the blessing of her land … [sic] (cf. Deut. 28.1–14). On the terms of the covenant concluded in the Sinai desert can tell us to what God was committing by promising to be the God of Israel.[75]

Although Renihan's argument addresses how the terms of the covenant determine the way that people obtain the blessing of having God as their God, Denault inverts the point to say that the terms and the type of covenant determine what the blessing even means that God is God to a people. He made this point clear in explaining the new covenant:

> To be God's people under the New Covenant, is guaranteed by the forgiveness of sins obtained by the mediator of this covenant; this is why Christ is presented as the one who is its guarantor (Heb. 7.22)… What is more, to have the Lord as one's God under the Old Covenant did not confer the same blessings as

> under the New Covenant: the first guaranteed earthly blessings, the second, heavenly blessings: eternal life.[76]

Renihan is on firmer conceptual ground since he did not leave the meaning of the covenant formula entirely up for grabs. Denault, however, has assigned entirely different blessings to the same words.

The significance of Denault's maneuver leaves the principal basis for biblical theology in question. Progressive revelation is not static but develops in continuity with previous revelation. Even as later writers develop themes by invoking phrases and concepts, that development and change occurs on the basis of assuming the same meaning as its earlier use and then reshaping it in a new context. That method of development, however, presumes that meaning carries over. Denault use of the nominalist/positivist concept of covenants omits that continuity of meaning, which is the basis of development. When Revelation 21:3 invokes the covenant formula from Leviticus 26:11–12 and Ezekiel 37:26–28, the intent is to describe the new heavens and new earth as the ultimate consummation God's promised covenant blessings from the OT — going all the way back to Abraham — rather than to revise the meaning of those blessings.[77] In 2 Corinthians 6:16–7:1, Paul enlists the same covenant formula from Leviticus 26:11 with exhortations from Isaiah 52:11 and Ezekiel 20:34 to show how the consummate reality of this old covenant blessing in the church should motivate Christians to holiness.[78] The positivist concept of covenants in 1689 federalism then leaves much for them to clarify to hold a cogent system together.

2. Dialectic Reasoning.

The tendency toward nominalist formulations also produces a dialectic tension in 1689 federalism when it comes to the unity of salvation across redemptive history. The insistence that the new covenant alone is the covenant of grace and that the previous covenants had their own distinct substance, therefore not administering the substance of the covenant of grace, produces a strained explanation of how old covenant believers received salvation. The effect is affirmations of seemingly incompatible ideas. Second London Baptist Confession 8.6 outlines the issues:

> Although the price of Redemption was not actually paid by Christ, till after his Incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated to the Elect in all ages successively, from the beginning of the World, *in and by those Promises, Types, and Sacrifices*, wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the Seed of the Woman, which should bruise the Serpents head; and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the World: Being the same yesterday, and today, and forever.[79]

Given that this statement is very close in wording to Westminster Confession 8.6, it helpfully sets out an area where there should be unflinching agreement as Baptists have historically confessed that the blessings of Christ's work—the substance of the new covenant—were distributed to believers through the ordinances of the OT covenants.[80]

In some ways similar to Reformed covenant theology, 1689 federalism argues that there is one covenant of grace providing salvation across the scope of redemptive history. Denault summarizes the position:

> The Baptists maintained unity with the Presbyterians by affirming the unity of the Covenant of Grace. Baptist theology subscribed fully to the notion of their [sic] being only one Covenant of Grace in the Bible, which bring together all who are saved as one people … The Baptists considered that the Covenant of Grace started immediately after the Fall and that the substance of this covenant, even under the Old Testament, was salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.[81]

Although this statement seemingly aligns with mainstream Reformed covenant theology, this expression of 1689 federalism denies that the same substance—namely Christ and his benefits—belongs to the Old and NT covenants: "The Baptists saw a unity of substance in the Covenant of Grace from Genesis to Revelation, but they didn't see this same unity between the Old and the New Covenants. They therefore did not accept the idea that those two covenants were two administrations of a same covenant [should be "same substance"]."[82] This formulation raises the question about how OT believers received that salvation.

The tension comes because 1689 federalism insists that the new covenant is exclusively the covenant of grace but denies that there have been diverse administrations of its substance. Drawing upon the distinction

between the revelation and the administration of the covenant of grace, Denault concluded: "The Baptists believed that before the arrival of the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace was not formally given, but only announced and promised (revealed)."[83] To reconcile how the covenant of grace could grant its benefits before Christ enacted the new covenant, Denault contended: "This distinction: (revealed/concluded) summarized the difference between the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament and the Covenant of Grace in the New Testament. In the Old, it was revealed, in the New, it was concluded (fully revealed according to the expression of the 1689)."[84] In this respect, "Before the establishment (νενομοθέτηται) of the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace did not have a concrete manifestation, any cultus or ceremony; it was not a covenant, but a promise revealed in an obscure manner under types and shadows."[85] This formulation demands an explanation for how believers received the grace of the new covenant/covenant of grace during the OT period.

Without a doubt, 1689 federalism affirms that believers during OT period did receive Christ's grace. The explanation of how that occurred introduces the dialectical aspect of their reasoning. Denault writes:

> The Presbyterians and the Baptists both believed that Christ's sacrifice was effective before being offered, however they saw the relationship of this effectiveness with the Old Covenant differently. Many paedobaptists considered that it was through the Old Covenant that Christ offered the benefits of his mediation to the believers that were under this covenant, while the Baptists affirmed the effectiveness of Christ's death from the revelation of the Covenant of Grace, but exclusively by virtue of the New Covenant. These two conceptions were very different; according to the paedobaptist conception, the work of Christ was communicated to believers both *by* the Old and New Covenants.[86]

The tension in this argument is that the Second London Confession also says that Christ's work was communicated believers specifically "in and by" the old covenants' ordinances, which Denault flatly denied. Any attempt to affirm the confessional language of "by" while also directly criticizing it seemingly involves some sort of dialectic language game grounded in nominalist principles.[87]

The confusion arises because of the dialectic between, on the one hand, 1689 federalism's attempt to affirm that OT believers received the grace of Christ and, on the other hand, their denial that the OT covenants were administrations of that substance. The problem is that we cannot truly have it both ways. Either the blessings of Christ's new covenant mediation were delivered in advance without the same external means as we have in the new covenant, or they were not. 1689 federalism affirms that Christ's blessings were applied to believers but wants to deny that it was administered differently. Eventually, they must affirm that one substance was differently administered, even if they parse that differently than the Westminster Confession. Denault writes: "Those who were saved before Christ were saved because of an oath; those who were saved after Him were saved because of a covenant."[88] Certainly, he means that the old covenant saints were saved because of Christ's work. That work was applied to old covenant believers, however, with the substance of the covenant of grace (for them, the new covenant) being given via an oath rather than a covenant. In other words, the substance was administered differently. It has to be so unless we are going to embrace full-throated dispensationalism even for a different manner of salvation. We end up with the same structure of one substance administered in different ways regardless of how we parse the method of administration. The simple fact is that the same covenantal benefits (substance) that we receive from Christ in the new covenant were either applied to believers before his coming through other means than we have now (particularly either through other but nonetheless sacramental ordinances or somehow with a lack of sacramental ordinances entirely) or it was not given at all until Christ came.

Among some representatives of 1689 federalism, this dialectical tension wherein the covenant of grace both communicated Christ's benefits and was not administered ends up breaking the wrong direction. Although the covenants of the old economy "carried the promise of another covenant," they revealed but did not apply the substance of this covenant of grace.[89] More specifically, "Through typology, the Old Covenant portrayed salvation in Jesus Christ, but it did not offer salvation in and of itself."[90] This point becomes clear as Renihan argued: "The covenant of grace is the in-breaking of the covenant of redemption into history through the progressive revelation and retroactive application of the New Covenant."[91] For

Reformed covenant theology, the ordinances of the OT covenants serve as means of grace to apply Christ and his benefits proactively, namely in advance, to believers before Christ came.[92] The 1689 federalist position that new covenant blessings retroactively applied to OT believers entails that those saints did not receive the full experience of saving benefits until after Christ inaugurated the new covenant.[93] Far from reading too much into infelicitous words, Renihan has written a whole volume explicitly defending the notion that OT saints did not enter heaven until after Christ came in the incarnation.[94] Although he affirmed that OT believers trusted in Christ, which guaranteed their future rescue from Sheol as a place of privation, he nonetheless resolved the dialectical tension about the lack of administration for the covenant of grace by rejecting that OT believers had the full experience of Christ's blessings, specifically in that they did not enter heaven until Christ came in the incarnation.[95]

Similar to the way that 1689 federalism's positivist construction of covenants facilitates a Roman Catholic doctrine of pure nature in anthropology, their denial of the same substance diversely administered starts to resemble a Roman reading of redemptive history. Cardinal Thomas Cajetan (1469–1534) articulated his understanding — positivist at that — of the redemptive historical development of the covenants:

> For we often read in the Old Testament that God deigned to make a pact with men. Indeed in Genesis 9, God's covenant is written about the future of not another universal flood. And in Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abraham to give the land of Canaan to his seed. And Genesis 17. The covenant of circumcision is written. And Exodus 24, Moses says, This is the blood of the covenant, etc. Jeremiah 31. God clearly speaks of the covenant of the new law and the old … For it is clear from these events that merit's condition can be found even legally in our works related to the first thing about which an agreement [conventio] was made with God.[96]

The notion that OT saints did not experience the full benefits of Christ until he came in redemptive history because the covenants of the old economy had another substance has an antecedent, but it is outside the Reformed tradition.

This redemptive-historical issue clearly pertains most forcefully to the ordinances or sacraments in the covenants of the old and new economies. At least for some 1689 federalists, the ordinances of the old economy, particularly circumcision, concerned merely the earthly promises to Abraham concerning a physical offspring, a land, and kingship rather than the spiritual realities of Christ.[97] Charles Hodge noted that Roman Catholics rejected the identity of substance across the covenant of grace precisely to differentiate the old and new sacraments. Because they believe the sacraments effectually communicate saving grace and saw that many Israelites rejected salvation, they teach that the ordinances of the old economy merely signify grace while the new convey it. This premise grounds Rome's reasoning for the *limbus patrum*, wherein OT believers did not enter heaven until after Christ came, namely because the covenantal ordinances of the OT could not directly communicate Christ and his benefits.[98] In arguing against the Anabaptists about the nature of salvation across the covenant of grace, Hodge said, "It follows from the same premises in opposition to the Romanists, that the salvation of the people of God who died before the coming of Christ was complete. They were truly pardoned, sanctified, and, at death, admitted to that state into which those dying in the Christian faith are now received."[99] The Reformed tradition has then long appealed to the unity among sacraments of the Old and NT in applying Christ and his benefits precisely to argue against the Roman notion of the *limbus patrum*.[100] Baptist theologian Craig Carter has articulated a stronger way forward in recognizing a real Christological ontology to the OT.[101] This model coheres well with traditional Reformed categories that effectively explain how the effects of Christ's mediation could be applied in full even before his historical work in the incarnation.[102]

The tension behind this matter of the proleptic application of Christ's benefits, which is bound into the nature of how OT ordinances could communicate salvation, rests partly on a confusion concerning external-internal issues. For some 1689 federalists, this confusion carries into even the new covenant itself. Baptists want to affirm that only those with the substance of the covenant of grace are in its administration. Denault thus criticized Reformed covenant theology for separating substance and administration: "We believe that it was arbitrary on the part of paedobaptists to link baptism, not to the internal substance, but to the

external administration of the Covenant of Grace since baptism symbolizes union in the death and resurrection of Christ (the ultimate spiritual substance of the Covenant of Grace."[103] The criticism itself is confused, however, because baptism — as I think everyone understands it — is an external rite applied tangibly to the body through the use of water.

The criticism also fails because it cannot cash out its own terms. Denault asserts: "In fact, the Scriptures declare that no member of the New Covenant can be deprived of its substance, the latter being nothing less than salvation in Jesus Christ."[104] The claim is patently false, however, since every communion has the problem of baptized and communing members proving that their profession of faith was false. Unless it is affirmed that every baptized person is truly and certainly saved, which likely necessitates an Arminian soteriology that none in this conversation employ, then we all have to admit that people can illicitly participate in the administration of the covenant of grace — however defined — without truly partaking of its substance. Renihan affirms clearer and better lines concerning the substance-administration distinction:

> We would agree with the distinction between the substance of the covenant — its inward invisible benefits — and the external administration of the covenant. So, not everyone who's eating the bread and drinking the cup is necessarily feeding on Christ by faith, not everyone who's baptized is partaking of Christ by faith in baptism, etc. We acknowledge that … But the idea that there is the inward, invisible benefits of the covenant — the substance — and the outward visible administration of it in its ordinances, we would absolutely affirm that.[105]

1689 federalism would be helped by implementing this solid understanding of the substance-administration discussion more thoroughly and consistently throughout the explanation of their system. The consistent application of this distinction would have helped avoid some of the problems about relating the substance of the new covenant to the covenantal administrations during the OT period.

This criticism about confusion over internal-external issues is not simply crossed-wires as if a Reformed covenant theologian is trying to fit Baptist theology into his Procrustean bed. Jordan Steffaniak has well

argued that Baptist covenant theology should align itself more thoroughly with Westminster federalism on all issues save the structure of the new covenant administration. He has leveled the same critique of confusion about the internal-external issues against Baptist compatriots:

> Second, the New Testament is also marked by an external physical sign: water baptism. It is not as if the New Testament suddenly sheds all external signs that point toward an inward reality. Water baptism guarantees a baptized heart as much as physical circumcision guarantees a circumcised heart. Why do Baptists think the New Covenant is purely internal when they have an external and physical sign in water baptism?[106]

Further, Steffaniak also recognized that we all share the same problem of explaining how some participate in the covenant's administration without partaking of its substance: "Baptists seem to forget that baptism is both a physical and spiritual reality—like outward and inward circumcision. There are plenty of people Baptists have baptized who are not carrying the internal reality of spirit baptism."[107] Steffaniak exemplifies the sort of theological reasoning that is highly conducive to greater reproachment among Baptist and Reformed explanations of covenant theology. We should *aim* for maximal agreement rather than independent systems.

Ultimately, 1689 federalism seems inconsistent with its own positivist criteria for determining the substance of specific covenants. This inconsistency occurs as they blend the OT covenants. Renihan clearly outlined the 1689 federalist paradigm for the terms-substance relation:

> You know what a covenant is based on what it grants. And the old covenant purifies the flesh. It doesn't purify the conscience, so therefore because it has an inferior promise and an other promise, a different promise from that of the new covenant, it cannot be the same for substance. The fact that the grace of Christ is presented to believers secondarily through typology still doesn't make the old covenant the new covenant. It just means that it's a type of the new covenant and that the grace of Christ is made known there.[108]

That criterion is not fully and consistently applied, however, concerning covenants besides the new covenant. Renihan cited Benjamin Keach, who

taught that the Adamic and Sinaitic covenants were different in "end and design" but "both, as to the Essence and Substance of them but one and the same Covenant."[109] Given the 1689 federalist premise of positive laws as defining a covenant's terms, these covenants are certainly different since the law for Adam concerning the tree is not the Mosaic laws. How, then, can these covenants be the same in substance? 1689 federalism sets aside the criteria for positivist terms determining a covenant's substance when it comes to relating the various OT covenants, resulting in an erroneous blending of those economies together.[110]

The attempted resolution of the dialectical relationship of the substance of Christ's benefits being administered before the incarnation is two-tier typology. Renihan specifies: "Integral to the Particular Baptists' covenant theology was their view of typology. Types revealed antitypes, but were distinct in substance from them."[111] If 1689 federalists truly affirm Second London Baptist Confession 8.6, the promises, types, sacrifices, and general ordinances of the OT covenants did deliver the antitypical substance, thereby administering the same substance, then it is hard to fathom how they can reconcile that affirmation with the premises of their typology. Yet, Renihan noted about the old economy ordinances that "the question arose as to whether their typical character made them distinct from the blessings to which they pointed. If there were a difference in substance between the type and antitype, one would have to acknowledge a difference in substance between the Old and New Covenants."[112] The two-tier explanation does not seem to harmonize this aspect of the 1689 federalist dialectic fully with their confession.

The argument for harmonization is to attach the spiritual component to the secondary layer of the types. Relying on John Cameron's covenant theology, 1689 federalism asserts that old covenant types were primarily about earthly realities and secondarily means of grace communicating Christ to the elect.[113] According to 1689 federalism, that a type primarily concerns something at the earthly level, only secondarily signifying the spiritual reality, makes the substance of the new covenant different from that of all the other covenants.

From the Reformed perspective, the two-level typology of 1689 federalism makes a type's relationship to Christ merely accidental, rather than inherent, conflicting with Hebrews' insistence that God established types precisely because of spiritual realities (Heb 8:1–7).[114] Two-

level typology's suggestion that a type's first-level typological significance is substantially distinct from its meaning in Christ seems to confuse the relationship of type and antitype. For example, the suggested two levels of animal sacrifices are (1) meeting the requirements of the Mosaic covenant and (2) pointing to Christ's work.[115] It is not clear, however, how meeting the Mosaic covenant's requirements is a distinct level of typology apart from pointing to Christ. The animal sacrifices providing for tenure in Canaan is simply the type, and its antitype is Christ's death to provide for entrance into the new creation. Reading another level into the Mosaic sacrifices' significance arbitrarily disconnects one feature of the whole type and divests it of spiritual significance. In every example, it seems that the "first level" is simply what has been traditionally called the type — the earthly aspect — and the "second level" is simply the antitype — its eschatological fulfillment. The type is obviously not its fulfillment, but if its meaning as a type is "substantially distinct" from its fulfillment, then it is no longer a type. [116]

The culminating observation is that if OT ordinances were only secondarily about Christ, they were primarily about something else. In other words, 1689 federalism seems at odds with the inherent unity of progressive revelation concerning, as PC would put it, the plurality of covenants drive the metanarrative of God's one plan culminating in Christ.[117] For 1689 federalism, the OT covenants are only secondarily about that one plan. 1689 federalism should help its Reformed readers by clarifying how their two-tier typology does not make the OT primarily about something other than Christ, implicitly veering toward dispensationalist structures.

From a Reformed perspective, the problem in 1689 federalism concerning typology and substance is tied into a misunderstanding of sacramental function. Renihan outlined the 1689 federalist premise for distinguishing the type's meaning from the antitype's meaning: "On the earthly level, animal sacrifices had a real function and purpose and meaning. And that meaning was *substantially distinct from its antitypical meaning*. The blood of goats and bulls is not the blood of Christ, and their forgiveness is not the forgiveness that Christ's blood affords. Nevertheless, they made Christ's forgiveness known."[118] The move to distinguish the substance of a type from its antitypical significance aims to keep the substance of the covenant of grace from belonging in any inherent way to the covenants of the old economy: "Thus the Old Covenant and the New, though closely

connected through typology, were not the same thing. They were not one in substance. And their differences could not be reduced to external administrational changes."[119] Thus, 1689 federalism denies that type and antitype have the same substance in order to keep the substance of the covenant of grace from having any direct or inherent relationship to the ordinances of the OT covenants.

The claim that a type cannot be the substance of its antitype, from the vantage of sacramental function, misses the point entirely. The premise itself confuses the nature of typology. The type *as type* is necessarily about its antitype, else it is not serving as a type. For example, if we consider the animal sacrifices without reference to their divinely intended meaning in fore-signifying Christ's sacrifice, then we are no longer discussing them as types. The sacrifices' truly historical — albeit proleptic — correspondence to their fulfillment in Christ is what makes them typological.[120] Outside that relationship to an antitype, they cannot be a type. This same premise considered in the example of animal sacrifices applies to all types. 1689 federalism seems to miss that they cannot validly speak of a type outside of its relation to its fulfillment in its antitype. Outside that relation, the person, event, or institution that is a type in relation to the antitype becomes just something that happened in history. The 1689 federalist model of typology then risks evacuating the *inherent* spiritual valence from the OT and the God-appointed features of religious life for the believers who lived during that OT period.[121] 1689 federalism can help its Reformed readers by clarifying how it maintains that necessary *inherent* connection between type and antitype.

This skewed premise of typology disrupts a properly sacramental understanding of the OT types and ordinances. Since Augustine, Christians have always had a distinction between signs and the realities signified.[122] So, of course a type, since it is a *sign*, is not *itself* the substance of its antitype, which is the signified reality. Nonetheless, the same is true of ordinances in the new covenant since the sign baptism is not *itself* the reality of regeneration and the signs of the bread and the cup in the Lord's Supper are not *themselves* the physical body and blood of Christ. Thus, in the new covenant, we also have signs that have a sacramental relation to the spiritual realities that they signify. Interestingly, the catechisms most closely linked to the network of churches that composed the Second London Baptist Confession omit the language of

signs and seals from their discussion of baptism and the Lord's Supper, thus departing from the standard Augustinian pattern and creating a precedent for the lack of sacramental awareness in 1689 federalism.[123]

The sacramental function of the OT types and ordinances is again simply what Second London Confession 8.6 affirms. Namely, the virtue, efficacy, and benefits of Christ's incarnate work were applied to believers during the OT period "*in and by* those Promises, Types, and Sacrifices."[124] Certainly, those types and ordinances proleptically revealed and signified Christ and his work. They also applied, as means of grace, Christ and his benefits to believers who made use of those ordinances with true faith in the reality therein signified. Daniel Block outlines this sacramentality well:

> when God observed faith demonstrated in a pure life and rituals performed as he instructed, he applied to that person the forgiveness made possible through the blood of Christ, whose redemptive work was "foreknown" (Gk. *proginōskō*; cf. the use of this verb in Rom. 8:29; 11:2) and who was slain from "before the foundation of the world" (cf. 1 Pet. 1:20).[125]

Block says essentially the same as theologians on both sides of the baptism debate have affirmed in Westminster Confession 8.6 and Second London Confession 8.6.

1689 federalists obviously affirm the statements of their confession. Nonetheless, their version of typology has seemingly disconnected the OT typological ordinances from their sacramental function. If the types and ordinances of the former covenants truly delivered Christ and his benefits to those who used them in true faith — in the same way as the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and prayer serve as means of grace unto Christ for us today — then those types applied the substance of the covenant of grace (even if the covenant of grace is defined as the new covenant). The point has never been that a sacramental ordinance is the substance or reality signified. The point is that God has used these signifying and/or typological ordinances as means of grace to bring spiritual realities to bear upon believers. Inasmuch as God used the features of religious life during the OT to create, confirm, and cultivate faith in Christ, they administered the substance of the covenant of grace. 1689 federalism can help its Reformed readers by explaining, clarifying, and developing its understanding of

the sacramental role that OT ordinances had in truly applying Christ and his benefits, that is the substance of the covenant of grace.

3. Manner of Engagement.

The scholars and teachers in 1689 federalism, inasmuch as I know them, are fine and godly men. I count several of them as my friends — you will have to ask them about their opinion of me. The adherents, however, are often hard at war. 1689 federalism, even according to Renihan, is largely on online movement with certain liabilities that are inherent to that medium.[126] Some of the most prominent advocates of 1689 federalism are these online figures, who seemingly fail to make good-faith efforts at doing theology.

They often twist alternative arguments into the worst possible meaning, even despite the clarification, objection, and insistence of the people who made those arguments. Ironically, they also persistently claim to be misunderstood and misrepresented without offering full explanation to address what has been misunderstood. Often this tactic simply leans on one side of their dialectic structure as is advantageous to the moment without holding it together with the opposing side of the dialectic.

It is hard to take the claim of misrepresentation seriously any longer unless a clearer interpretation is proved and demonstrated from the existing published material as it is worded presently. Richard Lucas has noted that 1689 federalism has not published with mainstream evangelical publishers, instead producing material through self-publication and "in-house small publishing efforts."[127] The lack of any major publisher's editorial team might explain why Reformed and PC readers seem, at least from the 1689 federalist perspective, to misunderstand them so frequently and thoroughly: no rigorous grid of consistency and cogency has been forced upon writings from the 1689 federalist perspective. On the other hand, if I might blunt for a moment, perhaps that lack of consistency, cogency, and clarity could be a reason why 1689 federalists have not been able to land their writings with those mainstream publishers. The point is that 1689 federalist writings themselves may lend to misinterpretation because of an inherently non-cogent and internally confused nature. The 1689 federalist claim to be misrepresented would then be the boy who cried wolf.

1689 federalism can help its conversation partners from Reformed covenant theology (and PC for that matter) by toning down the aggression

and limiting its tendency toward heated debate. Many Reformed theologians are losing interest in 1689 federalism because we feel its representatives want us to engage with them only so that they can have another platform to debate us. All of us — and I certainly do — should lament any contention or ungodliness in how our party conducts itself in theological discussion. Reformed theologians have undoubtedly been guilty of this fault at times, and we should repent if we are liable of it. We should all should work toward more cordial interaction aimed at friendship and greater agreement.

Conclusion

Scripture makes great use of covenant as an important theme, which Baptist and Reformed theologians have rightly recognized. We often struggle to understand each other well concerning how we are interpreting the covenants when we come at them from varying hermeneutical and systematic standpoints. Before criticizing each other on particular aspects of our systems, we should strive for greater methodological clarity as we press for greater, even maximal, agreement on foundational matters. It is worth stating those areas of agreement and appreciation before rushing to contend over areas of disagreement. Accordingly, covenant theologies of varying kinds should not limit the discussion to ecclesiology since that is the primary area of divergence and will short circuit discussion on other fronts. This essay has tried to outline ways in which Reformed covenant theology, at least as I understand it, struggles to accept certain methodological aspects of PC and 1689 federalism in hopes that its suggestions might foster clearer discussion and even mutual methodological refinement moving forward. Thankfully, even though someone in this discussion necessarily fails to recognize a birdbath, ultimately Christ washes the chicks he gathers to himself to make us clean before God's throne. Someone will be shown as wrong about whom gets how much water. Blessed are we all to know that Christ is the power behind that cleansing water for all who trust in him.

1 I was privileged to present a version of this paper as part of a panel, including Stephen Wellum, Richard J. Lucas, Daniel Scheiderer, and Robert Howel, focused on Baptist Covenant Theology at the Evangelical Theological Society 2023 annual meeting. I am thankful for the opportunity to have a serious but encouraging interaction with these dear brothers about a topic of increasing importance to us all.

2 Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World* (Short Studies in Biblical Theology; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (eds.), *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016); Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," in Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (eds.), *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 74–111; Stephen J. Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26 no. 1 (2022): 164–87; Richard Lucas, "The Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology: Comparing 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26 no. 1 (2022): 116–63.

3 Samuel Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ: His Covenant and His Kingdom* (Cape Coral, Fl: Founders Press, 2020); Samuel D. Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists* (1642–1704) (Oxford: Regents Park College, 2018); Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism*, rev. ed. (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2016); Richard C. Barcellos (ed.), *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014); Richard C. Barcellos, *Getting the Garden Right: Adam's Work and God's Rest in Light of Christ* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2017); Samuel D. Renihan, "Above and Beyond: Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist Covenant Theology," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26 no. 1 (2022): 90–114.

4 Even representatives of 1689 federalism have noted that PC rejects paedobaptism more than covenant theology wholesale, e.g. Samuel D. Renihan, "*Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, A Review Article," *Journal of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies* 1 no 1 (2014): 163.

5 The assumption sometimes is that PC and 1689 federalism should and must be in close agreement because they are both Baptist movements; Daniel Scheiderer, "Progressive Covenantalists as Reformed Baptists," *Westminster Theological Journal* 82 (2020): 137–52; Blake Wade Johnson, "One Position, Two Administrations: Exploring the Theological Overlap Between 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism" (ThM thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021). This assumption can hold only if the baptismal debate is the tail that is wagging the dog of Baptist covenant theology, as Reformed theologians have often suspected.

6 On this point of emphasizing focus on the major premises in the covenant discussion, Jordan Steffniak's assertion that most paedobaptists assume that covenant theology entails our sacramental practice seems to run both ways, since Baptist theologians — Steffaniak excepted — rarely affirm the full covenantal system with modifications only concerning new covenant ecclesiology; Jordan Steffaniak, "Reforming Credobaptism: A Westminster Alternative for Reformed Baptist Identity," *Journal for Biblical and Theological Studies* 4 no 2 (2019): 280n2, 296–97; also Patrick Abendroth, *Covenant Theology* (Omaha, NE: Pactum Publishing, 2023). In contrast to Steffaniak's claim of that Reformed theologians assume that covenant theology "necessarily implies paedobaptism," my own view is that covenant theology *eventually* entails paedobaptism. The central premises of paedobaptism are (or should be) built from explicit NT arguments. Nonetheless, the soteriological core of covenant theology likely has stopping points within the linear development toward ecclesiological implications where Baptists could revise certain premises while still agreeing with us about the continuity of salvation across redemptive history.

7 Brent E. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 39–68; Richard J. Lucas, "The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11 and the Nature of Israel's Future Salvation," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 235–54; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 748–49, 799–807.

8 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 799–807; Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 170–71.

9 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 657–60; Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 177–80.

10 Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, "Rejoinder to Review of *Kingdom through Covenant*," *Westminster Theological Journal* 76 (2014): 450–52.

11 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 35 (italics original).

12 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 34 (italics original).

13 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 35n8 (italics original).

14 Casper Olevianus, *An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Classic Reformed Theology; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 9–15. Thanks to R. Scott Clark for this reference and for his feedback on this entire essay.

15 Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 1.

16 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 4.

17 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 168, 170, 171, 175–76; Samuel D. Renihan, Guy Prentiss Waters, Stephen J. Wellum, and Michael Beck, "Covenant Theology Roundtable," *The London Lyceum* (September 12, 2022; accessed at https://youtu.be/uu7O2YbmSFM?feature=shared&t=2328), 38:48–39:50.

18 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 677.

19 The point of the covenant of works was never that Adam had to merit God's continued favor in the original state. Rather, Adam's covenantal condition of obedience pertained to obtaining eschatological advancement; cf. Lucas, "Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology," 125.

20 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 335; Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 183.

21 Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vol. (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1877), 3:617–18, 621–22.

22 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 183.

23 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 748

24 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 169, 173–75; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 616, 666–68.

25 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 675–76.

26 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:616–17.

27 Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 40–52.

28 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 676.

29 Johannes Cocceius, *Commentarius in Pentateuchum, Josuam, et Librum Judicum* (Amsterdam, 1669), 38 (Homo igitur eo ipso, quod fuit factus ad imaginem Dei, fuit constitutus quasi in foedere Dei).

30 Harrison Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology: A Systematic Introduction* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2024), 428n52, 429n57.

31 Stephen J. Wellum, "The Law of God," *The Gospel Coalition* (Concise Theology Series; accessed on October 22, 2023 at https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-law-of-god/).

32 Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 215–33; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 782–98; Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 171.

33 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 142n91; Lucas, "Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology," 133.

34 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 88–91; Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 167–70, 172–73, 177–78, 187n27.

35 For more theological elaboration of this antecedent-consequent distinction, see Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology*, 212–13, 237–40, 416–28.

36 Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2002), cited in Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 784–98.

37 e.g. Philip S. Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (Fearn: Mentor, 2010); J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996); Michael S. Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom: Relating to God and Others through the Ten Commandments* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1993).

38 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 76n84, 87n128, 90n136, 99n169, 104n180.

39 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 166, 184–86; Stephen J. Wellum with Brent E. Parker, "Introduction," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 2–4, 7; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 1st ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 24–25.

40 Samuel D. Renihan, "Above and Beyond: Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist Covenant Theology," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26.1 (2022): 91–93; Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 17–67; Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 20–22.

41 Richard C. Barcellos, *Getting the Garden Right: Adam's Work and God's Rest in Light of Christ* (Cape Coral, Fl: Founders Press, 2017), 81–269.

42 James M. Renihan, *A Toolkit for Confessions: Helps for the Study of English Puritan Confessions of Faith* (Recovering our Confessional Heritage; Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2017); Rob Ventura (ed.), *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* (Fearn: Mentor, 2023).

43 Samuel D. Renihan and Harrison Perkins, "Clarifying Some Confusions: Covenant Theology in Baptist and Presbyterian Perspective," *The London Lyceum* (March 13, 2023; accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8cylBBJWpU), 7:54–9:38.

44 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 13, 14.

45 David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 83–86.

46 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 15.

47 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:640, 611

48 E.g. Zacharius Ursinus, *Catechesis, Summa Theologiae*, in *Opera Theologica*, 3 vol. (Heidelberg: Johannes Lancellot, 1612), 1:14; Robert Rollock, *Tractatus De Vocatione Efficaci* (Edinburgh, 1597), 9; Franciscus Turrettinus, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, 3 vol. (Geneva, 1679–85), 8.3.5; Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans. Todd M. Rester, ed. Joel R. Beeke, 7 vol. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017–), 1.3.12.5, 9–11.

49 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 177.

50 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 178.

51 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:616–17; *A Confession of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country* (London: Benjamin Harris, 1677), 26.

52 Richard C. Barcellos, *The Covenant of Works: Its Confessional and Scriptural Basis* (Recovering our Confessional Heritage; RBAP: Palmdale, CA, 2016); Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 59–77.

53 *Confession of Faith … of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 67.

54 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 611–12.

55 For theological and historical defense of this claim, see Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology*, 41–45

56 *Confession of Faith … of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 17–18.

57 *Confession of Faith … of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 18.

58 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:640 (emphasis added).

59 *Confession of Faith … of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 62–63.

60 *Confession of Faith … of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 67.

61 Bernard Wuellner, SJ, *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Co., 1956), 93.

62 Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5 vol. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012–14), 2:32; Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus*, 3rd ed. (1694), 1.2.1.

63 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 66.

64 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 67–68.

65 Renihan, Waters, Stephen J. Wellum, and Michael Beck, "Covenant Theology Roundtable," 8:35–8:43.

66 For more considerations on this point in connection to Reformed covenant theology, see Harrison Perkins, *Righteous by Design: Covenantal Merit and Adam's Original Integrity* (Mentor, 2024).

67 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 17.

68 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 18

69 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 19.

70 Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," in Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (eds.), *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 90; Stephen J. Wellum, "A Progressive Covenantalism Response," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 205–7; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 675–77.

71 Matthew Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 251–83. See also Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

72 Concerning the covenant of works: "The only reason that Adam's obedience *to the positive laws* would be meritorious for eternal life, was because God condescended to make it so according to covenant." (Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 67–68; emphasis added) Drawing the same connection between positive ordinances and the works principle for sinners to earn blessing in covenant with God: "In other words, this is a demand for strict obedience from Abraham and his descendants. The way in which they will keep the covenant *is the circumcision* of all males on the eighth day after their birth … Consequently, this covenant can be classified as a covenant based on works, or obedience." (Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 92, 94)

73 Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 253–58.

74 "[W]hen God pledges to be God to a people in covenant, one cannot instantly assume that this is the covenant of grace." Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 257. 1689 federalism seems to suggest that the Old Testament covenants were all covenants of works: "In any covenant, God was the God of the covenant people. The question to be asked was, on what basis did God covenant himself to be the God of a given people?… His [Thomas Patient] arguments, then, were designed to prove that although God was indeed the God of Abraham's offspring according to the flesh, it was on the basis of their continued obedience to laws, not promises which God committed to perform." Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 134.

75 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 108.

76 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 109.

77 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 1046–48.

78 Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 350–58.

79 *Confession of Faith … of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 32 (emphasis added).

80 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:621–22.

81 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 56.

82 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 58.

83 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 62.

84 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 64

85 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 65; also "Before Christ, the Covenant of Grace was announced; after Christ, it was decreed (νενομοθέτηται)." Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 66.

86 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 72 (emphasis added).

87 By "language game," I of course mean in the technical, philosophical sense developed by Wittgenstein and do not suggest any sort of ethical sense as if 1689 federalist scholars are trying to play games with their words.

88 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 66–67.

89 Renihan, *Mystery*, 186. "These passages emphasize and reinforce the fact that the Abrahamic Covenant is first and foremost an earthly covenant of national promises." Renihan, *Mystery*, 97. "In other words, this [Abrahamic] covenant provides a descendant who will bless. But it *does not provide a relationship* to the descendant beyond common genealogy." Renihan, *Mystery*, 89 (emphasis added).

90 Renihan, Mystery, 37 (emphasis added). I understand that Renihan was here likely wanting to assert that the types did not *themselves* achieve salvation for God's people. Yet, this idea is not a matter of dispute between Reformed and 1689 federalist theology, since Reformed covenant theology affirms that the former types and ordinances applied *Christ and his benefits* to believers. 1689 federalists have often mischaracterized Reformed theology on this point and argued against a strawman. Still, Renihan's words state that the old covenant did not *offer* salvation in and of itself, which proves to be true since the doctrine of the *limbus patrum* means that the OT believers did not receive the full benefits of salvation until after Christ came.

91 Micah Renihan and Samuel Renihan, "Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology and Biblical Theology," in Richard C. Barcellos (ed.), *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014), 477 (emphasis added).

92 Westminster Confession of Faith 8.6, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:621–22.

93 I previously interpreted these same passages assuming too much agreement between 1689 federalism and Reformed covenant theology; Harrison Perkins, "Engaging Confessional Baptists on Covenant Theology (Part 2): Unity of Salvation in the Old and New Testaments," *The Heidelblog* (September 20, 2022; https://heidelblog.net/2022/09/engaging-confessional-baptists-on-covenant-theology-part-2-unity-of-salvation-in-the-old-and-new-testaments/). In light of other 1689 federalist literature and more conversations, my assumption that the language used entailed that OT believers did not have the full experience of Christ's benefits until after Christ came was correct.

94 Samuel D. Renihan, *Crux, Mors, Inferi: A Primer and Reader on the Descent of Christ* (Monee, IL: Independently Published, 2021). Renihan himself even documents how his view of Christ's descent runs against the mainstream trajectory of Reformed theology as well as his own Baptist confession; Renihan, *Crux, Mors, Inferi*, 105 – 29.

95 "Rather, there were many prior to Christ who trusted in Him through the mystery that made Him known and thus received all of the blessings that Jesus secured in His life, death, and resurrection. They believed the gospel, the good news, and were the children of the New Covenant." Renihan, *Mystery*, 192.

96 Thomas de Vio Cajetan, *de Fide et Operibus adversus Lutheranos*, ch. 7, in *Opuscula Omnia* (Lyon, 1562), 290 (Saepe enim legimus in veteri Testamento, Deum dignatum esse pacisci cum hominibus. Genesis enim 9. Scribitur pactum Dei de non futuro amplius universali diluvio. Et Genesis 15. Foedus iniit Deus cum Abraham de terra Chanahan danda semini eius. Et Genesis 17. Foedus circumcisionis scribitur. et Exodus 24. Moyses dicit, Hic est sanguis foederis, etc. Hiere. [Jeremiah] Quoque 31. De foedere novae legis ac veteris Deus manifeste loquitur).

97 Jeffrey D. Johnson, "The Fatal Flaw of Infant Baptism: The Dichotomous Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant," in Richard C. Barcellos (ed.), *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014), 223 – 56.

98 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vol. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 2:367.

99 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:373.

100 Turrettinus, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, 12.11.1 – 17; 19.9.1 – 18; Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:102 – 4.

101 Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018).

102 Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology*, 116 – 22, 187 – 216.

103 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 87.

104 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 152.

105 Samuel D. Renihan and Harrison Perkins, "Clarifying Some Confusions: Covenant Theology in Baptist and Presbyterian Perspective," *The London Lyceum* (March 13, 2023; accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8cylBBJWpU), 53:02 – 53:27, 53:50 – 54:01.

106 Steffaniak, "Reforming Credobaptism," 291.

107 Steffaniak, "Reforming Credobaptism," 292.

108 Samuel Renihan, "What is the Substance of a Covenant? Old vs New," (accessed on April 1, 2023 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89ZL-x3hrT8), 0:32 – 1:01.

109 Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 288n96, quoting Benjamin Keach, *The Ax laid to the Root Part II* (London, 1693), 15.

110 According to Denault: "We believe that the establishment of the Old Covenant started before the arrival of the Sinaitic Covenant. This covenant was concluded on the basis of a covenant between Abraham and God." (Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 99) Renihan explained how Philip Cary associated God's covenants with Abraham and at Sinai with his covenant with Adam in Eden using the logic of the same substance among them; Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 277.

111 Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 325; also Renihan, *Mystery*, 33, 38.

112 Renihan, *Mystery*, 36.

113 Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 48 – 57, 98, 214 – 15, 245; Renihan, "Above and Beyond," 98 – 102; Renihan, *Mystery*, 36.

114 Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:89 – 90, 94 – 100; Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 778; Q. 313 – 15 in John Calvin, *The Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, trans. Elijah Waterman (Hartford, MA: Sheldon and Goodwin, 1815), 88 – 89; Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 49 – 68. Note that "spiritual" is primarily eschatological in this context, not some Platonic notion of a non-earthly blessings. The spiritual realities concern Christ's work for us, which is historical, even though its efficacy was communicated in advance.

115 Renihan, *Mystery*, 33.

116 The preceding paragraph previously appeared in Harrison Perkins, "Engaging Confessional Baptists on Covenant Theology (Part 1): Typology," *The Heidelblog* (September 13, 2022; accessed at https://heidelblog.net/2022/09/engaging-confessional-baptists-on-covenant-theology-part-1-typology/).

117 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 35.

118 Renihan, *Mystery*, 33 (emphasis added).

119 Renihan, *Mystery*, 38.

120 James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 19–28.

121 Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology*; Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*; Hans Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

122 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 2.1, in Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1*, 14 vols. (New York, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 2:535; Augustine, *On Catechizing the Uninstructed*, 50.26, in Jacques Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64), 40:344 (signacula quidem rerum divinarum esse visibilia, sed res ipsas invisibiles in eis honorari); Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Book 1: The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007), 1.1.1; Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Book 4: On the Doctrine of Signs*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2010), 1.4.2; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (New York, NY: Benziger Bros., 1948; repr. Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), 3.60.2; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 4.14.1. For summary concerning early modern Protestantism, see Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c. 1530–1740* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; repr. 2004), 508–13.

123 E.g. Benjamin Keach, *Instructions for Children*, 9th ed (London, 1710), 97–101; William Collins, *A Brief Instruction in the Principles of Christian Religion* (London, 1695), 18–19. For more detailed exposition of this point, see Harrison Perkins, "Sacraments as Signs, Seals, and Means of Grace: A Guided Tour of Seventeenth-Century Catechisms in England," *Modern Reformation* 32 no. 3 (May/June 2023): 18–27.

124 *Confession of Faith … of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 32.

125 Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 272.

126 Renihan and Perkins, "Clarifying Some Confusions," 37:55–38:50, 41:00–41:07.

127 Lucas, "Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology," 146–47. The standout exception here is Scheiderer, "Progressive Covenantalists as Reformed Baptists," which was published in the *Westminster Theological Journal* and represents a significant achievement in satisfying an unsympathetic process of peer review.

Brothers from Another Mother? A Progressive Covenantalist Analysis of 1689 Federalism

Richard J. Lucas

Richard J. Lucas is Pastor of Teaching and Reaching at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida and the Director of the First Baptist Center for Ministry Training. He earned his PhD in New Testament from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. Dr. Lucas has co-edited *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (IVP, 2022) and contributed to *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (B&H, 2016).

Introduction

I've titled this article by using the colloquialism, "Brothers from Another Mother?"[1] As this contemporary idiom is often used, it refers to two people who act so similarly that they must be brothers, yet they look nothing alike, so they must have different mothers. As applied to the two contemporary Baptist covenantal theologies, my basic thesis is that 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism (PC) are both Baptist brothers, and actually in function (and theological distinctives) end up with many similar conclusions, but they can look so different on the surface. At the risk of being overly simplistic, but for the sake of comparison,[2] my contention is that the mother of *historical theology* birthed the modern-day version of Baptist covenant theology we now commonly call 1689 Federalism. And, similarly, the mother of *biblical theology* birthed PC as a contemporary version of Baptist covenantal theology. These different origins have resulted

in different historical developments, different conversation partners, different ecclesiological settings, and different vocabularies, terminologies, and theological burdens to be protected. The consequence is that (in many cases) many proponents of 1689 Federalism and some proponents of PC, because their respective systems look so different on the surface, are largely talking past each other and often not understanding each other (which is especially the case for 1689 Federalists). It's no coincidence that the leading exponents of 1689 Federalism have PhDs in historical theology, and the leading exponents of PC have PhDs in biblical and systematic theology. There is a disciplinary gap that is not easily crossed at times.

Even the labels that have come to describe these respective Baptist theological proposals illustrate these different origins. Though Baptists have been doing covenantal theology for centuries, the terms 1689 Federalism and PC are of recent vintage.[3] Speaking autobiographically, when I showed up on the campus of Southern Seminary as an MDiv student two decades ago, no one, neither professors nor students were using these theological labels, and they could not be found in print either.[4] I took all of my church history and Baptist history courses with Tom Nettles and Michael Haykin. I fell in love with my historical Baptist heritage and considered the 17th century Particular Baptists my theological forefathers. Yet it would be another decade before these burgeoning Baptist covenantal theologies coalesced around this new parlance.

Two landmark works, which have each set the terms of the conversation since their publication released in less than a year from each other. In 2012 Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum published *Kingdom Through Covenant* and articulated a version of Baptist covenantal theology they described as "progressive covenantal" for the first time in print. Although anecdotally I knew of a growing body of students around campus who were already using the term informally to describe the teaching of their professors as early as 2004, it wasn't until *Kingdom Through Covenant* was published that the label became widely known and embraced.

In that first edition, Wellum states that in describing their "kingdom through covenant" proposal as "PC" they recognize that they are "coin[ing]" a new term.[5] He writes, "Even though it is a *new term*, it nicely captures our basic proposal."[6] Wellum adds, "This view may also be thought of as a 'Baptist theology' since we believe that it best provides the grounding

to a Baptist ecclesiology over against other ecclesiologies. However, since our view has more implications than merely that of ecclesiology and since Baptists differ in matters of God's sovereignty, soteriology, and eschatology, 'progressive covenantalism' is probably a more appropriate label."[7] The term indicated that their proposal was not progressive *dispensationalism*, nor was it *traditional* covenantalism. And descriptively, the term PC aptly summarizes that the *progressive* unfolding of God's one redemptive plan through the biblical *covenants* forms the structure of the biblical-theological storyline.

What was a surprise to me at least at the time, was the 2013 publication of the ThM thesis from a French-Canadian Reformed Baptist Pastor. Pascal Denault's *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology* was published in English and soon after given a wider promotion when it was featured on the new website: www.1689federalism.com.[8] Brandon Adams, the purveyor of the website, coined the term "1689 Federalism" to describe this "new" version of Baptist covenantal theology. A new term was needed to describe this fresh articulation because it stood in contrast to the version of covenant theology held by most other contemporary Reformed Baptists.[9] *1689 Federalism* was the term chosen by those who advocate for this view because they believe they are rearticulating the covenantal (federal) theology that the majority of British Particular Baptists formulated in the 17th century and that stood behind their seminal doctrinal statement, the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith.[10]

Besides wanting to survey this background, my point is to highlight how even the respective terminology reflects their origins. 1689 Federalism was birthed as a result of historical retrieval efforts, even to distinguish themselves from other modern Reformed Baptists who articulated a version of covenantal theology that yes, fell within the bounds of the 1689 Confession, and yes, could be found to have some historical precursors, but is now, in light of more historical work, understood not to have been the view of the majority of 17th century Particular Baptists.[11] In their polemics with paedobaptists, our 17th century forebearers hammered out some covenantal distinctives that were effectively lost for a few hundred years.[12] 1689 Federalism is claiming to be the historical-theological view of the majority of these Baptists, and the nomenclature of the view highlights this historical-theological appeal.

Whereas Gentry and Wellum (and the other contributors to the 2016 publication titled, *Progressive Covenantalism*[13]) were not seeking to make a historical appeal. The subtitle of *Kingdom Through Covenant* makes clear that they are seeking to present *a biblical-theological understanding of the covenants*. It was a contemporary proposal articulated in the context of the two contemporary dominant biblical-theological alternatives, namely dispensationalism and traditional Reformed covenant theology. 1689 Federalism was birthed out of historical retrieval efforts and framed in the context of historical theology. PC was birthed out of the biblical theology movement and framed in the context of contemporary biblical-systematic theology.[14]

So even the labels most commonly associated with each version of Baptist covenant theology highlight their disciplinary differences. They look different on the surface, but with closer examination, they actually function very similarly. Let me provide a few other examples of more substance than just the labels of the views. Here are three areas that have caused some confusion between representatives of the two Baptist covenantal theologies: (1) the positioning, or posturing, of the view as a *via media*; (2) describing the Mosaic Covenant as a works covenant or a gracious covenant; and (3) the bicovenantal framework of the covenants of works and grace.

The Positioning of the View as a "Via Media"

PC has been positioned or even self-postured as a *via media* between dispensationalism on the one side, and covenant theology on the other side.[15] That has been confusing for some Reformed Baptists, including 1689 Federalists, because they view themselves as holding to covenant theology, and they hear the *via media* language as saying PC is creating some new theological system. Some have called it a sort of theological amalgamation or hybrid mixing together elements of dispensationalism and covenant theology to form some theological chimera.[16] It's the theological systems version of those who say they are a "cal-minian"—some unholy blending together of Calvinism and Arminianism. Well, with that sort of impression, no wonder many 1689 Federalists are not interested in rapprochement efforts or considering our mutual compatibility. And even some Reformed Baptists who have investigated PC more closely and discovered how very similar our views are, are still put off by this *via media* posturing. Sam

Renihan, in his review of *Kingdom Through Covenant*, states that it is a "false dilemma" to reject covenant theology, when what Wellum and Gentry are rejecting is paedobaptism, that is, Presbyterian covenant theology, not necessarily Baptist covenant theology.[17] Another Reformed Baptist pastor has written that it is "false advertising" and even "deceptive" for PC to give the impression that they are equally close to dispensationalism and covenant theology.[18]

However, it was never the intention of PC to give the impression that they are equally close to dispensationalism as they are to covenant theology, at least not in all points of doctrine.[19] Additionally, as it concerns the comparison between these two Baptist covenantal theologies, PC does not mean anything substantially different than 1689 Federalists do when they too employ similar *via media* posturing. A closer examination of this *via media* positioning will illuminate this claim, first in reference to the covenant of grace, then in reference to the Abrahamic covenant.

The Covenant of Grace

In traditional covenant theology, Reformed paedobaptists appeal to the *substantial* unity of the covenant of grace across the old and new covenants (WCF 7.5–6). Even though the *administration* of the sign of the covenant changes from circumcision to baptism, the *substance* of the covenant remains unchanged so as to continue to include natural descendants in the new covenant just like the old covenant. As a consequence, the *nature* of the covenant also remains unchanged such that its membership is mixed, that is, both regenerate and unregenerate are considered members of the new covenant.[20]

In defending their credobaptism, both Baptist covenantal theologies find this definition ("one in substance, varied in administration") of the covenant of grace problematic, but they take different turns in their redefinition of the term. PC is content with understanding the covenant of grace as *only* the one saving plan of God.[21] As a comprehensive *theological* category emphasizing the spiritual unity of God's people across the testaments, they see the term "the covenant of grace" as legitimate.[22] But in order to emphasize the fundamental *newness* of the new covenant and not to cede ground to the paedobaptist argument from *the* covenant of grace, PC opts not to employ

that term when describing the relationship between the covenants, given how it functions in classic covenant theology.[23]

1689 Federalism, on the other hand, retains this terminology, but distinguishes their view from paedobaptist covenant theology by redefining the covenant of grace as *only* the new covenant. The new covenant of grace existed as a promise since Genesis 3:15, was progressively revealed through other historic covenants, and was formally enacted and concluded in the new covenant by the death of Christ. In their respective anti-paedobaptist polemics, both Baptist covenantal theologies intentionally deviate from traditional reformed covenant theology in their definitions of the covenant of grace, but they arrive at similar destinations.[24]

What I want to highlight is that in their respective anti-paedobaptist polemics, both Baptist covenantal theologies each employ a different rhetorical strategy, but they are not mutually exclusive. 1689 Federalism retains the language of "the covenant of grace," but redefines it. PC sets aside "the covenant of grace" language given how it functions in classic covenant theology to focus on the redemptive promise and how God's *one* plan of redemption, ordained in eternity and enacted in time, is progressively revealed in multiple covenants culminating in the new covenant.[25] Yet, PC does not reject the *theological* concept of "the covenant of grace" but instead speaks of God's *one* plan of salvation.

Thus, different burdens stand behind these respective choices. For the 17th century Particular Baptists, who were already in a precarious position in terms of public perception of their theology in the midst of the changing winds of English Puritan Separatism, they self-consciously wanted to show common confessional agreement with the Westminster Presbyterians and the Savoy Congregationalists in their doctrinal expressions. Basically, they kept the same confessional language to show an interdenominational unity around orthodoxy.[26] They also did not want to be associated with the radical discontinuity of the Socinians who did not see a unity of salvation across the testaments. So, a continuity of terminology burden was a catalytic for the original 1689 Federalists because of their 17th century ecclesiological setting. But for PC, the stronger impulse in their doctrinal formulation leading to the decision for many to set aside "the covenant of grace" terminology is not to cede ground to the paedobaptists. It is the covenant of grace formulation that many paedobaptists keep appealing to in defense of their position,[27] so

to make headway in the baptism conversation, it provides a cleaner slate to work with in conversation to simply focus on what is actually meant by the theological concept. But PC, in continuity with all versions of covenant theology, also wants to avoid the ditch of discontinuity represented in dispensationalism, so they emphasize the one redemptive kingdom plan of God.

Both of these Baptist covenantal theologies are seeking to forge a different path than Reformed paedobaptist covenant theology on the one hand, and Socinianism (in the 17th century) or dispensationalism (in our day) on the other hand. It's in this way that the *via media* language is descriptive, not just for PC, but also for 1689 Federalism. Pascal Denault describes the novelty and difficulty that the 17th century Baptists faced in attempting to carve out this *via media* in their day. He writes,

> Regarding the covenant of grace, the Baptist position was in some ways *midway* between the strict continuity of the Presbyterian position and the radical discontinuity of the Socinians. In agreement with the Presbyterians against the Socinians, the Baptists affirmed the unity of substance of the covenant of grace from Genesis to Revelation. However, like the Socinians against the Presbyterians, they affirmed the discontinuity of substance between the old and the new covenants.[28]

Denault makes a similar point in reference to dispensationalism in stating, "As for the Baptist approach, it allows for the vigorous assertion of the continuity of the covenant of grace and, consequently, the continuity of only one church in both testaments, while simultaneously affirming, in concert with the Bible and the dispensationalists, a discontinuity between the old and the new covenants."[29] Speaking of Baptist covenantal theology as a "midway" is reminiscent of the positioning of PC as a middle way between (paedobaptist) covenant theology and dispensationalism. By understanding the context and the respective conversation partners, both Baptist covenantal theologies are legitimately positioned as *via media* views, properly understood.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Related to the prior discussion, their distinctive approach to the Abrahamic covenant puts 1689 Federalism at odds with not just paedobaptist covenant theology, but also (in our day) with dispensationalism. Denault writes,

> Understanding the workings of the dualism of the Abrahamic covenant is essential for every theological system. We believe Presbyterian federalism and dispensationalism have failed in this task by confusing the promises of the covenant of grace with the covenant of circumcision. The Presbyterians thereby made the covenant of grace mixed and the dispensationalists assigned a distinct and permanent status as people of God to the physical descendants of Abraham. In both cases, the spiritual and permanent blessings were amalgamated with the earthly and temporary covenant of circumcision.[30]

So, in this way, 1689 Federalism, like PC, is arguing for a distinct theological system (a distinct Baptist covenantal theology) that diverges from and cuts a middle path between both (paedobaptist) covenant theology and dispensationalism.[31] The clear point of departure between each of these theological systems takes place with regard to the Abrahamic covenant. Wellum expresses the same idea in writing, "Ironically, *both* dispensational and covenant theology follow the *same* hermeneutic in appealing to the Old Testament and drawing theological conclusions, yet they do so in *different* areas *central to their theological systems*."[32] Elsewhere he continues the point, "Dispensational thought makes [this hermeneutical argument] in regard to the land promise, while [paedobaptist] covenant theology makes it in regard to the genealogical principle, both of which are tied to the Abrahamic covenant!"[33] In contrast to *both* Presbyterian Federalism *and* dispensationalism, 1689 Federalism and PC are positing a middle way between them on the spectrum of continuity/discontinuity between the Testaments.

Even though 1689 Federalists have been troubled at times by the *via media* posturing of PC, proponents mean nothing different by it than what 1689 Federalism proponents mean when they employ the same "middle way" posturing. It is the burden of the historical-theological setting of 1689 Federalism that led them to want to retain the covenant of grace language but redefine it. The burden of the contemporary systematic-theological setting

of PC led their proponents to want to lay aside the language. The same goal animated them both, but their respective settings and conversation partners took them on different routes.

Describing the Mosaic Covenant as a Works Covenant or a Gracious Covenant

Another area of confusion between these Baptist covenantal theologies concerns the Mosaic covenant. On the surface, it seems like 1689 Federalists and PC are characterizing the nature of the Mosaic covenant in exactly opposite categories. Is the Mosaic covenant a covenant of works or a gracious covenant? Sam Renihan states that for 1689 Federalism "the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works for [temporal] life in the land of Canaan,"[34] whereas Tom Schreiner, who represents PC, clearly states that "the covenant with Israel was gracious."[35] However, speaking of covenants as being one of "works" or of "grace" can be slippery terms and we can easily talk past each other. It's important once again to push past superficial differences to understand what is being asserted by these statements and the context in which they were made.

1689 Federalism links the Mosaic covenant with the Abrahamic covenant *of circumcision* and therefore emphasizes the earthly, temporal, and national orientation of these covenants in contrast to how they understand the new covenant (existing as a covenant promise to Abraham) and in distinction from how Westminster Federalism understands the Mosaic covenant (as an administration of the covenant of grace). 1689 Federalism argues that the Mosaic covenant is essentially one of works *because* it is built on the Abrahamic covenant. But that assertion only makes sense in the context of them separating out the multiple seeds of Abraham into two covenants.[36] The Mosaic covenant is linked with the Abrahamic covenant *of circumcision*, and thus together they are simply referred to as the "old covenant." It's that *old* covenant (the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision and the Mosaic covenant) that together are contrasted with and replaced by the *new* covenant.[37]

When Schreiner, who represents PC, argues for the gracious nature of the covenant with Israel, he is not seeking to communicate that it provides saving grace in itself. The context for these comments is the gracious

redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt in (the stage one) fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Schreiner is disagreeing with those who might "identify [the covenant with Israel] as a legalistic covenant, as if in this case salvation is based on works."[38] In arguing that the Mosaic covenant is not legalistic, Schreiner means something similar to what Renihan means when he says that the Mosaic covenant is not *the* covenant of works, by which eternal life can be earned through obedience. Conversely, when Schreiner is maintaining God's gracious dealings with Israel in the Mosaic covenant, he is saying something similar to what Renihan means when he writes,

> The Mosaic Covenant demonstrates God's kindness and *graciousness* by providing not only a way for Israel to address and redress their sins against the law, but also to teach them in all of this about true forgiveness to be found in a heavenly sacrifice administered by a heavenly High Priest in a heavenly temple. The kindness of the covenant is visible in light of God's absolute dominion, in light of the Abrahamic promises, and in light of the sacrificial system. The history of Israel is a public record of God's kindness.[39]

For Renihan, when viewed in light of the new covenant promise to Abraham, God's continued dealings with Israel were gracious. But when connected to the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision, the old covenant was based on works. Similarly, for Schreiner, when God's dealings with Israel in the Mosaic covenant are viewed in light of God's established relationship with Abraham, they must be seen as gracious.[40] But when viewed in an ultimate sense (i.e., eschatological salvation), the Mosaic covenant demands an obedience (works) that sinful man cannot render on his own.[41]

In this "works" and "grace" language concerning the Mosaic covenant, neither Baptist covenantal theology is arguing either that salvation can be earned by obedience to the law (i.e., *the* covenant of works) or that salvation is administered *directly* by the Mosaic covenant (i.e., *the* covenant of grace). In emphasizing the *gracious* nature of the Mosaic covenant, part of what PC is doing is pushing back against the legal and often negative description of the Mosaic law-covenant offered by new covenant theology.[42] On the other hand, when 1689 Federalism is emphasizing the *works* nature of the Mosaic covenant, they are pushing back against both Westminster Federalism and 20th Century Reformed Baptists who followed their

paedobaptist covenantal mentors.[43] Though their terms and polemical partners are opposite, PC and 1689 Federalism actually arrive in a similar place on this issue with regard to the Mosaic covenant.

The Bicovenantal Framework of the Covenants of Works and Grace

The bicovenantal framework of the covenants of works/grace serves to safeguard the central Reformational insight of the law/gospel distinction, which is fundamental to preserving the *ordo salutis* category of justification by faith alone. When some PC advocates choose not to frame their system of theology around this bicovenantal schema, it has confused some in Reformed circles to think we are abandoning a biblical view of salvation. However, PC clearly affirms and has always believed in justification by grace alone through faith alone based on the work of Christ alone.[44] That's why it has also confused PC advocates as to why anyone would ever think otherwise.[45]

Again, here I think the two sides are using terms in different senses. PC is not rejecting this bicovenantal framework as an *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) category. If all that is meant by the covenants of works and grace is another way of summarizing our covenantal union with either Adam or Christ, then PC has no problem with that framework at all.[46] However, PC is arguing that the bicovenantal framework is less useful as a *historia salutis* (history of salvation) category. *Soteriologically* there is one salvation in Christ throughout both the old and new covenants,[47] but *ecclesiologically* there are real differences, especially regarding covenant membership (mixed vs. regenerate-only) and the application of covenant signs (infant circumcision vs. credobaptism) across the covenants.

PC is addressing the covenants of works/grace framework in *only* a redemptive-historical sense (not in a soteriological sense), which it finds less helpful in describing *progressive* revelation. However, it seems that confusion enters into the conversation because traditional covenant theology relies on the bicovenantal schema of the covenants of works/grace to do double duty. Their covenants of works/grace framework serves as both *ordo* and *historia salutis* categories because all of the subsequent covenants after the covenant of works are united in substance as one covenant

of grace. This framework protects the law/gospel paradigm, but it also leads to subsuming all the post-fall covenants under this one covenant of grace. When PC rejects the bicovenantal framework of Reformed paedobaptist covenant theology on *historia salutis* grounds, they also think we are rejecting it on *ordo salutis* grounds, because for them the two categories are linked together.[48]

When it comes to 1689 Federalism, they retain the bicovenantal schema of the covenants of works/grace, because they agree with Reformed covenant theology (and PC!) on the law-gospel distinction and justification by faith alone as an *ordo salutis* teaching. However, they break with traditional Reformed covenant theology in their description of the *historia salutis*. A different *historia salutis* is one of the fundamental distinctives of 1689 Federalism compared with Westminster Federalism. Following John Cameron and John Owen, the original 1689 Federalists recognized that the Mosaic covenant did not neatly fit into one of the two covenantal categories. The Mosaic covenant could not rightly be characterized as either the covenant of works or the covenant of grace.[49] Cameron, whom the 17th century Particular Baptists followed and built upon (through Samuel Bolton and John Owen), argued that the Mosaic covenant was a third kind of covenant, which is best described as a *subservient covenant*.[50]

Without previously employing the language of "subservient covenant" (or specifically appealing to Cameron, Bolton, Owen, or Coxe), PC also agrees with the teaching it is meant to communicate in reference to the Mosaic covenant.[51] The Mosaic covenant *subserved* its intended goal which was not to bring salvation itself (as not being either *the* covenant of works or grace), but to lead to Christ and his new covenant work, by preserving the messianic seed, by pointing typologically to Christ through the sacrificial system, and by proving our need for redemption because in our sin we could not perfectly keep the demands of the law.[52]

Sam Renihan argues that the "diversity of Reformed covenant theology largely derived from the interplay of the law and the gospel *dogmatically* with the law and the gospel *historically*. Stated another way, its diversity derived from the relation of the covenant of works and covenant of grace to the old and new covenants."[53] PC, like 1689 Federalism, wants to affirm a *dogmatic* agreement with Reformed (paedobaptist) covenant theology (i.e.,

ordo salutis), but must depart *historically* in how we understand the relation of the old and new covenants (i.e., *historia salutis*).

In light of this clarification, the question that will help bring clarity in the comparison between these two Baptist covenantal views is: what is covenantal theology and the covenantal framework principally aiming to categorize? Dogmatic theology or redemptive history? Systematic theology or biblical theology? In his review article of *Kingdom Through Covenant*, Renihan writes, "The covenant of works and covenant of grace metanarrative is pitted against the metanarrative of progressive covenantalism. That is almost like pitting the chapters of a book against the beginning and end of a book. While classic covenant theology may say that the metanarrative hinges on two covenants, as long as we understand that between the two lies a progression of covenants (as the seventeenth-century Particular Baptists argued), such a dilemma is dissolved."[54] But I don't think that 1689 Federalism does consistently dissolve this dilemma, at least I think it does not clearly and consistently communicate the chapters in the book with its prominent focus on the beginning and the end by framing their covenantal system around the covenants of works and grace. Though perhaps to a lesser degree, Steve Wellum's critique could also be applied to 1689 Federalism's appeal to the bicovenantal framework when he writes, "What covenant theology does not sufficiently attend to is how the covenants unfold from creation to Christ and how they progressively reveal, predict, and anticipate the coming of Christ and the entire new covenant era."[55] Jesus is not only the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), but also Abraham's true seed (Gal 3:16), the true Israel who obeys completely (Matt 2:15; 3:15–17; 4:1–11), and David's greater Son (Matt 1:1; Rom 1:3–4). All of these steps are crucial for developing the unfolding story of God's kingdom through the progression of the covenants.

From the PC perspective, there could be use in the speaking of the covenants of works and grace as *dogmatic* categories to describe the *ordo salutis*. But to describe the *historia salutis*, they lose their usefulness as a *biblical-theological* framework. For the purpose of describing redemptive history, the covenant of works/grace architecture obscures how Scripture unfolds God's kingdom through the covenants, because it flattens out the progressive unfolding of that plan over time with covenantal development along the way. Again, the question is: what is a covenantal

system of theology chiefly aiming to describe? For PC it is the *redemptive-historical storyline* that we are keen to emphasize and highlight and not allow to be overshadowed by an extra-biblical *dogmatic* framework. We are treating the framework of covenant theology in primarily *historia salutis* categories, which we think better reflects the main ways that the bible itself is unfolding the covenantal framework.

If the subservient covenant is one of the three types of covenants, why don't 1689 Federalists consistently speak of the covenants of works, subservience, and grace, when they frame their covenant theological system? 1689 Federalists have a distinctly Baptist *historia salutis*, especially as it concerns the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants as subservient covenants that are neither *the* covenant of works nor administrations of *the* covenant of grace. Nevertheless, I suspect that these Baptist covenantal distinctives are muted at times in trying to retain the bicovenantal framework of traditional Reformed (paedobaptist) covenant theology.

My chief aim here is to explain what PC means and what it does not mean by not appealing to the bicovenantal framework, and also to explain why we think the framing of the progressive unfolding of redemptive history in terms of the *biblical* covenants is more useful. Once again, I suspect that part of what is underlying this different framing of our respective Baptist covenantal theologies is the 1689 Federalist derivation from *historical* theology, and the PC commitment to *biblical* theology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I'd like to offer some suggestions for continued rapprochement between these two Baptist covenantal theologies.

First, towards 1689 Federalists, I suggest developing your covenantal theology into a contemporary biblical-theological system apart from (or at least in addition to) historical retrieval. This suggestion certainly does not entail ignoring your confession or the historical sources you have worked to retrieve. However, for 1689 Federalism to be considered an equal player in contemporary theological discourse, it needs to develop into more than merely a historical retrieval project.[56] It also needs to be its own biblical-theological system, which is informed from past labor, but primarily built from exegesis of the text of scripture. And when 1689 Federalists produce that

kind of biblical theology, I further suggest they interact with contemporary theological literature in addition to historical sources. Sam Renihan wrote that PC advocates need "a good dose of Baptist historical theology"[57] to which I agree with him. And I would say the same in return. A good dose of reading in contemporary biblical-theological and exegetical literature might be of great benefit.[58]

Some of the contemporary literature that 1689 Federalists should interact with is dispensational sources. As a byproduct of the historical-theological emphasis and retrieval focus, 1689 Federalism does not interact directly with dispensationalism. There was no dispensationalism in the 17th century, so 1689 Federalists can't draw on our Baptist forebearers for direct help in responding to dispensationalism. I consider this a problem because most Baptists in America today are dispensational. On the other hand, PC has had extensive interactions with the leading dispensational scholars of our day, both in print and in scholarly dialogue at the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). Most (if not all) of the anti-dispensational polemic that PC has developed and marshalled in defense of a Baptist covenantal reading of the Bible, 1689 Federalism can give full-throated endorsement to and also appropriate for similar ends. We PC advocates are asking our 1689 Federalists brothers to join us in helping move the millions of Baptists in our country towards a covenantal framing of the Bible. But in order to do that, 1689 Federalists must read dispensational literature and interact with their best contemporary arguments.

It would be helpful along these lines for contemporary 1689 Federalists to present regularly at ETS and open up their biblical-theological proposal for scholarly interaction while it's being developed. Also, to my knowledge there is no full-orbed systematic theology work that has 1689 Federalist distinctives represented. If such a work does not already exist in church history, then no ressourcement effort will fill that lacuna. It will have to be a new contemporary work.[59]

The second suggestion is to leave aside theological cheap shots and name-calling. I don't see how it helps conversation and mutual understanding. There are two accusations that I've heard from Reformed Baptists aimed at PC that I would categorize as theological cheap shots. The first is the accusation that PC is really a form of dispensationalism. I suspect that charge comes because, lined up beside one another on a spectrum of

continuity on the left to discontinuity on the right, I think it would be fair to put PC (slightly) to the right of 1689 Federalism (especially in relation to the role of the law). But PC advocates are not dispensationalists, in fact, dispensationalists themselves are quick to claim as much.[60] And PC certainly doesn't claim to be dispensationalists either. Actually, PC has worked to develop detailed arguments against dispensationalism.[61]

The irony here is that other Reformed Baptists, such as Jordan Steffaniak[62] and Earl Blackburn,[63] have called 1689 Federalism a form of dispensationalism, because again, they would position their version of Reformed Baptist covenant theology further down the continuity side of the spectrum. But this is how these kinds of accusations always work. There is always someone that wants to theologically out-flank you. Greg Bahnsen called Meredith Kline's covenant theology (because of his republicationism) a crypto-dispensationalism![64] So, covenant theologians also make this accusation against each either. Even many traditional dispensationalists argue that that progressive dispensationalists aren't true dispensationalists, even though they claim to be.[65]

The second accusation that should be left aside is that of antinomianism. Now, I understand why Reformed Baptists have looked at some forms of New Covenant Theology and made that accusation.[66] But that accusation just is not a fair analysis of what PC teaches.[67] PC affirms God's abiding moral law and the helpfulness of the category of natural law,[68] and therefore believe in obeying all of God's laws, including the decalogue, even the fourth commandment.[69] However, PC believes that the decalogue should not be read ahistorically, but should be read according to its covenantal context, and therefore in light of Christ for new covenant believers.[70] The PC disagreement with 1689 Federalism related to the applicability of the law of God across the covenants is primarily hermeneutical, not ethical.

The third closing suggestion I direct towards my PC brothers. In addition to all the wonderful biblical theological literature we love to read, I commend that PC also drinks deeply from the well of historical theology, especially historic Baptist covenant theology. Start with some of the efforts to explain these sources, such as Pascal Denault's *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, then read Sam Renihan's *From Shadow to Substance*. After those read James Renihan's expositions of the First and Second London Baptist Confessions,[71] and then even make your way through the Coxe/

Owen volume on *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*.[72] These works will not only give an increased appreciation for the context and theological distinctives of our Particular Baptist forefathers, but also provide a more nuanced understanding of the claims of 1689 Federalism. My experience has been that a greater understanding of each Baptist covenantal theology reveals more to appreciate than to critique. A sympathetic comparison also reveals the complementary role they can serve in developing a contemporary articulation, with historical grounding, of a consistent Baptist covenantal theology. 1689 Federalism is strong where PC has been weaker so far, in historical theology, especially historic Baptist covenantal theology. But similarly, PC has been strong where 1689 Federalism has been weaker, in biblical-theological development, especially taking advantage of the many advancements over the last few hundred years.[73] I don't view 1689 Federalism and PC as mutually exclusive. There are still differences and I don't want to paper over them,[74] but I think we can serve each other best when we extend Christian charity to understand and learn from each other. I hope that will occur for many years to come.

---

1 This paper was originally presented during the 2023 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in San Antonio, TX during a session dedicated to the subject of Baptist Covenant Theology. I presented the PC position interacting with 1689 Federalism, Daniel Scheiderer presented the 1689 Federalist position interacting with PC, while Harrison Perkins presented a paper giving a Presbyterian response to both Baptist covenantal theologies. These three presentations were followed by a panel with these participants, joined by Stephen Wellum and Robert Howell, with Oren Martin moderating. The colloquial nature of the original presentation is retained in this published version. To my knowledge this was the first time that there has been a dedicated session on the topic of Baptist Covenant Theology at ETS, and even though there have been many sessions over the last decade dedicated to PC, I do not believe that there has ever been a presentation dedicated to 1689 Federalism.

2 For a more detailed comparison between these two views, see Richard J. Lucas, "The Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology: Comparing 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism," *SBJT* 26.1 (2022): 116–63. Portions of that essay appear here with permission.

3 I detail some of this history in Lucas, "The Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology," 116–22. The first time the term "progressive covenantalism" was put in print was in 2012 by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 24. Roughly a year later Brandon Adams coined the term "1689 Federalism" when he launched the website by the same name in June of 2013.

4 I began my MDiv studies on the campus of Southern Seminary in the Fall of 2003, moved away from Louisville in 2011 (before *Kingdom Through Covenant* was published), and graduated with the PhD in 2014.

5 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 24.

6 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 24n7 (emphasis added).

7 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 25n8.

8 Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013). A revised edition was released in 2017. References in this article follow the revised edition. The basic argument of the book is also summarized in Pascal Denault, "By Farther Steps: A Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist Covenant Theology" in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014).

9 When the website 1689federalism.com first launched, it featured various videos and diagrams comparing 1689 Federalism with competing biblical-theological views, such as: Westminster Federalism, Dispensationalism, New Covenant Theology and Progressive Covenantalism. It also initially included a video and diagram on "1689 Federalism vs. 20th Century Reformed Baptists." It has since been removed because of the division it created in the Reformed Baptist community, but the terminology has stuck for contrasting the dominant view among Reformed Baptists before the mainstreaming of 1689 Federalism.

10 The claim is not that the 1677/89 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith itself articulates the distinctives of 1689 Federalism, but that this version of Baptist covenantal theology was the majority view of the Baptists who first embraced this confessional document, and it was also the view of the main architect of that confession, namely Nehemiah Coxe. See Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants That God made with Men before the Law* (London: John Darby, 1681), which has been republished along with John Owen's discussion of the Mosaic Covenant from his Hebrews commentary in Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*, eds. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (Owensboro, KY: RBAP, 2005). One need not necessarily embrace 1689 Federalism to also hold to the 2LCF as their confessional standard. But 2LCF 7.3 does intentionally deviate from WCF 7.5–6 in not describing the covenant of grace as one in substance across the Old and New Testaments.

11 In addition to Denault's *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, the work by Samuel Renihan has been crucial for demonstrating the historical pedigree of this distinctive Baptist version of covenantal theology which is now commonly referred to as 1689 Federalism. See especially his published dissertation, Samuel D. Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642–1704)* CBHHS 16 (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2018). He has also provided (what is essentially) a summary of his dissertation thesis in Samuel D. Renihan, "Above and Beyond: Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist Covenant Theology," *SBJT* 26/1 (Spring 2022): 90–114.

12 James M. Renihan proposes a few of the factors that led to this essential loss of the Baptists' covenantal roots in his "Introduction" in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014), 13–18.

13 Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

14 As representative of this contemporary biblical theology movement, see T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000). Cf. also, Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).

15 Many examples could be provided, but simply consider the subtitle for Wellum and Parker's edited volume, *Progressive Covenantalism,* which is "*Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies.*"

16 Blackburn calls PC "a mongrel hybrid between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism." Earl M. Blackburn, *It Pleased the Lord to Make a Covenant of Grace: A Critique of 1689 Federalism* (Elkin, NC: Veritas Heritage Press, 2023), 10.

17 Samuel D. Renihan, "*Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theology Understanding of the Covenants*, A Review Article" *JIRBS* (2014), 163.

18 Andrew Lindsey, "Progressive Covenantalism: A Reformed Baptist Reflection." May 16, 2016, http://alindsey4.blogspot.com/2016/05/progressive-covenantalism-reformed.html.

19 For more evidence that PC is closer theologically to traditional covenantalism than to any form of dispensationalism, see the interaction among the contributors in Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022).

20 Reformed covenant theology posits that the unregenerate are only members of the *external administration* of the covenant of grace, not the *internal essence*. Nevertheless, the infant children of professing parents receive the sacrament of baptism (as they understand it) because they are considered members of the covenant of grace (see WLC 166 and HC 74). For a further description of how Reformed covenant theology understands the "newness" of the new covenant, see Scott R. Swain, "New Covenant Theologies" in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, eds. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 559–69.

21 Wellum plainly states that "progressive covenantalism does not deny the theological concept of 'the covenant of grace' if one merely means 'the one plan of God.'" Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism" in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies,* eds. Parker and Lucas, 82.

22 Wellum issues this clarification in writing, "If we are not careful, however, the notion of *the* 'covenant of grace' may be misleading, because Scripture does not speak of only one covenant with different administrations. Rather, Scripture speaks in terms of a *plurality* of covenants (e.g. Gal 4:24; Eph 2:12; Heb 8:7–13), which are all part of the progressive revelation of the one plan of God that ultimately is fulfilled in the new covenant. In reality, the 'covenant of grace' is a comprehensive *theological* category, not a biblical one. This does not mean that it is illegitimate. In theology we often use theological terms that are not found specifically in Scripture (e.g., the Trinity). If the theological category, 'the covenant of grace,' is used to underscore the unity of God's plan of salvation and the essential spiritual unity of the people of God in all ages, it is certainly helpful and biblical. But if it is used to flatten the relationships and downplay the significant amount of progression between the biblical covenants, which then leads us to ignore specific covenantal discontinuities across redemptive-history, then it is unhelpful, misleading, and illegitimate." Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 126–27 (emphasis original).

23 Again, Wellum proposes that "In order to make headway in the baptismal divide and think biblically regarding the relationships between the covenants, we should place a moratorium on 'covenant of grace' as a category when speaking of the biblical covenants and the relationships between them. In its place, let us speak of the one plan of God or the eternal purposes of God centered in Jesus Christ, for that is what the language of the 'covenant of grace' is seeking to underscore." Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," 127.

24 Wellum writes, "is Genesis 3:15 the ratification of the covenant of grace or is it a gracious promise that God will provide a Redeemer that is finally realized in Christ and the new covenant? It is better to say that Genesis 3:15 is a Christological promise that prophetically anticipates and predicts in seed-form the ultimate provision of the new covenant, which is progressively revealed through the covenants." Stephen J. Wellum, "A Progressive Covenantalism Response" in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, eds. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022), 206.

25 That's not to say that someone holding to PC couldn't make use of the covenant of works/grace framework if they chose to. Again, the point is about how the covenant of works/grace functions in one's overall theology and specific theological conclusions.

26 See Michael A. G. Haykin, *Kiffen, Knollys, and Keach: Rediscovering our English Baptist Heritage*, 2nd ed. (Peterborough, Canada: H&E Publishing, 2019), 103–37. The letter appended to the front of the 2LCF also indicates this intention. It is reprinted in James M. Renihan, *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: A Contextual-Historical Exposition of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*, Baptist Symbolics Volume 2 (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2022), 23–26.

27 See the various appeals to the covenant of grace to argue for paedobaptism in Gregg Strawbridge, ed. *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003). This argument is also documented in Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," 97–124.

28 Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 50.

29 Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 82n67.

30 Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 125.

31 Jeff Johnson also clearly positions (his) 1689 Federalism as a third, middle covenantal and hermeneutical system between Presbyterian covenant theology (on the *continuity* side of the spectrum) and dispensationalism (on the *discontinuity* side of the spectrum). See Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Kingdom of God: A Baptist Expression of Covenant and Biblical Theology* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2014), 17–31.

32 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 2nd ed., 141–142, emphasis original.

33 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 2nd ed., 100.

34 Samuel Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ: His Covenant and His Kingdom* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2019), 110.

35 Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 72.

36 For the dichotomous nature of the Abrahamic covenant, see Jeffrey D. Johnson, "The Fatal Flaw of Infant Baptism: The Dichotomous Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014), 223–56; and idem., *The Fatal Flaw of the Theology Behind Infant Baptism* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2010). While it does seem to be the majority position of the 17th century Particular Baptists to express this dualism in the Abrahamic covenant as representing two covenants, not all modern day 1689 Federalists follow suit. See the discussion of the Abrahamic covenant in Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 87–101.

37 Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 116–29. Renihan summarizes the historical development that led to this theological conclusion in writing, "The Particular Baptists' distinctive feature was that they applied the same hermeneutical principles to the Abrahamic covenant that Cameron and Owen had applied to the Mosaic covenant, calling it a covenant of works" (*From Shadow to Substance*, 324–325). Elsewhere Renihan describes his own view by writing, "This [Abrahamic] covenant can be classified as a covenant based on works, or obedience" (*The Mystery of Christ*, 94).

38 Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, 59. He states elsewhere that "by legalism I refer to the idea that human beings can earn or merit right standing with God." Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2010), 25. See his fuller answer to the questions, "Was the Mosaic Covenant Legalistic?" and "Does the Old Testament Teach that Salvation is by Works?" on pp. 25–31.

39 Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 115, emphasis added. Cf. also when Schreiner writes, "We also see the graciousness of the [Mosaic] covenant and the need for atonement in the sacrifices that were offered for the cleansing of sin … The covenant, then, provided a means by which Israel could maintain fellowship with God … Israel's covenant fellowship with God was not dependent on perfect obedience, since sacrifices could be offered for covenant violations" (*Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, 65).

40 Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, 59–61.

41 Elsewhere Schreiner writes, "The contrast between law and promise is explained further, where it is clear that Paul does not think that the addition of the Mosaic covenant constitutes a clarification of the covenant with Abraham. They are fundamentally opposed in that the inheritance is obtained through obedience to the law under the Mosaic covenant, whereas it is given through a promise of God under the Abrahamic." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 232.

42 See Thomas R. Schreiner, "Review of *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*" *SBJT* 7.4 (Winter 2003): 94–96; Also, Jason C. Meyer, "The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ" in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 78–79. In his critique of John Reisinger's work, Meyer describes discovering "an attitude toward the law that still felt lukewarm at times and cold as ice at other times in so-called new covenant theology" (78). Cf. again Wellum's comments distinguishing PC and new covenant theology in Stephen J. Wellum with Brent E. Parker, "Introduction" in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 3. He includes among the NCT ideas that PC does *not* endorse as: "the old covenant was not gracious."

43 Walt Chantry is representative of the views of 20th century Reformed Baptists when he writes, "Every biblical covenant after the fall is revealed by God as a form of the Covenant of Grace." He continues, "It is because all biblical covenants since the Fall are united in their major feature of grace and major requirement of the principle of faith in man that our confession speaks as it does. All biblical covenants (with Adam after the Fall, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, New) are but varying administrations of the Covenant of Grace." Walter J. Chantry, "The Covenants of Works and of Grace" in *Covenant Theology: A Baptist Distinctive*, ed. Earl M. Blackburn (Pelham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013), 108.

44 Three of the five contributors to the recent Five Solas Series (Zondervan), including the editor, are advocates of progressive covenantalism. See Thomas Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). Wellum and Schreiner have been cited elsewhere in this essay as proponents of PC. For Barrett's sympathies, see Matthew Barrett, "What is So New About the New Covenant? Exploring the Contours of Paul's New Covenant Theology in 2 Corinthians 3," *SBJT* 19.3 (2015): 61–96. He writes, "the discerning reader will notice how the conclusions reached in this article will sympathize with 'progressive covenantalism'" (84n7). Editor's note: Matthew Barrett has since renounced PC and instead embraced Anglican covenant theology.

45 See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, "Responses Rejoinder to Review of '*Kingdom Through Covenant*'," *WTJ* 76.2 (Fall 2014): 449–52.

46 For a fuller PC discussion on these bicovenantal categories, see Stephen J. Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," *SBJT* 26.1 (2022): 164–87. In reference to the covenant of works, Wellum writes, "For the most part, progressive covenantalism agrees with covenant theology's understanding of the covenant of works over against dispensationalism's rejection of it (along with some forms of new covenant theology). We agree that Adam was created as the legal, covenant representative of humanity. In addition, we agree that Adam was created good, but not yet glorified, and he, due to the demands and promises of the covenant, was called to obey God perfectly to enter his rest just as God had rested, which means to enter a glorified, permanent state" (175). And of particular interest for the comparison of these two Baptist covenantal theologies, Wellum writes in reference to the covenant of grace that "if the theological category of 'the covenant of grace' is retained, it would be better to identify it with the new covenant, as 1689 Federalism does. Yet, given the diverse understandings of 'the covenant of grace' and how it often assumes a Reformed paedobaptist covenant theology, progressive covenantalism does not see the need to retain the language but instead speak of God's one redemptive plan unfolded through the biblical covenants which reach their fulfillment, *telos*, and terminus in the new covenant" (187n26).

47 In this sense, PC can agree with WCF 8.6 (and 2LCF 8.6), which reads, "Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever." And of course, this historical outworking of salvation is "founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect" (2LCF 7.3).

48 See the confusion around these category distinctions represented in Jonathan M. Brack and Jared S. Oliphint, "Questioning the Progress in Progressive Covenantalism: A Review of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*," *WTJ* 76 (2014): 189–217.

49 Renihan writes, "Cameron's threefold covenant model taught that the Mosaic covenant was neither the covenant of works made with Adam nor the covenant of grace, but a distinct covenant of obedience given to Israel concerning life in Canaan" ("Above and Beyond," 96–97).

50 For a detailed discussion of this historical development, see Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 48–57, 195–264.

51 See Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 93–95.

52 Cf. Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 141.

53 Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 66, emphasis added.

54 Samuel D. Renihan, "*Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theology Understanding of the Covenants*, A Review Article" *JIRBS* (2014), 164.

55 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 177.

56 As evidence that 1689 Federalism, despite protests otherwise, is not considered an equal player in the discussion around contemporary biblical-theological systems, note its absence from these works (but the inclusion of progressive covenantalism): Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022); Benjamin L. Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020); Chad O. Brand, *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views* (Nashville TN: B&H, 2015). In reference to this last volume, see the critique of the presentation of PC in Brent E. Parker, "Review of *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*" *SBJT* 20.1 (Spring 2016): 170–74.

57 Renihan, "*Kingdom Through Covenant*," 166.

58 Renihan's *The Mystery of Christ* is the closest work to attempting a contemporary biblical theology from a 1689 Federalist perspective. While I'm thankful to see several positive references to some PC literature in that work, it not only has many more references to historic Baptist sources, but hardly any references to contemporary biblical-theological scholarly sources. I suspect that was not the aim of the work, nevertheless, 1689 Federalism would be helped by the appearance of a robust contemporary biblical theology. While 1689 Federalism has not produced a work like the one I'm suggesting, there are numerous examples of contemporary Reformed covenant theology projects, such as: Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether, eds., *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020); Richard P. Belcher, Jr., *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2020); Stephen G. Myers, *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: RHB, 2021); and Harrison Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology: A Systematic Introduction* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2024).

59 A systematic theology that has progressive covenantal distinctives represented is currently in development. See Stephen J. Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept, Volume One* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024).

60 As representative of dispensational critiques of PC, see Michael J. Vlach, "Have They Found A Better Way? An Analysis of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*," *MSJ* 24/1 (Spring 2013): 5–24; Craig Blaising, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response," *MSJ* 26/1 (Spring 2015): 111–27; Michael Grisanti, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*: An Old Testament Perspective," *MSJ* 26/1 (Spring 2015): 129–37; and Darrell L. Bock, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*: A New Testament Perspective," *MSJ* 26/1 (Spring 2015): 139–45.

61 As but two examples, see Richard J. Lucas, "The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11 and the Nature of Israel's Future Salvation," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 235–53; and Oren R. Martin, "The Land Promise Biblically and Theologically Understood" in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 255–74.

62 Jordan L. Steffaniak, "Reforming Credobaptism: A Westminster Alternative for Reformed Baptist Identity," *JBTS* 4.2 (2019): 297.

63 In his critique of 1689 Federalism, Blackburn claims that republicationism (which he attributes to 1689 Federalism) "has latent within it incipient dispensationalism" (*It Pleased the Lord to Make a Covenant of Grace*, 46).

64 Greg Bahnsen calls Meredith Kline's covenant theology (specifically his republicationism) "the functional equivalent of dispensationalism." *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 122.

65 Mark Snoeberger writes, "I would suggest that progressive dispensationalism has lost sight of the reason for and essence of the dispensational system as it was originally conceived" ("Traditional Dispensationalism" in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, eds. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022), 152n9. See also, Bruce A. Baker, "Is Progressive Dispensationalism Really Dispensational?" in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism*, ed. Ron J. Bigalke Jr. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 343–75; and Charles C. Ryrie, "Update on Dispensationalism" in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 15–27.

66 For a prominent, yet troubling NCT presentation of the law, see Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (Self-published, 2006). For a Reformed Baptist critique of New Covenant Theology's view of the law, see Richard C. Barcellos, *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress Publishing, 2001); cf. also idem., *Getting the Garden Right: Adam's Work and God's Rest in Light of Christ* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2017).

67 For the purposeful attempts to distance PC from new covenant theology, see Wellum with Parker, "Introduction" in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 2–3; and Meyer, "The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ", 78–79. Cf. also Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, "A Response to Zaspel's Review." November 27, 2012, https://credomag.com/2012/11/a-response-to-zaspels-review-peter-gentry-and-stephen-wellum.

68 For the development of a natural law ethic through the framework of PC, see Andrew T. Walker, "Ethics Through Covenant: A Primer on Progressive Covenantalism and Moral Theology (Part 3)" in *Christ Over All* (October 2023), https://christoverall.com/article/concise/ethics-through-covenant-a-primer-on-progressive-covenantalism-and-moral-theology-part-3.

69 For the PC view of the Sabbath, see Thomas R. Schreiner, "Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers" in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 159 – 88; Craig L. Blomberg, "The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ" in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: 4 Views*, ed. Christopher John Donato (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 305 – 358; D. A. Carson, ed. *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Andrew David Naselli, "What is a Biblical Theology of the Sabbath?" in *40 Questions About Biblical Theology*, eds. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 257 – 265; Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, 209 – 217; Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics," 232; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 2nd ed., 797; Stephen Wellum, "3 Reasons Sunday Is Not the Christian Sabbath." October 27, 2020, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sunday-not-christian-sabbath.

70 See Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics" in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 225 – 226; and idem., Stephen Wellum, "The Law of God" in *TGC Concise Theology* (2020), www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-law-of-god. Cf. also Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd edition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 782 – 98.

71 James M. Renihan, *For the Vindication of the Truth: A Brief Exposition of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith,* Baptist Symbolics Volume 1 (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2021).

72 For more primary source works, see the 17 volume "Baptist Covenant Theology Collection" available on Logos.com. Baptist Heritage Press is also another new effort to republish Particular Baptists works.

73 See the bibliography in the first edition of Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 779 – 809.

74 The most obvious example is the role of the Decalogue in new covenant ethics, and specifically the abiding validity of the sabbath day command.

New Covenant Theology and Progressive Covenantalism Compared: Common Ground

Zachary S. Maxcey

Zachary S. Maxcey is a MDiv graduate of Providence Theological Seminary, and he currently serves as the President of Providence Theological Institute of New Covenant Theology (http://www.pti-nct.org).

Introduction

Beginning in 1977, New Covenant Theology (NCT) emerged as a *developing* theological system through the diligent labors of such men as Jon Zens, John Reisinger, Tom Wells, S. Lewis Johnson, and Gary D. Long. However, what is NCT? NCT has been described in a multitude of ways. For example, Dennis Swanson of The Master's Seminary refers to NCT as a "theology of the Internet."[1] Fred Zaspel describes NCT both as a "recent attempt" to "gain a clearer understanding of the unfolding of Biblical redemptive history" and as a theological system occupying "middle ground" between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology.[2] Blake White writes, "New Covenant Theology is the system of theology that allows the Bible to have the 'final say' most consistently."[3] Robert Plummer describes NCT as "[t]he theological system that attempts to systematize the Bible through the lens of old and new covenant, especially focusing on the 'newness' brought in Jesus."[4] Finally, Gary D. Long states that NCT "may be defined broadly as *God's eternal purpose progressively revealed in the commandments and promises of the biblical covenants of the OT and fulfilled in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ.*"[5]

In 2012, Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum published their seminal work *Kingdom through Covenant* which sets forth the theological framework known as Progressive Covenantalism (PC). In this work, Wellum rightly argues that "the biblical covenants form the backbone of the metanarrative of Scripture, and apart from understanding each biblical covenant in its historical context and then in its relation to the fulfillment of all of the covenants in Christ, we will ultimately misunderstand the overall message of the Bible."[6] Following this, Stephen Wellum, Brent Parker, and other contributors published *Progressive Covenantalism*, a book which further crystallizes the tenets and teaching of this new system. Although there are some disputable differences between NCT and PC — a matter which will be addressed by my article, there is also vast agreement between these two systems. In this article, I will address the following areas of common ground between NCT and PC: 1) historic Protestant Christianity; 2) one plan of God — centered in Christ; 3) God's plan is unfolded via the biblical covenants; 4) the interpretive priority of the NT; 5) the Mosaic Law is an indivisible unit; 6) Christians are not under the Old Covenant; 7) all believers are members of the New Covenant, have full forgiveness of sins, are permanently indwelt by the Spirit, and are empowered by the Spirit to please God; and 8) the Church is the eschatological Israel as God's people. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list; it is merely eight areas of common ground that I will highlight between both systems.

A Discussion among Christian Brethren

As believers in Christ, we *must* be able to lock arms together on all essential matters of the Christian faith, while agreeing to disagree in non-essential or disputable matters. We must remember that famous statement of Rupertus Meldenius, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."[7] When we fail to do so, we stand in *direct* violation of Christ's command to love one another as he loved us (John 13:34; Matt 22:39). As long as we accept the *absolute* essentials of orthodox evangelical Protestantism, we should be able to agree to disagree with fellow believers on disputable matters, which would include the non-essential differences between NCT and PC.

This is *not* to say that non-essentials theological matters cannot and do not significantly affect one's understanding of Scripture and overall theology. Of course, they *can* and *certainly do* in certain cases. This notwithstanding, every Christian must zealously labor to be abundantly gracious when interacting with Christian brethren in all matters. As Ephesians 4:1–3 declares: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Common Ground 1: Historic Protestant Christianity

The *first* significant common ground between NCT and PC that I will discuss is that of historic Protestant Christianity. Advocates of both NCT and PC affirm the early ecumenical creeds, with two examples being the Nicene Creed and the theological resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon. At the former, the full deity of Christ, and hence the Trinity, was affirmed. In the latter, the hypostatic union was defined, namely, that Jesus Christ, the God-man, is one person with two complete natures — divine and human. These are essentials of the Christian faith, upon which proponents of NCT and PC both agree.

Advocates of NCT and PC both hold to the five *solas* of the Protestant Reformation: (1) *sola Scriptura* (Latin: "by Scripture alone"): Scripture (which is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God) is the sole authority of faith and practice for the believer; (2) *sola fide* (Latin: "by faith alone"): believers are justified before God by faith in Christ not by works; (3) *sola gratia* (Latin: "by grace alone"): God's grace, that is to say, his unmerited favor (not man's will or effort) alone initiates, secures, and applies salvation to his elect; (4) *solo Christo* (Latin: "by Christ alone"): salvation is found only in the God-man Jesus Christ, the sole mediator between God and man; and (5) *soli Deo gloria* (Latin: "to God alone be the glory"): not only does God all things for his own glory but also that man is to glorify God not himself in all that he does (Rom 11:36; Rev 4:11; 5:12; 1 Cor 10:31; Isa 6:3; Luke 2:14; Heb 1:1–3). These are pillars of Protestant Christianity, upon which proponents of both NCT and PC agree.

Advocates of NCT and PC both affirm a Calvinistic or Reformed Soteriology — the doctrines of grace: (1) *total depravity*: man (a) is guilty of Adam's first sin, (b) desperately corrupted his entire being in Adam, and (c) is wholly unable to do anything that pleases God; (2) *unconditional election*: God in eternity past freely chose a specific number of people to become recipients of his saving grace, not because of any foreknown choices or merits but because he was sovereignly pleased to do so; (3) *definite (or limited) atonement*: Christ's penal substitutionary sacrifice is fully efficacious for the particular people whom God freely and sovereignly elected to salvation; (4) *irresistible grace:* the special inward call, whereby the Holy Spirit regenerates and enables individuals to come to Christ, invincibly secures the salvation of the elect; and (5) *perseverance of the saints:* God preserves to the end all those who are saved and those who persevere to the end are truly saved. Again, these are theological matters which proponents of NCT and PC both affirm.

Finally, proponents both NCT and PC heartily acknowledge that creeds and confession statements, whether historic or contemporary, can be and often are helpful systematic expressions of the Christian faith. However, proponents of both firmly oppose the elevation, whether perceived or actual, of any creed or confession to a level of authority approaching the Scriptures themselves. As Stephen Wellum, a proponent of PC, rightly states "that historic confessions function as secondary standards to Scripture."[8] In other words, although creeds and confessions can be and often are helpful summaries of what Scripture teaches, these statements are nevertheless formulated by men and are hence not inspired.

Common Ground 2: One Plan of Redemption, Centered in Jesus Christ

The *second* significant common ground between NCT and PC that I will discuss is that there is *one* plan of redemption, centered in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:10; 2 Cor 1:20; Col 1:18), implemented according to God's eternal purpose (Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9), and securing the salvation of God's elect (Rom 8:28–32). Wellum, as a PC advocate writes, "Our triune God has one eternal plan which is progressively revealed through the unfolding of the biblical covenants in redemptive history (Isa 14:24–27; Acts 2:23;

Eph 1:4, 11; 2:12; Rev 13:8). From all eternity, God has planned and foreordained all that comes to pass in history, or what is called in theology, the divine economy." Notice the similarity with Gary Long, an advocate of NCT: "God's plan of salvation is revealed and administered according to his eternal purpose (2 Tim 1:9) through the unfolding of biblical covenants in the flow of redemptive history,"[9] and "fulfilled in the New Covenant (NC) of Jesus Christ."[10] Or consider the words of Blake White, "God has one will/purpose/plan, and it is to make Jesus central in all things … The Bible is the story of God's work in history to sum up all things in Christ."[11]

Both groups hold that there exists only *one* plan of redemption — the salvation of *one people*. This one people is all God's elect from all time, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:15), first formed as the body of Christ, which is the Church, at Pentecost (Acts 1:4–5; 2:1–41), not before (John 7:39; 17:21; Col 1:26–27; Heb 11:39–40), as one corporate spiritual body in New Covenant union with Christ (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:19–21; Col 1:18, 24). This is where NCT and PC distinguish themselves from Dispensational Theology[12] (in all its forms), as they do not accept the latter's *sine qua non*, i.e., the sharp distinction between Israel and the Church.[13] Simply put, NCT and PC do not agree with the Dispensational teaching that God has *two* redemptive programs — one for Israel, and one for the Church.

Both NCT and PC affirm that the Scriptures resoundingly teach that the plan of God is *Christocentric*. Consider Daniel 7:13–14:

> I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Ephesians 1:9–10 declares: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ." Hebrews 1:2 teaches that God the Father "appointed" his Son to be the "heir of all things." Ephesians 1:20–22 also declares that God the Father

"raised him [i.e., Christ] from the dead," "seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion," and "put all things under his feet" (see also Heb 2:6–8). Clearly, God's purpose, God's plan is centered in his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Common Ground 3: God's Plan is Unfolded Via the Biblical Covenants

The *third* significant common ground between NCT and PC that I will discuss is that God's one plan is unfolded via the biblical covenants. Recall the explanations above of Wellum and Long concerning the one plan of God:

> Wellum: "Our triune God has one eternal plan which is progressively revealed through the unfolding of the biblical covenants in redemptive history (Isa. 14:24–27; Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:4, 11; 2:12; Rev. 13:8). From all eternity, God has planned and foreordained all that comes to pass in history, or what is called in theology, the divine economy."[14]
>
> Long: "God's plan of salvation is revealed and administered according to His eternal purpose (2 Tim. 1:9) through the unfolding of biblical covenants in the flow of redemptive history."[15]

Clearly, leading theologians in both groups believe that God's plan is unfolded via the biblical covenants.

At this point, the term *biblical covenants* requires explanation. Advocates of PC hold the following: "The primary biblical covenants are creation (Gen. 1–3); Noahic (Gen. 6–9); Abrahamic (Gen. 12–50); Mosaic/old (Ex.-Deut.); Davidic (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17), and the new covenant (Jer. 31:29–34; Prophets; Heb. 8–10)."[16] There are advocates of NCT that would agree with the previous statement. For example, Long writes that "God's eternal purpose of redemption" is "covenantally revealed and administered through biblical covenants beginning with a pre-Fall covenant of obedience with Adam (Rom. 5:12–19) and a post-Fall covenant of promise (Gen. 3:15)."[17] In short, Long agrees, even adding a post-fall covenant of promise. That being said, I believe it would be fair to say that the majority within NCT do

not hold to the existence of a pre-fall covenant. I will discuss this point in greater detail in my next message.

That being said, the issue of a pre-fall covenant aside, both groups agree that God's one plan is unfolded and revealed through the biblical covenants. Wellum writes:

> Each biblical covenant contributes to the unfolding and revealing of God's unified plan. To grasp God's plan, we must take seriously how all of the covenants reveal God's plan. It is crucial to interpret each covenant in its own redemptive-historical context and think through how it is related to the covenant(s) that precede it and to the covenant(s) that follow it. It is only by reading Scripture this way that we can discern how each of the covenants unveils God's plan over time and how all of the covenants reach their fulfillment in Christ. We do not view the covenants as isolated units; instead, we view them as organically related to each other as God's plan unfolds from creation to Christ. Thus, by the progression or unfolding of the covenants, God's plan is revealed.[18]

Take, for example, the seed promise that was first revealed in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." In other words, God promises that one of Eve's offspring would be a champion who would triumph over the serpent via his own death. Genesis 4–6 then trace the genealogy of this coming seed from Adam through Seth to Noah. Immediately after the Flood, God makes a covenant with Noah which guarantees the future realization of the Genesis 3:15 promise—a blessing that is ultimately realized in Shem's distant descendant Jesus Christ. God subsequently enters into covenant with Abraham and grants to him the seed promise in Genesis 12:7 (renewed in Gen 15:18; 17:7), which itself is a continuation of the original seed promise in Genesis 3:15. Following Abraham, God establishes his covenant with Isaac and Jacob just as he promised in Genesis 17:19–21. In doing so, he extends the Abrahamic seed promise to Isaac and Jacob. Later, God enters into covenant with David, a descendant of Jacob's son Judah, and he promises to David a seed, who will build God's house, who will be God's son, and who will receive an everlasting throne (2 Sam 7:10–16).

As one traces the seed promise throughout the Scriptures using a Christological hermeneutic, it is unmistakably clear that the biblical covenants progressively unfold God's promises. As the NT Scriptures resoundingly indicate, Christ is the true seed of the woman, the one whom God promised would crush the head of the serpent (Heb 2:14). He is the true seed of Abraham (Matt 1:1); that is to say, he is both the ultimate fulfillment and chief beneficiary of God's promises to Abraham (Gal 3:16). As "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5), Christ is descended from Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. Christ is David's greater Son and true seed (Matt 1:1; Rev 5:5)—the One who ontologically is God's unique Son, who through his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension is "building" the Church—God's temple, and who was enthroned in power at God's right hand at his ascension (Acts 2:29–36). Clearly, the biblical covenants progressively unfold God's kingdom purpose (Matt 6:10) in history, culminating in Christ Jesus and the New Covenant.

Common Ground 4: The Interpretive Priority of the NT

The *fourth* significant common ground between NCT and PC that I will discuss is that both groups agree that the NT has interpretive priority over the OT *due to the New being the final revelation of God*. For example, Long describes that in terms of its hermeneutics NCT strives for "consistent interpretation of the OT in light of the NT" with "Christ as the focus 'in all the Scriptures'" (Luke 24:27).[19] Blake White writes: "We learn how to interpret the Old Testament from Jesus and his apostles … God has revealed himself over time (progressively) and his revelation has come to a climax in Jesus Christ. Now all previous revelation must be understood in light of his centrality."[20] Wellum similarly states that PC "appl[ies] the entire OT to us as *Scripture* and in light of its fulfillment in Christ."[21] Elsewhere, he writes, "To apply rightly God's promises to us today, and to know now we ought to live as God's new covenant people, *all* of Scripture must be applied in light of its fulfillment in Christ."[22]

Why do both groups advocate for the interpretive priority of the NT? This is so for at least three reasons. First, he Lord Jesus Christ understood the message of Scripture to be about himself. For example, in an encounter with the Jews, Jesus boldly declared, "You search the Scriptures because

you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me" (John 5:39). In the same exchange, Christ also testified, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me" (John 5:46).[23] Second, the apostles and writers of the NT interpreted the OT in light of Christ, as he had taught them. In John 1:45, Philip exclaims to Nathanael, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth of son of Joseph." When speaking to the Jews in Acts 3:18, 24, the apostle Peter declares: "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he has thus fulfilled.24 And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days." Third, the NT revelation is a higher, clearer revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ than the OT Scriptures. This is not to say that the OT should be discarded, devalued, or considered less the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16–17) than the NT. May it never be! The NT though must have interpretive priority over the Old due to the former being the final revelation of God. John Reisinger also describes the interpretive priority of the NT: "First, we consider the promise/prophecy as stated in its Old Testament text. Next, we ask questions of that text. Finally, we turn to the New Testament for answers to those questions."[24]

As a brief aside, proponents of NCT and PC also find hermeneutical common ground with regard to the already-not yet or now-not yet principle to understand the teaching of the NT. For example, representing the NCT view, Long writes:

> The "now-not yet" principle of interpretation is essential to understand the teaching of the NT. The Christian experiences the commencement of "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3); yet he still awaits the consummation of these blessing at Christ's return. The whole theology of the NT is qualified by this tension: between the "already" or "now" and the "not yet" (I John 3:2).[25]

Presenting the PC view, Wellum writes:

> In the ratification of the new covenant, we embrace the "already-not yet" of inaugurated eschatology in understanding how the new covenant is fulfilled in

> redemptive history. In Christ and the new covenant, all that the OT prophesied, predicted, and anticipated through promises and typological patterns is now here in principle (e.g., Matt. 4:17; Jer. 31:34; Rom. 3:21–26; 8:1; Acts 2:32–36; 2 Cor. 5:17), yet we still await the fullness and consummation of the new covenant at Christ's glorious return (e.g., Matt. 6:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 1:13–14; Rev. 21:22).[26]

As a result, both groups hold not only to a Christological hermeneutic in which the NT has interpretive priority, but also to the *now-not yet* or *already-not yet* hermeneutical principle.

Common Ground 5: The Mosaic Law is a Unit

The *fifth* significant common ground between NCT and PC that I will discuss is that the Mosaic Law is a unit. For example, Wellum describes the PC view:

> [W]e do not simply divide the Mosaic/old covenant into a threefold division: moral, civil, and ceremonial. Such an approach insists that the civil and ceremonial parts of the old covenant are now fulfilled and abrogated for Christians, yet the Decalogue continues as God's eternal moral law for all people. No doubt, this approach is helpful and it often yields similar conclusions on how the Christian ought to live and obey God today, yet there are some hermeneutical problems with it. The old covenant is best viewed as a unit which has now reached its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant. As Christians, we are no longer under the old covenant as a covenant (Rom. 6:14–15; 1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 4:4–5; 5:13–18). Merely to appeal to the Decalogue as the principle by which we establish moral law today is not sufficient, and it faces difficulties with the Sabbath command. Instead, we ought to apply the Decalogue to us (as embedded in the entire old covenant) in light of its fulfillment in Christ.[27]

Long describes the predominant view within NCT:

> The Ten Commandments are not moral law "forever," first written in the heart of man at creation and forever binding upon all mankind as CT teaches in its

> confessions of faith; e.g., the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647–49) and the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1677/1689). In fact the term "moral law" does not occur in the original languages of the Bible. Although under any given covenantal administration, man is morally obligated to obey all of God's commandments, yet the Bible does not separate God's law into three parts: moral, ceremonial and civil. Historically, this threefold separation was not substantially taught until the time of Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century and in the 16th century by Calvin … The Decalogue is not "transcovenantal" and, therefore, does not function outside the Old Covenant as a unit as much of CT teaches.[28]

Blake White similarly writes: "[T]he old covenant law is a unit. It is a package deal. Another way to state this is to say that the law is bound up with the covenant in which it was given. One cannot separate the commands from the covenant to which they belong."[29]

Common Ground 6: Christians are not Under the Old Covenant

The *sixth* significant common ground between NCT and PC that I will discuss is that Christians are not under the Old Covenant. Wellum expresses the PC view:

> The old covenant is best viewed as a unit which has now reached its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant. As Christians, we are no longer under the old covenant as a covenant (Rom. 6:14–15; 1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 4:4–5; 5:13–18). Merely to appeal to the Decalogue as the principle by which we establish moral law today is not sufficient, and it faces difficulties with the Sabbath command. Instead, we ought to apply the Decalogue to us (as embedded in the entire old covenant) in light of its fulfillment in Christ. When we do so, we discover that the Decalogue comes over to us with greater expectations in light of Christ's work applied to us by the Spirit.[30]

Long, representing NCT, stands in general agreement:

> Christians "are not under law (hupo nomon), but under grace (hupo charin)" (Rom. 6:14), meaning that the believer in Christ is no longer under the Mosaic law as covenant law but under the grace of the NC … The Ten Commandments are a covenantal outworking of the two greatest commandments in redemptive history, not the reverse. They were given through the hand of Moses to the nation of Israel first at Mount Sinai (Exod. 20).[31]

Blake White similarly states: "New covenant Christians are not under the law of Moses but the law of Christ."[32] The Law of Moses can be defined as the exhaustive, *indivisible* (Jas. 2:10; Gal. 5:3) legal code, summed up in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 34:28), covenantally binding upon *the nation of Israel* (Exod. 19:5–6; 24:3), temporary in its duration (Heb. 7:11–12; Col. 2:14), and fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:4; Matt. 5:17–18; Col. 2:16–17).[33]

As a brief aside, advocates of NCT and PC also hold that the Sabbath command is fulfilled in Christ. Stemming from the three previous areas of common ground, namely if the NT has interpretive priority over the OT, if the Mosaic Law is an indivisible unit, and if Christians are no longer under the Old Covenant as a *covenant* — and hence, the Mosaic Law as *covenant law*, this leads to the view held by both NCT and PC that the Sabbath command is typologically fulfilled in Christ. Speaking for the NCT view, Long writes: "The old covenant Sabbath commandment is typologically fulfilled by Christ for the people of God who rest in Him by faith (Heb. 4:9–10; Col. 2:16–17)."[34] Wellum describes the PC view of the Sabbath:

> Regarding the Sabbath, like the Decalogue, we obey the Sabbath command in light of its fulfillment in Christ (Heb. 3:7–4:11). We do so by first setting the Sabbath command within its covenantal location (old covenant). This allows us to see how it functioned as a command/sign to Israel (which no longer applies to us), but also how it typologically pointed forward to a greater salvation rest that is now here in Christ (which does apply to us). In this way, Christians "obey" the Sabbath by entering into the rest that it typified and predicted, namely salvation rest in Christ.[35]

Common Ground 7: All Members of the New Covenant are Believers who are Fully Forgiven, Indwelt by the Spirit, and Empowered by the Spirit

The *seventh* significant common ground between NCT and PC that I will discuss is that all believers are members of the New Covenant, have full forgiveness of sins, are *permanently* indwelt by the Spirit, and are empowered by the Spirit to please God. Representing PC, Wellum states:

> Under the old covenant, Israel visibly was constituted as a mixed community of believers and unbelievers (Rom. 9:6), ruled by various Spirit-empowered leaders (prophets, priests, and kings), hence the famous visible-invisible distinction. However, under the new covenant, the church is constituted as a believing, regenerate people, united to Christ by faith and those who have minimally experienced the forgiveness of sin, new birth and gifting by the Spirit, and heart circumcision (Rom. 6). No doubt, not all people who profess faith in Christ show themselves to be truly regenerate. Yet, the church, unlike Israel under the old covenant, is constituted by those who have professed true saving faith in Christ. Thus, our view of the visible-invisible church is different than covenant theology. We affirm that the visible church is a professing believer's church, while the invisible church pertains to God's one people in all places and throughout time (Heb. 12:18–29).[36]

Blake White describes the New Covenant position:

> New Covenant Theology believes that all in the new covenant community know the Lord … Unlike the old covenant, all are indwelt by the Spirit in the new covenant. Moses longed for the day when all would have the gift of the Spirit … These promises came to fruition at Pentecost, and not before then. The Spirit is the gift of the last days. The new covenant community consists only of those who are indwelt by the Spirit. The church is to be a believer's church. There is no biblical precedent for having a mixed community of believers and unbelievers in the new covenant church. All are fully forgiven and are indwelt by the Spirit of God.[37]

Long also writes: "the believer in Christ is no longer under the Mosaic law as covenant law but under the grace of the NC — a covenant that … has the internal leading of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:4, 11)."[38] Later, he continues: "The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the norm for Christian living. NCT does not teach that the Ten Commandments are the only objective standard for evaluating the Christian life. Rather, NCT emphasizes that it is the Spirit who through Scripture enables the Christian to have a godly walk (Rom. 8:4) acknowledging that all Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16)."[39]

God promised to make "a new covenant" which not only would not be like the Old Covenant (Jer 31:31–33) but would also be founded "on better promises" (Heb 8:6). In 2 Corinthians 2:14–4:6, the apostle Paul contrasts the Old and New Covenants, demonstrating the New Covenant's superiority over the Old.[40] The Old Covenant was a "ministry of death" (2 Cor 3:7) and "condemnation" (2 Cor 3:9), and its defining dynamic was the Law of Moses, which, although a blessing for the regenerate[41] Israelite (e.g., Ps 19:7; 40:8; 119:72, 97, 174), inexorably resulted in death for the unregenerate[42] Israelite (2 Cor 3:6). However, the Mosaic Law resulted in death for unregenerate Israelites because the Old Covenant did *not* guarantee to its members the internal work of the Spirit.[43] This internal working of the Spirit was only experienced by a small remnant of the Old Covenant community to whom God freely and sovereignly chose to extend it in order to fulfill the spiritual promises made to Abraham. In contrast to the Old Covenant, the New Covenant is a "ministry of the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:8) and "righteousness" (2 Cor 3:9), and its defining dynamic is the Spirit, who inexorably produces "life" (2 Cor 3:6) in all members of the New Covenant.

Not only are all members of the New Covenant believers via the regenerative working of the Holy Spirit, but they also have full forgiveness of sins through faith in the salvific work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant does guarantee its members the internal work of the Spirit. Put differently, membership in the New Covenant community *does* indicate that a Christian is spiritually redeemed and empowered by the Spirit to live righteously and please God. Jeremiah 31:31–34 declares:

> Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Similarly, Ezekiel 36:25–27 states:

> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Notice that all God's elect "from the least of them to the greatest" (Jer 31:34) know the living God (Jer 31:34), have his "law" written upon their hearts (Jer 31:33), will be forgiven of their iniquity (Jer 31:34), have "a new heart" and "a new spirit" (Ezek 36:26), have the Holy Spirit indwelling them (Ezek 36:27), and are empowered to please God (Ezek 36:27). Behold, the breathtaking glories of the New Covenant!

Among the promises of the New Covenant was the permanent gift of the Holy Spirit to all the members of the New Covenant.[44] Ezekiel 36:27 declares: "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (cf. Isa 44:3; 48:16; Ezek 11:18; 37:14). Isaiah 59:21 foretold that the promised gift of the Spirit would be permanent: "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth … from now and forever." In John 14:16–17, Jesus taught his disciples, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is

the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you" (emphasis mine). When would the advent of the Holy Spirit occur? On the day of Pentecost, the ascended Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon his followers; the apostle Peter declares: "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He [i.e., Christ] has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

Another promise of the New Covenant is that the Holy Spirit would cause all the members of the New Covenant to obey the triune God. Ezekiel 36:27 declares: "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (cf. Isa 44:3; 48:16; Ezek 11:18; 37:14). In other words, the indwelling Holy Spirit is the divine agent who causes a believer's willing obedience (Ezek 36:27) by giving him a new heart or inclination[45] (Ezek 36:26) which consequently seeks to follow God and keep his inscripturated commandments (Jer 31:31–33).[46] The apostle Paul's words in Philippians 2:13 echo Ezekiel: "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Again, in Romans 8:14, Paul writes: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Simply put, the Spirit of God causes new covenant believers to obey God's commandments (cf. Phil 2:13; Rom 8:13–14; 1 Pet 1:2).[47]

As a result, advocates of NCT and PC both hold that all believers are members of the New Covenant, have full forgiveness of sins, are permanently indwelt by the Spirit, and are empowered by the Spirit to please God. In other words, both groups affirm a baptistic ecclesiology. In light of the doctrines of grace described above, both groups would understand the Church not to be a mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers — as taught by the Westminster Federalist branch of Covenant Theology — but rather a regenerate body of believers who all know the triune God "from the least of them to the greatest" (Jer 31:34). Both groups would substantially, and in some cases entirely, agree with historic Baptist confessions — such as the First London Confession, Second London Confession, or the Abstract of Principles.

Common Ground 8: The Church is the Eschatological Israel as God's People

The *eighth* significant common ground between NCT and PC that I will discuss is that the Church is the eschatological Israel as God's people by virtue of her New Covenant union with Christ — the true Israel. Wellum writes the following:

> God has one people (Deut. 4:10; Isa. 2:2–4; Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 11:18; Heb. 10:25), yet there is an Israel-church distinction due to their respective covenants. The church is new in redemptive history since she is God's new covenant people due to Christ's coming and work, yet she is in continuity with OT saints who in faith looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ (Heb. 12:18–29).[48]

He continues:

> The Israel-church relationship must be viewed both covenantally and Christologically. The church is not directly the "new Israel" or her replacement. Rather, in Christ, the church is God's new creation, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles, because Jesus is the last Adam and true Israel, the faithful seed of Abraham who inherits the promises by his work. Thus, in union with Christ, the church is God's new covenant people in continuity with the elect in all ages, but different from Israel in its nature and structure.[49]

Representing the NCT view, Blake White states:

> Dispensationalism teaches that the church and Israel are two separate people, while New Covenant Theology teaches that the church is the continuation of Israel through Jesus Christ. Sometimes, New Covenant Theology is accused of being "replacement theology," but this is unfair. New Covenant Theology does not teach that the church replaces Israel but that the church is the *fulfillment* of Israel by virtue of its union with the Jewish Messiah.[50]

To this, I will offer two definitions which represent the position of Providence Theological Institute of New Covenant Theology and which also generally agree with the aforementioned statements.

> *The people of God*: all God's elect from all time, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:15), first formed as the body of Christ, which is the Church, at Pentecost (Acts 1:4–5; 2:1–41), not before (John 7:39; 17:21; Col. 1:26–27; Heb. 11:39–40), as one corporate spiritual body in New Covenant union with Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:19–21; Col. 1:18, 24).
>
> *The nation of Israel*: the ethnic descendants of Jacob (Gen. 28:13–15) formed by God into a geopolitical entity at Sinai via the Old Covenant (Exod. 19:5–6), comprised of both believers and unbelievers (1 Cor. 10:1–5; Heb. 3:16–4:2), eschatologically fulfilled in Christ — *the True Israel* (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15) — and His Church (Exod. 19:5–6; 1 Pet. 2:9), the believing remnant (Rom. 9:27; 11:5) of which was transformed into the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–10,41), and which awaits a future *spiritual* restoration (Amos 9:8) in the form of a massive, end-time ingathering of *elect* Jews into the Church at Christ's Parousia (Rom. 11:12, 15, 25–27)

Proponents of both NCT and PC prefer to emphasize that the Church is the *fulfilment* of Israel *as the people of God*. However, this "fulfillment" is secondary to an even greater "fulfillment" regarding the nation of Israel — namely, *that Jesus Christ has fulfilled Israel as the True Israel*. As Christ is the true seed of Abraham and David's greater Son, Christ fulfills all God's promises, including those given to Israel (2 Cor 1:20). Not only does he recapitulate Israel's history in his own sinless humanity but he also perfectly succeeds where all God's previous mediators, including Israel, failed. Advocates of NCT and PC agree with other theologians in this regard such as Stephen Motyer and R. T. France. The former states:

> Jesus appears, not just as the Saviour of Israel in fulfilment of prophetic expectation, but also as an embodiment of Israel as they should be. Matthew makes this point dramatically in his opening chapters, first by applying the Exodus verse Hosea 11:1 to Jesus (Matt. 2:15), and then by telling the story in a way that makes Jesus re-enact Israel's history: the Exodus from Egypt (2:19–20), the crossing of the Red Sea (3:13–17), the temptations … in

> the desert (4:1–11), even the arrival at Mt. Sinai to receive the law (5:1–2). Perhaps most pointedly, it is Jesus on whom the Spirit descends (Matt. 3:16), although the prophetic expectation was of an outpouring of the Spirit upon Israel (Is. 44:2–3; Ezek. 36:25–27). Where Israel had failed the temptations in the desert, Jesus now remains faithful to God.[51]

Similarly, R. T. France writes:

> Jesus then saw himself as God's son, undergoing prior to his great mission as Messiah the testing which God had given to his 'son' Israel before the great mission of the conquest of Canaan. Israel then had failed the test; now, in Jesus, was found that true sonship which could pass the test, and be the instrument of God's purpose of blessing to the world which Old Testament Israel had failed to accomplish. 'The history of Israel is taken up by him and carried to its fulfilment.' The antitype, as always, is greater than the type. Old Testament Israel had failed; Jesus must succeed.[52]

Again, France writes: "The resurrection of Christ is the resurrection of Israel of which the prophet spoke.' It is not so much that Israel was a type of Jesus, but Jesus is Israel."[53]

When one studies the NT, it is very clear that Christ Jesus understood the message of Scripture to be about himself (e.g., John 15:1; Isa 5:2; John 5:39; Matt 5:17; Luke 24:27, 44). Additionally, it is apparent that Christ taught his apostles and the writers of the NT to interpret the OT in light of his person and work. Thus, the NT repeatedly describes the Church, Christ's New Covenant community, with terms originally used to describe OT Israel. Recall that the Lord at Mount Sinai declares to Israel, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5–6). Now, notice how the apostle Peter describes New Covenant believers — members of the Church of Jesus Christ — in 1 Peter 2:4–9:

> As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable

> to God through Jesus Christ … you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The apostle Paul similarly understands the Church to be a New Israel — namely, "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). Thus, the apostles understand the Church as *the people of God*, by virtue of being "in Christ," the true Israel. In other words, by virtue of being "in Christ," the true Israel, the Church is by extension the fulfilment of Israel *as the people of God* — a new Israel.

Although both NCT and PC teach that the Church has *fulfilled* Israel *as the people of God*, both *adamantly* maintain that God has not broken any of his promises to Israel, as is implied when either is accused of so-called "replacement theology." God has fulfilled all his promises in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). As a result, both NCT and PC hold that OT promises should be understood typologically with relation to Christ. To sum up, Christ *is* the true Israel, and he has ultimately replaced Israel, and it is only by virtue of the Church's spiritual union with him that she can be understood to be the *new* or *eschatological Israel*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a great deal of common ground exists between NCT and PC. Both groups lock arms on the absolute essentials of the Christian faith. Furthermore, both hold to historic Protestant Christianity, to include such things as the five *solas* and the doctrines of grace. Both groups believe that there is *one* plan of redemption, centered in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:10; 2 Cor 1:20; Col 1:18), implemented according to God's eternal purpose (Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9), and securing the salvation of God's elect (Rom 8:28–32). Both groups teach that God's one plan is unfolded via the biblical covenants — though many within NCT do not hold to a pre-fall covenant. Both groups hold not only to a Christological hermeneutic in which the NT has interpretive priority, but also to the *now-not yet* or *already-not yet* hermeneutical principle. Both NCT and PC teach that the Mosaic Law is an indivisible unit. Both groups teach that Christians are not under the Old Covenant. Both groups teach all believers are members of the New Covenant, have full forgiveness of sins, are *permanently* indwelt by the Spirit, and are

empowered by the Spirit to please God. Thus, NCT and PC both hold to a Baptist ecclesiology. And finally, both groups understand the Church to be the eschatological Israel as God's people by virtue of her New Covenant union with Christ — the true Israel.

---

1 Dennis Swanson, "Introduction to New Covenant Theology." *TMSJ* 18/1 (Fall 2007), 152.

2 Fred G. Zaspel, "A Brief Explanation of 'New Covenant Theology'" (online article from Zaspel's Biblical Studies); accessed October 20, 2015; available from http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/hermenutics/nct.htm.

3 Blake White, *What is New Covenant Theology? An Introduction* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012), 1.

4 Robert L Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 155.

5 Gary D. Long, *NCT: Time for a More Accurate Way* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2013), 2.

6 Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 21.

7 Although frequently attributed to Augustine of Hippo, Schaff notes that the theological axiom "appears for the first time in German, AD 1627 and 1628" and "has recently been traced to Rupertus Meldenius, the otherwise unknown divine." Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII: Modern Christianity and the German Reformation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1910; reprint 1974), 650.

8 Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism: Key Points of Definition" (Stephen J. Wellum, 2020), 1.

9 Gary D. Long, "New Covenant Theology" (Gary D. Long, 2013), 1.

10 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 2.

11 White, *What is New Covenant Theology?*, 6–7.

12 *Dispensational Theology* can be generally defined in the following manner: "a theological system that tends to emphasize the elements of discontinuity between the Old and New Testament Scriptures; this system divides redemptive history into a number of distinct time periods known as dispensations; among its other distinctives, generally speaking, are its sharp distinction between Israel and the Church, a literal premillennial kingdom, a pretribulation rapture, and a restoration of national Israel." *PTSJ* 1.1 (Nov 2014): 8.

13 What is the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism? Charles C. Ryrie is particularly helpful: "The essence of Dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the church. This grows out of the dispensationalist's consistent employment of normal or plain or historical-grammatical interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well." Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago, IL: Moody 1966; reprint 1995, 2007), 46–8. See also Michael J. Vlach who holds to a six-fold *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism: "At this point, I would like to offer what I believe are the core essential beliefs of Dispensationalism. By 'essential' I mean foundational beliefs of Dispensationalism that are central and unique to the system, beliefs upon which the system stands or falls … 1. Progressive revelation from the New Testament does not interpret or reinterpret Old Testament passages in a way that changes or cancels the original meaning of the Old Testament writers as determined by historical-grammatical hermeneutics … 2. Types exist but national Israel is not a type that is superseded by the church … 3. Israel and the church are distinct, thus, the church cannot be identified as the new or true Israel … 4. There is both spiritual unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles and a future role for Israel as a nation … 5. The nation Israel will be both saved and restored with a unique identity and function in a future millennial kingdom upon the earth … 6. There are multiple senses of 'seed of Abraham', thus, the church's identification as 'seed of Abraham' does not cancel God's promises to the believing Jewish 'seed of Abraham.'" Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (Los Angeles, Theological Studies Press, 2008), 18–30.

14 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 1.

15 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 1.

16 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 1.

17 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 1.

18 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 1.

19 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 1.
20 White, *What is New Covenant Theology?*, 9.
21 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 5.
22 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 1.
23 See John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 224. Concerning John 5:46, Calvin writes, "When Christ says, that *Moses wrote concerning him*, this needs no long proof with those who acknowledge that Christ is the end and soul of the Law."
24 John G. Reisinger, *New Covenant Theology and Prophecy* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012), 23.
25 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 3.
26 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 1.
27 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 5.
28 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 2.
29 White, *What is New Covenant Theology?*, 25.
30 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 5.
31 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 2.
32 White, *What is New Covenant Theology?*, 36.
33 See Gary D. Long, *Biblical Law and Ethics: Absolute and Covenantal: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Matthew 5:17–20* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2009), 86. Long writes: "*… God's absolute law-individually and personally binds all mankind by virtue of their being moral creatures of God regardless of dispensational and covenantal distinctions.* But God's covenant law corporately and covenantally binds only those who are in the covenant community according to the terms of the covenant in force at a specified time within redemptive history. In its absolute sense, then, God's law is ethically and morally binding upon all mankind as individuals forever—whether Jew or Gentile (Rom. 2:12–15), whether living in the Old or New dispensation era (Matt. 22:36–40). But in its covenantal sense, God's law is only binding upon a covenant community so long as that specified covenant is in force. The law of Moses as covenant law was binding upon the physical seed of Abraham under the Old Covenant dispensation. The law of Christ is binding upon the spiritual seed of Abraham under the New Covenant dispensation."
34 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 3.
35 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 5.
36 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 4.
37 White, *What is New Covenant Theology?*, 38–43.
38 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 2.
39 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 3.
40 See Colin G. Kruse, "Law," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, Donald A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 636. Kruse writes: "After the coming of Christ, obedience to the Mosaic law was no longer the distinguishing mark of the people of God. They were now distinguished by their faith in Jesus Christ and participation in his Spirit. The law continued to have an educative role for them, but it was no longer the regulatory norm under which they lived. Christians were not bound to the actual demands of the law but had much to learn from the principles and values underlying them."
41 The regeneration of the OT remnant of Israel by the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of the spiritual promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, not the Old Covenant.
42 The Old Covenant community of Israel was largely unregenerate. For example, Jeremiah 9:26b proclaims that "all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart" (cf. Isa. 1:9; Heb. 3:16–4:6). See also John G. Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 1998), 77. Reisinger states that Israel was "indeed a *special* nation … but the nation by and large was unregenerate." See also John G. Reisinger, *Tablets of Stone and the History of Redemption* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2004), 44. On page 44, Reisinger writes, "It is true that God showed special favor to the Jews in their redemption from Egypt, but that was a *physical* redemption. Most of those Israelites were still hard-hearted sinners who needed to be convinced of their lost estate (Heb. 3:16–19)."
43 See Blake White, *The Newness of the New Covenant* (Frederick: New Covenant Media, 2008), 17. White rightly declares, "Indeed, Israel was unable to serve the Lord (Josh. 24:19), lacking the heart inclined to keep the Torah (Deut. 30:6, 31:16)."
44 Max Turner, "Holy Spirit," 551–2.

45 This change of heart (or inclination) wrought by the Holy Spirit is the fruit of regeneration, one of the Holy Spirit's own ministries. Although not all OT saints were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, all saints, whether in the OT or NT eras, experience 'Holy Spirit' regeneration, resulting in willing obedience (albeit imperfect prior to death) to their own respective system of covenantal law (e.g., Law of Moses, Law of Christ).

46 See Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 298–9 (emphasis mine).

47 The Scriptures also declare that the Holy Spirit testifies of Christ (John 15:26) and guides believers "in all the truth" (John 16:13). This testimony and this truth center upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

48 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 4.

49 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 4–5.

50 White, *What is New Covenant Theology?*, 45.

51 Stephen Motyer, "Israel (Nation)," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 584–5.

52 R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1998) 53.

53 France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 55.

New Covenant Theology and Progressive Covenantalism Compared: Disputable Differences

Zachary S. Maxcey

Zachary S. Maxcey is a MDiv graduate of Providence Theological Seminary, and he currently serves as the President of Providence Theological Institute of New Covenant Theology (http://www.pti-nct.org).

Introduction

Although there are some disputable differences between New Covenant Theology (NCT) and Progressive Covenantalism (PC), there is vast agreement between these two systems. In my previous article,[1] I addressed the following eight areas of common ground between NCT and PC: 1) historic Protestant Christianity; 2) one plan of God centered in Christ; 3) God's plan is unfolded via the biblical covenants; 4) the interpretive priority of the New Testament (NT); 5) the Mosaic Law is an indivisible unit; 6) Christians are not under the Old Covenant; 7) all believers are members of the New Covenant, have full forgiveness of sins, are permanently indwelt by the Spirit, and are empowered by the Spirit to please God; and 8) the Church is the eschatological Israel as God's people. Again, this is not intended to be an exhaustive list; it is merely eight areas of common ground that I highlighted between the systems. In this article, I will highlight five disputable differences which exist to varying degrees between PC and NCT: 1) whether or not a creation covenant existed between God and Adam; 2) the imputation of Christ's obedience; 3) the nature of the Law of Christ; 4) whether or not there is any instructive use of the Mosaic Law for the

Christian; and 5) differences regarding terminology and categories related to the covenants.

A Discussion among Christian Brethren

As believers in Christ, we *must* be able to lock arms together on all essential matters of the Christian faith, while agreeing to disagree in non-essential or disputable matters in Christian love. We must remember that famous statement of Rupertus Meldenius, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."[2] When we fail to do so, we stand in *direct* violation of Christ's command to love one another as he loved us (John 13:34; Matt 22:39). As long as we accept the essentials of orthodox evangelical Protestantism, we should be able to agree to disagree with fellow believers on disputable matters, which would include the non-essential differences between NCT and PC.

This is *not* to say that non-essentials theological matters cannot and do not significantly affect one's understanding of Scripture and overall theology. Of course, they *can* and *certainly do* in certain cases. This notwithstanding, every Christian must zealously labor to be abundantly gracious when interacting with Christian brethren in all matters. As Ephesians 4:1–3 declares: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Disputable Difference 1: The Existence of a Creation Covenant

The *first* disputable difference that exists to varying degrees between PC and NCT is whether or not a covenant existed between God and Adam in the beginning. Representing the PC position, Stephen Wellum writes:

> As we think of the Bible's overall metanarrative, it is best to think of God's one plan unfolding through a plurality of covenants, first starting with Adam and culminating in Christ and the new covenant. The creation covenant under Adam lays the foundation that continues in all the covenants and is fulfilled in

> Christ and his obedient work. God's plan, then, moves from creation in Adam to consummation in Christ (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22; Heb. 2:5–18).[3]

Wellum argues that "starting with the creation covenant is crucial for grasping the Bible's story for at least two reasons." The first reason that Wellum states is the following:

> First, the creation covenant is foundational for all future covenants since all subsequent covenants unpack Adam's role in the world. Adam, and all humanity, is created as God's image-son, a priest-king to rule over creation. Adam is created in relationship with God as he mediates God's rule to the world; he does not need to merit favor before God. Yet, God, as holy and just, demands perfect obedience from his covenant partner. All subsequent covenant heads will function as subsets of Adam, who, in God's plan, will point forward to Christ. Even though the amount of space devoted to Adam is small, his role as the representative head of creation defines what comes after him, and the entire work of Christ (Rom. 5:12–21; Heb. 2:5–18).[4]

Wellum continues with the *second* reason:

> Second, the creation covenant is foundational for establishing various typological patterns that eventually reach their telos in Christ and the new covenant (e.g., the rest of the seventh day in Sabbath [Gen. 2:1–3; Ex. 20:8–11] and salvation rest in Christ [Heb. 3:7–4:13]; Eden as a temple sanctuary which is fulfilled in Christ as the new temple; and marriage which points to a greater reality, namely, Christ's relationship to his people [Gen. 2:24–25; Eph. 5:32]). All of these patterns will eschatologically terminate in Christ and God's new covenant people.[5]

Finally, Wellum summarizes the importance of the creation covenant for grasping the Bible's overall storyline:

> In fact, in and through the OT covenants, God re-establishes humanity's lost rule in Adam by the establishment of his kingdom and saving reign (Heb. 2:5–18). In embryonic form, the OT covenants restore what was lost in the fall, yet always pointed forward to the coming of the Redeemer/Messiah who alone

> establishes God's kingdom and the new creation by his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost by the ratification of a new covenant (Luke 22:20; 2 Cor. 3; Heb. 8–10).[6]

Various arguments are used by proponents of PC to support the existence of a pre-fall covenant, known as the *creation covenant* similar to Reformed theology's *covenant of works*, rightly understood. *First*, though the word *covenant* (*bĕrîth*) does not appear in Genesis 1–3, it is not necessary for the word to appear in the Genesis account in order for a covenant to exist between God and Adam, and then Adam as head of all humans. *Second*, similar to Psalm 89 with regard to 2 Samuel 7 and the Davidic Covenant, Hosea 6:7, whose most natural reading is argued to be "*like Adam* they have transgressed the covenant," counteracts the absence of the word *covenant* (*bĕrîth*) in Genesis 1–3. *Third*, the typological comparison in Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15 between the Lord Jesus Christ and Adam are argued to strongly imply that both men were not only heads of the human race — Adam of the old, Christ of the new — but also heads of their own respective covenants and thus covenantal representatives before God — Adam in the *creation covenant* and Christ in the *new covenant*. *Fourth*, it is argued that the usage of the covenant formula — "I *establish* my covenant with you" (cf. Gen 6:18, 9:9,11) — found repeatedly in Genesis 6–9 implies that God's covenant with Noah was an amendment, reconfirmation, or reestablishment of a previous covenant, namely a pre-fall covenant that God forged with Adam. *Fifth*, many covenantal motifs — pertaining to the priesthood, land, temple, king, even marriage — which are organically associated with many of the later biblical covenants appear in Genesis 1–3 with relation to the Garden of Eden, as well as Adam and Eve.

In my estimation, I believe it is accurate to say that the majority within NCT do not hold to the existence of a pre-fall covenant. For example, the New Covenant Confession of Faith, authored by the elders of New Covenant Bible Fellowship and associated with In-Depth Studies, the New Covenant Ministry of Geoff Volker, makes no mention of a pre-fall covenant.[7] Another example is the Redeemer Catechism, a New Covenant catechism, authored by Jordan Quinley, also makes no mention of a pre-fall covenant.[8] Lastly, two of the largest NCT ministries, Cross to Crown Ministries (formerly

Sound of Grace) and In-Depth Studies, neither hold nor teach the existence of a pre-fall covenant.

Various arguments are used by those proponents of NCT that do not hold to a pre-fall covenant. *First*, the word *covenant* does not appear until Genesis 6–9 when God forges a covenant with Noah. *Second*, it is argued that the most natural reading of Hosea 6:7 is not "*like Adam* they have transgressed the covenant" but either "*like men* they have transgressed the covenant" or perhaps even "*at Adam* they have transgressed the covenant." *Third*, it is argued that the typological comparison in Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15 between the Lord Jesus Christ and Adam does not necessitate the existence of a creation covenant with Adam. *Fourth*, it is argued that the usage of the covenant formula—"I establish my covenant with you" (cf. Gen 6:18, 9:9, 11)—found repeatedly in Genesis 6–9 and elsewhere—does not always indicate that the covenant being spoken of is an amendment, reconfirmation, or reestablishment of a previous covenant. Thus, it is reasoned that the usage of this covenant formula does not necessarily indicate that God's covenant with Noah is a renewal of a preceding covenant.

Now, as I mentioned in the previous article, there are advocates of NCT who agree with the PC view. For example, Gary D. Long, former President of Providence Theological Seminary, writes that "God's eternal purpose of redemption" is "covenantally revealed and administered through biblical covenants beginning with a pre-Fall covenant of obedience with Adam (Rom. 5:12–19) and a post-Fall covenant of promise (Gen. 3:15)."[9] In short, Long agrees, even adding a post-Fall covenant of promise. Elsewhere, he writes: "The type anti-type teaching of Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12–19 demands that a covenant relationship existed between God and Adam both before and after the Fall."[10] Furthermore, quite a few individuals who were directly associated with Providence Theological Seminary—referring to faculty and board members—held or do hold to a pre-fall covenant. Additionally, members of Providence Theological Institute hold to it as well. Speaking for myself as an advocate of NCT, I have been on both sides of this argument, as I am sure many have. But, if I were to define my position at this current time, I would say that I do hold to the existence of a pre-fall covenant. I teach the existence of a pre-fall covenant to my ninth-grade students at Samuel Fuller School, using Tom Schreiner's book *Covenant*—

all the while explaining that I view this issue ultimately to be a disputable matter of the Christian faith.

So, is it possible for a brotherly, in-house discussion to take place regarding this issue? And if agreement is unattainable, are we still able to differ with one another in Christian love?

Disputable Difference 2: The Imputation of Christ's Obedience

The *second* disputable difference that exists to varying degrees between PC and NCT pertains to the imputation of Christ's obedience — in other words, whether Christ's active obedience is imputed to his people. Within NCT, there is a sizeable contingent that understands Christ's passive obedience, which they define as his sacrifice on the cross, being imputed to the believer but rejects Christ's active obedience, which they define as his perfect obedience to the Mosaic Law, being imputed to the believer. That being said, I believe it would be accurate to say that it is held by a large group within NCT though it is not the majority view. In my estimation, though I could be wrong, it appears to me that relatively equal numbers believe that both Christ's active and passive obedience are imputed to his people. In this article, I will refer to the first view as the Passive Obedience View and its counterpart as the Total Obedience View.

The New Covenant Confession of Faith, authored by the elders of New Covenant Bible Fellowship and associated with In-Depth Studies, articulates the Passive Obedience View within NCT.[11] In Article 13 — Justification, the confession states in the first paragraph concerning justification by faith:

> God freely justifies, that is he declares righteous, all those he irresistibly calls to himself. He does not justify anyone on the basis of their performance (infused righteousness) but by pardoning their sins and viewing them as perfectly forgiven and accepted, which is the definition of righteousness. God imputes, or gives to the believer, the complete forgiveness of sins and full acceptance by God (the righteousness of Jesus Christ). Because of his sacrificial death on the cross which is the perfect payment for sin, righteousness is secured for all those who believe. Justification is received by trusting in the work of Jesus Christ alone to save us from our sins. This justifying faith

> is a gift of God and is not something that we are able to produce or attain on our own. Romans 3:21–31, John 6:44, Romans 4:1–25, Romans 5:12–21, Ephesians 2:4–10, Romans 10:3–4.[12]

The particular sentence in this section that is expanded and explained in a subsequent paragraph entitled *Imputation of Active Obedience* is the following: "Because of his sacrificial death on the cross which is the perfect payment for sin, righteousness is secured for all those who believe." In Section 4 of Article 13, the New Covenant Confession of Faith directly addresses the issue of the imputation of Christ's obedience. It states the following:

> The perfect obedience of Jesus to the Mosaic Law was necessary in order for him to be our substitute on the cross, but the perfect law-keeping of Jesus is not imputed to our account and is not necessary for our justification. The only work that secures our justification is the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross by which he paid for our sins and secured for the believer a status with God as though the law had been perfectly kept. The cross work of Jesus secured everything necessary for our justification.[13]

The Confession lists such passages as Romans 5:12–19, Romans 8:3–4, Hebrews 10:14–18, Hebrews 4:15, and 1 Peter 1:18–19 as support for its view.[14] Thus, we can see that this confession teaches that Christ's *active obedience*, defined here as "the perfect obedience of Jesus to the Mosaic Law … is not imputed to our account;" however, Christ's *passive obedience*, defined here as "the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross," is imputed to the believer.

Various arguments are used by those proponents of NCT that hold to the Passive Obedience View. *First*, it is argued that the phraseology of "one act of righteousness" in Romans 5:12–19 is best understood as being restricted to the sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross, his passive obedience as defined by this view. *Second*, it is argued via Hebrews 10:14–18 that Christ's "single offering" whereby "he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" is likewise best understood in this sense as well. *Third*, it is argued that other passages such as Romans 8:3–4 and 1 Peter 1:18–19 are best understood as being restricted to Christ's death on the cross, again his passive obedience as defined by this view. *Fourth*, those

proponents of NCT that hold to the Passive Obedience View also view the imputation of the active obedience of Christ as an unnecessary "hold-over" from Covenant Theology; this stems from their definition of Christ's *active obedience* as his perfect obedience to the Mosaic Law.

I would like to point out two observations at this point. *First*, although all proponents of NCT who reject the existence of a pre-fall covenant do not hold to the Passive Obedience View, all those who do hold to the Passive Obedience View do not hold to the existence of a pre-fall covenant. Whether this is readily apparent or not, it is still worth noting. *Second*, many people within NCT do hold to the Total Obedience View, as opposed to the Passive Obedience View. This is perhaps partly due to this issue's proximity to that of justification by faith alone — a cornerstone of Protestant Theology. This proximity can and does understandably engender a degree of controversy within NCT circles as well as between NCT and PC. That being said, it is still worth noting that the preceding excerpts from the New Covenant Confession of Faith representing the Passive Obedience View do also affirm *justification by faith alone*.

As just stated, there are advocates within NCT who do hold to the Total Obedience View. For example, Long states: "Christ merited righteousness for the elect only and imputed it to them based upon His total obedience to the will of the Father in His life and death (Matt. 3:15; Rom. 5:19)."[15] Elsewhere, he writes: "The imputation of Adam's first sin to all mankind (Rom. 5:12d, 18a-19a), the elect's sin to Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), and Christ's righteousness to the elect (Rom. 5:18b-19b) are vital for the Christian faith. Without the doctrine of imputation the whole doctrine of the substitutionary atonement and justification by faith alone in Christ alone are undermined (Rom. 5:12–19). 4. The type anti-type teaching of Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12–19 demands that a covenant relationship existed between God and Adam both before and after the Fall."[16] Long's words highlight the linkage by some advocates of NCT, and as we will see as well with the PC view, of a pre-fall covenant with Romans 5:12–19, and hence with the Total Obedience View. Additionally, I believe it would be fair to say that one of the largest NCT ministries, Cross to Crown Ministries (formerly Sound of Grace) also generally holds to the Total Obedience View. Speaking for myself as an advocate of NCT, I would fall into this particular camp as well that embraces the Total Obedience View.

Advocates of PC likewise hold to the Total Obedience View, meaning that the passive and active obedience of Christ are both imputed to the believer in justification. Wellum writes:

> Unfortunately, Adam disobeyed resulting in sin and death (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23; 6:23). However, our triune God did not leave us to ourselves. Instead, God the Father chose to redeem his people by sovereign grace by the provision of God the Son, who by his incarnation, life, death and resurrection secured our eternal salvation. As the incarnate Son, Jesus, as the last Adam, perfectly obeyed for us as our covenant head (Rom. 5:12–21; Phil. 2:6–11; Heb. 5:1–10). As the divine Son, he bore the penalty of our sin and satisfied God's own righteous demand against us (Rom. 3:21–26). By our covenantal faith-union in Christ, wrought by the regenerating work of God the Spirit, we stand justified before God as his redeemed, reconciled, and adopted sons (Rom. 8; Eph. 2:1–10). As new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), we are restored to the purpose of our creation, namely to know, love, serve, and glorify God, now and forevermore, in a new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21–22).[17]

Notice the two sentences: "As the incarnate Son, Jesus, as the last Adam, perfectly obeyed for us as our covenant head (Rom. 5:12–21; Phil. 2:6–11; Heb. 5:1–10). As the divine Son, he bore the penalty of our sin and satisfied God's own righteous demand against us (Rom. 3:21–26)."[18] This is the language of the Total Obedience View. Wellum also summarily states elsewhere: "The creation covenant under Adam lays the foundation that continues in all the covenants and is fulfilled in Christ and his obedient work."[19] Thus, the PC view holds to the imputation of both Christ's active and passive obedience.

Various arguments are used by PC as well as those proponents of NCT that hold to the Total Obedience View. *First*, it is argued that Christ's *active obedience* should not be restricted to Christ's perfect obedience to the Mosaic Law (which of course he never broke), rather it should be understood as his perfect obedience to the will of the Father — a far greater, far higher standard. *Second*, it is argued that Christ's *passive obedience* should not be restricted to his sacrifice on the cross, as in the words of Greg Van Court, "the active obedience has been historically defined as to have its greatest fulfillment in the sacrifice of Christ."[20] *Third*, it is argued

that the "one act of righteousness" in Romans 5:12–19 should not be so restrictively interpreted as "to exclude any aspect of Christ's obedience from that obedience through which 'many will be made righteous.'"[21] Thus, it is possible to view the "one act of righteousness" in Romans 5:12–19, Christ's "single offering" in Hebrews 10:14–18, and other references to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as *synecdoches,* in other words, literary expressions whereby a whole is signified via one of its component parts or vice versa. In other words, references to Christ's death on the cross may also referentially include other concepts such as the atonement, his perfect humanity, and his perfect obedience to the Father. *Fourth*, with regards to passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:21, as Van Court states, "There is nothing in the context of either Corinthian passage to suggest that the righteousness imputed to the elect is anything other than his entire righteousness. They are entirely found in him by union with him. His entire righteousness is reckoned as theirs." For these various reasons, advocates of the Total Obedience View argue, "It is best to speak of the obedience of Christ, meaning his obedience in the totality of his incarnate life."[22]

At this particular point, I want to reemphasize that this is a disputable matter of the Christian faith, and believers should be able to freely hold to either position and differ with one another in Christian love. Is it then possible for a brotherly, in-house discussion to take place regarding this issue? If agreement is unattainable, are we still able to differ with one another in Christian love?

Disputable Difference 3: The Law of Christ

The *third* disputable difference that exists to varying degrees between PC and NCT pertains to how both groups define *the law of Christ* (ἔννομος Χριστου — literally "in-lawed to Christ") in 1 Corinthians 9:20–21. Advocates of both groups, in my estimation, acknowledge that New Covenant believers are *not only* "not under the Law" of Moses (1 Cor 9:20–21) *but also* are "not without the law of God" since they are under the *law of Christ*. For NCT, we believe that the *law of Christ* is a *new* law (Heb 7:12), a *higher* law (Matt 5:20), and a *better* law (Matt 5:21–48; Heb 7:19) than the Law of Moses with its Ten Commandments, but for PC, the *law of Christ* includes all of God's moral absolute moral demand from creation to Christ, which is best

captured by the Great Commandment, which also is basically represented in the Decalogue, except for the Sabbath command. On this issue, there are significant differences in how both groups define *the law of Christ*.

The New Covenant Confession of Faith, authored by the elders of New Covenant Bible Fellowship and associated with In-Depth Studies, articulates one such NCT view.[23] In Article 20 — the Law of God, the confession states in the seventh section concerning *the law of Christ*: "This is the law that must be obeyed in the New Covenant era. It comes to us through Jesus and the Apostles. It is what believers are required to obey today. The content of the Law of Christ contains both new laws and repeated laws from the Mosaic Law. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Galatians 6:1–5, Ephesians 4:25–32, Matthew 5–7."[24] Thus, this confession defines *the law of Christ* as consisting of not only the new laws of the NT but also certain commands from the Mosaic Law which are repeated in the NT. In *What is New Covenant Theology?,* Blake White defines *the law of Christ* in the following manner:

> It is clear that the heart of the law of Christ is cross-shaped love, but there is more to new covenant ethics than love. It also includes the teaching of Jesus and his apostles. *The law of Christ can be defined as those prescriptive principles drawn from the example and teaching of Jesus and his apostles (the central demand being love), which are meant to be worked out in specific situations by the guiding influence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.*[25]

The Redeemer Catechism, authored by Jordan Quinley, echoes Blake White's definition of *the law of Christ*:

> The law of Christ includes the example and commands of Jesus himself and the way of life set forth in all the New Testament. Yet the law of Christ may be summed up in Christ's new commandment, that we love one another as he has loved us. Therefore, our new life in Christ should exhibit Christlikeness. (John 13:14–15, 34–35; 14:21–23; 2 Thess. 3:4; Rom. 15:2–3; 1 John 2:3–6; 3:23; 4:17; 2 John 5–6; Eph. 5:2).[26]

Gary Long also provides an explanation on the law of Christ:

> The law of Christ is not to be equated with the Decalogue. Although the law of Christ, the law of the NC [new covenant] people of God, is related to the Decalogue in that it incorporates nine of the Ten Commandments. The law of Christ is a better law than the law of Moses (Matt. 5:21–48; Heb. 7:19) in the sense that (1) it is a higher revelation of the righteousness of God (Matt. 5:20); (2) it is based upon a higher standard of love (Matt. 5:44); and (3) Christ's inauguration of the New Covenant brings in things that are qualitatively "newer," expressed in developing the theological significance of such basic concepts as new wineskins, new teaching, new commandment, new creation, new man, new name, new song, New Jerusalem and all things new (Rev. 21:5).[27]

Each of these aforementioned definitions of *the law of Christ* contains aspects with which I heartily agree. As a result, being an advocate of NCT, I would suggest the following definition for *the law of Christ* which attempts to harmonize each together:

> *The Law of Christ* is the gracious law of the New Covenant (Rom. 6:14), which is covenantally binding upon the *Church* (1 Cor. 9:20–21) and consists of *the law of love* (Gal. 6:2; Jas. 2:8; Rom. 13:8–10), *the example of the Lord Jesus Christ* (John 13:34; Phil. 2:4–12), *Christ's commands and teachings* (Matt. 28:20; 2 Pet. 3:2), *the commands and teachings of the New Testament Scriptures* (2 Pet. 3:2; Eph. 2:20; Jude 1:17; 1 John 5:3), and *all Scripture interpreted in light of Jesus Christ* (Matt. 5:17–18; Luke 24:27,44; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

I believe it would be fair to say that PC has a broader, more general definition of *the law of Christ* than does NCT, a view that is closer to classic Reformed theology. Consider the following explanation by Stephen Wellum concerning *the law of Christ*:

> The entirety of Scripture, including the OT, is to be applied to Christians today, but in and through its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant (2 Tim. 3:15–17). We do not embrace the hermeneutical options of either all of the OT applies to us unless explicitly abrogated (covenant theology), or none of the OT applies to us unless explicitly repeated (dispensational theology). Instead,

> as Christians under the new covenant, we are not directly under the previous covenants as covenants, yet we apply the entire OT to us as Scripture and in light of its fulfillment in Christ. For us, the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) is the entirety of God's Word applied to us in and through the new covenant, while also carefully applying the Bible's creation, fall, redemption, new creation structures to us.[28]

Let me repeat the final two sentences of Wellum's statement for emphasis:

> Instead, as Christians under the new covenant, we are not directly under the previous covenants as covenants, yet we apply the entire OT to us as Scripture and in light of its fulfillment in Christ. For us, the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) is the entirety of God's Word applied to us in and through the new covenant, while also carefully applying the Bible's creation, fall, redemption, new creation structures to us.[29]

In other words, advocates of PC understand *the law of Christ* to be all of Scripture applied to us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ and the New Covenant. This definition resonates with me as I, in a similar fashion, understand *the law of Christ* to include all Scripture interpreted in light of Jesus Christ. In my estimation, I do believe there are advocates of NCT who would likewise agree with the PC definition of *the law of Christ*. Although to be fair, such an understanding of *the law of* Christ, is much less emphasized in NCT circles than in PC as the aforementioned definitions appear to indicate.

So, is it possible for a brotherly, in-house discussion to take place regarding this issue? If agreement is unattainable, are we still able to differ with one another in Christian love?

Disputable Difference 4: Instructive Use of the Mosaic Law

The *fourth* disputable difference that exists to varying degrees between PC and NCT concerns whether there is any instructive use of the Mosaic Law in the life of a New Covenant believer. As note in my other article given in this issue of *SBJT*, advocates of both NCT and PC believe and teach Christians are not under the Old Covenant in terms of covenantal obligation. Also, both groups teach that all Scripture, including the OT, is *authoritative*

for the New Covenant believer. Both affirm the clear teaching of 2 Timothy 3:16–17: "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Thus, both groups heartily teach that the OT (i.e., the Law and the Prophets) and the NT together comprise the wholly inspired, wholly infallible, and wholly inerrant Word of God. Furthermore, these Scriptures constitute the sole authority for faith and practice in the life of a believer. To reiterate, Christians are neither members of the Old Covenant nor under its direct authority as a covenant. However, Christians are still under the authority of the OT (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17) as Scripture. John Reisinger notes: "Christians, while being free from the Mosaic law (the Old Covenant), are not free from the Old Testament. Failure to maintain this distinction will result in confusion and can lead either to legalism or to antinomianism."[30] Elsewhere, he states that "the New Covenant has replaced the Old Covenant in totality, but it has not replaced the God-breathed Old Testament Scriptures."[31]

The disputable difference is how both groups practically implement the OT as relates to their authority in the life of the New Covenant believer. A focal point for this particular disputable difference is highlighted in how proponents of each system interpret Matthew 5:17–18: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." I believe it would be fair to say that many advocates of NCT apply the OT primarily in terms of instructing believers in such areas as redemptive history and theological doctrine, but less in terms of moral or ethical instruction. Some in NCT understand Matthew 5:17–18 to indicate that Jesus in his person and work has fulfilled the OT (which he certainly has), and thus, all the OT laws have been abrogated and cancelled as a result of his cross-work. Thus, only those OT commands which are explicitly repeated in the NT are ethically binding upon the New Covenant believer. As stated above, Article 20 of the New Covenant Confession of Faith states the following concerning the law of Christ: "This is the law that must be obeyed in the New Covenant era. It comes to us through Jesus and the Apostles. It is what believers are required to obey today. The content of the Law of Christ contains both new laws and repeated laws from the Mosaic Law."[32] Speaking for myself as an advocate

of NCT, I would respectfully differ from this position. I do so, as I believe it is important to understand an essential component of the law of Christ to be all Scripture interpreted in light of Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:17–18; Luke 24:27,44; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). Thus, although New Covenant believers are not under the Mosaic Law as covenant law, we can still glean ethical or moral instruction from the OT, even the Mosaic Law—provided that we understand it in light of its fulfillment in Christ and the New Covenant.

PC teaches that the entire OT, including the Mosaic Law, applies to Christians today through the lens of the Lord Jesus Christ and the New Covenant. Representing the PC view on this issue, Wellum writes:

> The entirety of Scripture, including the OT, is to be applied to Christians today, but in and through its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant (2 Tim. 3:15–17). We do not embrace the hermeneutical options of either all of the OT applies to us unless explicitly abrogated (covenant theology), or none of the OT applies to us unless explicitly repeated (dispensational theology). Instead, as Christians under the new covenant, we are not directly under the previous covenants as covenants, yet we apply the entire OT to us as Scripture and in light of its fulfillment in Christ. For us, the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) is the entirety of God's Word applied to us in and through the new covenant, while also carefully applying the Bible's creation, fall, redemption, new creation structures to us.[33]

Later, he states: "The old covenant is best viewed as a unit which has now reached its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant. As Christians, we are no longer under the old covenant as a covenant (Rom. 6:14–15; 1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 4:4–5; 5:13–18)."[34] Wellum's teaching on the Sabbath is particularly instructive of the PC view on the application of the OT to the New Covenant believer:

> Regarding the Sabbath, like the Decalogue, we obey the Sabbath command in light of its fulfillment in Christ (Heb. 3:7–4:11). We do so by first setting the Sabbath command within its covenantal location (old covenant). This allows us to see how it functioned as a command/sign to Israel (which no longer applies to us), but also how it typologically pointed forward to a greater salvation rest that is now here in Christ (which does apply to us). In this way, Christians

> "obey" the Sabbath by entering into the rest that it typified and predicted, namely salvation rest in Christ.[35]

Wellum further describes this position regarding the authority and applicability of the OT to the New Covenant believer in his work *Progressive Covenantalism*:

> Although Christians are not "under the law" *as a covenant*, it still functions for us *as Scripture*. As with any biblical text, however, before we directly apply to our lives, we must first place it in its covenantal location; *and* then second, we must think through how that text points forward, anticipates, and is fulfilled in Christ. Only by doing this can we correctly apply *any* biblical text to our lives as Christians. In fact, apart from following this hermeneutical process, we will incorrectly apply Scripture.[36]

He continues by discussing the applicability of the Levitical sacrificial system to the Christian:

> For example, if we ask, does the Levitical sacrificial instruction apply to us today?, the answer is no, if we mean *as* God's covenant instruction to Israel. We, as Christians, live *after* Christ, who by his glorious work has brought the OT sacrifices to their *telos* (Hebrews 5–10). Yet Leviticus as *Scripture* does apply to us in diverse ways — *as* prophecy, instruction, and wisdom — but now only in light of Christ. What is true of Leviticus is also true of the law covenant (e.g., circumcision, food laws, civil laws, and Decalogue). No part of the law is applied to us without first placing it in its covenantal location (immediate and epochal context), and then asking how the entire covenant is fulfilled in Christ (canonical context).[37]

Clearly, there is a disputable difference that exists to varying degrees between PC and NCT concerning whether there is any instructive use of the Mosaic Law in the life of a New Covenant believer. Again, I believe it is fair to say that many advocates of NCT apply the OT primarily in terms of instructing believers in such areas as *redemptive history* and *theological doctrine*, but less in terms of *moral* or *ethical instruction.* PC differs with this understanding, teaching that the OT, including the Mosaic Law,

applies to Christians today in and through the lens of the Lord Jesus Christ and the New Covenant.

So, is it possible for a brotherly, in-house discussion to take place regarding this issue? If agreement is unattainable, are we still able to differ with one another in Christian love?

Disputable Difference 5: Covenant Categories and Terminology

The *fifth* disputable difference that exists to varying degrees between PC and NCT concerns differences regarding terminology and categories related to the covenants. Wellum encapsulates this particular difference from the position of PC:

> In contrast to covenant theology, we do not divide the covenants in redemptive history into the two categories of "the covenant of works" (Law) and "the covenant of grace" (Grace/Gospel). Although "Law" and "Gospel" are helpful theological categories, which we affirm in regard to their theological content, Scripture does not divide up the biblical covenants this way. By "Law," we affirm that God's will and nature is the law and that God makes an absolute demand on his creatures; by "Gospel," we affirm that God, by sovereign grace, takes the initiative to redeem a people for himself and that he must achieve our redemption from beginning to end, but we do not think that each covenant can be simply divided under one of these two categories to the exclusion of the other.[38]

Wellum also comments on strictly categorizing covenants as either *conditional* or *unconditional:*

> So, instead of categorizing each covenant as either unconditional or conditional, it is best to see a combination in each covenant, culminating in Christ and the new covenant. By unconditional, we mean that God takes the initiative by grace to act and redeem, which is true in every covenant. By conditional, we mean that God demands complete loyalty and love from his covenant people, and thus perfect obedience, yet, sadly, we do not render it. This sad fact is important to remember since a crucial way the Bible's story progresses is

> that each covenant progressively reveals and anticipates the coming of the perfect covenant-keeper, our Lord Jesus Christ, who acts on our behalf and secures our eternal redemption by his entire life, death, and resurrection.[39]

Advocates of PC argue that though these categories are helpful, they should not be strictly applied, as the biblical covenants do not fit neatly into one category or the other. Rather, they overlap multiple *covenantal* categories. This criticism would also likely extend to the strict usage of such terms as *royal grant* vs. *suzerain-vassal treaty* and *gracious* vs. *not gracious*.

In my opinion, this criticism is generally fair, as there is a tendency to a stricter categorization of the covenants among some advocates of NCT. For example, the New Covenant Confession of Faith states the following concerning the Old Covenant in Article 9 — Section 3:

> The Old Covenant is also called the Mosaic Covenant or the First Covenant. This was a legal agreement between God and the nation of Israel that was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. This covenant was not a gracious covenant. Although the Lord had a gracious purpose in giving this covenant, the covenant itself was a legal covenant that demanded perfect obedience. The failure to obey would result in the curse of God. This covenant was used to prepare the way for the Messiah. Israel, as a whole, was not a believing people. The Old Covenant caused the Israelites to sin all the more. It was never the means of anyone's salvation. The Old Covenant functions as a physical picture of many spiritual truths that can be used to teach believers today. The Ten Commandments are the essence of the Mosaic Law or Mosaic Covenant. The pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost brought to a close the Old Covenant era.[40]

In my estimation, advocates of PC would differ with the phraseology, "This covenant was not a gracious covenant," arguing that it emphasizes the conditional aspects of the covenant to the detriment of the unconditional aspects of the covenant. Consider also the New Covenant Confession of Faith's statement regarding the Davidic Covenant in Article 9 — Section 4:

> The Davidic Covenant is an unconditional covenant made between God and David through which God promises David and Israel that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David and the tribe of Judah and would establish a

> kingdom that would endure forever. The Davidic Covenant is unconditional because God does not place any conditions of obedience upon its fulfillment. The fulfillment of the promises made rests solely on God's faithfulness and does not depend at all on David or Israel's obedience. The physical fulfillment of the promise to David came through his son Solomon as he reigned upon the throne and was responsible for the building of the physical Temple. Both the Temple and Solomon's reign were temporary however and only served as a picture of the true fulfillment of the Covenant which is the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.[41]

In my estimation, advocates of PC would differ with the phraseology, "The Davidic Covenant is unconditional because God does not place any conditions of obedience upon its fulfillment," arguing that it emphasizes the unconditional aspects of the covenant to the detriment of the conditional aspects of the covenant. It is certainly true that the failure of David's heirs would not bring about the abrogation of the covenant; that being said, God did promise to discipline kings who disobeyed God and continued in said disobedience. Admittedly, I myself have been at times too strict in my categorization of covenants with the *conditional* vs. *unconditional*, *law* vs. *gospel*, and *royal grant* vs. *suzerain-vassal treaty*. The approach of PC regarding classification and categorization of the biblical covenants resonates with me personally, because we must all strive to let the Bible speak for itself and resultantly conform our theological understanding to its teaching.

So, is it possible for a brotherly, in-house discussion to take place regarding this issue? If agreement is unattainable, are we still able to differ with one another in Christian love?

Conclusion

In this article, I have highlighted five differences which exist to varying degrees between PC and NCT: 1) whether or not a creation covenant existed between God and Adam; 2) the imputation of Christ's obedience; 3) the nature of the Law of Christ; 4) whether or not there is any instructive use of the Mosaic Law for the Christian; and 5) differences regarding terminology and categories related to the covenants. Despite these disputable differences between NCT and PC, there is much agreement between these two systems. In my other article in this issue of *SBJT*, I addressed the following eight areas

of common ground between NCT and PC, and I want to conclude by again listing these areas of common ground: 1) historic Protestant Christianity; 2) one plan of God centered in Christ; 3) God's plan is unfolded via the biblical covenants; 4) the interpretive priority of the NT; 5) the Mosaic Law is a indivisible unit; 6) Christians are not under the Old Covenant; 7) all believers are members of the New Covenant, have full forgiveness of sins, are permanently indwelt by the Spirit, and are empowered by the Spirit to please God; and 8) the Church is the eschatological Israel as God's people. "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."[42]

---

1 See Zachary S. Maxcey, "New Covenant Theology and Progressive Covenantalism Compared: Common Ground," in this issue of *SBJT*.

2 Although frequently attributed to Augustine of Hippo, Schaff notes that the theological axiom "appears for the first time in German, AD 1627 and 1628" and "has recently been traced to Rupertus Meldenius, the otherwise unknown divine." Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII: Modern Christianity and the German Reformation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1910; reprint 1974), 650.

3 Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism: Key Points of Definition" (Stephen J. Wellum, 2020), 1.

4 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 1.

5 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 1–2.

6 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 2.

7 "New Covenant Confession of Faith" (online theological Confession from www.ids.org); accessed on April 16, 2023; available at https://ids.org/featuredupdated-ncbf-confession-of-faith/.

8 Jordan Quinley, "The Redeemer Catechism" (Jordan Quinley, 2020), Part I.

9 Gary D. Long, "New Covenant Theology" (Gary D. Long, 2013), 1.

10 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 2.

11 "New Covenant Confession of Faith" (online theological Confession from www.ids.org); accessed on April 16, 2023; available at https://ids.org/featuredupdated-ncbf-confession-of-faith/.

12 "New Covenant Confession of Faith," Article 13 – Section 1.

13 "New Covenant Confession of Faith," Article 13 – Section 4.

14 "New Covenant Confession of Faith," Article 13 – Section 4.

15 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 3.

16 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 2.

17 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 2.

18 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 2.

19 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 2.

20 Gregory A. Van Court, *The Obedience of Christ: A Response to Steve Lehrer and Geoff Volker* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2009), 9.

21 Van Court, *Obedience of Christ*, 14.

22 Van Court, *Obedience of Christ*, 23.

23 "New Covenant Confession of Faith" (online theological Confession from www.ids.org); accessed on April 16, 2023; available at https://ids.org/featuredupdated-ncbf-confession-of-faith/.

24 "New Covenant Confession of Faith," Article 20 – Section 7.

25 Blake White, *What is New Covenant Theology? An Introduction* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012), 37–38.

26 Jordan Quinley, "The Redeemer Catechism" (Jordan Quinley, 2020), Part III – Question 60.

27 Long, "New Covenant Theology," 2–3.

28 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 5.

29 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 5.

30 John G. Reisinger, *New Covenant Theology and Prophecy* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012), 4.

31 Reisinger, *New Covenant Theology and Prophecy*, 14.
32 "New Covenant Confession of Faith," Article 20 – Section 7.
33 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 5.
34 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 5.
35 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 5.
36 Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics" in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 222.
37 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics," 222.
38 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 2.
39 Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 2.
40 "New Covenant Confession of Faith," Article 9 – Section 3.
41 "New Covenant Confession of Faith," Article 9 – Section 4.
42 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7:650.

Redeemed Humanity and Temple Theology: Defining God's Presence on New Covenant Terms

Everett Berry

Everett Berry is a Donor Relations Specialist at GuideStone Financial Resources. He earned his PhD from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. Dr. Berry served as professor of theology at Criswell College, Dallas, Texas from 2004–2023, the editor of the *Criswell Theological Review* from 2012–2023, and was Chair of the Graduate School of Theology at Arlington Baptist University, Arlington, Texas from 2024–2025. He has written numerous articles and two books entitled *They Spoke of Him: How Christ Unlocks the Old Testament* (Rainer Publishers, 2017) and *Those Who Endure to the End: A Primer on Perseverance* (Wipf & Stock, 2020). He is married to Tabitha and they have two grown children.

Introduction

One of the most significant themes in Scripture is God's dwelling among his people. As it unfolds in the biblical storyline, there is a natural gravitation toward the subject of a temple. Thus, the emergence of a "temple theology" motif. This is largely why the subject still receives so much attention in both higher critical and evangelical scholarship today. Literature abounds with volumes produced on the importance of temples in ancient backgrounds,[1] the history of Israel,[2] and biblical theology.[3] Yet one idea underlying all the different angles of temple research is the uniform concept of God's presence in heaven somehow manifesting a localized, theophanic residence on the earth. This supernatural convergence between heaven and earth unfolds throughout the Old Testament (OT), beginning with the Garden of Eden.

It then develops further through the function of a tent-tabernacle after the exodus, and later transitions to an actual temple, whether it be Solomon's, the one built by the post-exilic Israelites, or the one erected by Herod. From here, temple praxis is eventually directed at the person of Christ himself, subsequently fleshed out through the reality of the church as God's people, and ultimately culminates in the renewal of the earth as a "temple" of heaven itself in the eternal state.

However, one question that continues to cause notable debate in evangelical scholarship is the theological viability of a future literal temple. So much so that we want to engage how this inquiry should be approached in light of how New Testament (NT) writers interpret temple ideas through the prism of the finished work of Christ. To do so, we will 1) summarize the concept of a temple in categories defined by the OT and the Mosaic economy; 2) highlight how temple realities are interpreted through New Covenant and Christological categories; 3) note various points in history where attempts to re-establish a literal temple have been attempted; 4) mention some proposals that evangelical dispensational interpreters advocate regarding the necessity of a future temple; 5) and finally mention several concerns that have not been sufficiently answered by those who advocate such a view.

Clarifying OT Temple Language

The underlying etymology of the English word *temple* derives from the Latin term *templum* and the preceding Greek word *temenos*. *Temenos* was typically used to describe a piece of land designated for some assigned purpose, whether to be used by kings or dedicated to a special event or deity.[4] Likewise, the Latin *templum* was used in the context of signs that were perceived to be pointing to good or bad events that were to come. They could be designated places in the sky or specified geographical locations. Objects like shrines or sacred structures could also be labeled as *templum*.[5] Furthermore, the term was used in various contexts to describe consecrated spaces, including buildings and other structures where high officials or deities may convene.[6] So, there was almost always an inherently religious tone to the word.

Relatedly, it is common knowledge that the concept of a localized sacred structure far precedes Greco-Roman culture. In antiquity, temples were a

kind of tangible merging between the heavens (or skies), the earth (or the physical realm), and other worlds (heaven, the underworld, afterlife, etc.).[7] Whether it be Babylonian, Egyptian, Assyrian, or any other kingdom that was a contemporary of Israel in the ancient Near East (ANE), temples were perceived as designated throne rooms for designated deities.[8]

Echoes of this imagery emerge in Genesis 1 – 2 where two complementary accounts describe the Lord creating the heavens and the earth so he could manifest his presence among two earthly human ambassadors, Adam and Eve. The key feature is the special place that they were given. They were blessed with provisions, delegated with authority over creation, and privileged to spread God's image throughout the whole earth. Their calling was to reflect God's heavenly character and power in the earthly realm. We also see that the Lord created a specific garden in Eden located somewhere in the "East." He made it lush with vegetation, full of animal life, and supplied with water from a river that ran through the garden and branched off into four others. Eden was overflowing with beauty and blessing — it was almost like heaven on earth.[9]

Eden was also somewhat distinct from the rest of the earth for several reasons. It had two trees that had no rival throughout the rest of the earth, those being the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and a tree of life. It was also where the Lord communed with Adam and Eve. We see examples of this when God brought Eve to Adam to be his wife, as well as when he came to confront them in their sin. And unfortunately, it was ground zero for humanity's judgment because Adam and Eve were evicted from Eden, forbidden to return.

Before this tragedy, though, Eden served as the first address shared by the God of heaven and the first two earthly inhabitants. This is why the prophet Ezekiel, for instance, later calls Eden "the garden of God" (Ezek 28:13) and likens it to God's "mountain" (Ezek 28:14).[10] It was where heaven and earth met, and yet ironically parted ways. What's more, its features were not forgotten because centuries later, the apostle John speaks about heaven coming to the earth (Rev 21 – 22). He alludes to Eden-like traits of a flowing river from God's throne (Rev 22:1), the tree of life being available to the nations (Rev 22:2), the curse of sin no longer having any sway (Rev 22:3), and creation no longer depending on the sun or moon as before because heaven's new address will be the whole earth (Rev 22:5).[11]

Therefore, just as Eden was lost, it is regained once more, even surpassed. But the question is: how?

1. God's Presence on a Mountain

After sinful humanity went into exile by forfeiting the divine presence in Eden, the Lord began taking measures so his heavenly domain could unite with the earth once again. Unfortunately, sometimes such a goal includes judgment. The Lord was compelled in one instance to bring a cataclysmic flood on Noah's day. On another occasion, he destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because their wickedness had become so decadent. In another instance, we see the Lord confounding the languages of the people at the Tower of Babel event because they attempted to regain his presence on their own terms. Instead of obtaining divine communion by their own power, they were forced to do what Adam and Eve were commissioned to do before they sinned, namely spread throughout the whole earth.

Now, in contrast to the Lord's presence resisting the ongoing evil of humanity, there are many other moments where God expresses his desire to reconcile with his creation. He constantly communicates with believers such as Noah and the great Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He spoke through direct interchanges, dreams, visions, angels, and prophetic utterances. And in response to his interaction with these men, we often see these leaders building altars to praise the Lord because of his various provisions. Such acts not only served as a means of approaching him in worship. They were liturgical landmarks that represented the Lord's presence because he had accepted the sacrifices that were made on such altars.[12] So, even though Eden had been lost, the Lord's presence could still be experienced on his terms of sacrifice and faith. Similarly, the restoration of the divine presence began to be teased out in covenantal agreements. We begin to see this in the one he made with Abraham. The Lord began to reveal how he would restore the nations of the human race by channeling blessings through one future nation (Israel) of which Abraham would be the father.

It is at this point that God's Eden-like presence takes a significant turn. The people of Israel eventually found themselves in Egypt in the twilight years of Jacob's lifetime because of his son Joseph's provisionary care. But after that generation of Hebrews left the scene and their population grew, God's people were later enslaved by an evil Egyptian Pharaoh. This set the stage

for the Lord to remember his promises to Abraham about a specific land for his promised people, commissioning Moses to lead Israel in the great deliverance of the Exodus. By the time this major event had run its course, the Egyptian deities and authorities had been trounced, the Egyptians were humiliated, their leaders destroyed, and Israel left triumphantly on their way to Canaan. Following Egypt's defeat, the Lord used a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night to navigate the Hebrew people through the Sinai terrain (Exod 13:21–22). So, in a sense, he was beginning to manifest his presence for Moses and all Israel to see.

As they made their way across the Sinai plains, it was here that the Lord made a covenant with Israel, which included an agreement that his presence would be in their midst. However, God's manifestation on Mt. Sinai revealed that his presence would be experienced in an entirely different way from that of Eden. Adam and Eve had communed with the Lord in the garden as innocent creatures in a right covenantal standing. Now Israel stood on the horizon of receiving a new agreement. The Lord was going to reinstate his presence among a remnant of fallen humanity. Such a hope emerges early on when the Lord declares, "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God" (e.g., Exod 6:6–7; 19:5). He would tangibly and locally abide in Israel's midst, as opposed to any other nation.

Still, before this promise was fulfilled, Israel received a preview of the sheer power of the Lord's presence. The people were instructed to prepare themselves ceremonially and not approach the mountain without permission. If any person or animal came too close, they would be killed (Exod 19:10–15). The Lord promised that within three days, he would "come down" on the mountain. Tall mountains were often considered the homes of divine beings since it was seldom that anyone could climb them.[13] But in this case, Israel had justification to be in awe. God was coming down the mountain. And on that day, the Lord did not come in the "cool of the day" as he did in Genesis 3. The mountain was hidden by smoke and fire as if a giant thunderstorm had taken over its peak. What sounded like a trumpet bellowed, with the mountain shaking violently because of the noise of the divine storm.

One can, no doubt, see a key shift in the story of God's presence. In the early parts of Genesis, the divine presence was peaceful, glorious, and tranquil. Here it is ominous, overwhelming, even dangerous. The problem is that

while God's presence in Eden was something his people (Adam and Eve) could share, now it was something to be guarded so his people (Israel) would not be destroyed. So much so that when the Lord later instructed Moses to let Aaron come up with him, he warned that if the leaders or people came up uninvited, he would "break forth upon them" (Exod 19:24). If Israel followed the Lord's commands, the beauty of the divine presence could still be seen. We read examples of this when Moses, Aaron, his two sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of the nation communed with the Lord on the mountain. They shared a meal on the ground, glistening as though it were made of clear sapphire (Exod 24:9–11). Later when Moses had to revisit Sinai, he returned down to the people with his face shining because it reflected the luminous glory of God (Exod 34:29–34). The dilemma, however, was that Sinai was not Israel's final destination. They were being led to the southern region of Canaan to receive the Abrahamic promise of the land. Thus, the pressing concern was this; how could the people behold the glory of the Lord while at the same time being protected from its brilliance and overwhelming purity? Answer: the divine presence would have to become mobile.

2. God's Presence in a Tent

Since Sinai was just a stop along the way to the land of promise, the Lord gave Moses instructions to build a portable structure where his divine presence could rest as the people continued their journey (Exod 25–31). The same God who had banished the first couple from Eden and almost dismantled Sinai with thunder and fire was now going to condescend to a tent, literally in the midst of the people. The English word describing this tent with which Bible readers are most familiar is the term "tabernacle," which means "dwelling place." God, whose address is the heavenly realm, once again takes up an earthly dwelling place.[14] He stands above the heavens with the earth as a footstool, while at the same time having a place where he can commune directly with Israel. The tabernacle also is referred to as the "sanctuary," meaning that this tent is sacred ground, and in other instances, it is described as a "tent of meeting." Here, the stress is on the fact that the tabernacle (the place where God dwells) or sanctuary (the sacred place) is where the Lord can convene with his people, whether it is Moses, the later anointed Aaronic priests, or certain other individuals.[15]

Israel stayed at Sinai while in the process of receiving the divine floorplan for this tabernacle and subsequently building it (Exod 19:1; Num 10:11). Upon completion, Exodus concludes with a dramatic ceremony where the Lord's consuming glory descended into it. When it was time to move, it would rise back into a cloud. This ritual of the Lord camping with the people continued from Sinai to Canaan. As a matter of fact, the tabernacle was still in existence when King Solomon began to build the temple although its central piece of furniture, the ark of the covenant, had been removed years earlier during the ministry of Eli as the High Priest.

As we mentioned previously, many ancients thought highly of mountains and gardens. Mountains were revered because they were largely unexplored, being seen as places that only deities could inhabit. Likewise, gardens were the envy of many due to their luxurious climates and wealth of agrarian resources. These scenes were now going to be merged in this tabernacle-tent. It would reflect — even storehouse — the awesomeness of the heavenly glory which was witnessed on Sinai as well as Eden itself. This was accomplished by assigning a certain location for the tabernacle as well as pieces of furniture that were to be placed in and around it. Regarding the former concern, the tabernacle was to be erected with the twelve tribes (except for the Levites since they were the priestly tribe) in specific spots around the tent. The reason was so God's presence was directly in the middle of the nation as a whole. The rectangular compound surrounding the tent entailed a high fence that only had one gate at the eastern wall. This restricted people to enter only from that direction, which reflects the similar eastern entrance to Eden (Gen 3:24).[16]

Along with each piece of furniture — which alluded to heavenly realities — the tent itself conveyed Edenic overtones. It was divided into two partitions: the first room into which the priests entered was the holy place, and then beyond a collection of curtains (a veil) was a second room called the holy of holies. God sat here, and unlike pagan kings, no earthly entourage was allowed in his presence. In the holy place where the priests served stood a lampstand made of gold with seven candles (six branches). It provided light within the tent's quarters and it was located just outside the room of divine presence, thereby somewhat replicating the function of the tree of life in Eden.[17]

The most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle was the famous ark of the covenant, located within the holy of holies. Inside this acacia wood box, which was overlaid inside and out with gold, stored key heirlooms of God's provisions for Israel during their journey to Canaan, including the stone tablets of the law that Moses later put there at Horeb, a jar of manna (the heavenly bread that the Lord had given to Israel in the wilderness), and Aaron's staff that actually blossomed (a sign that the Lord had chosen Aaron's tribe to be the priests). On top of the box was the sacred table of atonement, or mercy seat, which was guarded by two installed images of cherubim whose wings covered this sacred place of divine presence. The angelic guards who watched over Eden's paradise after humanity fell now guarded the Lord's heavenly presence among the Israelites.

Finally, there were numerous purposes for this tabernacle's existence, but we only want to emphasize how it maintains continuity with the divine presence theme in the biblical story. Originally, heaven converged with earth at its inception when humanity was placed in Eden. When that union ruptured, the Lord eventually re-established a new earthly presence among a remnant nation of Adam's children, through whom he would use to heal other nations. It commenced at Sinai, where God made a covenant with his people. Following this agreement, Israel moved forward with the Lord's presence by their side. Sacred space was now mobile. A simulation of Eden (and for that matter, heaven) was now moving with the people to the new land of promise. The Lord's presence returned to his people, but this time in a world wrought with sin. Therefore, the tabernacle also reminded God's people that while he could approach them, they could not approach him. This is why a means of atonement was provided, along with the tent of meeting, so the people's sins could be forgiven and they could be cleansed from the everyday pollution of the fallen world.[18] Just as the Lord covered Adam and Eve's sinfulness in the garden, now he gave Israel a means of covering their sin in the sacred tent.

3. God's Presence in the Temple

The tabernacle was the place where God's presence rested from the time of the Canaan conquest to the establishment of the monarchy. It was first installed at Bethel ("House of God") after Israel entered the Promised Land. This was a region originally identified by Jacob (Israel) as God's house after

he saw a vision of angels traversing upon staircases (or a ladder) between heaven and earth.[19] Then later the tent was moved to Shiloh and remained there until the time of Eli the high priest.

During this time, one misconception that the Israelites came to embrace was that the ark of the covenant guaranteed divine blessing. They thought that if they took it into battle, it would automatically ensure a victory. Tragically, this was not the case because the ark was eventually taken after a battle with the rivaling Philistines. However, just as the Israelites tried to presume upon God's presence and blessing, the Philistines made the mistake of thinking they could control it. What they discovered was that, unlike other pagan ancient near eastern deities, the Lord of Israel had homefield advantage no matter where the ark was placed. So, after experiencing a horrendous series of events, the Philistines surrendered the ark and it was stored in Kiriath-jearim.

Years later, after David finally became the second king of Israel, the ark was brought to the newly established city of Jerusalem.[20] David placed it in a tent and later planned to build a temple so the Lord's presence could be treated as true royalty, having its own palace in which to dwell. However, David was forbidden to fulfill that task. Instead, his son Solomon completed the project of building the temple after he became king. When it was finished, the three motifs of God's presence — garden, mountain, and tent — came together in this new structure. The temple was surrounded by garden-like decorum; it was built on Mount Zion, itself in Jerusalem; and the tabernacle-tent was placed in the center of the temple building.

The temple highlighted assorted features of God's character. Each of the temple's features was intended to point to the Lord's majesty, sacredness, and power because architecture is essentially artwork in which we live. Just as art is often a visual expression of an idea in creative form, buildings and/or homes typically reflect the personality and status of its residents.[21]

By anchoring the tabernacle in the Promised Land, it exalted the Lord's faithfulness. Previously, the tabernacle was the sign that the Lord was going to keep his promises to Israel because he was moving along with them from Egypt to Canaan. Now the temple acted as a means of closure. It was fixed on Mount Zion in the capital city. It represented security, stability, and safety because the Lord lived among the people at a permanent address. Because the temple was where the Lord dwelt, it was the place where

heavenly decisions were made — not just for Israel's fate but the surrounding nations as well (cf., Ps 29:10; 99:1–5; Amos 1:1–15). Zion was the center of world — not literally in some geographical sense — but theologically because everything was under the Lord's authority. The Lord's Oval Office was now the temple.

It would be remiss, however, to stop with the observation that the temple reflected God's character and authority. It also mirrored his heavenly habitat. The temple was built to provide a visual aid illustrating the otherworldly nature of heaven. But the only way an earthly structure could achieve such a goal was if it replicated previous encounters between heaven and earth. This is why much of the temple was overlaid in gold, riddled with carvings of trees and flowers, and filled with cypress and olive wood. It was a cubicle version of a garden. At the same time, it maintained continuity with the tabernacle because its inner chambers were placed in the temple. And to top it off, the temple again was established on Mount Zion, which made it just as sacred as Sinai, where the Lord originally married himself to Israel. It also pictured God's rule over creation by instilling two enormous cherubim standing side-by-side with their wings touching each other. The image conveyed was that of a kind of seat where the Lord sat over creation, with the ark being his footstool.[22] The temple was a kind of microcosm of heaven within the Promised Land among the earthly people of Israel.

Now while it is easy to see why the temple was central to Israel's understanding of the Lord and their identity as his people, the nation unfortunately applied their previous distortion of the ark of the covenant to the temple. They believed that the mere possession of the building ensured God's blessings. Yet the temple (just like Eden, Sinai, and the tabernacle) only harbored special status when the Lord chose to reside in it. His presence was contingent upon obedience to the covenantal obligations that were documented in the Law. Israel was to abide by this divinely received constitution in order to be in a right standing before the Lord. If the Law was violated without pending repentance or atonement, it listed various curses that could fall upon the people, with exile being the pinnacle of judgments. This ended up being the exact fate of Israel in 587 BC. The Babylonian armies invaded Jerusalem, destroyed Solomon's temple, and uprooted many of the Jews to take them back to Babylon as captives.

Banishment from the Promised Land was indicative of a dire reality — God's presence had departed from the temple.

Still, we cannot stop there because God does not. The promise of judgment was never the final word. He did not abandon his people. The Lord extended the promise of blessing and restoration. We see this good news arriving after the demise of the Babylonian empire and the rise of the Persians. King Cyrus the Great permitted the Israelites to return to their homeland. After three major phases of exiles returning to the Promised Land, the Israelites were able to rebuild their lives, which included restoring another temple. This was a display of God's faithfulness to Israel, no doubt, because he promised that the glory of this new temple could supersede that of Solomon's (Hag 2:4–9).

For a while, this renewed focus on the temple panned out well. Many of the earlier prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as the current prophets including Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, all spoke about how the restoration of the temple would bring healing to Israel and the nations. But as history records, the Jewish people once again began to violate their covenantal obligations. This resulted in constant conflicts with surrounding nations, which ended in the desecration of the temple during the Maccabean period.

Subsequent conflicts maintained political tensions, especially during the early stages of the later Roman Empire's growth. By the time history approached the birth of Christ, the temple was in such need of repairs that King Herod the Great had it completely renovated and expanded. The problem was that the Jews did not control the temple nor did they have power over their land. They were exiled in their own neighborhoods under the thumb of the Romans, awaiting the divine presence to vindicate them and reconvene the temple-harmony between heaven and earth. This expectation helped set the stage for the ministry of Christ.

Temple Language in the NT

The future prospect of God's renewed presence among his people remained central to the Jewish faith coming into the first century. But by the time Christ's arrival, the temple was a bit of a cruel irony. It was a visible reminder of everything absent from Israel's hope. Although it stood in Jerusalem, the Jews had no control over the priesthood, no Davidic king ruled from

Jerusalem, and Israel's borders belonged to Rome.[23] Ironically, then, the temple triggered a certain amount of bewilderment because there were so many things that the Lord's presence had not accomplished, which, in turn, made it both a source of hope and disappointment.[24]

It was this crisis of national identity that helped create the volatile setting into which Christ was sent. Israel wanted to know that the Lord's temple-presence would one day address all their concerns.[25] And this is partly why we see the Gospels apply divine presence language to Christ. For example, Matthew — in his account of the angelic announcement Christ's birth — claims that his arrival marked a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about a son who would be born named Immanuel, meaning "God with us." We also see in Luke's account of Jesus's birth that angelic hosts proclaimed to nearby shepherds that the God of the *highest* (or the heavenlies) had brought peace to the *earth*. Luke also recounts Jesus's circumcision where he was brought to the temple in Jerusalem. A man of God named Simeon held him, declaring that the baby was the Lord's salvation, which he was accomplishing in the "presence" of the people, both Jew and Gentile. From here, the Gospels continue to expand this theme of Jesus as the divine temple-presence in various ways.[26]

1. Jerusalem's Temple and Christ as the Embodiment of a Heavenly Temple

The gospels present a tension between what the temple was *supposed* to be and who Jesus *actually* was. The temple was intended to be the Lord's permanent address among his people. He had communed with Adam and Eve in Eden. He had covenantally bonded with the Israelites at Sinai and in the tabernacle. He resided with the nation in the land of promise via the temple. Now the arrival of Jesus marked a new chapter in this story. He was the divine presence in mobile-human form.

We see this point in John's Gospel where Christ is portrayed not as deity clothed in a dark cloud over a mountain, or a tabernacle room shrouded in fabrics, but as God in the flesh. He came in human form to "dwell" or "tabernacle" among the nations — Israel in particular and the Gentiles in general (John 1:14–18). And instead of watching the glory of God from afar at the bottom of Sinai or by proxy through the eyes of the high priest, John says that everyone was able to see his "glory." People were able to hear his teachings and see his miracles. We even catch a glimpse of the power of God's

presence once more when the Jewish authorities came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. John claims that when Jesus said he was the one they were seeking, they drew back and fell to the ground (John 18:6). When their motives were exposed by the gravity of his presence, they collapsed in trepidation.

The transfiguration was another dramatic example of Christ being a walking temple. Jesus went up on a mountain with Peter, James, and John where he then revealed the glory of the divine presence.[27] Yet unlike Moses, Jesus possessed the glory within himself, reflecting the same divine aura of his Father. His face glowed like Moses's did, just not for the same reason; the divine glory shone from the inside out instead of merely reflecting an external source. So, as opposed to a portable tent being carried across the wilderness or a temple fixed on a mountain, the divine presence was now encased in a human being. The Son was a living, breathing temple. The Lord's address between heaven and earth was transitioning from Mount Zion to the heavenly Son who had come to earth.

At first glance, one would assume that such a reality would inspire hope, and for some it did. But for others, this connection between Jesus and the temple raised serious concerns. Why? Because some Jews found it difficult to see the expected Messiah as a new temple when Herod's temple was still standing in Jerusalem. This dilemma caused quite a divide between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day because the temple was their political bread and butter. We see this conflict rising on at least two fronts. First, tensions rose when Jesus occasionally claimed to be greater than the temple. Jesus contended that his position as the Son of Man (or the heavenly agent of his Father's kingdom) gave him authority to (1) indict those who misunderstood the purpose of the temple, and (2) transcend its importance. In other words, what the temple originally did, he could do supremely better. Yet if this were true, the religious leaders would be put out of business. No more money changing. No more extortion. No more leverage.

This led to the other part of the impasse between Jesus and his opponents, which was his shocking prediction that the temple would be destroyed. This bold claim appeared to be an affront to Israel's hopes. However, in reality, it was a charge of divine judgment against the Jerusalem's corrupt leaders. Jesus was essentially saying that they were going to cut off because of their lack of integrity. Note here that the temple itself was not the problem. On

the contrary, as a faithful Jew, Jesus held the temple in high esteem. His zeal for the Lord's dwelling place was so fervent that at least on one occasion he forcefully dispersed the moneychangers from the temple because they had made it into something it was never supposed to be. It was intended to be a light to the nations and a house of prayer to the one and true living God. Instead, it had become a place for bartering, trade, and possibly even corrupt business deals. So. while Jesus claimed that the temple would be sacked, he still revered its role in Israel's heritage.

What balanced out his respect for the temple with his declaration of its demise was the fact that the covenantal agreement undergirding its existence (the Mosaic covenant) was being phased out. Jesus, as the new source of the divine presence, was ushering in a new covenant. This is why he occasionally alluded to himself as a temple because, in a sense, he was reliving the temple's story. Just as God's enemies had destroyed it, so would the corrupt leaders of Israel and the Roman authorities put Jesus to death. Just as the temple had been defiled, so would a son of perdition (namely Judas) betray the Son of Man to unjust leaders. Really then, Jesus spoke of two temples, one that was to be torn down (i.e., Herod's temple) and another that would be raised up (i.e., his body).

2. Christ Surpasses the Tabernacle/Temple's Functions

Christ's fulfillment of the various services that the temple provided is the second major NT emphasis. An immediate case in point is the frequent allusions between the furniture of the tabernacle-temple and Christ himself. For instance, early on in the book of Revelation, Jesus is the one, like a Levitical priest in the tabernacle, who walks among the candlesticks. Yet instead of watching over the temple's furniture, he now inspects his people — the Church.[28] He also is the one who gives the Holy Spirit so people can worship the Father regardless of their geographic location. The day was coming when bickering over the sacredness of Mount Zion (for the Jews) or Mount Gerazim (for the Samaritans) would be irrelevant (John 4:19–23).

Additionally, the temple's location as the place where atonement and forgiveness of sin could be obtained was key. By following the sacrifices that were documented in the Law, which culminated in the annual Day of Atonement, the temple was the spot where Israel could have their sin problem addressed. The only hitch, as the Book of Hebrews makes clear,

is that the temple could only enforce the benefits of the Mosaic covenant. This meant the temple sacrifices were ongoing, not permanent. Likewise, sacrifices were also safeguarded by the numerous laws against ceremonial uncleanness. One may not even qualify to approach the temple if these rules were broken. But Christ overcame both these barriers.

When it came to uncleanness, the problem was that it could be transferred from person to person, while cleanness could not — unless Jesus was involved. He could touch lepers and make them whole, heal physical deformities, cast out demons, and raise the dead. He was able to absorb the stigma of uncleanness and still remain clean. Even beyond that, he himself established a titanium steel covenant where a day of atonement only had to occur one time (Heb 7:27; 10:10). Once it did, the mercy seat of the divine presence was triumphantly replaced by a Messiah who now sits on the heavenly throne as the resurrected Lord.

3. The Church is a New Covenant Temple

The corresponding language between the temple and Jesus is later applied to his people who are brought together by his death and resurrection. These connections can be seen in John's gospel where Jesus promises his followers that the Spirit will be "in" them, thereby making them true worshippers where being located on a specific mountain will be irrelevant. In Luke's account, the disciples are promised to receive the Spirit, which comes to pass in Acts 1 – 2. Then in Acts 2, flames of fire fall upon each disciple — (in an upper room, not the temple mount) — harkening back to the supernatural blazing that filled Solomon's temple and the violent storm that hovered over Mount Sinai.

This idea of believers being indwelt by the Spirit and consequently reflecting temple realities is carried over by various NT authors in passages that are well-known. For instance, Paul describes believers (and the church) as temples in whom the Spirit dwells. He also claims that the very bodies of believers are temples as well, so they should be used for holy purposes. Believers are literally sacred space.[29] Similarly, Peter claims that believers are "living stones" who are being built into a "house" as a priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ. Those stone language reflects the stones of the tribes of Israel that were worn by the high priest. Now Jesus is the high priest in the heavenlies with his apostles as stones in the foundation

of God's city and we are the covenantal benefactors. This is also why Hebrews speaks about the believer's ability to offer the sacrifice of praise to God with which he is pleased. The image is of a priestly worshipper in the temple offering one's expected service.

4. A Renewed Earth will be a Temple

Temple theology is also extremely important in John's visions recounted in the apocalypse. We see the word being used by the glorified Christ himself when promising believers that those who persevere will be columns in his temple. Such a promise receives later clarification when Revelation records that a temple space is located in God's sacred throne room of heaven. This reading is further supported by Revelation 14–16 where this "temple" is described as being in heaven where angels declare the Lord's will that is to come upon the earth. One heavily disputed usage of the word occurs earlier in chapter 11 where John is told to measure a temple space, which echoes the same commission Ezekiel was given in his temple vision. However, if it is literal, then it is being placed in contrast to God's heavenly temple that is mentioned just a few verses later in 11:19.[30] Thus, the vision would be saying that God has two temples, one on earth and the other in heaven. Be this as it may, Revelation ends with a cosmic-apocalyptic picture of heaven and earth converging through the image of a city touching down on earth. In its description, John claims that this new heaven and earth function as a city, garden, and temple simultaneously.[31] The Lord will dwell with his people. To be fair, though, we recognize that the question at this point is not so much about whether temple language is applied to the church. Dispensational and non-dispensational interpreters alike agree on this. The issue is whether such connections prohibit any further theological significance for another literal temple building.

Rebuilding the Temple After 70 AD

The 70 AD fulfillment of Jesus' prediction that the Jerusalem temple would be destroyed was a pivotal event in the history of Judaism for three major reasons. First, it marked a serious divide between the status of non-messianic Judaism and the early Jesus movement that eventually became known as Christianity.[32] Second, the temple's demise forced Jewish people

to exchange their understanding of communal solidarity and atonement — which had centered around temple categories like sacrifice and a Levitical priesthood — to a new system dictated by rabbinic traditions. Third, the temple's demise was a historic landmark showing that the Mosaic economy had transitioned to a time of Christological fulfillment and this new age was not going to be subverted.

However, none of these factors changed the fact that many Jews would continue to long for a newly established temple. There were several occasions where attempts were made to do just that. One occurred in the early second century during the Shimon Bar Kokhba revolt. In 118 AD when Hadrian became the new Roman emperor, he extended favor to the Jews by allowing them to return to Jerusalem and reconstruct another temple. In a short amount of time, Hadrian changed his policy by demanding that the temple site be relocated. This decision led to a violent back-and-forth conflict between Rome and the Jewish population. The attempted revolt resulted in Hadrian trying to place a city in Jerusalem named after himself and the Roman deity Jupiter, many surviving Jews being sold as slaves or deported to surrounding regions like Egypt, and a steady level of persecution being levied against surviving Jews until Hadrian's reign was over in 138 AD.[33]

Almost two centuries later, another opportunity to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem emerged during the reign of Falvius Clauias Julianus, otherwise known as Julian the Apostate. Being the nephew of Constantine and the cousin of Constantius II, Julian began his reign as emperor in 361. He had abandoned the Christian faith in exchange for choice versions of Greek philosophy and even forms of occultic mysticism.[34] In time, he expressed interest in rebuilding the temple for the Jewish community. Scholars speculate on what Julian's motivations may have been for such a project. A minimal consensus is that accomplishing this feat would be Julian's way of discrediting the prophecy of Jesus because the temple could be re-established for renewed Jewish praxis.[35] Whatever his other reasons may have been, the project never gained much traction because Julian was killed in a battle and subsequent emperors put an end to the endeavor.

Finally, a chance to erect another temple came in the early seventh century when Persian forces took control of Jerusalem by defeating Christian Byzantine forces. Amidst the conflict, the Persians mounted support from different parts of surrounding Jewish populations. Because of the success of

this alliance, it was announced that the temple would be able to be rebuilt in Jerusalem once more. But the peace with Persia was short lived and the temple project was subsequently revoked. Moreover, the temple situation took an even greater turn for the worse when the crushed Christian population became an inadvertent precursor to looming Muslim conquests just twenty years later. These events set the stage for the Arab construction of the Dome of the Rock, the ultimate tangible renunciation of Jewish temple.[36]

Futurist Expectations of a Literal Temple

The fervor for rebuilding a Jewish temple has continued since these early centuries. But no historical moment in the modern era has created such a stir as the establishment of a modern state of Israel in the mid-twentieth century. The birth of a Jewish "state" in 1948 was the product of numerous sociopolitical factors and its success has set the perfect backdrop for many to think a new temple could become a reality in the foreseeable future. Many express concerns with such a possibility because of the potential conflicts it could cause, while numerous Jewish coalitions and aggressive Zionistic ideologues eagerly anticipate this project getting underway.[37] Likewise, a third temple project remains a major topic of discussion among many believers worldwide.

The pitch of this debate within Christan circles is often heightened by a variety of American conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists who advocate assorted forms of dispensational premillennialism. They are convinced that Scripture requires the existence of a future temple for two primary reasons. One is that it is part of a chain of events related to the return of Christ. The other is that one must exist as a partial prophetic fulfillment of promises God made to Israel. What makes this perspective so intriguing is many dispensationalists stress that "two" temples must one day be erected in Jerusalem. The first one will be built before or during a future time of divine judgment upon the earth, commonly known as the Tribulation Period (or the Great Tribulation). This belief is based on a conflation of several key biblical texts, with the conclusion being that a temple will be rebuilt in Israel only to be defiled by a nefarious figure sometimes labeled as the Abomination of Desolation, the Man of Lawlessness, the Antichrist, or the Beast.[38]

More specifically, this perspective is often based on interpretive connections between a prophecy in Daniel 9:24–27, certain claims Jesus made in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 19), and some of Paul's observations in 2 Thessalonians 2. The first passage is known as the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, where Daniel uses apocalyptic imagery to describe a series of events that will transpire in the last, or seventieth "week," including a figure who will mount an assault upon Israel and defile the temple. Centuries later, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus refers to this prophetic utterance about the temple's desecration, linking it to another apocalyptic vision in Daniel 7 regarding the coming of the Son of Man. Dispensational interpreters conclude that this language is referring to the second coming of Christ. So, because the "coming" imagery is connected to the temple's demise depicted in Daniel 9, many postulate that another temple must exist in the future because Christ did not return in the first century. The argument continues from here with an appeal to Paul's similar account, where he tells the Thessalonian believers that the Day of the Lord would not arrive until the "man of lawlessness" is revealed when he exalts himself in the "holy place" or the temple, only to be destroyed by the Lord at his coming.[39] The overall point then is that a literal Jerusalem temple must exist before Christ's return because of an eschatological confrontation that must take place at that precise location.

Many dispensational interpreters also believe a second future temple will exist after the Parousia when Christ establishes a millennial reign on the earth. This perspective is based on a premillennial reading of Revelation 20, which views the 1,000-year period mentioned in vv. 1–10, as a segment of time that transpires between Christ's return and the eternal state. Additionally, dispensationalists contend that the millennium is a divinely designated time window for OT prophecies of a restored national Israel to be fulfilled. For this scheme, after the Tribulation period ends and Christ's second coming, an intermediate geopolitical Jewish kingdom will be established. Israel will be restored, with Jerusalem serving as the political epicenter of the world.

Once Jesus begins this theocratic reign as the glorified Messiah, another structure will be erected in fulfillment of many prophetic expectations, including the reinstitution of Israel's corporate worship (Isa 56:7; Jer 33:18; Zech 14:16–21; Mal 3:3–4) as well as the realization of Ezekiel's famous heavenly vision of a new temple (Ezek 42–48). It will be supervised by

the remnant priestly line of Zadock because of a covenantal promise that the Lord made to this Aaronic descendant. These priests will oversee various sacrifices that will be offered during Christ's millennial reign. Conversely, dispensationalists who propose this view differ on the purposes of these sacrifices. Some argue that they will be performed as a means of memorializing the work of Christ, similar to how the Lord's Supper is practiced by the church in the present age.[40] Others, who disagree with this view, contend that temple sacrifices will be offered as a means of purifying the ceremonial uncleanness of non-glorified worshippers during the millennium.[41]

In response to these proposals, I would like to conclude with four considerations. They are not intended to address whether there will be an actual tribulation or premillennial intermediate earthly kingdom. My concern here is how it can be feasible to expect some type of temple to exist that has prophetic and theological significance, since the people of God now exist in the context of the inaugurated stage of the New Covenant, awaiting its culmination in the new creation.

1. How Should OT Language About a Future Temple Be Interpreted?

The first issue to address regarding the biblical viability of a future temple is hermeneutical in nature. This is because the lion's share of debate centers on how one should understand OT language that speaks about an eschatological temple, especially the one envisioned by Ezekiel. Discussions about such a possibility — and numerous other issues related to eschatology for that matter — inevitably bog down into an interpretive quagmire when dispensationalists clash with various nondispensational evangelicals who often are covenantal in their theological orientation. The underlying reason for this impasse is whether future temple language in Scripture should be understood literally, typologically, Christologically, or, to reduce the discussion to its lowest common denominator, "nonliterally."

What should be kept in mind, though, is that this polemical back-and-forth is really fueled by two deeper points of contention. First, wrestling with how to interpret OT descriptions of a future temple from the original historical perspectives of Israel's prophets is one set of challenges. But more concerns emerge when trying to discern how these initial prophecies should be read in light of later NT revelation, which interprets OT hopes through

the person and work of Christ. Or to touch the methodological nerve more acutely, one must ask if New Covenant fulfillment is always linear, having a strict one-to-one correspondence between OT promise and NT fulfillment. Sometimes this is indeed the case, while in other instances, it simply is not.[42] Nevertheless, dispensationalists usually contend that the amount of emphasis on a restored temple, including Ezekiel's meticulous details of one, requires at least a bare minimum belief that one will be erected one day. Yet nondispensationalists usually counter that certain claims about the significance of Christ's redemptive work prohibit such literalistic expectations.

Coupled with this tension is a second ordeal in deliberating this topic, namely that if one does embrace a "literal" interpretation of OT future temple passages alongside New Covenant categories, one still has to ask how much of these depictions are to be understood that way. For instance, dispensationalists will sometimes argue that the future millennial temple is the one of which Ezekiel speaks. It will include a newly established priesthood through Zadock, a revised sacrificial system, and an ornate structure in Jerusalem. However, what about the added claims of specified priestly purification rituals, a river that flows through the Judean desert until it eventually "heals" the Dead Sea, the disregard of topographical details regarding the land of Israel when the twelve tribes are restored, the dimensions of the temple and city being described in multiples of five, and lastly, the promise that this temple will remain the seat of God's throne forever (43:7, 9), not just a thousand years?[43]

Likewise, the entire depiction in Ezekiel is experienced via a series of heavenly visions that are described with many literary features of apocalyptic imagery. If everything in these visions is to be interpreted "literally," then should the same approach be applied to other visions in the book, like Ezekiel's description of God's divine chariot in chapter 1 or the valley of dry bones in chapter 37? This approach is hard to maintain. The former appears to be describing God's universal rule over creation despite the fact that Israel is in exile, while the latter stresses God's ability to bring Israel back from exile even though the nation is considered as good as dead. Consequently, appealing to the necessity of literal interpretation does not really answer the question as to whether a future temple is theologically or prophetically necessary because all interpreters put limits on what should be

understood as "literal" and what is not. A better strategy is to acknowledge that there are certain ways in which the New Covenant directly connects with OT eschatological hopes and there are other instances where elements of OT eschatology are reconfigured in light of what Christ has accomplished for believers within Israel and all the nations.

2. A Temple in Revelation 20?

A second major factor in this discussion that warrants attention is the dispensational insistence that many of OT temple expectations find their fulfillment in the millennial era described by Revelation 20. The glaring problem with this proposal is that regardless of one's interpretation of the millennium in general, absolutely nothing is said in this series of visions that supports an Israel-centric, theocratic, geopolitical kingdom reigning throughout its duration. Granted, there are key references in Second Temple Jewish literature that reflect strands of thought supporting a belief in some kind of intermediate Messianic kingdom.[44] Some even argue that Paul allows for such a reality in his discussion of the return of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15.[45] And regardless of one's views on this latter point, Revelation clearly emphasizes that Christ is the glorified, resurrected Messiah who will reign over the earth with his people. Nonetheless, even if one accepts a premillennial reading of Revelation 20, John only describes two events that will occur. One is that Satan will be supernaturally bound so he is unable to deceive the nations. The other is that devoted followers of Christ, who were faithful unto death, will be resurrected so they can rule with Christ (regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile). Therefore, the emphasis is upon Satanic defeat as well as the vindication of all of God's people by reigning with Christ together on earth.

Furthermore, not only does Revelation 20 omit any reference to a temple, or even the possible need for one. As we have already mentioned, Revelation 21 – 22 is replete with temple imagery when John describes his visionary encounter with a heavenly Jerusalem that converges with the earth. The idea being described here is God's abode in heaven becoming unified with creation itself. The world is renewed, thereby becoming a "temple" itself. The restoration of "Jerusalem" is fulfilled in that believers of all the nations now enter the heavenly kingdom, or city, that has come to the earth.

And unbelievers are excluded from this city because they are not part of this Messianic kingdom.

So, to venture beyond these basic points by inserting a collection of Israel-centric components — including a temple — into a premillennial scheme is essentially a contrived enterprise based on hermeneutical assumptions and precommitments to OT expectations that do not fit the narrative flow of what Revelation explicitly describes.[46]

3. A Temple as a Place Where God's Presence Dwells?

A third key concern requiring more attention is how a future temple can exist as a legitimate locale for God's designated presence on earth, whether it be in the present age, a potential intermediate one, or the eternal state. Stated another way, how can a future tribulation temple or millennial temple be legitimately described as "sacred space"? During a future tribulation, will a non-messianic-centered temple be a place where the presence of the Lord dwells? Will the Holy Spirit indwell saints during this tribulation as well as a designated structure on the temple mount in Jerusalem? Or, as it pertains to a millennial temple, will there be a designated building standing alongside the glorified resurrected Messiah? Neither Daniel nor Ezekiel delve into such complexities. These kinds of scenarios must be proposed in attempts to harmonize various accounts of eschatological hopes. The difficulty, however, is that the spectrum of prophetic expectations for Israel's restoration cannot always be interpreted in a linear fashion because the NT repackages them in larger cosmic (and earthly) categories. To think otherwise creates all sorts of conundrums. For example, what does it mean to speak about glorified resurrected believers (who are temples in which the Spirit dwells) observing and living alongside non-glorified believers who must participate in quasi-Mosaic rituals in a post-Old-and-New Covenant temple?

4. A Temple is Governed by a System: The Problem with a Future Sacrificial System

Finally, if certain dispensational evangelicals continue to insist on the need for a future temple — whether it is during an upcoming tribulation period or an intermediate millennial kingdom — they must propose functional categories to justify its existence. And once again, they usually do so by arguing for a renewed sacrificial system and priestly order. This is quite

a daunting task because it is difficult to reconcile this proposal with the theological trajectory of the New Covenant that moves from a former sacred building to Christ (i.e., the incarnate temple that was destroyed and raised again), his people (i.e., a priesthood of people who form an organic temple indwelt by the Spirit), and ultimately the earth itself (i.e., a temple in which heaven itself dwells). Thus, a fair question must be asked. How can we proceed — or revert — to some revised version of a quasi-Mosaic economy since Christ's death and resurrection abrogate any clean/unclean distinctions and nullify any need for further means of atonement.

Some dispensationalists counter these points by arguing that New Covenant categories do not mitigate against a future temple economy. There are those who point out that Ezekiel himself spoke about the future New Covenant that would work in the hearts of Israelites so they could be restored as God's obedient people. At the same time, he also speaks about the famous temple with its various sacrifices and priests. as the argument goes, then, the millennial period marks a new era between the church age and the eternal state where sacrifices will be practiced either as a way of memorializing Christ's word of redemption or resolving the clean/unclean reality that will exist during the millennium because there will be believers worshipping the Lord in an intermediate theocratic kingdom in non-glorified bodies.[47]

Here, we will only focus on two problems with this proposal. First, it should be noted that neither Ezekiel nor any OT prophet portrays the restoration of Israel and creation in terms of glorified and non-glorified believers cohabitating an unrestored earth with one party requiring priestly and earthly temple services while the other is exempt. That proposal only emerges as one tries to reconcile a certain premillennial reading of Revelation 20 with OT depictions of Israel's eschatological hopes. It is true that Ezekiel and other prophets speak of a temple because it is a way of promising Israel that she will be delivered from the plight of exile and potential national extinction. This is relatively clear. Yet as this hope develops throughout NT revelation, the temple restoration project expands beyond the reestablishing of sacred space in the land of Israel. Instead of a temple being temporarily — or permanently — rebuilt in the earthly city of Jerusalem, the Christian hope expands to a larger scale where heaven's Jerusalem arrives on earth, thereby establishing a planetary temple.

The second problem with this view (as it pertains to the millennium) is that one must nuance some sort of qualified non-Mosaic, non-New Covenant system to justify how certain temple sacrifices are offered for non-glorified believers living in a temporary theocratic kingdom. For dispensationalists who argue that millennial sacrifice will reflect on Christ's atonement in a similar way that present-day communion does, this misses a key point which is that the Eucharist looks forward as well as backward. Scripture admonishes believers to partake and remember what Christ did as well as anticipate what he will do when he returns. So, what would be the future hope of post-Parousia sacrifices? Furthermore, how does the reality of the church coincide with these parameters? How does the church of glorified Jews and Gentiles headed by a glorified resurrected Messiah correspond with a national geo-political temple enacting memorial sacrifices? One would have to ask if the church ceases to exist temporarily, if not permanently.

Finally, in response to other dispensational ideas such as the necessity to address clean/unclean distinctions during the millennium, two concerns deserve mention. One is that Revelation 20 provides no commentary whatsoever on such a question. One must insert it because of certain theological expectations on how OT prophecies must be fulfilled in congruence with specific futurist demands. The other issue is that if Christ nullified the ceremonial clean/unclean distinction for believers in the present age as well as the age to come (as Hebrews clearly prescribes) and no mention of this dilemma is made in Revelation's discussion of the millennium, then it seems that one is forced to do one of two things. One must either contend that the OT has much to say about an intermediate age where temple sacrifices are required when the NT offers no commentary at all. Or one must conclude that no sacrificial system is to be expected after Christ's return, and if this is the case, then the validity for a future temple evaporates as well.

1 Cf., Gregory J. Wightman, *Sacred Spaces: Religious Architecture in the Ancient World* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2007); Mark J. Boda and Jamie R. Novotny, eds., From the *Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010); Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); and Deena Ragavan, ed., *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2013).

2 E.g., John Day, ed., *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007); Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); R. E. Clements, *God and Temple: The Idea of the Divine Presence in Ancient Israel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016); and Andrew R. Davis, *Reconstructing the Temple: The Royal Rhetoric of Temple Renovation in the Ancient Near East and Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

3 Cf., G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2004); G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2014); and J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God's Relational Presence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019).

4 Cf., K. W. Bolle, "Temples," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia,* 2nd ed., Berard L. Marthaler, Gregory F. LaNave, Jonathan Y. Tan, et al., eds., vol. 13 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2003) 805–06; Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions,* trans., John McHugh (New York, 1961), 271–344; and Yehezkel Kaufman, *The Religion of Israel from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile,* trans. and abridged by Moshe Greenberg (London: George Allen & Unwind LTD, 1961), 302–303.

5 Bolle, "Temples," 805.

6 Bolle, "Temples," 805.

7 J. Daniel Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 18.

8 There are several other Hebrew and Greek words that the Old and New Testaments use to describe temples and other temple-like structures. A thorough survey can be seen in Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 13–17.

9 This is partly why temple language is used in the creation account, especially as it pertains to the Edenic setting. See discussion of this in John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 179–87.

10 Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 46–47 Also, for detailed treatments of the role of mountains in temple-like depictions of theophanies, see Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 9–24, 98–106; L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus* (Dissertation: University of Bristol, Trinity College, May 9, 2011), 7–19; and R. E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 1–16.

11 See a fully orbed treatment of this comparison in David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1–22.5*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 238 (New York: Sheffield, 2003).

12 See the discussion of this point in Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 100–3.

13 Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 44–5. This is possibly why the earlier nations attempted to build the Tower of Babel so they could have a heavenly perspective without a mountain view.

14 R. E. Averbeck, "Tabernacle," in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2003), 809; Hays, *Temple and Tabernacle*, 28–62.

15 More in-depth discussion of these terms can be found in Averbeck, "Tabernacle," 807–12.

16 Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 176. Others suggest that the Israelites were forced to face the west when entering the Tabernacle because it opposed the surrounding sun worshippers who always faced the east when praying or worshipping.

17 Averbeck, "Tabernacle," 817; Gordon Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the in the Garden of Eden Story," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19–24.

18 The latter idea of "pollution" refers to the OT concept of uncleanness. Being ceremonially unclean did not necessarily convey the idea of being morally corrupt. It primarily referred to being contaminated or unfit to come into God's presence. Such uncleanness was indicative of death, decay, or imperfection, not evil actions in every case. See discussion of these points in Joe M. Sprinkle, "The Rationale of the Laws of Clean and Unclean in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 4 (2000), 637–57.

19 Often temple sanctuaries were depicted as having multiple levels. See Brant Pitre, "Jesus, the New Temple, and the New Priesthood," *Letter & Spirit 4* (2008), 55.

20 David's first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem was a disaster because he did not follow the Law's instructions on how to transport it (see 1 Sam 6:1–11; 1 Chron 13:1–14).

21 P. P. Jenson, "Temple," in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, eds. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2012), 767.

22 Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 224–25.

23 Cf., George Athas, *Bridging the Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023), 586–90; Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 10–12; and Martin Goodman, "The Temple in First-Century Judaism," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed., John Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 459–68.

24 A large portion of section of the article is based on my content that can be found in Brandon D. Smith and Everett Berry, "The Temple," in *They Spoke of Me: How Jesus Unlocks the Old Testament* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2017), 155–75.

25 In actuality, there were strands of Judaism that looked forward to some sort of future eschatological temple, although its expression on earth was to be fulfilled by the arrival of some sort of heavenly temple. See treatment of this point in Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 10–11.

26 See Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 183–90.

27 Also, the Father's presence then encompassed the mountain and he spoke in affirmation of his Son's identity. Cf., discussions on this point in Patrick Schreiner, *The Transfiguration of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024), 93–128; and Brant Pitre, *Jesus and Divine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024), 86–108.

28 Scripture goes on to extend the theme of Christ as the true temple to his people, the Church. Because he gives the Spirit to them, the divine presence now indwells them, thereby making their bodies individually holy (sacred) and making them a holy people.

29 This view is disputed among some in NT scholarship. The contention is that Paul only claims the corporate church is indwelt by the Spirit. See an overview of this proposal in Nicholas G. Piotrowski and Ryan Johnson, "One Spirit, One Body, One Temple: Paul's Corporate Temple Language in 1 Corinthians 6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65, no. 4 (2022), 733–52.

30 Most likely, in line with the language of the book of Hebrews, John is highlighting that God's heavenly temple is symbolized by Jerusalem's earthly temple. See Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of John* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2005), 293–94.

31 Or as Eyal Regev states, "For John and his readers, there is no coming back from heaven …" [meaning no way for an earthly temple to supersede a heavenly one]; "the next logical step could only be a New Jerusalem, with God and the Lamb as its Temple." See Regev, *The Temple in Early Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 209.

32 An excellent overview of this historical divide can be referenced in Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans., Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

33 A helpful overview of this brief assessment can be found in John M. Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 127–50.

34 Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 118–19.

35 Wilken, *First Thousand Years*, 119–23.

36 More helpful details on these events can be found in Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem, The Biography: A History of the Middle East* (New York: Vintage Books, 2024), 191–213.

37 Examples include the Temple Mount Faithful, Yeshivar Ataret-Cohanim, and the Jerusalem Temple Foundation. See an overview of such groups in Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem*, 211–23.

38 One of the best overviews of these titles and its specific referent can be found in Bernard McGinn's *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994).

39 Paul's language here is dependent upon Dan 11:36 and Ezek 28:2. See Gordon Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 278–80. Also, the Greek word translated with the English term "temple" is used to refer to the holy place in temple, not just the temple itself. See treatment in Gary S. Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan , 2012).

40 One can find a survey of dispensational proponents in Jerry Hullinger's helpful article "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (July-September 1995), 279–81.

41 E.g., Hullinger, "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40 – 48," 285 – 89; Hullinger, "The Divine Presence and Uncleanness: The Rationale for Ezekiel's Millennial Sacrifices," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 652 (2006), 405 – 422; idem., "Two Atonement Realms: Reconciling Sacrifice in Ezekiel and Hebrews," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 32 (2007), 33 – 63; idem., "The Function of the Sacrifices in Ezekiel's Temple: Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January 2010), 20 – 57; idem. "The Function of Sacrifices in Ezekiel's Temple: Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April 2010), 166 – 79; idem., "The Compatibility of the New Covenant and Future Animal Sacrifice," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* (Spring 2013), 47 – 66; and John C. Whitcomb, "Christ's Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel," *Grace Theological Journal* (1985), 201 – 17.

42 An excellent book that provides numerous examples of this dynamic between prophetic expectation and fulfillment, especially as it pertains to apocalyptic, can be found in D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2002).

43 Cf., other helpful examples regarding this point in Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapter 25 – 48*, The New International Commentary on the OT (Grand Rapids: 1998), 501 – 06; and Dean Davis, *The High King of Heaven* (Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2014), Chp 16.

44 See a concise survey of Jewish sources regarding this belief in Larry Helyer, "The Necessity, Problems, and Promise of Second Temple Judaism for Discussions of New Testament Eschatology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (December 2004), 612 – 14.

45 E.g., Wilbur B. Wallis, "The Use of Psalms 8 and 110 in 1 Corinthians 15:25 – 27 and in Hebrews 1 and 2," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15 (1972), 25 – 29; and idem., "The Problem of an Intermediate Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20 – 28," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (1975), 233 – 37.

46 In many ways, the traditional dispensational expectations of future temple and restored Israel rise and fall on a premillennial reading of Revel 20. One can see this in an entire volume devoted to the defense of a future eschatological temple of Jerusalem. The book spends thirteen chapters summarizing the various components of Ezekiel's vision, but then has to connect all of its proposals to Revelation 20 in chapter 14. The reason for this is because evidence for an intermediate kingdom in the NT is scarce and the disputed occurrences where one is discussed omit any reference to a potential temple. See John W. Schmitt and J. Carl Laney, *Messiah's Coming Temple: Ezekiel's Prophetic Vision of the Future Temple*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014).

47 Again, one can consult the works of Hullinger mentioned in note 39 to see detailed arguments for this idea.

The Great Evangelical Fudge

Ranald Macaulay

Ranald Macaulay was born in South Africa. He moved to the United Kingdom in 1956 to do a law degree at Cambridge. At the end of his second year he met Francis and Edith Schaeffer. The Schaeffers had just recently started L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland. He visited them at the end of 1959 and decided to join the work. He and Susan Schaeffer were married in April 1961. In 1964 they started the English L'Abri in London. There Ranald completed a BD Hons in theology, at King's College, London. In January 1971 they moved to Hampshire to start a residential branch of L'Abri. In 1978 Ranald co-authored the book *Being Human* with Jerram Barrs (IVP Academic, 1998), on the nature of spiritual experience. A number of his articles have appeared in *Evangelicals Now* and other journals. When Francis Schaeffer died in 1984 the family returned to Switzerland for four years. In 1996 they moved to Cambridge where Ranald founded *Christian Heritage* at the Round Church (since renamed "The Foundation Trust")—the second oldest building in the city built in 1130 AD. Since 2017 he and Susan have been back in Hampshire near the L'Abri house.

2024 was the 40th anniversary of Francis Schaeffer's final book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*.[1] When it came out in 1984, he had only months to live.

The title sounds alarming, but that was Schaeffer's intention. The same theological drift he had witnessed as a young man was now threatening Evangelicalism. Churches which had once been faithful to the Bible were now in danger. He felt this deeply. In short, the book was the act of a dying and desperate man and should be read as such.

What interests me most about it, however, is not so much its content, crucial as that is, but its *operating principle*. By the 1980s the modern West, whose background and future Schaeffer had sketched so prophetically, was now promoting ideas about gender and sex inimical to the Bible. This was no surprise to him for he knew better than most that, given the culture's rejection of Christianity, it had to happen.

What he also knew was that the church could never compromise over its most basic principle, namely, the authority of the Word of God. It was what Schaeffer had stood for all his life — that human ideas must always be subject to the revelation of God in Scripture.

But why the urgency?

Few realize, I think, that early in 1984, specifically to mark the publication of *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, the publisher arranged a series of speaking-engagements at five or six of the leading Evangelical Colleges (universities) across the States. He hoped that, by appearing in person, he might reinforce a stronger commitment to Scriptural authority in the younger generation. Those who had heard him at the Lausanne Congress 10 years earlier disappointed him.

> The hallmark of our generation in contrast to the previous generation is that this generation does not believe that truth exists in any form. All is relativistic. There is no such thing as truth as truth. The issue is clear: is the Bible true-truth and infallible, wherever it speaks, including where it speaks of *history and the cosmos*, or is it only in some sense revelational where it touches religious subjects? … There is no use in Evangelicalism seeming to get larger and larger if at the same time appreciable parts of Evangelicalism are getting soft at that which is the central core of Evangelicalism, namely, the Scriptures. There is no use having greater numbers if the whole thing is deluded.[2]

By 1984, despite his warnings, the drift had continued. Perhaps the young would prove more attentive. In the event his health, already compromised by cancer, deteriorated rapidly and he died in Rochester, Minnesota, on May 15, 1984.[3] Those who heard him in those last months said it was like hearing a voice from the grave.

Why then, in such extreme circumstances, did Schaeffer do this? Why write a controversial book, then crisscross the States within weeks of his death? The closing sentences of his preface tell us: "I would say that the statement I am making in the pages of this book is perhaps the most important statement I have ever written."[4]

Schaeffer may well be overstating his case here for surely his observations about the *background* to the West's growing antipathy to biblical ethics were his most important legacy. However, in relation to the immediate fall-

out of the society's repudiation of God's existence and revelation, the book was critical. It was a timely warning.

Background

The larger background, however, is where we need to begin.

When Schaeffer was preparing for ordination in the Presbyterian Church in the early 1930s, old-fashioned liberalism had already overwhelmed the seminaries. Princeton was no longer a bastion of Protestant orthodoxy. The greats of the past, like the two Hodges and B. B. Warfield, were no more. J. Gresham Machen, one of Schaeffer's main influences, had recently attempted a counter-offensive, but was defrocked for his pains and kicked out in 1936. Since the church was still a significant voice in society, Machen's expulsion made front-line news. Schaeffer highlights this to emphasize the rapidity with which American society was changing. The limited respect that ordinary folk had for the old ways (e.g., for the sanctity of marriage and of the unborn) was still evident. But within a decade that was swept aside. From then on it was open season. The so-called sexual liberation had begun.

Interestingly, Schaeffer lays the blame for this moral collapse at the feet of the Bible-believing churches themselves. Why? Because, when the leaders knew this would happen, they failed to prevent it. He says,

> It was *this drift* (in the mainline denominations from 1900–1936) which laid the base for the cultural, social, moral, legal and governmental changes from that time to the present. Without *this drift* in the denominations, I am convinced that the changes in our society over the past 50 years would have produced very different results from what we see now. When the Reformation churches shifted, the Reformation consensus was undercut.[5]

After 1936 the mainline denominations began to hemorrhage badly. Why go to church to hear moral platitudes only. Their Bible-believing counterparts by contrast surged. An unashamed commitment to the gospel and to the historical reliability of the Bible proved appealing. Time magazine even ran a cover-story about the new phenomenon: an Evangelical majority in the American nation!

But nothing was as it seemed. Church growth had brought a false sense of security. When speaking at the Billy Graham Congress in Berlin in 1966 Schaeffer tried to address this.[6] The liberal pressures had if anything intensified: modernism had morphed into existentialism and existentialism into postmodernism. The deceptions were more subtle but more dangerous. According to the new theologians, statements in the Bible could be *spiritually* meaningful even though *factually* untrue. Jesus may not have risen from the dead, but that did not matter: his "resurrection" retained spiritual force, as a concept. He called this "the existential methodology" and considered it potent enough to destroy civilization as we know it. This theological drift would become an abiding threat.

Finally, on his deathbed, he bared his soul for the last time. He feared that Evangelicalism was about to repeat the mistake of the early 20th century.

And what was it? In his own words: "the drift in the denominations"—more specifically, the drift away from the principle of Biblical authority. As he put it in Lausanne: "Is the Bible true-truth and infallible, *wherever it speaks*, including where it speaks of history and the cosmos, or is it only in some sense revelational where it touches on religious subjects?"[7]

Which brings us naturally to "the Great Evangelical Fudge."

The Fudge

Framing his question as he did (and speaking to some 2,700 participants and guests from over 150 nations) it was incumbent upon him to keep his message tight. In a sense he was using shorthand; so when he said "where (the Bible) speaks of history and the cosmos" he was referring principally to Genesis 1–3. This would have been obvious to those present. It was his way of saying that, not only were his own writings built on the foundational reality of a space-time creation and Fall, but so too those of the Old and New Testaments and of the historic creeds of the church. Until the late 19th century, no church had hesitated to teach the traditional view: that Adam and Eve were two individual human beings like ourselves (*homo sapiens* made "in the image of God"); that they were the progenitors of the human race; that by a unique act of creation they had been formed as finite and moral beings without sin or any inherent defect; that only when tempted

and seduced had the actual reality of evil, suffering and physical death entered their experience.

The fact that he received a standing ovation is remarkable. He could hardly have been more direct: "In our day … holding to a strong view of Scripture or not holding to it is the watershed of the evangelical world."[8]

The Elephant in the Room

The elephant in the room, of course, was evolution. From 1859, when Darwin's *Origin of Species* appeared, a new scientific consensus had developed. Whatever Darwin himself thought about God, the general assumption was that a supernatural Creator was no longer necessary. The Genesis account was just a myth. What had actually happened was just a physical phenomenon of some sort (later the "Big Bang"). Life then developed as a result of physical and chemical processes only. Eventually, human beings emerged through natural selection working upon chance mutations.

I call this the "elephant in the room" because I do not think Schaeffer's audience fully appreciated just how radical he was being. On one hand they liked what he said about apologetics. His challenge of modern philosophy reminded them of the apostle Paul. Had not Paul used the same sort of logic at Athens and also in his letter to the Romans? When human beings turn away from God's revealed truth their alternatives end up looking ridiculous.[9] Schaeffer's potted sketches of western thought — from Enlightenment rationalism to Existentialistic irrationalism and so on — fleshed this out. His hearers could see from the way humanistic ideas had imploded in the West (damaging people's lives along the way) that scientific materialism was a dead end. Schaeffer's approach was exciting and moving: they even gave him a standing ovation.[10]

On the other hand, Schaeffer sounded uncomfortably reactionary. Did Evangelicals really have to hold on to Biblical infallibility like *this*? Wasn't he asking them to bury their heads in the sand? Hadn't evolution been shown to be scientifically true? (There were other scholarly concerns, of course, but Genesis 1 – 3 must suffice for the present).

The elements of the fudge were beginning to form. *Step one*: the biblical account of origins is in conflict with science. *Step two*: an adjustment to the meaning of the text is considered necessary. By the early 20th century,

the new orthodoxy of *theistic evolution* had been widely accepted. Only "fundamentalists" thought otherwise.

Few seemed to realize the enormity of what was happening. Most leaders ignored the issues and kept preaching "the Genesis story" as if nothing had happened. They assumed that it was still possible to maintain the framework of "Creation-Sin-Salvation" even if the details were a bit blurred. The fudge was necessary: nothing *too* robust should be said about design in creation,[11] or the nature of humanity at the beginning, or the fact that death came through the Fall. The details had to be kept fuzzy. This was *Step three*.

Human Death before the Fall?

And what were those details? The main problem was human death. If Adam and Eve were not the first human beings on the planet and if pre-humans were dying continuously during the evolutionary process, when did *the law of sin and death* that the NT refers to come into effect?[12] Did not Genesis 1 – 3 say explicitly that human death would *follow* human sin? Isn't the NT equally explicit about it?[13]

What brought things into sharp relief for me personally was my contact with Denis Alexander at the turn of the century.[14] Around 1996, when my wife and I moved to Cambridge, I was handed a copy of one of his recent lectures. This brought me face to face with the ideas I had hoped never to encounter inside the evangelical church. For the first time I realized that the goalposts were now as far outside the ballpark as possible: human death was no longer *a consequence* of the Fall. Instead, it ante-dated the Fall (whatever that might mean in this new scenario).[15] In other words, human death was as 'natural' for human beings as it was for animal and plant life, just a fact of carbon-based life.

The only concession to the Genesis account seemed to be the assertion that, in some mysterious way, the whole process was under God's providential control.

I realized at a stroke how serious this is. If human death isn't related to the sinfulness of the human race, what was Jesus doing on the cross? Yes, he was serving as a substitutionary atonement for human guilt, but wasn't he

also *conquering death* through his physical resurrection (after the tragedy of physical death)? I thought that's what the church had always believed!

Hence the useful dictum: *if human death was not in the Fall how can it be in the Cross?*

This is radical stuff. First, it contradicts the teaching of the church historically. What makes it doubly problematic is that the theory sounds increasingly implausible. Why? Because the *raison d'etre* for theistic evolution (the fact of evolution, which earlier seemed so compelling) is a lot less certain than originally thought. Evolution is now being challenged more than at any time since 1859. Not that evolutionists have renounced the Neo-Darwinian formula, by no means; but the model now faces strong headwinds. Chief amongst these are the scientific discoveries of the past 70 years — especially Crick and Watson's double-helix breakthrough in 1953. These have brought to light "hard facts" that raise insuperable problems for the theory. Complexity within the microscopic world is now known to be so profuse that it makes purely physical explanations absurd — something we will hear more about in the coming years. At which point this anecdote about Richard Dawkins deserves notice: in a filmed interview he admits that "no one has any idea how life began!"[16] But wasn't that Darwin's point — to explain the origin of life? With a hole that size in the theory, one wonders why the experts are so confident about it?

By contrast Schaeffer was never persuaded by evolution. He agreed that there are things in Genesis less clear than others and advised against dogmatism in such cases. His simple rule was "go where Scripture goes and stop where Scripture stops." (He frequently pointed out, for example, that on purely linguistic grounds, the word "day" in Genesis 1 allows for several meanings — not simply 24 hours). But he never said this to be evasive. For example, he never excluded the possibility of a six 24 hour day creation. He preferred to remain agnostic on some issues and retained a healthy skepticism about the science. A public discussion/debate he had in London in about 1982 puts this beyond doubt.[17] I had heard of a young PhD research scientist, Arthur Jones, who in the late 1960s worked on an anti-Darwinian thesis in the Zoology Department of Birmingham University.[18] I made contact and encouraged him to keep speaking out on the issue. Meanwhile, members of the Victoria Institute,[19] all committed evolutionists, also took note of this maverick biologist. They arranged a debate with him and

asked Schaeffer to represent the anti-evolutionary view theologically. Arthur dealt with the science. The discussion was amicable and moderately useful, but it illustrated the fudge well. All insisted that Darwinian science *has* to take precedence over the biblical accounts.[20] Instead of following our 16th century forefathers' and repudiating any "parallel authority" (to Scripture), they seemed oblivious to the irony involved: that the whole Bible teaches explicitly that human death is the result of the Fall — yet theistic evolution chooses to deny that.

One of the casualties of the fudge was apologetics. When evangelicals became embarrassed by the Genesis account, they made it harder for themselves to mount a suitable response to philosophical materialism.[21] Instead, they withdrew to what seemed like safer biblical ground, namely Christ's physical resurrection. This would fill the gap left by science for "physical evidence" of supernatural reality. Nature could not provide that. According to their science, it was simply the product of chance!

By comparison, Schaeffer took this as his starting point, his presupposition. He then showed that materialism proves too much. On the one hand, it provides answers to physical questions (about aeronautics or medical infections etc.) and does that well. On the other hand, it explains away the very mind(s) through which the scientific answers were arrived at in the first place! Surely this cannot be right. If our materialistic view of science leads us to deny our own humanity, the picture of reality we are left with starts to look like a self-destruct machine. This was why the Existentialists ended up the way they did.[22] They *had* to concede that knowledge, too, is relative. But they could not live like that. Hence the force — and attraction — of Schaeffer's apologetic. In essence what he was doing was flipping the argument on its head. If everything about human experience looks designed, it is because it *is* designed. It testifies to a different sort of reality, one which "fits" with personhood — that is, a universe made by the personal God of the Bible. Personality and nature are real and can be known. Although knowledge is never exhaustive it works. Reality is not a sick joke. The facts speak for themselves. The materialistic nightmare which imagines (by faith) that things pop into existence by themselves is contradicted by the evidence. In effect, humanism is hoisted by its own petard. Science belongs to God.

Conclusion

It is time to return to where we began.

Schaeffer's final book was a desperate attempt to keep Evangelicalism off the rocks. He had seen what theological drift does to the church when left unchallenged. Whole denominations had foundered because of a failure to uphold the authority of Scripture. In his final months he felt he needed to speak up. A "disaster" was in the making and he realized someone should sound the alarm. Was he right? Time will tell.

What I have tried to clarify about the book is the role evolution played behind the scenes. Although he did not use the expression itself, this was clearly what was in his mind. His actual words in Lausanne in 1974 were, "where the Bible speaks about history *and the cosmos*." Central to that commitment was the fact that human death is a result of the Fall. The theme runs consistently through his writings. Again, he may not have spelled it out at length in relation to evolution theory, but to those who worked alongside him, this was obvious.

The addition I have made concerns the status of theistic evolution within Evangelicalism. The fact that Bible-believing churches accept a high degree of ambiguity when it comes to Adam and Eve, or the garden of Eden or original sin is no small matter. Although one can understand that proponents of theistic evolution feel threatened by the weight of scientific opinion, this simply reinforces Schaeffer's point: at no time in history should the church submit to current intellectual fashions. Whatever the statistics and however plausible they seem to be it *has* to be a wrong move — on principle.

In fact, over the past century this fudging of Genesis 1 – 3 has damaged the church more than any other single factor. For one thing it has weakened her understanding and enjoyment of the truth. For another it has undermined her ability to challenge falsehood. Now that the fudge has been superseded by a denial of the fact that human death is a result of the Fall, insult has been added to injury. It begins now to look uncomfortably like another gospel.

That being the case, a final question is in order. What should the church's attitude be to this form of theistic evolution? Obviously, in terms of drawing lines in the sand it is a sensitive issue and needs to be handled carefully. On the one hand, the fundamentals of the faith need to be secured; on the other hand, the human tendency towards acrimony in debate needs

to be considered. (Schaeffer's contribution at this point was a small book which many consider his finest, *The Mark of a Christian*. It highlights the biblical imperative: whenever controversy arises over important doctrinal matters, love in the midst of serious disagreement is the ultimate test of spiritual integrity).

What happened within the original Christian Student Movement in the United Kingdom serves as a helpful object lesson. The UCCF (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship) of today emerged from it when, under the pressure of liberal ideas — principally about Christ's substitutionary death — some felt that the gospel was being compromised. The two sides discussed their differences and a split became inevitable. In 1910 the conservative element broke away to form the UCCF. Interestingly, although the SCM (Student Christian Movement) was the larger segment at the time of the break, it steadily declined in numbers and influence and eventually folded and died.[23]

To keep theological drift (and fudge?) going unchecked, the UCCF resorted to a statement of faith which speakers at formal gatherings (and all officers of course) had to sign. Apart from the fudge issue, the strategy worked well. Perhaps this is what now needs to happen in relation to the doctrine of the Fall. A simple statement like that would surely not be difficult to devise. In the light of present discussions about fudges and falsehoods, it would help to bring greater clarity. More importantly, it might save the evangelical ship from being wrecked on the reefs of what some have described as a myth — possibly the most perverse of all time.[24] Throughout its history the church has had only one reliable means of distinguishing between "myths and fancies" and (what Schaeffer called) "true-truth" — the Word of God!

Which is why Schaeffer wrote *The Great Evangelical Disaster* in the first place.

1 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1984). For a helpful interview about the book and Francis Schaeffer in general, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wviNr2CwL8 and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEsvoOHSN6o&t=2871s.

2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMYEH435os0&t=20s.

3 His final words, echoing Ps 84:5, 7, were "(they go) from strength to strength (… 'till each appears before God in Zion')."

4 Schaeffer, *Great Evangelical Disaster*, 13.

5 Schaeffer, *Great Evangelical Disaster*, 35.

6 One of Edith Schaeffer's letters highlights this. A friend of mine, Michael Cassidy, was present at his workshop and was so impressed by what he heard that he tried to get things rescheduled so that Schaeffer could speak to the whole conference. (Personal letter in author's possession).

7 See endnote 2.

8 Schaeffer, *Great Evangelical Disaster*, 51.

9 "Thinking themselves to be wise they became fools" (Rom 1:22).

10 Meanwhile, behind the scenes his books began to sell by the thousands — and they have kept selling since.

11 I even received a brief note from an earlier General Secretary of UCCF (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship), Oliver Barclay, urging me to be more careful in speaking about design! He and other General Secretary's whom I knew took theistic evolution for granted.

12 See 1 Cor 15:26.

13 For example, see Rom 5:12.

14 Denis Alexander is an eminent geneticist and founder of the Faraday Institute.

15 See my two papers entitled "Rescuing Darwin or Wrecking the Faith" (https://www.e-n.org.uk/2008/11/features/rescuing-darwin-or-wrecking-the-faith/?search=1) and "An Intrinsic or Extrinsic Image of God" (https://www.e-n.org.uk/2014/10/features/intrinsic-or-extrinsic-image/?search=1).

16 See Stein link: https://youtu.be/w7ggMpCtr1A?t=5244 (1hr 27:20 mins) or see below https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xmb0lqHddbejrnNYhZ39b2CsdtAOsJHz/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=106436478539115328699&rtpof=true&sd=true.

17 This paragraph is taken from a book that honors the legacy of Francis and Edith Schaeffer, entitled *He Still Speaks* (2020), 19. For the book, inquire at labri.org.

18 "Lowenstein told him that he would never let an anti-evolutionist do research in his department. However, he did allow Arthur to do research and receive his PhD, perhaps hoping that the lecturers would be able to use the time to convince Arthur that evolution was true" (private e-mail November 4, 2020).

19 The Victoria Institute is now called "Life and Thought."

20 In answer to one of my questions, a few admitted they were not confident about the physical resurrection.

21 As an aside, they also overlooked Paul's argument in Rom 1:16–32.

22 In this context, think of the "Theatre of the Absurd."

23 "After an hour's talk, I asked Rollo point-blank, 'Does the SCM put the atoning blood of Christ central?' He hesitated, and then said, 'Well, we acknowledge it, but not necessarily central.' Dan Dick and I then said that this settled the matter for us in the CICCU (Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union). We could never join something that did not maintain the atoning blood of Jesus Christ as its center; and we parted company." [1] https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2013/09/05/miscellania-some-snippets-about-the-ciccu-and-the-scm-from-google-books/.

24 See James Le Fanu, *Why Us? How Science Rediscovered the Mystery of Ourselves* (New York: Harper, 2009), 261, 262.

Compatibilist Freedom in the Garden: A Defense for the Possibility of Adam's Fall

Benjamin Wesley Cottrell

Benjamin Wesley Cottrell is a MDiv student and PhD applicant at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky studying philosophy and theology. Ben lives with his wife, Cheyenne, in Louisville and is a member at Kenwood Baptist Church.

The compatibilist view of human freedom and divine sovereignty claims that a person is only free when permitted to act according to his or her strongest desire at any moment. Furthermore, it insists that everything is ordained or determined by God, and that he is not morally responsible for any evil committed. Given these requirements that the compatibilist view demands, how could Adam, who was presumably created in the image of God and possessed fully good desires, have sinned, and sinned in a manner excusing God of reprehensibility? This problem of original sin is perhaps the greatest stress point of the compatibilist view. Can a defense be made that is both logical and consistent with the Bible? In this article, I will provide a defense for the possibility of Adam's fall under a compatibilist view of freedom, arguing that Adam was able to be influenced to sin due to a lesser understanding of God's glory, was necessarily mutable, and outwardly introduced to the idea of sin by Satan's temptation which provided sufficient intramundane cause for the development of a false imagination leading to sinful action. To accomplish this, I will first give two helpful compatibilist views on the problem of the first human sin given by Francis Turretin and James Anderson. Then I will provide a defense of my own view with a

summary of the greater-glory theodicy proposed by Scott Christensen and a response to two possible objections to my view.

Francis Turretin: Primary and Secondary Causation

In his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* on his discussion of the first sin, Francis Turretin ponders how it is that a perfect creature could sin. Adam fell despite his existence as an "innocent man" in which there could be found no "error ... in his mind" or "disorder in his will." How could such a man "in whom was original righteousness" have sinned? To answer this question, Turretin first denies the view that Adam was created with "a headlong inclination to vice." Adam and Eve could not have been created as individuals with an inherent inclination to rebel. This would make God the immediate creator of all moral evil, since the possession of such a flaw would indicate that God created a flawed thing. Furthermore, as Turretin points out, "all things were very good in man before the fall, since he was made in the image of God." To say that mankind was created in the image of God and yet possessed an inherent disposition towards choosing evil violates the character of God and the nature of the law, since "it is repugnant to the law." Turretin then points to the first man's existence as both holy and just, yet mutable. Adam could choose either to stand righteous before God or choose evil. Here Turretin finds the "proximate and proper cause of sin … nowhere else than in the free will of man" as influenced by the temptation of Satan and decreed to occur from before creation by God in a way that excuses God from guilt.[1]

How does Turretin understand mankind's free will considering God's sovereignty? Turretin's understanding of God's decree(s) must be understood in order to better understand his view of free will and Adam's fall. Earlier in the *Institutes,* Turretin argues against the concept of middle knowledge and the condition of God's election on the absolute free will of man to choose. Against "the design of the Socinians and their followers on this subject ... to confirm the figment of middle knowledge (*scientia media*), to establish election from foreseen faith and to extol the strength of the human will," Turretin argues that "there are no conditional decrees" of God since "every decree of God is eternal; therefore it cannot depend upon a condition which takes place only in time." God's decrees are dependent only upon his will and good pleasure. Turretin goes further than this and argues that any decree

conditional upon a created being is "highly derogatory to God" and "cannot and ought not to be ascribed to him," since such an understanding of God's decree would indicate that God is reliant upon his own creation. Turretin distinguishes between the decree of God that everyone who will be saved will be saved "through legitimate means" against the view that the decree is a conditional event. He argues that "although faith and perseverance are related as the condition prerequisite to the decreed salvation (so that without them it ought not to be expected), yet they hold not the relation of powerful conditions to God's eternal decree of bestowing salvation." To Turretin, faith and perseverance in the Christian are evidence of God's decree of election as opposed to conditions (foreseen by God before creation) for salvation. Thus, following Turretin's arguments, man is not free in the libertarian sense (always able to choose one or the other option and unbound to either),[2] rather, he is bound to make one choice and one choice alone according to the divine decree.[3]

Given this understanding of God's decree, how can man — and especially Adam, who was created without flaw — be held responsible for sin? Turretin distinguishes between primary and secondary causes ordained to happen by the decree. God decreed from before creation that primary causes would be separate from secondary ones. As Turretin explains,

> … the same decree which predetermined also determined the mode of futurition, so that the things having necessary causes should happen necessarily and those having contingent causes, contingently. Therefore the effect may properly be called both necessary and contingent at the same time, but in different respects: the former on the part of God and relative to the decree; the latter on the part of the thing and relative to second and proximate causes which might be disposed differently.[4]

Thus, all sin, while decreed to occur, is decreed to occur through only secondary causes. Turretin maintains that "the decree which is the cause of the futurition of sin is nevertheless neither its physical cause ... nor its ethical cause ... So although sin necessarily follows the decree, it cannot be said to flow from the decree." When creatures make choices and act upon them, they are free to act on whatever desire they may possess and are not compelled to act contrary to their desire. In this way they have free will;

but they cannot be said to be innocent of their actions if they sin, since they possess awareness of good and evil and willfully choose evil. With this (very) brief analysis of Turretin's view of man's free will and God's decree, I can now return to his exploration of the first sin.[5]

Turretin views Adam's sin (and all future sins) both necessary and free: "the former with respect to the decree ... the latter with respect to his will and as to the mode."[6] The actual process of Adam's sin is, however, slightly different than every other human sin afterward, since Adam was not yet bound by the curse and was created fully good with no inclination towards evil. Consequently, he had to corrupt himself as opposed to pre-possessing any corruption. The ability to sin required an outward (and false) idea proposed by an instrument that had already succumbed to such an idea, hence the role of Satan. Turretin views the process by which Adam was capable of sinning as such: first, due to Satan's speech, Adam was "imbued with a false idea … [then] corrupted himself and … received the error suggested by Satan." Because Adam was mutable — as a mortal creature, capable of change — it should not "seem strange that man … changed and fell." God gave Adam the ability to sin and decreed from before time (unknown to Adam) that Adam would do so, but did not compel him to do so. Adam was first created with the desire to obey and please God but was not given efficacious grace (grace given through the Holy Spirit that would ensure proper desire), and so his desire was capable of being changed through the imbibing of a falsehood.[7] Furthermore, Turretin points out that such efficacious grace was not demanded of God. Combined with his (correct) view of God's absolute freedom and independence, it should be asserted that no grace could be demanded of God, otherwise it could not be considered grace and would place God in a position in which he could be considered accountable to the demands of his creatures.[8]

Turretin's position as to the cause(s) of Adam's fall and the manner of its possibility can, perhaps, be summarized in the following way. God decreed that Adam would fall through the secondary causes of Satan's temptation leading to Adam's subsequent change of desire through the imbibement of Satan's false reasoning. Because Adam was both mutable as a creature and not bestowed efficacious grace, his desire could change to choose evil. So, Adam's desire changed, and that desire was acted upon by his own ability

to choose. Through all this, God is not directly responsible for sin, although he decreed that such a sin would occur through the free choice of Adam.

James Anderson: The Authorial Model of Providence

James Anderson, in his essay "Calvinism and the First Sin," argues for what he calls the Authorial Model of Providence against the Domino Model of Providence. The Domino Model asserts that only one form of causation exists in the universe, such that God directly causes E1, which directly causes E2, E3, etc. "In the Domino Model," Anderson explains, "the lines of causation are entirely 'horizontal.' They all operate on the same ontological plane. On this view, God and the universe amount to an arrangement of univocal causal chains." Thus, God's causation is no different than his creatures' causation. This model of providence, Anderson asserts, "Calvinists ... ought to firmly repudiate." The Authorial Model of Providence, as Anderson argues, defines two different forms of causation: α-causation (divine causation) and β-causation (intramundane causation). α-Causation is a fundamentally superior form of causation which decrees all things, including β-causation, to occur, but is not morally responsible for any β-causation which occurs.[9] Anderson describes the view in this way:

> For every creature C: (1) God α-causes C to exist in the first place; (2) God α-causes C to *continue* to exist (i.e., α-causally sustains C's existence); and (3) God α-causes C to have the β-causal powers that it has. Furthermore, as I think Calvinists should also affirm: (4) God α-causes C to exercise its β-causal powers in precisely the way that it does. Given that α-causation and β-causation operate on different levels, we should avoid saying "God caused C to cause E," which suggests a univocal, horizontal causal chain.[10]

"On this way of thinking," Anderson says, "God's acts of creation and providence are analogized to the human authoring of a novel."[11] With this view of providence in mind, Anderson is capable of defending a form of compatibilism that excuses God from bearing any guilt for evil committed by his creatures. As Anderson points out, in this compatibilist model, S creatures choose evil at some time *t* when the S creature's internal state at *t* is combined with external circumstances (β-causes) at *t*. Yet this

view poses the question: if all evil action is caused by a combination of both internal and external β-causes, and β-causes cause creatures to sin (a β-cause for post-Adamic humanity would be the fallen nature), then how could Adam, whose "internal state prior to the first sin was wholly good," have sinned? There is seemingly no sufficient internal β-cause and "while the external circumstances included a diabolical tempting agent, that outside influence cannot be considered a *sufficient* explanation for Adam's sin."[12] Anderson swivels around this apparent flaw in the Authorial Model by pointing out that "Calvinists *can* affirm that there is a sufficient *ultimate* explanation for Adam's sin: God decreed it. Indeed, there is a sufficient *causal* explanation: God α-caused Adam's sinning."[13] In this way, Anderson is able to say that God's decree that Adam would sin is a form of decree which both guarantees that Adam will sin and that God is not responsible for that sin, since God's α-causation is of an entirely different form of causation than that of creaturely β-causation.

Anderson, continuing, points out that "no doubt some will view this response as a dodge," then admits that "at this point I must confess that further answers are not readily forthcoming." He then proposes what he considers to be a possible way forward: "the phenomenon of *akrasia:* weakness of will." According to Anderson, it is entirely possible that Adam possessed a weak will and acted in contradiction to what he knew to be correct. Admittedly, Anderson's explanation of this process is not particularly clear and even he admits that "in this case, this proposal is no more problematic than the standard Christian claim that Adam was created sinless but not impeccable, uncorrupted but not incorruptible."[14]

My View

In order to begin a defense for my view of how Adam could sin and why God is not morally responsible, I must first begin by summarizing a theodicy for the overall problem of evil; specifically what Scott Christensen calls the greater-glory theodicy for the problem of evil, which he accompanies with a narrative defense. I agree with Christensen's theodicy and his narrative defense. This combination of defense and theodicy will help give the second part of my view greater clarity. Then I will explain my own view in full by using Christensen's theodicy alongside Anderson's Authorial Model of

Providence and applying them to Adam while slightly adjusting the model with my own understanding of how Adam could have generated his own β-cause. To summarize, my view is that Adam was (1) able to sin because he was a mutable creature with a lesser understanding of God's glory and (2) outwardly (through secondary, or β-causes) provided enough cause to inwardly β-cause his own sin.

In *What About Evil?* Christensen presents a comprehensive greater-glory theodicy of the Bible. Before he begins his theodicy, however, he wisely points out that "Scripture contains little in the way of explicit propositions that might form a basis for constructing a theodicy." Anderson goes on to explain that this is likely because "the power of a biblical theodicy is better conveyed in the deeply affective nature of the metanarrative of Scripture ... the *monomyth.*"[15] The monomyth is the paradigm of all other stories. All good stories contain fragments — usually broken, often misguided fragments, but fragments nonetheless — of the biblical narrative. He then goes on to briefly frame the storyline of the Bible using Freytag's pyramid, placing the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection at the climax of the story.

Christensen locates the return of Christ and the arrival of the new heavens and new earth at the *denouement* of the storyline. Here it is shown that not only will the finale be as good as the perfect beginning, but it will be better. The reason for this, Christensen claims, is that only after comprehending the whole story and the horror which Christ suffered on our behalf will we be able to truly appreciate God's glory and our identity in him. As Christensen says,

> "When we, the redeemed of God, circumspectly reflect on the depths to which the conflict has dragged us fallen creatures, then the glory of our redemption begins to emerge … When we realize that the divine hero was dragged even deeper through the conflict we created, and then rose up victorious — this is where glory is supremely magnified."[16]

Christensen here appears to imply that one of the results of the glorified state given to all Christians at the return of Christ will be a deeply powerful emotional and perfectly accurate (though not all-encompassing) intellectual understanding of Christ's deeds as the great hero of history — an act which was only possible due to the presence of sin. It is true that stories have a

strong capability to move passions and change our thoughts. How much more would the ultimate story be capable of moving us? But as Christensen points out, "it is not enough for the mere *showing* of the story. There must be a fuller *telling* of its meaning to clarify its remarkable power."[17] Christensen's narrative argument flows into the greater-glory theodicy.

Christensen lays the greater-glory theodicy argument out like this:

1. God's ultimate purpose in freely creating the world is to supremely magnify the riches of his glory to all his creatures, especially human beings, who alone bear his image.
2. God's glory is supremely magnified in the atoning work of Christ, which is the sole means of accomplishing redemption for human beings.
3. Redemption is unnecessary unless human beings have fallen into sin.
4. Therefore, the fall of humanity is necessary to God's ultimate purpose in creating the world.[18]

Christensen portrays both the traditional monomyth U-shaped storyline and his own view of the J-shaped Biblical/historical storyline. Whereas in traditional monomyths, the story ends either slightly better, slightly worse, or on par with the goodness of the beginning, the J-shaped picture of the Biblical storyline ends infinitely better. This infinitely better ending is only made possible through the horrible struggle of sin and the incarnation of Christ. This is because, for God to maximize the glory attributed to himself, he necessarily foreordained the fall of humanity and death and resurrection of Christ.

But why were the death and resurrection of Christ so necessary? Christensen argues that such an act was the only act capable of perfectly displaying the mercy of God, which is made visible by both eternal redemption and eternal punishment. "Thus, the maximization of divine glory," Christensen says, "is connected to two important realities. First, maximal love to God's creatures is uniquely displayed in his mercy ... Second, this mercy is further maximalized when contrasted with those who get ... divine wrath." Since such amazing mercy is only possible when shown to completely undeserving creatures mired in sin, horrible sin must be allowed to exist. Since God is fully good and just, then he would not have created a world with more sin than is needed to properly express his

mercy in a way that would fully ensure that redeemed humanity would no longer be capable of sinning while present in good, glorified bodies. In addition, the presence of hell as just punishment for sin would act as equally important evidence for the glory of God and the magnificence of his grace. Christensen continues, "Part of this maximal love is experienced when sinners who have been pardoned by God's mercy contemplate the torments of the damned ... The Judge allowed his Son to absorb those fires ... in their stead, and this produces a far-reaching awe." Hell both reveals the punishment from which God redeemed the elect while also impressing upon them the realities of the agony that Christ endured.[19]

Christensen's theodicy contains particular importance for an explanation, in part, of my own argument for why Adam and Eve were capable of sinning. In the garden of Eden, neither Adam nor Eve had experienced the true glory of God because they had what I consider to be a *lesser understanding* of God's mercy — and thus a lesser understanding of his glory — compared to those who will be unable to sin upon the return of Christ. Unlike humanity after the fall, Adam possessed no record of God's redemptive acts. He undoubtedly knew that God was good since he himself was created good and in God's image, thus he was not pre-possessing of any flaw (as Turretin correctly argued); yet he had not experienced the full grace of God as made evident through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and thus did not possess a perfect ability to resist temptation. Given no outer source of temptation, Adam would have continued to act in accordance with his perfectly good desires; but when provided sufficient temptation through an outward source, Adam's understanding of God's character would not be (and was not) comprehensive enough to perfectly prevent a sinful rebellion.

From the beginning, Adam had been told that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die. It is not clear that Adam could have understood what death really meant, having never experienced it himself. A creature with no experience of the curse could not appreciate its horrors. He clearly passed this knowledge on to his wife, Eve, as is evidenced when, in Genesis 3:3, she recalls her own slightly altered version of God's command: "'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"[20] Genesis 3:5 is the crux of Satan's lie in the Fall narrative: Satan promises Adam and Eve that they will be like God, and verse 7 tells us that the tree was *good,* a *delight* to the eyes,

and to be *desired* by Eve. Here are three descriptions which are meant to be attributed to God. To one who had truly seen God in his full glory, who has received miraculous grace and been given a mind to comprehend the wonders of redemptive history, the tree would likely pale in comparison to God's own goodness and delightfulness. To an Adam and Eve who had been witnesses to God's marvelous splendor as made manifest through the greatest story of all, desire could only ever be to serve in blissful obedience. To do otherwise would be utterly unthinkable. Yet Adam and Eve had not taken part in the grand narrative.

Turretin calls the special, empowering grace of God "efficacious grace." He defines efficacious grace in this way: "grace (taken effectively) indicates all the gifts (*charismata*) of the Holy Spirit gratuitously given to us by God: whether ordinary ... for each one's salvation bestowed upon us in calling, conversion, and sanctification; or extraordinary or miraculous."[21] This form of grace is provided directly through the Holy Spirit's action, who only came to dwell in man permanently *after the resurrection.* Efficacious grace, as Turretin defines it, could be said to only be rightly given by God after the great sacrifice of his son and the revealing of his greater glory through the death and resurrection, which required the arrival of the fullness of time (Gal 4:4, Eph 1:10). Complete perfection, so that a person cannot sin, is not achieved until the human person sees Christ in the flesh, is given new eyes with which to see and a new heart and body with which to understand the fullness of God's glory. This, I imagine, will undoubtedly be a result of finally understanding the fullness of God's grace by reflecting on our own lives and the reality of Christ's sacrifice — an ability given through the efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, not only was Adam capable of sinning due to a lack of understanding the greater glory of God, but he was capable of sinning due to his inherent nature as a creature capable of change. Adam was mutable, not a rigid, unmoving thing. Moreover, he was created in the image of God. While there are infinite differences between the creator and the creature, to possess desire is something which is in God himself. God desires his own glory: this can also be called his will, since he wills that he shall receive glory. "God wills all created things not to make himself perfect," Turretin declares, "but to communicate himself and to manifest his goodness and glory in them."[22] A God without desire could not do anything but exist

without aim. A God without desire could not even recognize his own glory. Such a God would no longer be the God of the Bible. A human life without desire would be incapable of enjoying the life given to him. A life without desire would be incapable of bringing glory to God through loving devotion. No real praise could erupt from a desireless creature. Yet unlike God, Adam's desires could change due to his nature. God cannot change (since he has no need to); his creatures can (and should). Adam, though good, had the ability to change. However, his being mutable should not be considered a cause of his sin, but merely a good aspect of his nature. It is a blessing that God bestowed his creation. Why is this so? The ability to change is a conduit through which a finite creature can experience the infinite God, for through it he may experience in a limited amount at different times and in different ways different infinite aspects of the eternal God. Just as a stiff, dead tree would be toppled by a large gust of wind, so would a creature incapable of changing passions be destroyed by experiencing God.

Two premises have now been argued: first, that Adam had a weak understanding of God's glory due to a lack of knowledge and personal experience of his efficacious grace, and second, that Adam was a creature necessarily capable of change. Now I will discuss the process and manner in which it was possible for Adam to have sinned in a way that excuses God of moral responsibility for Adam's evil act. Here, James Anderson's Authorial model of Providence will provide a useful way of conceiving divine causation as contrasted with intramundane causation. As I will argue, Anderson's argument that Adam was his own intramundane cause can be further elaborated upon, though I do not believe *akrasia* is an adequate theory, neither do I believe that the claim that Adam was not impeccable and was corruptible in his pre-fall state is problematic.[23] However, the Authorial model provides a useful theory for the two different levels of causation. Anderson simply assumes that Satan's temptation in which Adam found himself did not provide enough intramundane cause, but he does not consider that Satan himself is enough of an intramundane cause to influence Adam's internal intramundane cause, which itself (as in all humans) becomes a self-generating cause for sin. Regardless, Adam's fall was still ultimately divinely caused.

Intramundane causation is the process by which all created things affect other created things. All intramundane (β) causes remain on the same

ontological level and can be said to directly impact one another. A moral creature in the world is responsible for their actions, and they are also impacted by other actions and situations. God, however, is not bound on the same ontological plane as his creation. Divine (α) causation is altogether above everything. The "authorial" aspect of Anderson's model is a particularly helpful analogy. Much like a human author cannot be said to be guilty of the crimes that his fictional characters commit, despite the author having dictated that it would be so and writing in every necessary detail, so God cannot be held guilty for his divine causation of evil. God's divine causation is also unbound by time and thus not the same as intramundane causation, which moves moment by moment. Intramundane causes follow the domino effect, in that one cause impacts another, which continues to impact others. In contrast, divine causation is fully present at every moment and causes every single domino to fall without being the β-cause. The α-cause did not hit the other dominoes and watch them fall. It set every domino up, decided that they would fall and at what times, and α-caused each one to fall just as the dominoes hit each other as they β-caused each other to fall. Given this model, God is never morally reprehensible for sin while also divinely causing sinful actions.

The Authorial model of Providence is useful; however, how can it explain the first sin? If human evil is a result of a combination of internal and external intramundane causes, how could a perfect creature with no sinful disposition have fallen? Adam, if he was created good in the image of God, could not have contained a disposition to create sinful intramundane causes. It seems a perfect disposition would result in only good causes. Before I continue, I will admit that any attempt to further explain the process through which the first human sin came about is mostly theory. As any wise theologian will admit, the true origin of sin is a mystery. A quick gaze at the vast sum of ever-changing scholarship on the complexities of the human mind, the mystery of death, eternal life, and the human soul, should be evidence enough that we are far from close to determining the mystery of sin. Anything other than speculation is beyond human knowledge. As Herman Bavinck points out, "we must be satisfied with the straightforward account of Scripture ... Sin was brought into being by the will of the creature ... It is unlawfully there but its existence is no accident."[24] Anthony Hoekema concurs when he writes, "The fact that we can discern ... stages in the temptation and fall of our first parents

... does not mean that we have in the Genesis narrative an explanation for the entrance of sin into the human world."[25] With this said, I will continue to (humbly) present a possible theory of the process of the first sin.

As Anderson has argued, the lies of Satan cannot be the sole cause of Adam's fall. If it were, then Adam could not have been considered morally reprehensible. Interior motives from a moral creature must also account for sin. How could Adam, who possessed only good motives, have sinned? Under the Authorial model, Adam must have become his own β-cause. Satan's deceptive words promised a theoretical scenario in which Adam and Eve would be like God. Adam, knowing God to be a beautiful and powerful being, must have used, perhaps for the first time, what all humans possess to some degree: an imagination. This imagination, introduced to a new idea (the possibility of Godhood and rebellion), unchecked by a greater understanding of God's glory, and capable of changing, must have fueled a new desire: a desire to usurp God. Bavinck explains it straightforwardly: "The mind entertains the idea of sin, the imagination beautifies and converts it into a fascinating ideal, desire reaches out to it, and the will goes ahead and does it."[26] It is possible that, before the curse of death, Adam's perfect mind could present far grander, far more illustrious imaginations than any human afterward. So, though Satan's lie was not enough of a β-cause to explain the first human sin, it was certainly enough to compel Adam's powerful, perfect imagination which, upon creating itself an imaginative concept, was enough to redirect Adam's desire for good to a desire to please himself rather than God. Most importantly, God α-caused Adam's sin. The sin was willfully β-caused by Adam while being willed to exist by God.

Two Possible Objections

There are two possible objections to my proposal.

First, the authorial model of providence seems to regress infinitely backward. The argument may work to explain the first human sin, but it cannot pertain to the first actual sin, namely Satan's. If a creature requires both external and internal circumstances in which to sin, and if Satan was created good in a perfectly good creation absent of any sinful thing, then how could he have fallen? Surely his fall required at least a sufficient

outward prompt, just like Adam's fall. The problem seems to infinitely regress unless you consider God to have directly caused Satan's fall, in which case we must say he is morally repugnant, and Satan is innocent.

Second, the divine author analogy breaks down because, unlike human authors, God's authorship creates actual living beings. God is also intimately involved and fully present within the story, so much so that he physically entered it through the incarnation. Unlike a human author, God's creation is capable of genuinely acknowledging him, morally choosing, and feeling real pain. God's creation is *real;* thus, he is both morally obligated to ensure they do not suffer and morally reprehensible for allowing them to sin; much like a pet-owner is morally responsible for allowing an unchained, violent beast to maul an infant knowing that given the option, the dog would do so.

Responses to These Two Objections

As to the first objection, all Christians must admit that the manner of Satan's fall is truly a mystery. The Bible does not present a comprehensive explanation and most references to the nature of Satan's fall are vague.[27] While the Bible considers angelic beings to be morally responsible, we are not given details regarding the exact nature or manner of their fall, though pride seems to be the sin. While sin emerged from pride in Adam as well, Bavinck wisely advises that "We must not, however, think of angelic and human sin and fall in parallel terms."[28] Angelic beings are entirely different creatures and, unlike humanity, were not created in the image of God. Whereas Adam was led astray (i.e., provided an external β-cause), Satan's sin seems to have emerged entirely from within himself. Bavinck points out that Satan's tempting words were aimed at the fleshly aspects of human embodiment; "the lust of the eyes, the craving of the flesh, and the pride of life."[29] However, like humanity, Satan is still a creature; thus, he is ontologically beneath God. This is why we can say that God is not morally responsible for Satan's sin: God α-caused Satan's fall, and God's α-causes are always good and always end in his greater glory. Furthermore, Satan's acts as a creature do not contradict the compatibilist notion of freedom, since he seems to act only according to his greatest desires, all of which are evil. Whatever the exact nature of spiritual beings, it seems that Satan does not desire reconciliation with God or repentance. Finally, Satan fits into the

greater-glory theodicy as the ultimate enemy in the grand narrative. Evil must have a first cause, and Satan willfully accepts that role. Much more can be said on this point. However, the aim of this paper was to defend the possibility of Adam's sinning, not Satan's.

As to the second objection, I have two responses. First, the objection assumes that God does not have a greater good for allowing his creation to suffer and/or commit evil. As I have already argued, I believe God does have a greater good, namely, the display of his glory. Second, the objection makes the mistake that God and his creatures exist on a similar ontological plane. In the case of the zookeeper analogy, both the zookeeper and the animal are kinds of creatures. They exist on the same ontological level and so the zookeeper is held to certain expectations and demands within his ontological reality (i.e. he is morally responsible for any acts taken against another creature within his ontological realm). While the author analogy is not perfect (no analogy is), one of its primary purposes is to express just how vastly different God is from his creatures. He does not exist on the same ontological level as that which he creates. Furthermore, unlike the zookeeper, God is his own authority. He is beholden to no one else but himself. If God were morally responsible for his creation, then he would cease to be the God of the Bible. The incarnation is such an unfathomably remarkable event in time because God was not *obligated* to save us. If he were, then Jesus's life, death, and resurrection would have been entirely expected and quite unremarkable.

Conclusion

The exact origin of sin and how it could have arisen within a morally good creature such as Adam is a mystery. However, the greater-glory theodicy provides a compelling defense for a compatibilist view of Adam's fall. Adam's capability to sin despite his existence as a good creature is not entirely inexplicable if one considers his creaturely aspects, namely, his mutability and imagination. Furthermore, the Authorial Model of Providence provides an adequate logical defense for God's divine causation of Adam's sin.

1 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* vol. 1, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 606–7.

2 I recognize that the use of "libertarian" to describe free will as opposed in Turretin's writing is anachronistic, since the word was only used after Turretin's time; however, the concept of what would later be called libertarian free will is present in Turretin's arguments. See Drew Sparks, "Dependent Freedom, Scripture, and Francis Turretin: An Argument for a Compatibilist Reading," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26, no. 3 (2022).

3 Turretin, *Institutes,* 316–17.

4 Turretin, *Institutes,* 321.

5 Turretin, *Institutes,* 321.

6 Turretin, *Institutes,* 321.

7 Turretin, *Institutes,* 242.

8 Turretin, *Institutes,* 607–8.

9 James N. Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil,* eds. David E. Alexander and Daniel M. Johnson, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 209.

10 Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," 208.

11 Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," 208.

12 Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," 203.

13 Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," 216.

14 Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," 216–18.

15 Scott Christensen, *What about Evil? A Defense of God's Sovereign Glory* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020), 253.

16 Christensen, *What about Evil?* 277.

17 Christensen, *What about Evil?* 278

18 Christensen, *What about Evil?* 282.

19 Christensen, *What about Evil?* 338.

20 John Calvin believes that Eve was not accusing God of harshness in the command but was instead expressing "her pious disposition by anxiously observing the precept of God." John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis.* vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 97.

21 Turretin, *Institutes,* 243.

22 Turretin, *Institutes,* 219.

23 As I have already argued, the possibility of change is itself a necessary and good thing for a finite creature. This in combination with a lesser understanding of God's mercy and thus his glory could have rendered an Adam who, though he knew God was good, could in theory be subject to confusion and wrong desire. Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin," 218.

24 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 352.

25 Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 130.

26 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 350.

27 "The rest of Scripture is relatively silent about the fall into sin; the principal verses (Job 31:33; Ps. 90:3; Prov. 3:18; 13:12; Eccles. 12:7; Isa. 43:27; 51:3; 65:25; Joel 2:3; Hosea 6:7; Ezek. 28:13–15; John 8:44; Rom. 5:12ff.; 8:20; 1 Cor. 15:21– 22, 42– 49; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14; Rev. 2:7; 22:2) are open to different interpretations and often contain little more than allusions." Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 341.

28 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 350.

29 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 350.

Revisiting Commentaries on Joshua

David M. Howard, Jr.

David M. Howard, Jr. is Professor of Old Testament at Bethlehem College and Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He earned his PhD in ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Previously, he taught for twenty-eight years at Bethel Seminary, where he is now Professor of Old Testament Emeritus. He is the author of seven books, served as the series editor for the *Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis*, and numerous other articles. Dr. Howard was raised by missionary parents and lived in Costa Rica and Colombia. He has taught since 1998 at a Christian university in Romania, and for more than a decade at schools in East and Southeast Asia. He is married to Jan, and they have two daughters, two sons-in-law, and seven grandchildren.

In 1998, I published a survey of a dozen of the best exegetical commentaries on the book of Joshua in the *SBJT*, in conjunction with having completed my own commentary on the book in the New American Commentary series (NAC).[1] I have now completed a comprehensive revision of that commentary for a new series, the Christian Standard Commentary (CSC),[2] and so I am delighted that Stephen Wellum, editor of *SBJT*, has agreed to let me revisit that survey again in these pages.

In the original survey, I first addressed what a commentary is, how best to use one, and how to go about building a library of commentaries on any given biblical book, and I reproduce much of that discussion here (though in expanded and reorganized fashion). I then selected the twelve best exegetical commentaries that in my judgment would help pastors, students, and well-motivated laypeople to mine the riches of the biblical text of Joshua. This time around, I do the same, keeping some from the original survey and adding others. I again select the dozen best—my own opinion, so *caveat lector!* ("let the reader beware!"). In this survey, I have limited myself to commentaries published in the last thirty years, with one significant exception.[3]

What is a Commentary?

In its most basic sense, a commentary simply makes comments on a text. In the best commentaries, these comments are not random or impressionistic statements that may or may not have a legitimate connection with the meaning of the text at hand. Rather, they focus on the given text, and on clarifying the text's meaning.

Commentaries do this using different tools. The first step is determining which text is to be clarified. Many commentators provide their own original translation and textual notes, which explain which ancient versions are being followed. Others use an established English translation as the basis for their comments. The commentaries by Butler, Dozeman, Goldingay, Nelson, Pitkänen, and Woudstra mentioned below each provide an original translation, while the others use an existing translation. The best commentators always refer to the original languages in their research, however, and all the works evaluated below do this. Expositors whose Hebrew is weak, or who do not know Hebrew at all, should not despair. All the commentaries recommended below can be used profitably even without such a knowledge; most of them refer to technical details in footnotes, endnotes, or special sections, and, when Hebrew is included in the text, it is usually transliterated into Roman characters and translated into English.

Good commentaries orient readers to the manifold settings of the text. These include historical, archaeological, literary, and theological settings, at least. Knowing about the historical context of the events written about in a text, and what light archaeological excavations might have shed on them, is important for an expositor in establishing a proper framework for interpretation. An expositor should also have confidence in the historical accuracy of the text, and attention to the historical context can help in this regard, as well. The literary and theological settings of the text concern how it fits in with the message of other biblical books and the major theological motifs of the Bible, including the NT, and the best commentaries include attention to these, as well.

Good commentaries then take readers through each passage, digging deep into the content of the chapters, paragraphs, and verses. They explain the meanings of the words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, and follow the flow of logic in the text. They take readers back and forth between

the "forest" and the "trees," giving proper attention (1) to the broad sweep of the large literary units and the theological messages at this level and (2) to the details of the individual words and phrases. Such commentaries also show how the two levels interact with each other.

In many places, texts prove difficult to understand and interpretations vary. The best commentaries discuss these issues, including at least the major alternative interpretations, and then lead readers to a reasoned conclusion.

Commentaries can be broadly divided into three types: exegetical, homiletical, and devotional. "Exegesis" can be defined as "the practice of and the set of procedures for discovering the author's intended meaning," and I have been describing exegetical commentaries in the remarks above. Homiletical (or "preaching") commentaries are much more self-consciously focused upon making relevant applications of the text to the modern, contemporary world, and they commonly refer to events, ideas, and movements in contemporary culture. As such, they often have an immediate relevance, but they also can become outdated as the culture changes. Most such commentaries are weak concerning the exposition of the text's meaning, compared to exegetical commentaries. Devotional commentaries are often similar, but their focus usually is more individualistic. Often, they are very impressionistic, commenting at random on individual verses or portions of verses, but paying little or no attention to their contexts.

I recommend that pastors use exegetical commentaries in their teaching and sermon preparation. If pastors learn well the message of the text, then many relevant applications should naturally come to mind. Pastors will naturally know their own congregations and immediate cultures much better than most commentators, and so they can easily apply the truths and principles derived from a detailed exegesis of the text to their own context. If homiletical commentaries are used, I recommend they be used where their strengths lie: in bringing in relevant illustrations and making proper application.

However, careful expositors — having worked in depth on the text themselves and consulted a few good exegetical commentaries to flesh out their exposition (see below, on "How to Use a Commentary") — will not need to rely on a homiletical commentary's attempts at exegesis, which are almost always weaker than exegetical commentaries at this point.

Furthermore, having done their own in-depth study of the text, expositors will be in a good position to evaluate a commentary's success at making proper application, that is, application that faithfully arises from the text at hand.

Oftentimes, points that many preachers and teachers try to make in applying biblical truths to the modern day will certainly be true — but in too many cases, these points are not supported by the texts appealed to. Expositors firmly rooted in the text itself, supported by a few, judiciously selected commentaries, will be well equipped to make proper and relevant application of the Scriptures to the audiences they minister to.

How to Use a Commentary

Caution: Even the best commentaries can be dangerous to expositors' spiritual health and exegetical skills! Why is this? Because, if they become a substitute for the Bible itself, then expositors have abdicated their awesome responsibility of "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). They have closed their minds to the riches of the Scriptures and have settled for a pale imitation, someone's words *about* Scripture.

The temptation all too often for expositors is to read the Scripture text through once or twice and then hurry to the commentaries for their insights into the text. The sermon or the lesson becomes a compilation of miscellaneous comments about what different commentators think.

Far better for the expositor to translate the text for himself or herself, to mull over and over again the nuances and flow of thought in the text, reading the original text and their translation 15–20 times. For those without knowledge of the original language, far better to work in a similar manner: read the text in two or three English translations 15–20 times, and then to devote most of the remaining time — before the actual crafting of the lesson or the sermon — to identifying the key sentences in each paragraph, key words and thoughts, the flow of ideas, and so forth. Being saturated with the text after multiple readings is essential for faithful, godly preaching and teaching.

After extensive interaction such as this, many questions and problems will have answered themselves, and the expositor will have had the joy of

discovery and internalizing of the truths of the text in a way that would not be possible by merely perusing various commentaries.

Then, a few commentaries can be consulted in order to shed light on remaining knotty questions, historical context, literary and theological contexts, and possible textual difficulties. Good commentaries contain a wealth of such information. However, expositors do not need a commentary to help them state the obvious, such as "This is what verse 2 says." Expositors should develop their own exegetical skills so that they can use commentaries in those places where they can truly be helpful, and keep from developing an unhealthy dependency on them. Commentaries should be *tools* of exegesis, not *crutches*.

I recommend, therefore, that pastors practice expository teaching and preaching through books of the Bible (or portions of books, if the books are extraordinarily lengthy) as their primary approach. With such an approach, pastors and congregations can be immersed in the overall message of a book in its context, along the lines suggested above, and not just isolated verses or passages.

How to Build a Good Library of Commentaries

Most seminary students and pastors can recall seeing their own professors' or pastors' libraries, beholding with a sense of awe the thousands of volumes therein, and wondering how they will ever be able to build such a library of their own. The publishing options have exploded since I began graduate studies in the mid-1970s, including many great new evangelical publishers and commentary series. If a person had unlimited financial resources — and shelf space in one's house! — one could easily accumulate several dozen multi-volume commentary sets, many of them composed of 30–40 stand-alone volumes (the NAC, for example, runs to forty-five hefty volumes!).

So what is the average student or pastor with more limited resources to do? In recent years, there has also been an explosion of online resources, including many blogs and self-published resources, and the temptation can be to rely primarily on these. I urge caution with this type of resource, however, since most of them are not vetted at all by editors or scholars who know the field well (though of course many bloggers are established scholars themselves whose online work *can* be trusted).

But many respected academic resources, including commentaries, are also available online directly through their publishers (for a purchase price) or through established Bible software resources such as Logos or Accordance. Usually individual commentaries, and commentary series, are available as modules in these platforms, frequently at more affordable prices than stand-alone hard copies would be.

I recommend that every student and pastor should have at least one multi-volume commentary set in their library, whether in Logos/Accordance or in hard copy. Some of the non-technical works I mention below are in relatively affordable series that can be good starter sets.

Beyond this, I recommend that expositors should make it a goal eventually to own several commentaries on any given book. This can easily be done by scheduling preaching or teaching series through their preferred book and purchasing 3 – 5 commentaries on that book at that time. If they do this, then expositors can build up their libraries of commentaries over time, in a systematic way, as they preach or teach through different books.

For the book of Joshua, there should be plenty to choose from in the list below.

Exegetical Commentaries on Joshua

The dozen (plus one) best and most important exegetical commentaries on the book of Joshua published in the last thirty years are evaluated below. Not all of these are recommended for purchase, but they all are important works in standard commentary series, and pastors and students will be well served by at least knowing about each one, the approaches each one takes, and its strengths and weaknesses. All can be consulted with profit.

Six of the twelve below are technical commentaries, exploring all manner of issues in depth, but they can nevertheless very useful in a variety of ways: those by Butler, Dozeman, Goldingay, Nelson, Pitkänen, and Woudstra. Six are less technical and yet will serve the needs of most pastors and teachers very well: those by Coleson, Dallaire, Firth, Hess, Lennox, and Reimer. The list includes four that I recommended in 1998 (Butler, Hess, Nelson, Woudstra) and eight published since then. All are from the last thirty years, save one (Woudstra, 1981).

My criteria for evaluation include a commentary's thoroughness, attention to the text's message as we have it, evangelical (or non-evangelical) stance, and all-round usefulness for preaching and teaching.

Top Twelve Commentaries on Joshua (plus one)

1. Butler, Trent C. *Joshua 1 – 12, Joshua 13 – 24*. Word Biblical Commentary 7A and 7B. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014, 923 pp.

This is a thoroughgoing revision, updating, and greatly expanded edition of the author's 1983 one-volume offering in the Word series. It is the most detailed commentary all-round on Joshua (along with Thomas Dozeman's), consistent with the Word series in which it is located. Butler gives a good original translation and excellent textual notes. He then proceeds with insightful comments about the text's form and structure, verse-by-verse comments, and helpful theological reflections. Butler demonstrates an encyclopedic knowledge of the literature on Joshua and delves deeply into any issue one can think of. The work's major flaw is its too-easy acceptance of higher-critical orthodoxy concerning the history of traditions and sources that supposedly went into the composition of the book. In the revision, Butler addresses critics who pointed this out in the first edition, but mostly, he doubles down on his original arguments, so it must be used with some caution. Nevertheless, it is a valuable work, with many exceptional comments about text, grammar, and theology. Good, all-round treatment.

2. Coleson, Joseph. "Joshua," pp. 1 – 183 in P. W. Comfort, *et al*., eds., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012, 183 pp.

A very readable, brief commentary in the Cornerstone series, a solidly evangelical series based on the New Living Translation (NLT). It includes the text of the NLT, followed by limited but useful technical notes and helpful commentary on each section of the book. It has no footnotes but includes a seven-page bibliography at the end. A helpful, entry-level contribution.

3. Dallaire, Hélène, "Joshua," pp. 815 – 1042 in T. Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Revised Edition*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012, 228 pp.

A strength of this work is the series in which it is located, the Expositor's Bible Commentary (EBC), edited by Tremper Longman and David Garland, a 2010s revision of the highly regarded evangelical series from the 1970 – 80s, edited by Frank Gaebelein, both based on the New International Version (NIV). Dallaire's work is consistently irenic; on controversial issues (e.g., date of the Exodus or the destruction of the Canaanites), she surveys the main options in a fair manner and then cautiously states her agreement with this or that position. Her work is fairly brief in its treatments of individual texts (e.g., only two pages on the much-discussed sun-and-moon passage of Josh 10:12 – 14). She is at her best in the Introduction, where she introduces the book well, laying out all the major issues for interpreters to be apprised of in order to best understand the book.

4. Dozeman, Thomas B. *Joshua 1 – 12, Joshua 13 – 24*. Anchor Yale Bible 6B and 6C. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, 2023, 1040 pp.

This work stands as the most comprehensive of all Joshua commentaries (along with Trent Butler's), as is the trend toward monumental tomes in the Anchor Yale Bible series (e.g., it includes 66 and 45-page bibliographies in the two volumes). Dozeman is firmly situated in the critical tradition prevalent today, especially viewing the book of Joshua through the lens of violence, i.e., that it is a mostly negative book whose "colonialist" and "genocidal" message must be rejected in the modern day.[4] Nevertheless, Dozeman's translation, textual notes, attention to central themes and literary structure for each section, and his exegetical work are second to none, and certainly worth consulting for such questions.[5]

5. Firth, David G. *Joshua*. Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary. Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2021, 425 pp.

Firth, an Australian evangelical, has written an excellent commentary in a new evangelical series whose distinguishing feature is "its orientation toward Christian proclamation," based on the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). Although it is not a "technical" commentary in the strict sense —

the pages are not cluttered with endless footnotes or in-depth discussions of minutiae — it is refreshingly comprehensive in its exegesis and attention to theological issues. Firth regularly gives attention to "bridges" between Joshua and the NT and also the modern day. It is an insightful, readable, and very helpful work.

6. Goldingay, John. *Joshua*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Historical Books. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023, 507 pp.

This is a solid work by a British evangelical in a new, in-depth evangelical series. Each section provides an "Overview" of the text at hand, Goldingay's own translation and textual notes, followed by "Interpretation" and "Theological Reflections" sections. Goldingay has consistently good exegetical insights, and often comments with his signature cheeky, easy-to-read style. He does not ignore difficult modern-day issues: for example, he interacts with modern, postcolonial readings of the text, but consistently affirms what the book itself affirms, that God is over all and sometimes works in ways that we might not prefer or understand. A very insightful work.

7. Hess, Richard S. *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary.* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996, 320 pp.

This remains one of the best commentaries on Joshua today, despite its being three decades old now. Its series, the Tyndale OT series, is reliably evangelical and readily accessible to pastors and laypeople alike, based on the NIV (though the NIV text is not included in the commentary itself). In its short scope (320 small-sized pages), Hess's work accomplishes far more than most other commentaries, including much longer ones, and it is without question the best value for the money. Hess is conservative and evangelical in his approach, and his comments consistently defend the reliability of the text and the historicity of the events described in it. Nearly every page bristles with valuable exegetical insights, and he interacts well with the very latest scholarship as of 1996. Hess does not waste a word: practically every sentence is pregnant with an awareness of many issues at hand — literary, archaeological, historical, theological. An added bonus is Hess's consistent attention to NT themes that arise out of the material at hand in Joshua, one of the few commentaries on Joshua to do so. Indispensable.

8. Lennox, Stephen J. *Joshua: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. New Beacon Bible Commentary. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2015, 303 pp.

A very accessible work in a series devoted to "the best scholarship in the Wesleyan theological tradition," though there is little distinctively "Wesleyan" in this particular volume; it takes a firmly evangelical stance throughout. Working with the NIV (not included in the text), Lennox provides a helpful introduction, followed by paragraph-by-paragraph commentary divided into three parts: "Behind the Text," "In the Text," and "From the Text," representing introductory matters, commentary proper, and modern-day trajectories, respectively. A brief, but very helpful work.

9. Nelson, Richard D. *Joshua: A Commentary.* Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997, 310 pp.

This slim volume is one of the best mainstream critical commentaries, still useful after three decades. Nelson provides his own translation, textual notes, and extensive exegetical notes. He is no evangelical; he operates within a higher-critical framework, devoting considerable attention to reconstructing the hypothetical sources behind the text, and he is very skeptical concerning the actual historicity of most of the events in the book (though he does not engage with recent, trendy issues such as postcolonialism). On the positive side, this work helpfully pays much attention to matters of the message of the text in its received form, and it makes many very useful and insightful comments.

10. Pitkänen, Pekka M. A. *Joshua*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary 6. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010, 454 pp.

This is an in-depth work in a broadly evangelical series aimed at providing "not only tools of excellence for the academy, but also tools of function for the pulpit," and it accomplishes its aims well. Pitkänen provides his own original translation, textual notes, background information, along with detailed exegetical notes. These are followed by discussions of modern-day concerns arising from the text, and as such, will serve pastors and teachers well.

11. Reimer, David. "Joshua," pp. 311 – 508 in I. M. Duguid, J. M. Hamilton, Jr., and J. Sklar, eds., *ESV Expository Commentary*: Vol. 2: Deuteronomy – Ruth. Wheaton: Crossway, 2021, 198 pp.

This is a fine contribution in a solid new evangelical series from a Reformed perspective, based on the English Standard Version (ESV). The author is conversant with current trends in Joshua studies and consistently affirms orthodox positions, but with a minimal amount of jargon or excessive footnoting. An especially helpful feature of the work is the "Response" after every section, where issues of application and theology are dealt with, including regular attention to NT trajectories.

12. Woudstra, Marten H. *The Book of Joshua*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981, 396 pp.

The NICOT series has long stood as the gold standard of in-depth, evangelical series, and Woudstra is an excellent representative of that series. He is clearly committed to the authority and integrity of the book of Joshua, and his commentary focuses on its literary and theological distinctives and message. Woudstra provides his own translation, and he is very sensitive to small nuances in the text missed by many commentators. He intentionally focuses his attention on literary, as opposed to historical and archaeological, matters, but his is one of the very best commentaries on the *text* of Joshua. It has remained the most detailed evangelical commentary for four decades — until the appearance of Pitkänen's, Goldingay's, and my own — and is still essential reading.

13. Howard, David M., Jr. *Joshua*. Christian Standard Commentary 6 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2026), 688 pp.

I make so bold as to include my own commentary as a "bonus" selection, to be published in 2026. It is a revision of my 1998 volume in the NAC series, based on the NIV. The NAC series has established itself alongside the NICOT series as the most in-depth evangelical commentary series, and the CSC continues in that tradition, using the CSB as its base text. My primary aim here (as it was in the first edition) has been to attempt an in-depth exegesis of each passage in the body of the commentary; matters of

background, archaeology, apologetics, and the like are mainly found in the Introduction, in footnotes, and in several excurses. One special new feature is the "Biblical-Theological Reflections" after every chapter, where I have attempted to integrate each chapter's messages and themes with larger themes in biblical theology, including looking at the NT more frequently than I had in the first edition; this is in keeping with the stated goals and approach of the CSC, which I applaud.

---

1 David M. Howard, Jr., "Evaluating Commentaries on Joshua," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2.3 (Fall 1998), 4–10; idem, *Joshua*, New American Commentary 5 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998).

2 David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua*, Christian Standard Commentary 6 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2026).

3 This is not by any means to say that older commentaries have no value; they do, of course. Two of the best classics by orthodox scholars are those by John Calvin (*Commentaries on the Book of Joshua* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.]), which he completed in six months, shortly before his death in 1564—a monumental achievement; and C. F. Keil (*The Book of Joshua* [Commentary on the Old Testament (by Keil and Delitzsch)] [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 reprint (1863 original)]). Keil was a conservative German scholar whose exegetical insights are still valuable today, as are Calvin's.

4 "Postcolonialist" and feminist interpretations predominate in critical biblical scholarship today. Perhaps this is best illustrated in Carolyn Sharp's recent commentary, where she acknowledges her debt to "the pantheon of feminist and postcolonial biblical scholars." Her discussion of "Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence" begins "Joshua is a genocidal and colonizing text" (see Carolyn J. Sharp, *Joshua*, Smith and Helwys Bible Commentary [Macon, GA: Smith and Helwys, 2019], 44–53; quote from p. 44); her next section is entitled "Postcolonial Resistance" (pp. 53–7). Such views also tend to lead organically to biases against the modern-day state of Israel, seen in such works as Rachel Havrelock, *The Joshua Generation: Israeli Occupation and the Bible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

5 Dozeman's is a replacement in the Anchor Bible series of the still-helpful commentary by Robert G. Boling and G. Ernest Wright, *Joshua* (Anchor Bible 6; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982).

Book Reviews

The Wisdom of Sirach. Eerdmans Critical Commentary. By Walter T. Wilson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023, xvi + 620 pp., $85.99.

Walter T. Wilson is a professor of New Testament (NT) at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. As an accomplished scholar, he has published critical editions of the *Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (University of Michigan, 2005) and the *Sentences of Sextus* (SBL, 2012), as well as a commentary on Philo's *On Virtues* (Brill, 2010) and the Eerdmans Critical Commentary (ECC) volume on the Gospel of Matthew (2022). The current volume is Wilson's commentary for Eerdmans on the Deuterocanonical book Sirach. The series is geared toward an academic and serious general readership and offers their readers critical notes and commentary on the text's literary, historical, cultural, and theological aspects. Wilson's *The Wisdom of Sirach* accomplishes these goals by offering insightful commentary on the text and guidance on how the book's sapiential thought relates to biblical and nonbiblical wisdom literature. The commentary examines Sirach from four interpretive contexts: the book's historical and social context, the biblical (Old Testament [OT] and OT Apocrypha) scope of the text, the world of Second Temple Judaism, and the development of ancient wisdom literature (1).

Wilson begins by introducing the reader to critical issues of authorship, original text, and provenance (1–10). He affirms that the text's author is a scribe and sage named Ben Sira (2). However, he is open to the possibility of pseudonymity and/or portions of the book being created or compiled by a sage other than Ben Sira (2–3). Appealing to internal evidence, Wilson argues that the original audience is likely comprised of young men training to become scribes themselves (6). Wilson briefly comments on the Hebrew and Greek versions of the text and how these versions diverge from each other (4–5). The introduction also includes an overview of the book's major themes, including the fear of the Lord, the relationship between wisdom and Torah, theodicy, and a substantial survey of the content of Sirach's practical wisdom (10–19). The introduction includes a measured discussion on how to understand Sirach's dependence (or

lack thereof) on biblical and nonbiblical wisdom traditions (20–22). Related to Wilson's expertise, the commentary has a valuable discussion on various forms of expressions used to communicate the book's content (23–28). He closes the introduction with an outline of the entire book of Sirach (28–35).

The rest of the commentary is organized around Wilson's proposed structure. Consequently, following his commentary on the "Prologue" of Sirach, *The Wisdom of Sirach* is divided into nine sections, each subdivided into numbered parts. Generally, the commentary on each passage begins by situating the text in its literary context. Wilson effectively assists readers in finding the coherence between the material that precedes and follows. He demonstrates how Sirach utilizes known forms in wisdom literature when structural features are present in the passage.

In general, *The Wisdom of Sirach* provides readers with three to five pages of commentary on each pericope. The author analyzes phrases and themes that emerge from the text in question. Wilson often relates these themes to other passages within Sirach, giving readers a greater sense of how Sirach develops ideas throughout the work. Additional comments typically involve connecting the ideas or sapiential themes of the text with biblical literature and/or other ancient texts within the ancient wisdom genre. The commentary concludes with a highly useful bibliography of primary and secondary sources, along with an author index, subject index, and Scripture index.

One of the strengths of Wilson's commentary is his mastery of ancient wisdom traditions, both biblical and non-biblical. The reader is presented with a continuous flow of intertextual connections between Sirach and the OT, particularly in the books of Proverbs and Psalms. Additionally, Wilson provides extensive comparisons between Sirach and the OT Apocrypha, as well as comparisons with writings from the Jewish Pseudepigrapha. Readers who are less familiar with the gnomic literature of the ancient Near East or of the Greco-Roman world will be exposed to a significant portion of these texts through the commentary. The section on Sirach 24:1–22 is especially strong in this regard. The author assembles an impressive array of biblical and extrabiblical allusions when commenting on Sirach's poem on Woman Wisdom (282–87).

The comparison of Ben Sira's teachings with other examples of wisdom literature can pose challenges. As Wilson explains, "It is often difficult to determine when Ben Sira is dependent on a specific literary source (i.e., citing something), as opposed to drawing more loosely on scriptural traditions as a general fund of themes and motifs" (20). The commentary strikes a healthy balance by acknowledging Ben Sira's dependence on earlier biblical traditions while also illustrating that he sometimes reworks traditional material to create new combinations of content (22). Despite the significant record of intertextual connections, Wilson allows the book of Sirach to maintain a distinctive voice.

Overall, the commentary differentiates between Sirach's reliance on biblical traditions, such as the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and sapiential texts beyond the biblical canon, including those from Egyptian and Greco-Roman contexts. Regarding the former, Wilson employs terms like "influence" and "inspiration" (169, 179, 281) along with "based on" (287). For non-Jewish sources, he references "cross-cultural pollination" to draw parallels (23). For instance, while recognizing conceptual similarities between Sirach and a Greco-Roman text (the myth of Pandora), he is reluctant to ascribe direct influence (301). Nevertheless, the author does mention that a "possible source" for Ben Sira's advice on moderation and banqueting (31:20) is Papyrus Insinger (352), and he cites the Elegies of Theognis as a potential source for 31:26 (353). Although his statements here are cautious, the author's abrupt shift regarding Sirach's dependence on extrabiblical traditions prompts questions that the commentary does not address.

For students studying Sirach to grasp the Jewish background and context of the NT, Wilson occasionally compares content from Sirach with passages from the NT. Sirach's teachings on dining etiquette and the potential embarrassment that the wealthy can cause to those who are economically disadvantaged (13:7, 8–13) provide valuable insights into the apostle Paul's confrontation with the Corinthian church in 1 Cor 11:22 (164). However, the commentary primarily assists NT students through Wilson's careful historical and social analysis of the text of Sirach (128, 143, 159, 336).

The Wisdom of Sirach diverges from the ECC's stated goal of providing an original translation. Instead, the commentary relies on the New Revised Standard Version. The author occasionally highlights semantic features of

the original text that inform interpretation. However, the commentary offers limited guidance on the grammatical and syntactical aspects of either the extant original Hebrew text or Greek versions.

Wilson has provided students and scholars of Sirach with an insightful and valuable resource. The author's expertise in ancient gnomic literature and his dedicated interest in interpreting the text of Sirach on its own terms establishes *The Wisdom of Sirach* as an essential resource to consult.

Garrett S. Craig, PhD Candidate
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

The Appearing of God Our Savior: A Theology of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. By Claire S. Smith. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025, xxi + 168 pp., $21.99 paper.

Claire Smith, author of *Pauline Communities as "Scholastic Communities": A Study of the Vocabulary of "Teaching" in 1 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Mohr Siebeck, 2012), brings her Pauline expertise to Crossway's NT Theology series. *The Appearing of God Our Savior* provides pastors, students, and interested laypersons with her distinctive teaching on the theology of the letters to Timothy and Titus (xiii). As Smith explains, "Despite the intensely practical nature of the letters, they say more about *God and his project to save a people for himself than they do about us*" (xv, emphasis original).

The introduction addresses questions of authorship, recipients, and the letters' designation as "Pastoral Epistles." Smith aligns with most evangelicals in affirming Pauline authorship of the three letters (3). She appropriately emphasizes the significance of authorship and dating in the interpreter's hermeneutical approach and conclusions regarding the letters (4). As she states, "Authorship has become the lens through which every aspect of the letters is viewed, including their theology" (2). Another important factor in interpreting the letters is the label "Pastoral Epistles." Smith notes that harmonizing the message and theology of the three letters, rather than examining them individually, can obscure the distinctive features of each letter and so organizes the book into three parts, with each part corresponding to each letter (6).

The book consists of twelve digestible chapters. Chapter 1 demonstrates that "1 Timothy is primarily about God" (9). The chapter adopts a

trinitarian structure, addressing the titles ascribed to God (10–16), then examining Christology in the letters (16–21), and concluding by briefly addressing the letter's teaching on the Holy Spirit (21–22). Chapter 2 shifts to soteriological themes in 1 Timothy, describing how Paul addresses questions of who needs salvation (25–27, 33–35), what people are saved from (28), and how people are saved (29–33). In chapter 3 "The Word of God," Smith explores the teaching of the apostolic message in 1 Timothy by describing key terminology, such as "faith," "truth," "teaching," and "gospel" (37–42). She contends that God's written word is featured in the letter "against the backdrop of the false teachers' misuse of the Old Testament" (42). Chapter 4 "The Household of God" focuses on the church. Smith argues that "God's household is formed by, ordered for, and primarily directed toward the gospel" (57). Smith pushes back against the notion that the household metaphor should be understood as Paul's capitulation to first-century cultural norms. Chapter 5 "The Promise of Godliness" closes the section on 1 Timothy by examining its teaching on ethics and eschatology (59). Smith shows that, while 1 Timothy focuses on the Christian existence in the present age, it does so in the context of Christ's return (66).

Smith shifts to Paul's second letter to Timothy in part 2. Chapter 6 "The God of Power" is structured around Paul's understanding of God (72–75), Christ (75–78), and the Spirit (78–79). Smith frames the letter's theology in the context of Paul's final words to encourage Timothy to endure while he awaits his death. Chapter 7 "The Promise of Life" follows the theme of God's salvation in 2 Timothy. According to Smith, with the threat of persecution looming over Timothy, and Paul's death on the near horizon, the emphasis is on the surety of God's salvation. In Chapter 8 "The Living Word," the apostolic word and Scripture come into view. Smith provides a fresh look at 2 Timothy 3:14–17 (93–95), along with a short survey of Paul's use of the OT in 2 Timothy (95–97). Chapter 9 "Suffering and the Gospel" looks closely at the theme of hardship and suffering as Paul comes to the close of his ministry. Smith shows how Paul wants Timothy to join in his suffering for the sake of the gospel while recognizing the future horizon of Christ's return (99).

Part 3 focuses on Paul's letter to Titus. In chapter 10 "The God of Grace," Smith once again uses a trinitarian structure to follow the themes of God (111–14), Christ (114–15), and the Holy Spirit (116). Chapter 11 "He

Saved Us" focuses on the soteriology of the letter to Titus. In reference to Titus 3:4–7, Smith states, "The word 'Gospel' does not appear in Titus ... Yet Titus contains at least one of the pithiest, clearest statements about salvation, and about the involvement of the Trinity in salvation, in the entire New Testament" (119). Chapter 12 "Our People, God's Elect" surveys the identity and transformed lives that are present in the people of God in Titus.

Smith has provided evangelicals with a concise overview of the theology of the letters to Timothy and Titus. In addition to covering key theological themes, such as God, salvation, the church, and ethics, Smith connects the motif of mission to areas of Paul's teaching. For instance, she highlights how Paul's instruction to slaves contributes to the missional motif (52), along with the household metaphor (56–57), ethics (61, 64, 66–67), the ministry of Timothy and Titus (92), and Paul's own ministry (97, 132). The missional motif is such a prominent aspect of Smith's understanding of the letters that one wonders if the idea could have been treated as a theme on its own.

A notable strength is Smith's decision to accent the theological texture of each letter. For instance, when comparing the theological emphasis of each letter, Smith says, "Whereas 1 Timothy focuses on God's *desire* to save all people, and 2 Timothy on God's *power* to save, in Titus the focus is on God's *character*, which guarantees his salvation: he is the God who never lies" (111, emphasis original). The method of treating each epistle separately enhances the portrayal of the theological nuance of the corpus.

Another strength of the book is Smith's interpretation of the letter corpus against the backdrop of the OT. While she often acknowledges the Greco-Roman cultural frame for understanding aspects of the letters, she nevertheless gives pride of place to the OT. As she notes on the description of God in Titus, the attributes of God's grace, mercy, and goodness "were commonly attributed to Greco-Roman gods and rulers, and Paul may be co-opting that cultural frame to portray God as the ideal benevolent ruler. But the OT is the richer and more immediate background" (122).

The Appearing of God Our Savior is academically informed, exegetically careful, and theologically attuned. Smith recognizes that the letters to Timothy and Titus have been characterized for their teaching on gender relations and ministerial guidance but rarely appreciated for their theology (xv). Smith helps to fill this gap for pastors, students, and

laypersons looking for a trusted resource that explores the theology of some of the most neglected letters in the Pauline corpus.

Garrett S. Craig, PhD Candidate
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Aquinas on Scripture: A Primer. By John F. Boyle. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2023, 138 pp., $26.95.

John F. Boyle is professor of Catholic studies at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota and an alumnus of both the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies and the University of Toronto. Having studied Thomas Aquinas for over thirty years, Boyle has delivered the Aquinas Lecture at the National University of Ireland and has been awarded with the Aquinas Medal from the University of Dallas. He is the author of *The Order and Division of Divine Truth: St. Thomas Aquinas as Scholastic Master of the Sacred Page* (Emmaus, 2021). *Aquinas on Scripture: A Primer* provides a more condensed, accessible introduction to the way Aquinas approached Scripture.

A given verse of the Scripture may be interpreted differently by the Church Fathers and medieval theologians, but they shared the same interpretive principles (2). For Boyle, Aquinas is distinct, not because he deviates from the tradition of the Church, but because of his clarity and precision in articulating this tradition (2). The author argues that understanding these hermeneutical principles will enable one to profit from both Aquinas and other ancient commentators, in addition to one's own reading of Scripture (2–3). Boyle dedicates the first chapter exclusively to what Aquinas presumed of his reader, detailing his understanding of words, grammatical units, the literal and "mystical" senses of Scripture, and so forth.

Chapter 2 introduces the principles at the heart of Aquinas's thinking: the "causes." These "causes" are questions one asks to illuminate the truths of Scripture, which are each addressed in subsequent chapters (40). Chapter 3 asks "why," for what purpose or end, Scripture was written (45). For Aquinas, salvation is the end of Scripture, governing his understanding of and commentary on it (47). While each book of Scripture has a particular focus, its purpose is salvific (49). Chapter 4 asks "who" the author of Scripture is. For Aquinas, Scripture was authored by God who

used humans as instruments (65). Chapter 5 deals with "what," seeking to understand the material, or subject matter of Scripture (83). The aim of this question is not at the content of a book but the way the parts of Scripture relate to the whole (84). Accordingly, Boyle articulates the way Aquinas understands the division and structure of certain books of Scripture. The final chapter, chapter six, addresses the question of "how," as in how to understand the form, style, or genre of Scripture (112). Boyle, in all these chapters, draws from Aquinas's corpus to show how he understood and applied these "causes" to Scripture.

It is apparent that Boyle's mind is saturated with the works of Thomas Aquinas. In *Aquinas on Scripture*, the author synthesizes Aquinas's hermeneutics from a corpus containing little systematic attention devoted to the subject (3). Boyle accomplishes this task in a structured and clear manner in less than 150 pages. His work equips one to catch a glimpse of Scripture through the eyes of the foremost scholastic theologian. This is an invaluable exercise.

It should be noted that *Aquinas on Scripture* assumes a Catholic audience with some degree of comprehension concerning history and saints. The book's text is littered with Latin words and phrases throughout that make no substantial contribution to one's comprehension. Additionally, in chapter 1, Boyle describes the two senses in which Scripture is understood: the "literal" and the "mystical," or "spiritual," sense (24). The "literal" sense of Scripture is what the words themselves signify while the "mystical" sense is a thing signifying another thing (25). Endorsing this type of hermeneutic can "*seem* to give license" to erroneous readings and cause modern readers to bar these readings (30, emphasis mine). Boyle seems to attribute reservations like this to cultural differences: "our own intellectual and religious culture, which is particularly fixed on getting at what an ancient author meant to say in his particular intellectual and religious culture" (30). He considers that his book "will have succeeded" if afterward the reader is "able to read Scripture itself with greater faithfulness and joy" (3). However, implementing this hermeneutic largely does the opposite: it leads to reading obscure meanings into the text. These interpretations may sound convincing, but in one's own devotional time, one only needs to convince himself. Scripture has layers of meaning, indeed, but biblical fidelity is best preserved when Christians

leave these interpretations to the inspired writers of the Bible. When one busies oneself with these interpretations, one detracts from the plain truth.

The other weaknesses are relatively minor, such as the author's claim on Aquinas's articulation. Boyle states that Aquinas exemplified "the tradition of the Church" and interpreted Scripture much like Augustine, Chrysostom, and Bernard (1–2). The significance of Aquinas, according to Boyle, is his unmatched articulation of this tradition (2). But unless one is versed in Aquinas and every other theologian of the Middle Ages, this claim is not entirely verifiable. One cannot know the degree to which Aquinas conforms to tradition, nor his unparalleled ability to articulate it, without having read broadly the medieval theologians. Apart from this weakness, it is striking that the author writes 150 pages on Aquinas, the longest chapter dealing with Aquinas's presumptions, only to mention Aristotle once. This is especially noticeable because the book is about the tradition of applying the "causes" to Scripture, that is, the four causes articulated by Aristotle. The one instance where Boyle does mention Aristotle is when he writes that "it is perhaps no surprise that St. Thomas, explicitly following Aristotle, describes wisdom as understanding things in their causes" (43). The issue is worth noting because Aristotle's influence on Aquinas is great.

Weaknesses aside, Boyle has done valuable work here. Through the corpus of Aquinas, he outlines the prominent interpretive principles of the medieval Church. Regardless of one's church affiliation, Boyle's book offers keen insight into the theological traditions of the Middle Ages.

Elijah S. McClanahan, PhD Student
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Biblical Counseling and the Psychologies. By Ernie Baker. Critical issues in Biblical Counseling. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2023, 100 pp., $17.99 paper.

The series Critical Issues in Biblical Counseling derives from some influential biblical counselors' concern that trends in "the broader biblical counseling world" ultimately will diminish confidence in Scripture's sufficiency as the source of "answers for the deepest human struggles" (24). Ernie Baker's role as the series consulting editor coalesces with his authorship of this volume,

written to demonstrate for pastors and lay counselors the construction of counseling theory as well as a "historic biblical counseling approach" (25). Drawing from decades of experience teaching, counseling, and pastoring, Baker seeks to cultivate the reader's discernment, enabling pastors and other counselors to dissect counseling models, identify them as belief systems, and conclude that Scripture's belief system is complete for counseling, without any "need to incorporate the beliefs of other systems" claiming to be biblical counseling (48).

Baker advances his aims in four movements. First, he presents a case study organized in a memorable flow of thought, summarizing a specific person's situation, thinking, interaction with others, responses, emotions, and expectations, using the acronym "storee" (29–32). Second, he outlines a historic position of biblical counseling, defined as a way of seeing the world through the lenses of biblical presuppositions applied to evaluate counseling models in seven areas: source of authority, source of the problem, solution, methodology to reach the solution, support system, counselor's role, and apologetics (47–48). Third, Baker summarizes the interpretation and intervention of two prominent counseling models, applying his sevenfold framework to critically evaluate cognitive behavioral therapy and trauma-informed care as they may relate to the case study. Fourth, Baker presents a traditional biblical counseling approach, demonstrating the interpretive and transformative power of Scripture at work in counseling.

Baker specifies presuppositions of biblical counseling as the foundation of his work in this volume. His critical engagement rests on viewing psychologies as belief systems (32). Scripture constitutes a belief system superior to that of secular psychologies, able to explain and rectify human struggles (28, 38–39). Specifically, the presuppositional theology of God as Creator, man as his image, sin and the fall, and Scripture's epistemological authority drive a biblical worldview as the "eyeglasses" through which counselors see (44–45). Counseling systems must be constructed from these presuppositions, from theoretical foundation to methodological application.

Baker's apologetic concern lies with the core identity of biblical counseling: a "radically biblical" system of care for troubled people (27). Biblical counseling aims to help people "live a God-glorifying life" in the midst of their circumstances. The "bottom-line question" is whether counselors

need to know information from secular therapies to help people reach that aim (71). Baker's answer is clear: no, the psychologies do not provide information necessary to a counseling system (79–80).

Baker cites Jay Adams to argue for the distinction between research psychology and counseling psychology, suggesting that "we can learn much from their research" (36–37). His concern lies with counseling psychology, which proposes explanatory theories and redemptive interventions. Furthermore, in his discussion of trauma-informed care, Baker raises significant points of critique against purportedly scientific brain research underlying trauma theory (69–70). He identifies the psychology he critiques as counseling psychology or questionable research psychology.

This book's greatest strength is its reproducible methods for organizing personal information in counseling and evaluating counseling systems. First, Baker's "storee" mnemonic provides relevant categories to guide the questions a counselor may ask and shape her interpretation of a person's life story. Second, the seven tenets of a counseling system constitute a framework for thorough evaluation. The "key questions" Baker provides in the conclusion further detail a replicable method for analysis (99–100). Counselors will benefit from considering these methods.

This work could be strengthened by including more primary research and citation of contrasting positions. Though a key aim is drawing clear distinctions between "historical" biblical counseling and current aberrations that concern him within biblical counseling, Baker only specifically cites two examples: Eliza Huie and Nate Brooks commending integration (though Baker does not define the term as they use it) and Esther Smith inaccurately referencing neuroscience related to trauma (37, 69).

This book mentions disagreement over trends and methodology within the modern biblical counseling movement (29, 71). More specific examples would clarify Baker's concerns. He critiques the use of "secular trauma-informed techniques" (73), but the only specific technique he mentions is that of "retraining the amygdala" (71). Baker clearly identifies tenets of trauma theory that reflect a godless worldview, most notably reducing human troubles to biological factors, apart from any relationship to God or identity as his image bearer. Biblical counselors should reject the assumption that trauma is "the central, unifying theme" of a person's story, instead seeking to orient people upward to God rather than inward to self

(76–77). Counselors may agree with these critiques and yet wonder if accepting Baker's position overall entails a categorical dismissal of any information related to the brain or body. In light of his earlier distinction between research and counseling psychology, the reader should assume not. However, the position would be stronger if this point were clarified.

In the source Baker cites, Huie and Brooks affirm most of the presuppositions Baker presents. The point of disagreement seems to lie in the understanding of what biblical counseling *is*, and from there, what kind of knowledge from which kind of psychology is relevant, whether such knowledge is merely relevant or ultimately necessary, and how such relevant or necessary knowledge might be used or not. These questions are central to the current conversations on sufficiency and common grace, and many thoughtful biblical counselors are eager for guidance. A work about biblical counseling and psychology that aims to clarify distinctions would be strengthened by specifically and thoroughly addressing these points, with citations from differing positions.

Baker's urge to evaluate all systems for epistemological authority reminds biblical counselors that our theoretical discussion and practical methodologies should be derived from and saturated with Scripture (58). In a moment marked by discussion over views of common grace from Herman Bavinck and John Calvin, neuroscience and its critiques, and the significance of embodiment, Baker reminds us all that as Christian theologians and counselors, we are people of the Book. The content of Scripture itself should dominate and direct our reflection, discussion, interpretation, and intervention, as we depend on our Father for wisdom and personal transformation.

Laura-Lee Alford, PhD Student
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Text and Paratext: Book Order, Title, and Division as Keys to Biblical Interpretation. By Gregory Goswell. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023, xv + 252 pp., $26.99 paper.

Gregory Goswell is a lecturer in Hebrew and OT and academic dean at Christ College in Sydney, Australia. Goswell has published over thirty

scholarly articles on paratextual issues, and *Text and Paratext* is a synthesis of these articles into an introductory book. His stated purpose is to "introduce readers to the biblical paratext and give training in detecting and evaluating the paratextual features" (173). For Goswell, paratext comprises "those elements that are adjoined to the text but are not part of the text itself" that shape how a reader approaches the Bible (1). Readers can often overlook paratext, yet it "has an influence on reading and may assist (or sometimes hinder) the interpretation of the text of Scripture" (1). Since paratext is a later addition to inspired Scripture intended to help facilitate reading, Goswell holds that it should be scrutinized for its usefulness (2). His analysis of book order, titles, and textual divisions is not exhaustive but instead aims to provide a reader with hermeneutical tools "to understand and apply the text of Scripture" (178).

Goswell divides his book into three parts. In part 1, he discusses the influence that book order can have on interpretation by surveying the orders of the Hebrew and Greek canons of the OT and the NT canon. He bases his analysis on the axiom that "the placement of books in close physical proximity implies that they are related in some way" (51). Then, in part 2, Goswell analyzes how the various titles used throughout church history for the biblical books impact interpretation. Goswell's analysis follows Gérard Genette's fourfold framework, where a title can identify a book, describe a book's content, recommend a book, and/or indicate a book's form or genre (80). In part 3, Goswell shifts to surveying how textual divisions can influence interpretation. For this analysis, he identifies four ways that a division could be functioning: to separate, to join, to highlight, or to downplay (126–27). He then concludes the book by distilling the key insights from each section and discussing how readers can apply these insights.

Goswell does a commendable job of showing the important yet often unnoticed impact that paratextual features can have on interpretation. His discussion of paratextual issues involves significant analysis of how early Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts of the Bible were formatted that would normally be inaccessible to the average Christian. And while discussion of ancient versions in foreign languages can run the risk of alienating some readers, Goswell helpfully keeps his discussion focused and relevant with clear explanations of potentially foreign ideas. Goswell takes

a balanced approach in that he does not claim too much importance for paratextual features, but he takes them seriously, demonstrating that they have an impact on interpretation. His construal of paratext as an addition that can either help or hinder interpretation enables him to avoid the pitfalls of either dogmatism or irrelevance. The book is filled with numerous examples of how varying book orders, titles, and textual divisions will affect a reader's understanding of a text. For example, Ruth could reasonably be placed near Judges because of the setting (Ruth 1:1), before Psalms because of its Davidic connections (Ruth 4:18–22), or even after Proverbs because Ruth was viewed as the "worthy woman" of Proverbs 31 (46–47). It would be difficult for Ruth's position in any canon to make all these connections, and so interpreters must choose an ordering that emphasizes one of them.

While Goswell's book successfully accomplishes its purpose, I see two ways that his argument could be improved. First, while Goswell helpfully interacts with three key areas of paratextual decisions, his book largely overlooks the important influence that modern punctuation can have. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:13 English translations differ on how much or whether any of the verse is a quote of Paul's opponents. How modern translations punctuate this passage reveals an interpretive difference over whether Paul is expounding his own view or correcting a false view. While book order or titles operate above the text, punctuation decisions, which can often go unnoticed by readers, directly impact how a text is read.

A second issue with Goswell's book is that he assumes the paratextual issues he discusses are later additions to the text of Scripture and overlooks the possibility that they might be original. For the most part, he is correct that much of the order, titles, and divisions are later phenomena. However, he largely discounts the possibility that any paratextual features are original except for the titles of the Psalms (140). The possibility that other elements could be original is at least worthy of more discussion, since authorially intended paratext should be treated differently than later additions. For example, Goswell too quickly rejects Martin Hengel's claim that the Gospel titles were original, and more discussion of why would be helpful (105). Similarly, Goswell too quickly assumes the Hebrew titles of the Pentateuch are a later addition. Goswell notes that it was typical for ancient Near-Eastern documents to take their title from the first couple words of the writing (82). This leaves open the possibility that Moses could

have intended the titles of his books. I was left wondering if other paratextual features could reflect authorial intent (e.g., the ordering of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets), but these examples show that Goswell's assumptions could be better justified. Perhaps it is not possible to determine whether most paratextual features are original or not, but it at least merits more discussion.

Although the book could be strengthened in these areas, I heartily commend *Text and Paratext* as a helpful introductory discussion on the role of paratextual features for biblical interpretation. Goswell rightly argues that every Bible is a study Bible due to paratextual additions, and I would add that every Bible reader is an interpreter (4). Therefore, every Christian should at least be aware of the different ways that Christians have ordered, titled, and divided the books of the Bible throughout church history. This awareness will prevent readers from being blindly locked into viewing Scripture according to how their preferred modern Bible translation formats the biblical books. Any Christian would benefit from reading *Text and Paratext*, and as an introductory work it is written for a broad audience. Despite the book's introductory nature, Goswell has filled it with insightful nuggets that will enrich anyone's reading of the Bible, as it did for me. The book could prove particularly useful for someone who typically reads the Bible a chapter at a time, since it can help this type of reader see how chapters and books connect to each other.

Matthew J. Bekken, PhD Student
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Creation and Christian Ethics: Understanding God's Designs for Humanity and the World. By Dennis P. Hollinger. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023, 304 pp., $29.99 paper.

Dennis P. Hollinger is Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's president emeritus and senior distinguished professor of Christian ethics. Among his notable publications are *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World* (2002) and *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (2009), both for Baker. In *Creation and Christian Ethics: Understanding God's Designs for Humanity and the World*, Hollinger examines the role the creation

account found in Genesis 1–2 plays in the development of ethics, arguing for creation being the foundational pillar upon which the rest of the biblical storyline falls. Without creation, the Christian "theological metanarrative" is lost (5), a problem Hollinger believes is plaguing contemporary discussion and scholarship in ethics. He places strong emphasis on God's revealed Word and the "theological precept" embedded in the Genesis account (2), setting his approach apart from natural law theorists who place more emphasis on the law of nature implanted in mankind's conscience.

In the introduction, chapters 1 and 2, Hollinger sets up the book's context for his readers: God has created out of love, and everything he has made is good. The main error of modern philosophy and ethics is disregarding Genesis creation for the new creation, and Christians must understand that the new creation is, in fact, a continuity of the old creation. Creation reflects who God is and reveals the patterns according to which believers are obliged to live, and at the final consummation, creation is not destroyed but restored to its original purposes. Before this consummation takes place, however, the good things that God has created are being misused and abused in this fallen world.

Chapter 3 examines the doctrine of *imago Dei* and the "moral obligations" entrusted to humanity (74). Here, Hollinger addresses the issue of human dignity in relation to moral issues such as racism and medical ethics like abortion and euthanasia. "Abortion," he writes, "is perhaps the most vivid example of the self-deception that accompanies the fall," and this can be seen in societies' attempt to euphemize the language surrounding the deadly act (92). Chapter 4 develops mankind's creation-ordained and ontological roles as stewards of God's creation, addressing common accusations and critiques levered against Christianity blaming it for the abuse of nature. Hollinger corrects popular misunderstandings and points out that the main culprit that has caused the mindless exploitation of natural resources is materialism (98). Christians living according to Christian ethics would understand that it is the believer's duty to exercise stewardship for God's glory and not for personal selfish gain.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine relationships and social institutions. As creatures created by the triune God, human beings are made to fellowship with one another and, most importantly, to have a relationship with God. Hollinger begins this exploration with the fundamental unit of society:

marriage and the family. His arguments defy the modern emphasis on the "expressive individual" and "self-actualization" (121–22). Among the institutions he lists is the church — a family of believers. Other institutions included are education, the media, entertainment and recreation, economics, and government. He considers each of these and acknowledges that while God has given us these institutions for the "common good of the social order" (170), this is an anti-Christian age, and much discernment is required to navigate them.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 explore work, rest, and human limitations. God, in the first seven days in Genesis, "builds a rhythm of life that will combine worship, work, and leisure" (178). The fall, however, has caused work to become painful and futile, and humanity's attitude towards work is distorted (185–87). Hollinger does not spiritualize the rest day but believes that this rhythm of work and rest is the ideal for all. At the heart of Sabbath is "a rhythm of life that incorporates worship, self-care, and care for others" (208). These concepts tie into the finitude of man, which Hollinger argues is good, since it is God who has created man "limited, dependent, temporal, and bounded" (223), distinguishing the creature from the Creator. Attempts to rebel against this distinction and limitation can be seen in humanity's attempts at creating communistic utopias, eugenics, transhumanism, and nonacceptance of mortality.

Chapter 10 answers the question of what constitutes a human being. For Hollinger, it is "very difficult to divide up the human self into tidy, separate compartments." Instead, he believes that the interchangeability between terms like "body, soul, spirit, and mind" in the Scripture "points to a unified self … that we are best to speak of embodied souls and ensouled bodies" (253). This reality is to drive the believer's evangelism and social concern. The book concludes by reiterating why creation is important for Christian ethics in a pluralistic fallen world that hates God (275).

Overall, Hollinger presents a convincing argument for creation as the foundational pillar of Christian ethics. His introduction accomplishes this excellently by pointing readers to the Prophets in the Old Testament and guiding them to see how these prophets appeal to creation as they call people to repent and to return to God and his ways (12–13). Jesus himself, in the NT, also refers to creation when answering questions concerning

moral issues (13–15). This proves that if the Scripture is sufficient for Jesus's moral arguments, it is sufficient for the controversies of today.

There are, however, two noticeable instances where Hollinger's argument falls short and contradicts the principles he is establishing. The first is in his allowance for abortion in cases for rape in the name of "just war" (92). Having just finished condemning the euphemizing of the language abortion uses, his "just war" analogy immediately weakens his argument on the inherent dignity and value of human life. The second is found in his view on the procreation mandate where he explains that this mandate "does not mean we should have as many children as possible" (111). This statement is puzzling as it implies that human beings are the ones who determine whether or not the earth is filled, not God. Hollinger believes that ethically using contraceptives *is* an act to "steward and control" nature and earth's resources (137–38). His case here is unconvincing because he also believes the procreation mandate allows for the ethical use of reproductive technology to assist couples faced with infertility, including in vitro fertilization. Thus, on one hand, Christians are encouraged to contracept or risk impacting the environment, while on the other hand, technology is allowed to aid in procreation as long as it is "ethically" practiced.

Nevertheless, despite the book's weaknesses in certain areas of practical application, *Creation and Christian Ethics* is a valuable resource for Christian ethicists who might pitch the new creation against Genesis instead of understanding them in continuity. As Hollinger has intended, this book will be a helpful resource for professors and students of the subject and for pastors and church leaders to use in personal and small group studies.

Sze Ying Lim, PhD student
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

THE
SOUTHERN BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40206
(502) 897-4200 | admissions@sbts.edu
sbts.edu/admissions