

Bible Training Institute

To proactively accelerate the spiritual growth of Grace Bible Church for the purpose of knowing God more intimately and becoming more effective servants of God in the world

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Survey of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology

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Necessary Thoughts

1. No issues presented are salvation issues.
2. We enjoy agreement in the major doctrines.
3. It is a good exercise in getting along with those who believe differently.
4. Objective presentation is challenging.
5. Both CT/DIS have many variations.
6. Both camps use history as an ally.
7. Argument from authority is a fallacy.

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Covenant Theology

Definition: A system of interpreting the Scriptures on the basis of two covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Some include a third covenant, the covenant of redemption.

Key Elements: Eternal covenant of redemption between Father/Son, Federal Headship of Adam, unity of covenant of grace, justification by faith

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Covenants of CT

Covenant of Works--According to the Westminster Confession: "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."

☐ Hosea 6:7; Rom 5:12-21; Gen 1:28-30; 2:15

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Covenants of CT

Covenant of Grace-- Westminster Confession: "Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe."

☐ Scripture: any Scripture dealing with grace

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Covenants of CT

Covenant of Redemption: The Father commissioned the Son to be the Savior, and the Son accepted the commission, agreeing to fulfill all righteousness by obeying the law of God.

- ❑ Scriptural support—numerous but none explicitly state this as a covenant

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Covenant Theology

Other Beliefs:

- ✓ Affirmation of Reformed Theology
 - High view of God
 - High view of Scripture
- ✓ New Testament Priority
 - OT primarily interpreted allegorically
- ✓ Parts of the Mosaic Law in effect today
 - Moral law = YES but Civil and Ceremonial = NO
- Christ is ruling His kingdom from David's throne currently

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Covenant Theology

Other Beliefs (cont'd)

- ✓ The Church:
 - Existed in the OT with Adam and Abraham
 - The church now replaces Israel (NOTE: CT today would more often say church = Israel and Israel = church)
 - The Church and/or Christ is/are the fulfillment of all promises to Israel.
- ✓ Doesn't lead to a particular millennial view
- ✓ Infant baptism based on Abrahamic Covenant (not all in CT agree with this)

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Dispensationalism: Foundations

- Hermeneutics (Bible study method)
 - ✓ Literal fulfillment of OT promises to Israel
 - ✓ NT does not reinterpret the OT
 - ✓ Progressive revelation and harmony of the testaments
- Unconditional, eternal covenants made with national Israel (Abrahamic, Davidic, New) just be fulfilled with national Israel
- Salvation and restoration of Israel

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Dispensationalism

- Church is distinct from Israel
 - ✓ Jesus viewed church as future (Matt 16:18)
 - ✓ Spirit baptism did not begin until Day of Pentecost
 - ✓ Christ became Head of the Church as a result of His resurrection (compare Eph 4:15; Col 1:18 with Eph 1:19-23)

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Dispensationalism

- Church is distinct from Israel (cont'd)
 - ✓ Spiritual gifts associated with the church (Eph 4:7-12; 1 Cor 12:11-13) were not given until the ascension of Christ
 - ✓ The "new man" nature of the church (cf. Eph 2:15) shows that the church is a NT organism and not something incorporated into Israel
 - ✓ Foundation of the church is Jesus Christ and the NT apostles/prophets (cf. Eph 2:20)

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Dispensationalism

- Multiple Sense of the “seed of Abraham”
 - ✓ Ethnic Jews (Rom 9-11)
 - ✓ All people spiritually related to God by faith (Rom 4:11-12; Gal 3:7)
 - ✓ Does not mean that those spiritually related only (Gentiles) take over all promises to the physical seed of Abraham (believing Jews)

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Dispensationalism

- Other Key Beliefs:
 1. Authority of Scripture
 2. Belief in dispensations (God has phases in his redemptive plan. These phases have similarities and dissimilarities)(many varieties)
 3. High emphasis on Bible Prophecy
 4. Belief in premillennialism

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Non-Essential Elements

of Dispensationalism

- The term “dispensation” as a divider—all Christian theologians acknowledge the concept of dispensation
- Number of dispensations—not essential
- Calvinism vs. Arminianism

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Critique of Covenant Theology

- “Covenant” is not the overriding theme of Scripture
- CT starts with presuppositions with which to interpret Scripture.
- Covenants of CT—not clear from Scripture
- Evaluation of Covenants of CT:
 - ✓ Based on assumptions not exegesis
 - ✓ No consistency
 - ✓ Three covenant view in particular falls apart quickly

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Critique of Covenant Theology

- New Testament Priority
 - Doesn't give justice to context of OT
 - CT interpretation of the OT is inconsistent with interpretation of the NT.
 - NT priority taken to the logical extreme is ludicrous.

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Critique of Covenant Theology

- Church
 - ✓ The Bible never represents the Church as the New Israel (or interchanging Israel/Church)
 - ✓ NT affirms the expectation of salvation and restoration of national Israel (Matt 19:28; 23:37-39; Acts 1:6; 3:19-21; Rom 11)
 - ✓ We do not agree with the CT claim that the church existed in the OT with Adam or Abraham.
 - ✓ Mosaic Law is not partially in operation today.

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Comparison of Hermeneutics

Covenant Theology	Dispensationalism
NT priority over the OT.	Starting point = authorial intent
Non-literal fulfillments of OT texts	Progressive Revelation
Typological Interpretation (OT = shadow of greater NT realities)	Historical-Grammatical interpretation applied to all Scripture
OT promises are ultimately about Jesus not national Israel	Types and their implications should be understood on a case-by-case basis
Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel means there is no reason to expect a national Israel	Jesus is linked with Israel as Israel's Corporate Head who restores the nation Israel.
