

Progressive Covenantalism: Key Points of Definition

1. *Relationship to Historic Christian Theology.*

- a. Affirmation of historic, orthodox Christianity: Nicene Creed, Chalcedonian Definition.
- b. Affirmation of Protestant theology as reflected by the 5 solas: *Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Soli Deo Gloria* and the Doctrines of Grace.
- c. Affirmation of baptistic convictions which entails a view of a regenerate, believer's church in contrast to a church constituted by believers and unbelievers. Also, in principle we affirm the 1689 London Baptist Confession and the Abstract of Principles.
- d. Affirmation that historic confessions function as secondary standards to Scripture.

2. *Overview of Progressive Covenantalism*

- a. Our triune God has one eternal decree or 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. In Reformed theology, God's plan of redemption is grounded in the "covenant of redemption" (*pactum salutis*). PC agrees with this understanding.
- b. God's eternal plan of redemption is unveiled over time through a plurality of covenants that reaches its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant (Heb. 1:1-3; 8:1-13; 12:18-24). 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).
- c. 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 history. In Christ and the new covenant, *all* that the OT prophesied, predicted, and anticipated through promises and typological patterns is 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 consummation of the new covenant at Christ's return (e.g., Matt. 6:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 1:13-14; Rev. 21:22).
- d. 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. The covenants are not isolated units; instead, they are organically related to each other as God's plan unfolds from creation to Christ. To apply rightly God's promises to us today, and to know how we ought to live as God's new covenant people, *all* of Scripture must be applied in light of its fulfillment in Christ.

3. *The Biblical Covenants*

- a. In agreement with covenant theology, we view the covenants as more than a unifying theme of Scripture. Instead, they are God's ordained means by which he has chosen to enter into relationship with his people and his creation and to make himself known to us. The covenants function as the backbone to Scripture's unfolding storyline, and they are central to grasping the Bible's metanarrative of the establishment of God's kingdom through covenants, all leading to Christ and the new covenant.
- b. In contrast to covenant theology, we do not simply 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 crucial *theological* categories which we affirm, the biblical covenants are not divided in 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 by sovereign grace God chooses to redeem his people and that he must achieve our redemption from beginning to end. However, we cannot divide each covenant merely by these two categories to the exclusion of the other. In truth, each covenant includes an unconditional and conditional aspect, culminating in Christ and the new covenant. By unconditional, we mean that God acts unilaterally by grace to redeem us, which is true of every covenant. By conditional, we mean that God demands perfect obedience from us, yet, sadly, we do not render it. This latter point is important since because as the Bible’s story unfolds each covenant progressively reveals and anticipates the coming of the perfect covenant-keeper, our Lord Jesus Christ, who obeys for us and secures our eternal redemption by his entire life, death, and resurrection.

- c. The Bible’s overall metanarrative reveals how God’s eternal plan unfolds through a plurality of covenants, first starting with Adam and culminating in Christ. 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).
- d. *Starting* with the creation covenant is crucial for grasping the Bible’s story for at least two reasons. 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, as God’s covenant creature, is created to mediate God’s rule to the world, yet Adam is not yet glorified. *All* subsequent covenant heads function as subsets of Adam, who, in God’s plan, point forward to Christ, yet none of these heads can redeem us. Although 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). Second, the creation covenant is foundational for establishing various typological patterns that all reach their fulfillment 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 relation to his people [Gen. 2:24-25; Eph. 5:32]). *All* of these patterns eschatologically terminate first in Christ and then due to our union in Christ to God’s new covenant people.
- e. Unfortunately, Adam disobeyed resulting in sin and death (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23; 6:23). However, God has not left us to ourselves. 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).
- f. The justification of God’s people has always been by grace through faith in Christ alone (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4). There is only one way of salvation and one Mediator, namely our

Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Yet, the knowledge and identity of Christ Jesus, our Redeemer and covenant head, has been progressively revealed over time through the biblical covenants. God's initial promise of a coming Redeemer is first given in Genesis 3:15. Those who believe God's promise of a coming Savior are justified by grace through faith. As each covenant is established, in a variety of ways, God's promise of who will redeem us and how he will do so is revealed, predicted, and foreshadowed in a more detailed way, which will ultimately culminate in the establishment of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). Through the covenants, then, we discover that the coming Redeemer will be Abraham's true Seed (Gal. 3:16), a greater than Moses (Deut. 18:15-18; Heb. 3:1-6), the true, obedient Israel (Matt. 2:15; John 15:1-8), our great prophet, priest, and David's greater Son (Matt. 1:1; Acts 2:32-36; Rom. 1:3-4; Heb. 1 [cf. Ps 2, 45, 110]). He will be the Suffering Servant (Isa. 53), who as our King-Priest (Ps. 110), will offer himself as our penal substitute. OT saints believed God's promises centered in the coming of Christ. They related to their Creator and covenant Lord under their respective covenants, yet all the covenants pointed forward to the coming of Christ and the new covenant.

- g. 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).

4. *The Relationship between Israel and the Church.*

- a. 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).
- b. 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.

5. *The Application of the OT to Christians Today.*

- a. 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).
- b. We do not embrace the hermeneutical options of either all of the OT applies to us unless explicitly abrogated, or none of the OT applies to us unless explicitly repeated. 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.