

I. Introduction - Purpose

- How does your view of God's Covenant with man affect your day-to-day life?
- How does your view of the Covenant affect your worldview and your view of the institutions of family, church, and state?
- How have different views of the Covenant affected some of the different movements within Reformed Theology?

II. What is Covenant Theology?

A. Definitions:

1. **What do we mean by "Covenant?"**
2. **What do we mean by "Covenant Theology?"**

B. Historical comparisons: *suzerain-vassal* treaty

1. **Some key concepts of a suzerain-vassal treaty**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

2. **Elements of a suzerain-vassal treaty**

1. **Preamble**
2. **Historical Prologue**
3. **Stipulations**
4. **Witnesses**
5. **Consequences**
6. **Perpetuation**

C. What Covenants?

1. Covenant of Works

Who is it between?

Requirement:

Blessing:

Curse:

2. Covenant of Grace

Who is it between?

Requirement:

Blessing:

Curse:

a) Administrations of the Covenant of Grace

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D. Distinctions of Covenant Theology

What sets Covenant Theology apart from other “flavors” of Christianity?

III. Non-Reformed views

A. Atheist

What is an Atheist's basis for morality?

How does he set the boundaries of family vs. state vs. church?

B. Papal administration

What is the Roman Catholic view of covenants in Scripture?

How can this view lead to the church having authority over other areas of life?

How does a Roman Catholic set the boundaries of family vs. state vs. church?

C. Dispensational

What is the dispensational view of the covenants in Scripture?

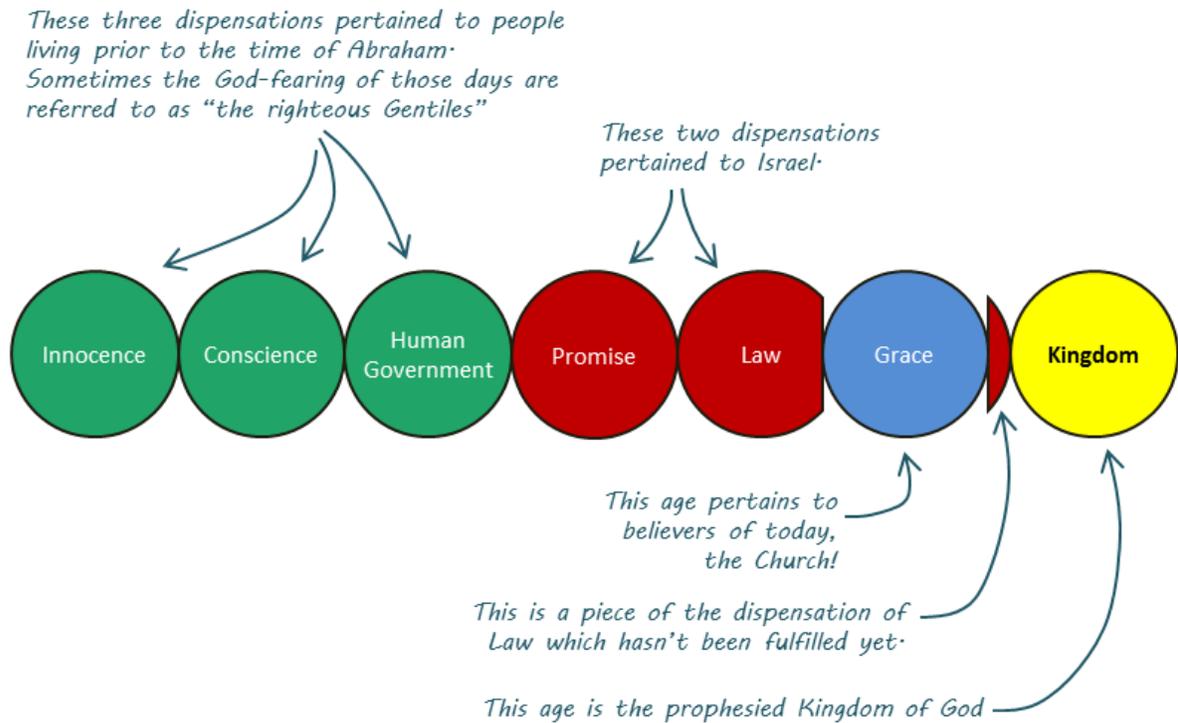


Figure 1 (DispensationalFriends.org)

What is the dispensational view of the Mosaic covenant, compared with the New Testament covenant?

How does a Dispensationalist set the boundaries of family vs. state vs. church?

IV. Reformed View

“I will be your God, and you will be my people.”

One Covenant of Grace with various administrations.

A. Natural Law

What is it?

1. How does scripture speak of natural law?

Romans 1:18-23, Romans 2:14-15, Genesis 1:26-27

What does it mean to be “In the image of God?”

What are some communicable attributes of God and how do we reflect them?

2. The applicability of natural law

Who does natural law apply to?

How was the situation of Abraham (and the Patriarchs) similar to that of believers today?

3. The usefulness of natural law

How is natural law useful to us? (both believers and non-believers)

How do we see natural law shown in creation? What are some examples?

4. The limits of natural law

Is natural law sufficient? Why?

Does the corruption of natural law mean it's now of no use? Why?

What examples do you see in cultures today where we've drifted further from correct recognition of the natural law? How/why do you think this has happened?

For further reading:

A Biblical Case for Natural Law (David VanDrunen, c. 2012)

B. Law in Special Revelation

1. Introduction: Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 19

CHAPTER 19

Of the Law of God

1. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, 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.
2. This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.
3. Beside this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the new testament.
4. To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.
5. The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.
6. Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and, not under grace.
7. Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.

Two tests to determine which laws are still applicable today:

- 1.
- 2.

2. Moral

James 1:22-25; Romans 3:21-31; Romans 13:8-10

Definition:

Applicability today:

3. Ceremonial

Hebrews 9:1-10:18

Definition:

Applicability today:

4. Judicial (Theocracy)

Deut. 25:1-6; 1 Cor. 9:3-12

Definition:

Applicability today:

5. Application Exercise

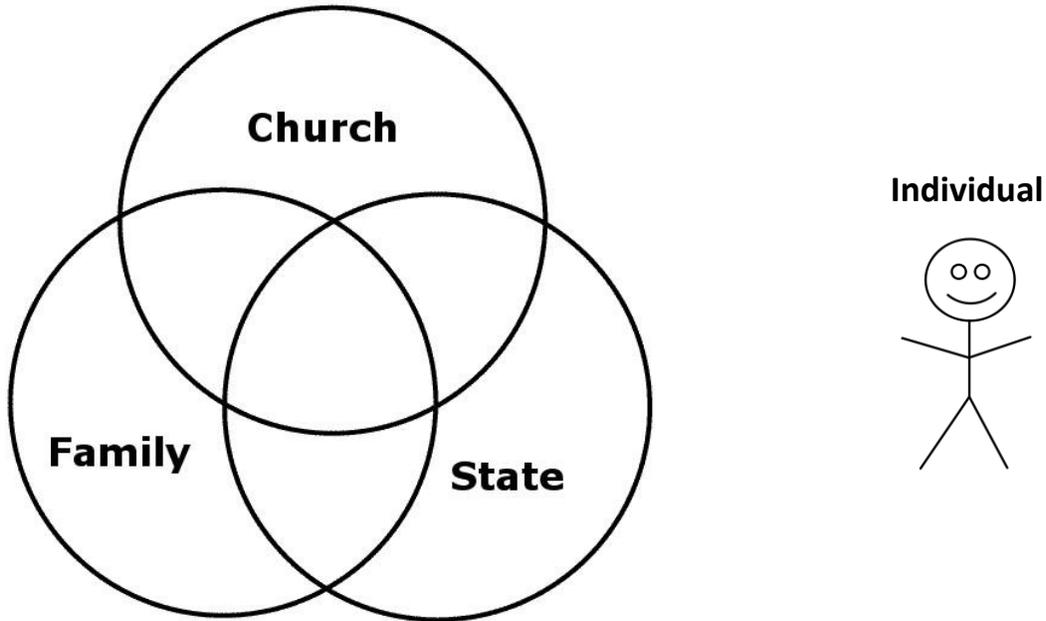
In which categories (Moral, Ceremonial, or Judicial/Civil) should we place each of the laws/commands given in these passages?

1. Gen. 17:9-14
2. Ex. 29:15-26
3. Lev. 23:22
4. Lev. 23:23-25
5. Num. 35:6-28
6. Deut. 22:11-12
7. Ex. 22:2-3
8. Ex. 20
9. Others?

C. God's law in society today

God's revelation through the Covenant shows us how his laws should be applied in the different areas of life.

Church, state, and family as three different institutions created by God, each with their own areas of responsibility.



We'll examine each institution in more detail and ask these questions:

- *How does our view of the covenant affect our view (or our very definition) of the institution?*
- *How does our view of God's Covenant influence how we determine which of God's laws and commands apply to each institution?*

1. Church

1 Cor. 5; Matt. 18:15-17

What kind of authority does the church have?

OPC Book of Church Order Chapter III: The Nature and Exercise of Church Power:

3. All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God. "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship" (Confession of Faith, Chapter XX, Section 2).

4. All church power is wholly moral or spiritual. No church officers or judicatories possess any civil jurisdiction; they may not inflict any civil penalties nor may they seek the aid of the civil power in the exercise of their jurisdiction further than may be necessary for civil protection and security.

5. Nevertheless, church government is a valid and authentic jurisdiction to which Christians are commanded to submit themselves. Therefore the decisions of church officers when properly rendered and if in accord with the Word of God "are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his Word" (Confession of Faith, Chapter XXXI, Section 2).

How does our view of the covenant help define our view of the institution of the church? (WCF 25:2-3)

2. The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

3. Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto.

How does our view of the covenant give us a different view of church authority than either the Roman Catholic or the individualistic dispensationalist?

What kinds of Scriptural laws or commands would we generally see as being part of the sphere of the institution of the church?

2. Family

Eph. 5:21-6:4

How does our view of the covenant help define our view of the institution of the family?

What are some other views of the family, and how would our view differ?

What kinds of Scriptural laws or commands would we generally see as being part of the sphere of the institution of the family?

3. State

Romans 13:1-6

How does our view of the covenant help define our view of the institution of the state?

How is this different from some other views of the state?

What kinds of Scriptural laws or commands would we generally see as being part of the sphere of the institution of the state?

4. Individual

Matt. 5:27-28

How does our view of the covenant help define our view of the individual?

How does our view of the covenant define our view of the individual in relation to:

- The Church?
- The Family?
- The State?

What kinds of Scriptural laws or commands would we generally see as being applicable primarily just to the individual?

5. Boundaries between the institutions

How does our view of the covenant help define the boundaries between the different institutions?

a) Church and Family

In defining the boundary between these two, we can look at:

- Who the command is directed to (parents, children, church, believers)
- What the command concerns (familial relationships, salvation, corporate covenantal commands)

Discussion of commands, responsibilities, and boundaries in different areas:

1. Criteria for determining deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13)
2. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25)
3. Behavior of children in worship
4. Theological education
5. General education (Eph 6:4, Duet 11:19)
6. Family devotions

b) Church and State

In defining the boundary between these two, we can look at:

- Who the command is directed to (rulers, humankind in general, believers specifically)
- What the command concerns (civil relationships, rules regarding commerce, the way of salvation)

Discussion of commands, responsibilities, and boundaries in different areas:

1. Execute murderers (Gen. 9:6)
2. Who to ordain as a minister
3. Building a church building
4. Education

c) Family and State

In defining the boundary between these two, we can look at:

- Who the command is directed to (rulers, parents, children)
- What the command concerns (familial relationships, moral laws that can and should be externally enforced, relationships with other people)

Discussion of commands, responsibilities, and boundaries in different areas:

1. Installing a pool at your home
2. Marriage
3. Behavior of children (see Deut. 21:18-21)
4. Education

6. Application Exercise

Categorize these Biblical commands in the different circles/institutions (church, family, state, individual):

1. Rom. 13:6
2. Num. 35:16-25
3. Lev. 23:22
4. 1 Cor. 11:17-34
5. 1 Timothy 5:3-4, 16
6. 1 Timothy 2
7. Ephesians 4:29-32
8. Ex. 20
 1. *No other gods*
 2. *No images*
 3. *Don't use the Lord's name in vain*
 4. *Remember the Sabbath Day*
 5. *Honor your father and mother*
 6. *Don't murder*
 7. *Don't commit adultery*
 8. *Don't steal*
 9. *Don't bear false witness*
 10. *Don't covet*
9. Others?

V. Theonomy

A. What is Theonomy?

B. History and Key Players

1. Rousas John Rushdoony (1916 – 2001)
2. Gary North (1942 -)
3. Greg Bahnsen (1948 – 1995)

C. Theonomic view of the covenant

Theonomy views the covenant in much the same way as the traditional reformed position, but there are some key differences in how it views Israel and the Mosaic Law.

Israel

Draws a clear distinction between Israel the *civil* nation and Israel the *religious* people of God. (*By This Standard*, p. 333)

Israel's Law (the Judicial Law)

Divides the law into only 2 primary categories: Ceremonial and Moral, with Moral being divided into 2 subcategories: God's everlasting moral standards and specific applications of it (also called judicial). Thus Theonomy views what we call civil or judicial law as a subcategory of the Moral law, rather than a specific application of it to a particular nation (Israel) in a specific circumstance (being God's chosen people in a theocracy).

D. Theonomic view of the judicial law and its application to today

Theonomy has a different view of how the Mosaic Law should be applied to society today:

"...We must recognize the continuing obligation of civil magistrates to obey and enforce the relevant laws of the Old Testament, including the penal sanctions specified by the just Judge of all the earth." (BTS, p.4)

"What is proposed here is that all civil governments, whatever their structure, should be encouraged to submit to and apply the standing laws of Old Testament Israel." (BTS p. 323)

This differs from the traditional reformed position that Israel's situation was unique (as a Theocracy) and its civil laws are God's moral law *applied concretely* to its unique situation.

Eschatological view: Postmillennial

For further reading:

- *By This Standard* Greg Bahnsen c. 1985
- *Theonomy: What have we learned?* (Ordained Servant 1995.2, John Haverland)