

An extra-Biblical Invention. While there are of course elements of truth within the covenant scheme, as a system, the major premises of it are largely derived from theological speculation rather than sound Biblical exegesis. . . .

A narrowing of the purposes of God. In their presentation of the covenants of redemption and grace, the purpose of God with man is limited largely to a soteriological one. Thus in every age the primary purpose of God is that of bringing individual persons to saving faith. An examination of Scripture disproves this contention. God has several purposes. He has a purpose for the Gentile nations, a purpose for Israel as a nation, a purpose for the church . . . Personal salvation is only one of several purposes of God.

All Biblical covenants are actually reduced to one. The distinctive character of the various Biblical covenants is not recognized by covenant theologians. Without regard to their plain meaning or proper interpretation they are all lumped together as various expressions of one eternal covenant, the covenant of grace. . . .

The dispensational distinctions of Scripture are obliterated. In covenant theology the evident differences of God's dealings in various dispensations are denied. The dispensations (whatever number are recognized) are only various modes of administering the one covenant of grace. Even the dispensation of law is in reality a phase of God's gracious dealings. No more serious charge could be brought against the covenant system than to say that it confounds the principles of law and grace, which error is condemned strongly in the New Testament. . . .

Covenant theology has an objectionable adjunct -- the federal headship of Adam. At least two arguments can be brought against the federal theory. First of all, it calls into question the justice of God. If Adam was the representative of mankind, and if mankind did not actually sin when he sinned, then what right has God to account as sinners men who did not actually sin? God can only regard men as responsible for Adam's sin if they actually had some part in it.

A more serious objection can be raised. Federal theologians who maintain that God, in view of Adam's sin, immediately creates each soul in corruption, are wide open to the charge of making God the author of sin. . . . is it not better and more Scriptural (in light of Romans five) to state that corruption precedes the imputation of sin and is the basis of it?

A false and harmful view of the nature of the church. . . . Theologically, . . . they do not see the church as a distinct purpose of God for this age. The church is found in every age. To undergird this contention extensive spiritualization of the Old Testament Scripture is required in defiance of many of the common laws of Biblical interpretation.

In short, the covenant system is unsatisfactory in many ways. its exegesis is faulty. its premises are artificial. its conclusions are seriously at odds with plain New Testament teaching. As such it cannot lay claim to being a Biblical system of thought.

-- Ernest Pickering, "The Nature of Covenant Theology", reprinted from the *Central Conservative Baptist Quarterly*, Winter, 1960.