

Law 5: The Law and Reformed theology

Apart from Reformed Baptists, Reformed theology is Presbyterian Covenant Theology, which avers that the unifying principle of the scriptures (what unites the OT & NT) is the Covenant of Grace. This leads to the conclusion that all covenants are merely the outworking of the single Covenant of Grace; Mosaic Law is but an administration of this and was not substantially changed by the introduction of the New Covenant, apart from a fuller influence of the Holy Spirit. The system was gradually worked out, chiefly by Dutch theologians, in the 150 years after Calvin's death who touched on the germ of the idea but did not teach all the principles of it; though the covenant was an important doctrine to him. Henry Bullinger did more to lay the foundations of it than Calvin did. Many Reformed theologians have not agreed with this system, and wrote against it, disagreed with parts of it, or stated that the theory needed to be reworked (e.g. John Murray, H Hoeksema, EF Kevan).

Do you agree with this system?

No, not as far as law is concerned, though there are good features in it. Covenant is an important Biblical doctrine that must be set within the confines of its use by scripture and not forced into an arbitrary construct of men. There is no Biblical phrase, 'Covenant of Grace', nor 'Covenant of Redemption' (the foundation of the Covenant of Grace in eternity). Neither is there any Biblical basis for another important aspect of this scheme, the Covenant of Works.

The manifest unifying principle of scripture is the eternal purpose of God, the counsel of God, or the decree of God, which is summarised in the message of the Gospel. The good news of salvation is worked out first as promise in the Old Covenant, then as fulfilment in the New. The cross is a clear dividing line between these. After the cross, everything is said to be new (2 Cor 5:17); comprising a new creation, new covenant, new commandment, new man, etc. and the law is fulfilled, completed and ended in that Old Covenant, Mosaic form by Christ (Rm 10:4).

The chief principle of the Old Covenant is law and the Mosaic Law summarises the Old Covenant. Law is said to be in opposition to the New Covenant brought in by Christ's work (Jn 1:17). The active principle of the New Covenant is not Mosaic Law but the work of the Spirit of Christ (Rm 8:2). Sanctification is no longer by faithful observation of law but obedience and submission to the internal working of the Spirit. This work is based upon the standard of Christ as a man, sometimes called, 'The Law of Christ' (Gal 6:2); Christ himself has replaced the objective law. Thus we are not being changed by following objective regulations but changed by degrees to be like Christ (2 Cor 3:18) For this reason we are dead to law but alive to Christ (Rm 7:4, 6).

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