

Fundamentals of Our Faith from the Beginning

Frameworks and the Future

Biblical Theologies: Progressive Covenantalism

1. What is Progressive Covenantalism?

- a. Like the others, it is a theological framework for Bible interpretation.
- b. Progressive Covenantalism is a “middle way” between Dispensationalism and CT.
- c. “Progressive covenantalism argues that the Bible presents a plurality of covenants that progressively reveal God’s one redemptive plan for his one people which reaches its fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant.” The covenants are the backbone of the biblical narrative but are not “subsumed under the bi-covenantal structure of what is commonly identified as ‘the covenant of works’ and ‘the covenant of grace.’”¹
- d. PC must be distinguished from New Covenant Theology which tends to see the Law fully abrogated in the New Covenant and rejects the “moral law” as a separate category.

2. What is the history of Progressive Covenantalism?

- a. PC, as an alternative framework, was introduced by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum in their book *Kingdom Through Covenant* (2012).
- b. Other contemporary scholars include Thomas Schreiner, James DeRouchie, and others at SBTS.

3. What are the key beliefs of Progressive Covenantalism?

- a. The covenants are the primary means by which revelation progresses. Each biblical covenant must be interpreted in its own right and should not be simply subsumed under the covenant of works or covenant of grace.
- b. Each OT covenant pointed toward and was fulfilled by Christ and is now applied in Christ in the New Covenant which is the fulfillment of all other covenants and, therefore, supersedes them and is the interpretive grid for them.
- c. “The entire storyline of Scripture is centered on two foundational individuals – Adam and Christ.”² Adam is the “son of God” charged with stewardship of the world but falls and brings corruption – Israel is the new “son of God” charged with stewardship of the promised land but fails, leading to exile and destruction – Christ is the perfect Son of God (the last Adam) who saves the world and will restore all things (the perfected land) at the consummation.
- d. The New Covenant is not only better; it is *new* and forms the “new man” (Eph. 2:15) which is the fulfillment of the one people of God, the “chosen race,” the “holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9, cf. Isaiah 54:8-17; 56:1-8, etc.).

4. What are some key arguments for Progressive Covenantalism?

- a. The covenants are not simply a helpful theme of Scripture but are the repeated *means* of revelation, and each contributes substantially and in its own right to the full understanding of Christ’s work of redemption and His establishment of His kingdom.
- b. Christ is explicitly tied to each covenant: He is the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), He is the Savior Noah (1 Peter 3:18-22), He is the blessing of Abraham (Gal. 3:14), He is the Prophet Moses (Acts 3:22; Heb. 3:5-6), He is the Son of David the King (Matt. 21:9; Mark 12:35).

¹ Stephen Wellum at www.Christoverall.com.

² Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, p. 616.

- c. PC appropriately sees the continuity of the OT covenants with the NC but also accounts for the discontinuity—the land promises are fulfilled in Christ (in the New Heavens and New Earth), and the genealogical principle gives way to the new birth (“you must be born again”).

5. What are some key arguments against Progressive Covenantalism?

- a. PC is new and should be viewed with great skepticism because it has not been articulated in the historic writings of the Church.
- b. PC misses the national and ethnic aspects of humanity as a key feature of the biblical narrative from its appearance in Genesis 10–11 to the final eschatological scene in Revelation 22.
- c. By failing to see the covenant of works as an overarching covenant for mankind, PC undermines the need for His active obedience and does harm to the Law/Gospel scheme.
- d. PC seems to discard the covenant of grace altogether rather than seeing it as something promised in the Old but enacted in the New.
- e. While PC accepts the covenant of redemption, it does not play a role in this interpretive scheme which neglects something integral to all other covenants and especially to the New Covenant.

6. Some final conclusions:

- a. The covenants are integral, progressive, and do relate to kingdom, so it makes sense to understand God’s redemptive/kingdom plan through the covenants. It is right and good for us to think covenantally, especially in our relationships with God and with each other.
- b. The covenant of redemption is foundational to God’s plan of redemption and helps us to understand the other covenants.
- c. The covenant of redemption was made in respect to the elect, meaning there has only been one people of God, one people given to Christ by the Father, one people for Him to redeem. Because Christ is the last Adam, He must be seen as the federal head of *all* the elect and as the one who, on behalf of His people, obeyed where Adam did not.
- d. The covenant of grace is rightly used to describe the redemptive promise of God in passages like Gen. 3:15 and is overarching but is not formally “covenanted” until the blood of Christ.
- e. Because the NC is made with all who are in Christ, all of Christ’s entailments are given to those in Christ, including the fulfillment of the land promise (i.e. the New Heavens and New Earth).
- f. The NC sacraments are not simply the OC sacraments in a different form; they are the fulfillment (antitype) and signify NC membership.
 - i. Circumcision *primarily* signified belonging to Abraham and participation in the promise of Canaan, but *secondarily* signified Christ and His being cut off for His people and the promise of the New Heavens and New Earth.
 - ii. The Passover *primarily* signified deliverance from slavery to Egypt, but *secondarily* signified Christ’s deliverance from the domain of darkness/the curse of sin.
- g. Because the sacraments are signs of NC belonging, they are given to those born into the NC.
- h. The NC community is not a “mixed” community; the covenant is between Christ and His elect people who are identified by repentance and faith and who will not break the covenant.
- i. People do falsely profess membership and come under real judgement for doing so, and there are real warnings in Scripture addressing false profession; but this does not mean that the community is “mixed” or that there are “covenant breakers.”