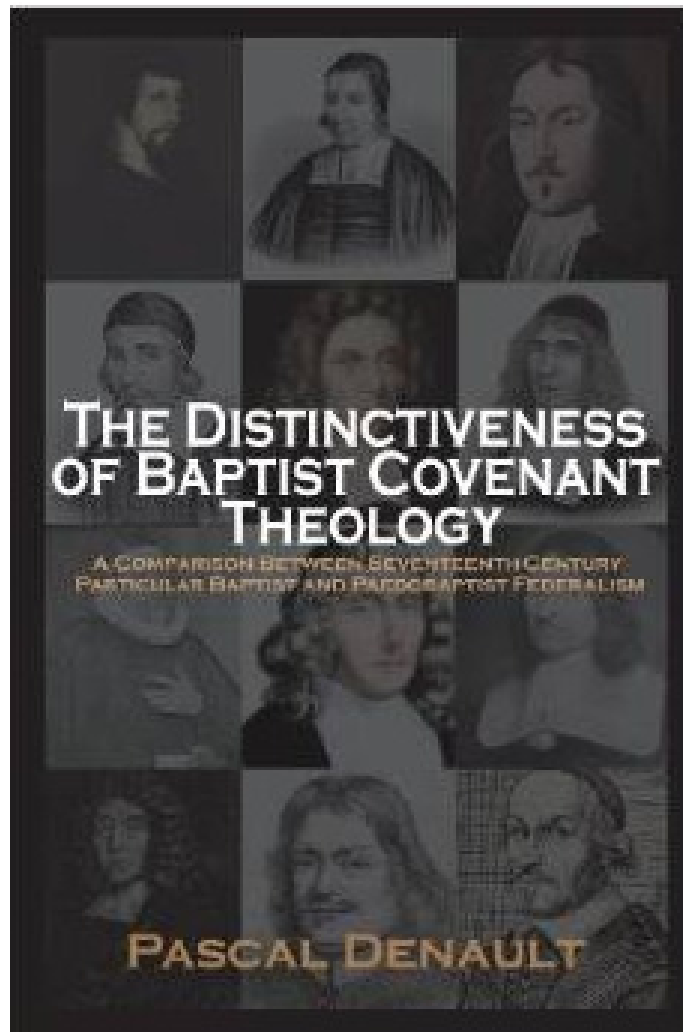


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# AN ANALYSIS OF 1689 BAPTIST FEDERALISM

As Presented and Cited by Pascal Denault



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In recent times, there has been somewhat of a rediscovery of the Covenant Theology espoused by 17<sup>th</sup> century Particular Baptists. Some of the writings from that period have been made available through the ministry of Jim Renihan and distributed via the 1689 federalism website: <http://www.1689federalism.com/>. Along with a 25-minute introductory video, the site contains additional teaching videos<sup>1</sup> and accompanying charts, which compare 1689 federalism to the Presbyterian federalism of the Westminster Confession, Dispensationalism, New Covenant Theology, and what they refer to as “20<sup>th</sup> century Reformed Baptists” (i.e., Reformed Baptists who agree with the Westminster Confession on Covenant Theology but disagree on some aspects of ecclesiology, including baptism).

One of the most heavily promoted resources by advocates of 1689 federalism is Pascal Denault’s book *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism*.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the book, Denault draws from 17<sup>th</sup> century Particular Baptists, such as John Spilsbury, Henry Lawrence, Thomas Patient, John Bunyan, Edward Hutchinson, Benjamin Keach, and Nehemiah Coxe.<sup>3</sup> One of Denault’s objectives is to demonstrate that Covenant Theology, rather than baptism, was the primary point of divergence between Particular Baptists and Presbyterians in the seventeenth century. Throughout the book, he compares and contrasts these two views of Covenant Theology. Key differences emphasized in his work may be summarized as follows:

Category	Presbyterian View	Particular Baptist View
The Abrahamic Covenant	A single covenant with both physical and spiritual elements made to Abraham and his seed	Distinction between the promise made to the spiritual seed and the covenant made with the physical seed
The Old Covenant	The administration of the Covenant of Grace prior to Christ	A purely conditional covenant of works established with physical Jews
Old Covenant Israel	The Church under the Old Covenant administration of the Covenant of Grace	A carnal people in physical covenant with God, chosen to bring forth the Messiah and to typify the NT church
The New Covenant	The administration of the Covenant of Grace under Christ	The Covenant of Grace – purely unconditional and different in substance from the Old Covenant
The New Covenant Church	Visible and invisible Church	Invisible Church only

<sup>1</sup> The teaching videos feature James Renihan, his son Samuel Renihan, and Richard Barcellos.

<sup>2</sup> Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Nehemiah Coxe is believed to be the primary author of the 1689 Second London Confession of Faith.

## The Abrahamic Covenant

There is long-standing dialogue/debate in Presbyterian circles regarding whether the Mosaic Covenant was, in any sense, a covenant of works. Regardless of one's position on this matter, those who hold to the Westminster Confession agree that there is continuity between the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant. According to Galatians 3, the promises were made to Abraham and Christ (v. 16)<sup>4</sup> and by extension, the church (v. 29).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the promise of God given to Abraham was never nullified by the Law (v. 17).<sup>6</sup>

Seventeenth-century Particular Baptists understood that recognizing continuity between Abraham and the church could be problematic for them theologically, especially since God commanded Abraham to place the sign of the covenant on infants. How then did the Particular Baptists deal with this problem? Their solution was to argue for a *duality* in the Abrahamic Covenant by asserting that Abraham had two distinct sets of descendants under two covenants with two purposes and two destinies. Abraham's *carnal* seed received the Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17) whereas his *spiritual* seed received the promise (Genesis 12). His carnal seed existed solely to preserve the messianic line and typify the NT church whereas his spiritual seed were set apart as a spiritual people to God. His carnal seed was given a physical inheritance (i.e., land, seed, and blessing) on earth whereas his spiritual seed was given a spiritual inheritance in heaven (i.e., eternal life, etc.).<sup>7</sup>

How is it that these seventeenth-century Particular Baptists sought to justify two distinct posterities of Abraham? Denault points out two ways (p. 121). First, they separated the Abrahamic promise (allegedly made to the spiritual seed in Genesis 12) from the Abrahamic Covenant (allegedly made with the carnal seed in Genesis 17). This approach is weak in several respects. First of all, it confuses the nature of promises. Biblically, promises are *contained* in covenants (2 Chronicles 21:7; Ephesians 2:12).<sup>8</sup> Next, Scripture specifically connects the Abrahamic covenant and promise together (Galatians 3:17).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Scripture *explicitly* asserts that the physical blessings to the "carnal seed" were tied to the covenant promises (Genesis 12:7; Nehemiah 9:8; Romans 9:4),<sup>10</sup> which is why the "circumcised and yet uncircumcised" would be punished (Jeremiah 9:25-26).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> **Galatians 3:16** Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

<sup>5</sup> **Galatians 3:29** And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

<sup>6</sup> **Galatians 3:17** What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

<sup>7</sup> One will note some similarities with Dispensationalism at this point. Both assert duality – two people of God with two purposes, etc. Their major difference lies in how they understand the purpose and perpetuity of each. Dispensationalists believe that God still has purposes and promises for ethnic Israel whereas Particular Baptists believe that God's purposes for them (i.e., physically bring forth the Messiah and typify the NT church) have been exhausted, since the physical line ended with Christ.

<sup>8</sup> **2 Chronicles 21:7** Yet the LORD was not willing to destroy the house of David because of the covenant which He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and his sons forever. **Ephesians 2:12** *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 5 above.

<sup>10</sup> **Genesis 12:7** The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. **Nehemiah 9:8** "You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him To give *him* the land of the Canaanite, Of the Hittite and the Amorite, Of the

The second way in which Particular Baptists sought to justify two distinct posterities of Abraham was through their interpretation of Galatians 4:22-31.<sup>12</sup> The distinction is primarily argued from verses 23-26, where Ishmael represents the carnal seed under the Old Covenant and Isaac represents the spiritual seed under the New Covenant. One seemingly obvious weakness in their arguments from this passage for two non-mixed, distinct seeds is that Ishmael was never a member of the covenant inwardly *or* outwardly whereas Isaac was both. In fact, all of the spiritual seed, or “children of promise” (Romans 9:8)<sup>13</sup> were, by design, outwardly members of the Abrahamic Covenant. Denault labors to conclude that Abraham’s two seeds cannot be mixed (p. 118) but must be distinct, separate categories (p. 119) who are members of two different covenants with two different inheritances. Yet, a few pages later, he states that they are “non-mixed” (p. 121) yet intertwined (p. 125) and “not necessarily distinct” (p. 127). This distinction is *nowhere* made in the OT. To the contrary, Scripture asserts that the elect and non-elect were always outwardly under the same covenant (Romans 9:6).<sup>14</sup>

Denault quotes Thomas Patient, who claimed that “the Covenant of Circumcision is no Covenant of Eternal Life” (p. 68). Nevertheless, it is clear that the covenant was designed to be spiritual, not simply physical. Faith and worship were always central to the Old Covenant, and circumcision itself pointed to justification by faith (Romans 4:11),<sup>15</sup> the new birth (Jeremiah 4:4, 14; Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:28-29),<sup>16</sup> the removal of sin (Colossians 2:11),<sup>17</sup> and covenant inclusion among God’s people (Genesis 17:7, 11)<sup>18</sup>

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Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite-- To give *it* to his descendants. And You have fulfilled Your promise, For You are righteous. **Romans 9:4** who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises,

<sup>11</sup> **Jeremiah 9:25-26** "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "that I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised-- <sup>26</sup> Egypt and Judah, and Edom and the sons of Ammon, and Moab and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples; for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart."

<sup>12</sup> **Galatians 4:22-31** For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. <sup>24</sup> This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND." <sup>28</sup> And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also. <sup>30</sup> But what does the Scripture say? "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN." <sup>31</sup> So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

<sup>13</sup> **Romans 9:8** That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

<sup>14</sup> **Romans 9:6** But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel;

<sup>15</sup> **Romans 4:11** and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,

<sup>16</sup> **Jeremiah 4:4** "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds." **Jeremiah 4:14** Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, That you may be saved. How long will your wicked thoughts Lodge within you? **Deuteronomy 30:6** "Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart

## The Old Covenant

The Particular Baptist position that Denault espouses has a high degree of discontinuity between Old and New Covenants.<sup>19</sup> To them, the Old Covenant was in no way an administration of the Covenant of Grace; instead, it was a different substance altogether. When pondering the contours of this position, one must wonder about the purpose of the Old Covenant. How could God's primary way of relating to His people prior to the New Covenant be devoid of grace?

Regarding this radical discontinuity, Denault writes, "the formal covenants that preceded [the death and resurrection of Christ] had a different substance and were, therefore, abolished and replaced by the New Covenant" (p. 82). There is no doubt that the New Covenant replaced the Old with regard to administration, but did it do so with regard to substance? Was the Old purely law and the New purely grace? Scripture describes them as organically related together with continuity of substance (e.g., Ezekiel 37:24-26).<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the central theme / central promise of the New Covenant – "*I will be your God and you will be My people*" (Hebrews 8:10) – is exactly the same as the theme of the covenants of promise (Abrahamic: Genesis 17:7; Mosaic: Exodus 6:7 and Leviticus 26:12; Davidic: Jeremiah 7:23), the Law is described as inherently spiritual (Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 7:14),<sup>21</sup> and faith was central in the Old Covenant (Hebrews 3:19; 4:2).<sup>22</sup>

Denault argues that the Mosaic Covenant was purely conditional (p. 110). Why, then, were Joshua, Caleb, and the next generation of Israelites allowed to enter the Promised Land without perfectly keeping all of the commandments (Deuteronomy 9:5-6; see again Hebrews 3:19; 4:2)?<sup>23</sup>

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and with all your soul, so that you may live. **Romans 2:28-29** For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. <sup>29</sup> But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

<sup>17</sup> **Colossians 2:11** and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

<sup>18</sup> **Genesis 17:7** "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. **Genesis 17:11** "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that references to the "Old Covenant" encompass not only the Mosaic Covenant but the entire period of time from Genesis 3:15 to the inauguration of the New Covenant (p. 99).

<sup>20</sup> **Ezekiel 37:24-26** "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd [an allusion to the Davidic Covenant]; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them [an allusion to the Mosaic Covenant]. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever [an allusion to the Abrahamic Covenant] ... I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever [an allusion to the New Covenant].

<sup>21</sup> **Matthew 22:37-40** And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." <sup>38</sup> "This is the great and foremost commandment. <sup>39</sup> "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' <sup>40</sup> "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." **Romans 7:14** For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

<sup>22</sup> **Hebrews 3:19** So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. **Hebrews 4:2** For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

<sup>23</sup> **Deuteronomy 9:5-6** "It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD your God is driving

Although their position would appear to have the potential to converge toward what would later become a Classical Dispensational understanding of law and grace (i.e., law in the Old Covenant and grace in the New), the Particular Baptists avoided this extreme of discontinuity by arguing that the elect under the Old Covenant were able to receive the saving grace of God by drawing from and participating in the New Covenant before its formal administration (p. 62).<sup>24</sup> Denault writes, “salvation was given under the Old Covenant, but not by virtue of the Old Covenant; during the time period of the Old Covenant but not by the Old Covenant.” (p. 70). Thus, the Particular Baptists were able to view the Old Covenant as purely a covenant of works. However, the argument that the salvation given under the Old Covenant was in no way by the Old Covenant begs several questions. If it was not through the covenant, then how exactly was salvation administered and made available to people during that time? If it wasn’t revealed in the Old Covenant (p. 71), then how was it revealed? Did not the entire Old Covenant point people to Christ through types and shadows?

## Old Covenant Israel

Most, if not all, Baptist theologies create a duality between Israel and the church by removing spiritual significance from Israel. They contrast the two as if Israel was solely (or primarily) a physical people while the church is solely (or primarily) a spiritual people. Likewise, OT circumcision is typically seen as a sign of membership and belonging to a *physical* people whereas NT baptism is seen as a sign of membership and belonging to a *spiritual* people. So, a comparison between Israel and the church is akin to a comparison between an apple and an orange, because the former is merely physical while the latter is spiritual.

Dispensationalists believe that God’s program with the Jews has been placed on hold while He deals with the church. When the church is raptured from the earth, He will resume His dealings with ethnic Jews. Advocates of New Covenant Theology see the ethnic Jews as a carnal people who served to typify the church. 1689 federalists have a similar position to that of New Covenant Theology – they believe that the purpose of Abraham’s “carnal seed” was to preserve the messianic line and to typify the church.<sup>25</sup>

One challenge to all Baptist theologies, 1689 federalism included, is the question of why people were grafted into and cut off from Israel in the OT? One particular problem with the Particular Baptist argument that Denault espouses is the failure to recognize that unbelievers were supposed to be cut off under the Old Covenant.<sup>26</sup> Denault and those he quotes assume that “the right of the remotest generation was as much derived from Abraham and the covenant made with him, as was that of his immediate seed, and did not at all depend on the faithfulness of their immediate parents.” (fn. 17, pp. 45-46). This is a fallacious argument. We have no reason to believe that the children of Ishmael, Esau, Dathan, Abiram, or any other physical descendant of

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them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. <sup>6</sup> "Know, then, *it is* not because of your righteousness *that* the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.

<sup>24</sup> See the section above on the Abrahamic Covenant.

<sup>25</sup> See the section above on the Abrahamic Covenant.

<sup>26</sup> When one views Israel as merely a physical ethnic group or nation, there is no reason to see a spiritual cutting off principle.

Abraham had a right to the covenant after their parents were cut off.<sup>27</sup> If it were true, then one may perhaps have grounds for arguing that alive today who are ethnically Jewish have a right to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.

Although the covenant was made with Abraham and his seed (i.e., descendants), it was never designed to be a primarily national or ethnic covenant. Instead, its core design was religious (i.e., spiritual and ecclesiastical). For this reason, proselytes were grafted into the covenant community while others were cut off from it. Even from the outset, God explicitly told Abraham that his own son Ishmael would be cut off from the covenant and that the covenant would be extended through Isaac (Genesis 17:18-21).<sup>28</sup> In fact, God explicitly commanded Abraham to cut off all covenant breakers (Genesis 17:14).<sup>29</sup>

There are other problems with the 1689 federalist position with regard to the Old Covenant. First, the argument that the “carnal posterity” was to be preserved unconditionally contradicts their vehement arguments for Old Covenant conditionality. Second, if the physical Jews were not a spiritual people, then what was the reason for establishing a covenant of works with them? One answer would be to typify the spiritual people of the NT which raises the further question of why a carnal people would serve to typify a spiritual people, especially given that spiritual people had been there from the beginning. Third, if Israel was designed only to be a carnal people, then why did Christ come “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24) and why did He grant Gentiles to be “fellow citizens” of “the commonwealth of Israel” (Ephesians 2:12, 19)?<sup>30</sup>

## The New Covenant

One of the primary distinctives of 1689 federalists is that they advocate that the New Covenant is completely different in substance than the Old Covenant. In their understanding, the New Covenant *is* the Covenant of Grace. Of course, this begs the question of why then one would even bother using the terminology “Covenant of Grace.” If it is completely redundant, then what is the point? Why not just call it the New Covenant?

Denault and those he quotes also argue that the New Covenant is purely unconditional. In fact, this conclusion is inescapable given their position that: (1) the New Covenant is the

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<sup>27</sup> In the case of Dathan and Abiram: **Numbers 16:31-33** As [Moses] finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; <sup>32</sup> and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with *their* possessions. <sup>33</sup> So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

<sup>28</sup> **Genesis 17:18-21** And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!" <sup>19</sup> But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. <sup>20</sup> "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. <sup>21</sup> "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year."

<sup>29</sup> **Genesis 17:14** "But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

<sup>30</sup> **Ephesians 2:12** *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **Ephesians 2:19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,

Covenant of Grace in every respect, (2) being in the New Covenant is equivalent to being saved, and (3) the church only exists as an *invisible church* (i.e., has a completely regenerate membership – see the next section of the paper). Yet, there are some problems with their formulation of it as an unconditional covenant. For example, if it is unconditional, then why must we enter by faith (p. 85)? Furthermore, what kind of faith is needed to enter into the New Covenant? Denault seems to argue for saving faith given that, in his opinion, the covenant cannot be separated from salvation (p. 88) and glory (p. 89).

Hebrews 10:29<sup>31</sup> poses a significant problem for Denault. What is the proper interpretation of the verse? After arguing for a unique and uncommon translation,<sup>32</sup> Denault admits that it “is talking about apostates and not members of the covenant” (fn. 26, p. 51). What is an apostate? By definition, an apostate is someone who has been cut off from the covenant (outwardly/externally).<sup>33</sup> Yet, Denault, along with those he represents, completely denies any outward aspect of the covenant.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, Denault admits that his interpretation is primarily driven by theological presuppositions (p. 151). This is, in part, due to his overly-narrow definition of “sanctified” which does not account for OT usage<sup>35</sup> (or NT usage per 1 Corinthians 7:14).<sup>36</sup>

## The New Covenant Church

In one of the key statements of the book, Denault writes, “The Scriptures do not provide any possibilities of being visibly in the New Covenant without participating effectively in its substance” (p. 153). This assertion represents one of the most fundamental errors of Baptist theology. Essentially, Denault is arguing that everyone in the New Covenant is truly saved and that it is impossible for an unbeliever to be connected to the New Covenant in any sense. Denault notes that, for Particular Baptists, the New Covenant “did not have an external administration in which the non-elect were to be found” (p. 86).

Again, the denial of the possibility of unbelievers in the visible church is one of the most problematic aspects of the federalism espoused by Denault. Is it really possible to guarantee that there are no non-elect people associated with the visible church? Even more, can this idea of

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<sup>31</sup> **Hebrews 10:29** How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

<sup>32</sup> He asserts that the one sanctified by the blood of the covenant is the covenant itself rather than the apostate or even Christ. It is odd that Denault offers two substantially different translations in his book (compare fn. 26, p. 51 vs. p. 151). Perhaps one of them contains typos or his interpretation was in flux during writing.

<sup>33</sup> This is supported by the fact that the apostates are included as “His people” in the very next verse: **Hebrews 10:30-31** For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” <sup>31</sup> It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

<sup>34</sup> Denault writes, “Regarding the apostates, whom the paedobaptists saw as transgressors of the covenant, the Baptists considered that they had simply never been members of the covenant (cf 1 Jn. 2:19)” (p. 95). While he is correct with respect to the internal/inward aspect of the covenant (i.e., membership in the invisible church), these apostates were indeed members of the covenant outwardly/externally (i.e., membership in the visible church).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example: **2 Chronicles 31:18** The genealogical enrollment *included* all their little children, their wives, their sons and their daughters, for the whole assembly, for they consecrated themselves faithfully in holiness.

<sup>36</sup> “Sanctified” and “holy” cannot be used in the salvific sense here: **1 Corinthians 7:14** For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.



“regenerate membership” in the visible church be defended as biblical? Given that 1689 federalists have always been convinced that true believers cannot lose their salvation, the very existence of a New Testament command for church discipline and excommunication contradicts their position.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the New Testament is full of references to unregenerate people who are externally/outwardly members of the covenant.<sup>38</sup>

Although Denault did not devote significant detailed attention to this issue, there are glimmers of Particular Baptist approaches to a few texts. For example, the quote of John Spilsbury on page 58 defines the invisible church (i.e., the elect) as the branches connected to the vine of Christ in John 15.<sup>39</sup> However, given that the Father cuts off “every branch in [Christ] that does not bear fruit” (v. 1) and fails to “abide in [Christ]” (v. 6), the Calvinist must understand the branches to represent those joined to Christ in the *visible* church.

1 John 2:19<sup>40</sup> is also mentioned by Denault. In fact, he uses it as a proof text for why Baptists believe that apostates were never part of the covenant in any sense. Although he is correct from an internal perspective, the verse itself contradicts and disproves his assertion from the perspective of the visible church. John distinguishes between the visible and the invisible in that the apostates departed/disconnected themselves from the church – If they were not visibly connected in any way to begin with, they would be nothing to “remain with” or “go out” from. Thus, prior to their apostasy, they were outwardly members of the New Covenant, and their departure from the church demonstrated the true nature of their hearts.<sup>41</sup> If they had not apostatized, the wickedness of their hearts would be revealed on the Last Day.<sup>42</sup> In the meantime, they would have been accepted as members of the New Covenant and treated with charity according to their profession of faith. This fact provides further evidence that, no matter how hard humans try, the local church, by definition, will always be a mixed multitude.

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<sup>37</sup> When Jesus gave the command to exercise church discipline, He instructed the church to address the one under discipline as a “brother” (i.e., one who is *inside* the covenant) throughout the discipline process and as a “Gentile” (i.e., one who is *outside* the covenant) upon excommunication: **Matthew 18:15-17** “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. <sup>16</sup> “But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. <sup>17</sup> “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

<sup>38</sup> For example, consider the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43), Jesus’ words regarding how He will judge false brethren who address Him as “Lord, Lord” but never knew Him (Matthew 7:13-23), Paul’s admonition to “test yourselves to see if you are in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5), and the warnings sections of Hebrews (2:1-4; 3:7-14; 5:11-6:20; 10:26-39; 12:15-17; 12:25-29). This pattern was a reality during the Old Covenant (Romans 2:28-29; 9:6), and, as demonstrated in the aforementioned passages, it will continue throughout the church age until Christ returns.

<sup>39</sup> **John 15:1-6** “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup> “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

<sup>40</sup> **1 John 2:19** They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

<sup>41</sup> See again Matthew 18:17.

<sup>42</sup> See again Matthew 7:23.

Given the denial of the important distinction between the visible and invisible church, it is not surprising that Denault argues that “the Baptists only practised baptism based on new birth” (p. 87). This, of course, raises the question of how one can infallibly know if a person has been born again. Furthermore, properly distinguishing between the visible and invisible church leads to the conclusion that water baptism is tied to the visible, not the invisible church. Just as Spirit baptism is the mark of the *invisible* church, water baptism is the mark of the *visible* church.

With regard to the above comments, it comes as no surprise that Denault defines “God’s people” as believers only (p. 92). Yet Scripture attributes the same title to corporate Israel in the OT (e.g., Exodus 6:6-7)<sup>43</sup> and the visible church in the NT (e.g., Hebrews 10:29-30).<sup>44</sup> Of course, given their distinction between the carnal and spiritual seed, Denault and those he quotes seem to believe that the definition has changed from the OT to the NT (p. 109). Continuity is assumed between the OT spiritual seed and the NT spiritual seed but not between the OT carnal seed and the NT spiritual seed (except via typology). Yet, if there is no real covenant connection between the carnal people of the OC and the spiritual of the NC, then how could Paul refer to the idolatrous and immoral OT covenant people as “our fathers” while addressing the predominantly Gentile church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 10:1-14)?<sup>45</sup> In fact, he goes even further by identifying these Christian Gentiles as capable of the same categories of sin and apostasy as their Israelite forefathers (vv. 6-12). It is also important to understand that these Israelite forefathers, many of whom were unbelievers, “all drank ... from a spiritual rock ... and that rock was Christ” (v. 4). How could these unbelievers partake of Christ? Certainly not in a salvific manner! They partook of Him outwardly through their external covenant membership.

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<sup>43</sup> **Exodus 6:6-7** "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. <sup>7</sup> Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

<sup>44</sup> **Hebrews 10:29-30** How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."

<sup>45</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:1-14** For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; <sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; <sup>3</sup> and all ate the same spiritual food; <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." <sup>8</sup> Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. <sup>9</sup> Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. <sup>10</sup> Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

## Conclusion

Seventeenth-century Particular Baptists who subscribed to the 1689 London Baptist Confession diverted significantly from the Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith in at least five key areas – The Abrahamic Covenant, the Old Covenant, Old Covenant Israel, the New Covenant, and the New Covenant Church. Their departures in each of these areas demonstrate significant weaknesses when measured against the testimony of Scripture.

All of the differences flow from the radical discontinuity they assign between the New Covenant and everything preceding it. Was the Old Covenant only outward/external/physical or did it also have an inward/internal/spiritual dimension? Is the New Covenant only inward/internal/spiritual or does it also have an outward/external/physical dimension? Scripture bears consistent witness to the truth of the latter in both cases. By asserting the former for both, 1689 federalists have inserted a dualism between the Old and New Covenants which is foreign to Scripture. By completely removing all aspects of an outward administration from the New Covenant, they have created a mismatch, joining water baptism (a physical sign) to the invisible church (a spiritual category), instead of properly understanding that water baptism is the sign of the visible church as spirit baptism is the sign of the invisible church.

Denault is correct in suggesting that a person's understanding of Covenant Theology will surely influence his or her understanding of baptism. The covenant dualism of Denault and those he cites has enabled them to conclude that infant baptism is invalid by asserting that only regenerate people can be connected to the New Covenant in any manner. A discussion of the validity of infant baptism will not be fruitful until and unless one recognizes that the New Covenant is outwardly administered in the visible church, and that water baptism is a sign of the visible church.<sup>46</sup> Until then, discussion between those who hold to the Westminster Confession and the "1689 federalists" who adhere to the 1689 London Baptist Confession must be focused on Covenant Theology.

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<sup>46</sup> The central, underlying question is not whether the children of believers in the New Covenant era are to be considered as part of the *invisible church* but whether they are to be considered as part of the *visible church*.