Covenant Theology
Outline

I. Definition of Covenant
A. In the most general sense, a covenant is a disposition or arrangement made by God. (Cummings, 3)
B. A covenant is designed by the King for the administration of His Kingdom and follows the structure of a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty – divine benevolence, human loyalty, and consequences (ThirdMill, I-A)
C. By its nature, a covenant is a religious relationship between God and man. It is made by God and sovereignly imposed on man through a representative. (Vos, 3)
D. Thus, a complete definition follows: A covenant is a binding agreement between God and man consisting of the terms in which their relationship is initiated, maintained, and/or broken. It includes divine promises and commands, as well as rewards/punishments for obedience/disobedience. (CV, 1)

II. Covenant of Works/Life
A. The Covenant of Works was the first covenant
   1. God constituted Adam as the representative or federal head of the human race. (Vos, 7)
   2. In this covenant, “life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” (WCF 7.2)
   3. Three evidences of a covenant with Adam: (1) Three covenant elements present; (2) Hosea 6:7; (3) Genesis 6:18 speaks of confirming the covenant (ThirdMill, II-A-1)
B. The Covenant of Grace did not replace but fulfilled the Covenant of Works. (CV, 2)
   1. The moral law continues to be a perfect rule of righteousness. (WCF 19.2) Thus, the Covenant of Works is still binding. (RP Testimony 7.3)
   2. Christ, the Second Adam, fulfilled the Covenant of Works for the elect. (Vos, 11)
   3. Anyone who is not “in Christ” is still “in Adam.” (Vos, 10)

III. Covenant of Grace
A. The Covenant of Grace is God’s arrangement to save man from sin (Cummings, 3)
   1. The parties are Father and the Son, who is the representative of the elect (Vos, 13)
   2. The Covenant of Grace has two phases, an eternal phase and a historical phase. (Vos, 13)
   3. The historical phase of the Covenant of Grace may be divided into three periods: (1) Preparation; (2) Realization; (3) Application (Vos, 16)
B. Faith is not the condition of the Covenant but a benefit of the Covenant and the appointed means of being united to Christ (Vos, 14)
IV. Covenant Administrations

A. The one Covenant of Grace is administered in different ways during different periods in the Bible. (Cummings, 6-7. See his illustration of the US Constitution)
   1. God introduces covenants throughout history to address particular issues that people were facing at each stage of the Kingdom (ThirdMill, II-A)
   2. The covenant administrations pertain to the visible body (CV, 3)

B. The covenant administrations were progressive, not mutually exclusive and all share one central promise (CV, 4)
   1. Scripture from Genesis 3:15 forward depicts the gradual unfolding of the Covenant of Grace through a series of successive covenants (RP Testimony Intro 3-4)
   2. The Covenant of Grace was formally established in Genesis 17 (Vos, 19)
   3. The administration of the Covenant of Grace moved from national to international with the New Covenant (Vos, 20)

V. Old/New Covenant

A. The Covenant of Grace is also referred to as Testament. (WCF 7.4)
   1. All of the OT administrations may be called the Old Covenant or Old Testament, and the New Covenant may be called the New Testament. (WCF 7.5-6)
   2. The division of the Bible is derived from the Old and New Covenants (RP Testimony Intro.1)

B. The different administrations of the Covenant of Grace can be essentially boiled down to two: the Old and New Covenants. (Cummings, 6-7)
   1. The Covenant of Grace was differently administered in the OT (promises and types to the Jews) and the NT (the gospel to all nations). (WCF 7.5-6)
   2. The Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants were covenants of promise; the New Covenant is a covenant of fulfillment. (CV, 3) The covenants of promise make up the Old Covenant and the covenant of fulfillment is the New Covenant. (CV, 4)
   3. “The essential meaning of the two dispensations of the Covenant of Grace is exactly the same. The one pointed forward, the other points backward, to the same Christ, the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace … The difference between the two dispensations is partly a matter of degree, partly a matter of external form; it is in no sense a matter of essential meaning.” (Vos, 20)
   4. Due to the Covenant of Grace, there exists continuity and spiritual identity between OT Israel and the NT Church. Only the form has changed. (Vos, 45)
VI. Visible/Invisible Church

A. There is a visible and invisible aspect to the Church but it is not two churches (RP Testimony 25.4)
   1. The Invisible Church is the people of God from God’s perspective and who are inwardly/internally in covenant with God; the Visible Church is the people of God from man’s perspective and who are outwardly/externally in covenant with God. (CV, 1)
      a. The universal or invisible church consists of all of the elect (WCF 25.1)
      b. The visible church consists of those who profess Christianity and their children (WCF 25.2)
   2. “The blessings God promised to Abraham in this covenant were both temporal and spiritual, earthly and heavenly, external and internal.” (Cummings, 8)

B. The covenant administrations of the Covenant of Grace pertain to the visible body throughout history (CV, 3)
   1. Every covenant administration included both believers and unbelievers (ThirdMill, IV-A-2)
   2. “The form of the Church has changed, but the life and essence has remained identical. Israel was merely the form of the Church in the period from Moses to Christ. After the day of Pentecost, the true spiritual life of Israel was continued in the New Testament form of the Church. Today the Church is the true Israel, just as in David’s day every true Israelite was a member of the Church.” (Vos, 45)
   3. “The visible church originated in the Garden of Eden when God entered into covenant with Adam and Eve … The visible church is essentially a body of people in religious communion with God by virtue of a covenant established by God Himself, and such a body of people has existed since the time of Adam and Eve. The often-heard assertion that the Church originated on the day of Pentecost is wrong. It confuses the form of the Church with the essence of the Church. The New Testament form of the Church came into being at Pentecost, it is true, but the Church itself had existed since Eden.” (Vos, 46)
   4. “The Old Testament Israel is the form of this [visible] body of covenant people during the period from Abraham to Christ. The New Testament Church is the form of the same body from Christ to the end of the world.” (Vos, 47)

VII. Covenant Membership

A. Covenant membership in the visible body is based on profession of faith for adults (WCF 25.2)
   1. The real descendants of Abraham are those who have faith and many physical descendants are not true recipients of the covenant promises (Vos, 47)
   2. There will always be true believers as well as professing unbelievers in the covenant (1 John 2:19) (ThirdMill, IV-A-2-b-ii)

B. The members of covenant administrations continue to be same people from one administration to the next (CV, 5)
   1. Those who reject or break the covenant are to be cut off from it; others on the outside who believe are to be grafted in to the covenant. (CV, 6)
   2. This grafting in and cutting off happened in unparalleled proportions at the inauguration of the New Covenant. (CV, 6)
VIII. Unity of Scripture

A. The Scripture is one book with one Author and one consistent message (Vos, 40)
   1. Everything in the Bible is organically related to everything else. It all fits together and each part is
      interdependent on the others. (Vos, 41)
   2. “If the Bible is not an organic unity, it cannot be the Word of God; If the bible does not present a
      consistent message throughout, it cannot really be the Word of God.” (Vos, 41)

B. “The Bible is seen to be a harmonious and consistent whole from beginning to end, the grand theme of
   which is Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of God’s elect.” (Vos, 42)
   1. The message of salvation is the unifying message of the Bible (Cummings, 1)
   2. All of the covenant administrations throughout the history of the world share the same central
      promise that God will be their God and they will be His people (CV, 4)

C. “The covenant character of revelation appears in all the Scripture and binds the sixty-six books together
   in one unified Word of God.” (RP Testimony Intro.1)
   1. From the time of Adam, a people of God has always existed and been bound together by the
      Covenant of Grace (Vos, 16)
   2. There is both discontinuity and continuity from one covenant administration to the next (CV, 5)
   3. The moral law is eternal and always applicable, but the civil and ceremonial laws expired at the
      inauguration of the New Covenant (WCF 19.1-6)