

**COMMENTARY ON
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 22)**

8:28. As a sign of covenant renewal, the Supper is not appropriate for those who cannot understand the nature of Christ's presence or the blessing and jeopardy which attach to the Supper.

This thesis is a repudiation of the practice of infant communion advocated by Federal Vision Covenantalists, and R.C. Sproul Jr. Their argument is that as members of the "covenant of grace," children should be encouraged to take the Lord's Supper as early as possible. The spectacle of pressing two-year-olds to take communion strikes most Evangelicals as a bit weird. But it signals a desire on the part of some Covenantalists to be consistent, and they point to the history of infant communion for support. What they don't seem to notice is that infant communion arose out of the growing belief in baptismal regeneration encouraging infant baptism in the late second and third centuries. There is no hint of these inter-connected errors in the NT text. A New Covenant Baptist would claim that Presbyterianism represents a semi-reformed ecclesiology still in bed with irrelevant state-church ideas.

29. The Lord's Supper is the fulfillment of all the typical Israelite feasts.

This is probably not totally correct, although we should not be too dogmatic about typology. There were several feasts in the Mosaic system not *obviously* represented in the Lord's Supper. The application of OT types not specifically stated in the Bible, are sometimes controversial. The Passover clearly is (1 Cor 5:7-8), but not Tabernacles. Paul indicates that there are no "food, drink, feasts, new moons or Sabbaths" which apply to the believer as obligations (Gal 4:10-11, Col 2:16-17). He leaves it open for Jewish Christians to celebrate a Seder with Christian commentary. That's just an evangelistic technique, about which Paul was pretty flexible. But for him, *no* feasts are obligatory.

Attention should also be drawn to Ezekiel's detailed predictions of feasts to be celebrated in the millennial Kingdom. I do not know what an Amillennialist could make of these details, but that's not our topic here. Most commentators agree that the Lord's Supper is commanded to be had right up to the Second Coming (1 Cor 11:26), and there will be similar celebrations after the Parousia (Mat 26:29, 8:11, *etc.*) I do not see how the Lord's Supper in this age could "fulfill" feasts that are still future. I presume Scott Clark doesn't believe in a real millennium, although plenty of conservative Presbyterians do.

30. Just as believers fed on the Passover lamb, Christ as the true Lamb of God, is really and truly present in the Supper.

This is a mild expression of the Calvinist Reformed opinion about the Supper ("really and truly") over against the Zwinglian Reformed position. Baptists (and modern Evangelicals generally) tend not to know how Calvin tried to mediate between the Lutheran and Zwinglian views of this matter, and are usually Zwinglians by default. Covenantalism cannot by itself, settle that question, so we move on. The idea that Christ as God's Lamb replaces the Passover sacrifice is not controversial.

31. In the Supper, believers feed on Christ's true body and blood by faith, through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

The usual proof for this type of expression is Christ's use of such language in John 6, but the question remains as to whether Jesus was not speaking (in verses 54-58) of conversion rather than the sacrament. The Roman tradition uses such words as an affirmation of *transubstantiation*, the Lutherans of the *ubiquity* of Christ's human nature in the elements. We will not concern ourselves here with the

strict meaning of the phrase “true body and blood by faith,” as Covenantalism cannot by itself, settle the question. It is just an expression of John Calvin’s mediating view of the Supper as a “means of grace.”

32. Because the old covenant community feasted every time they assembled, and because the Supper is Christ’s ordained sign and seal of covenant renewal, it ought to be observed every time the new covenant community assembles.

Here Clark agrees with the Churches of Christ and Plymouth Brethren against most Presbyterian churches, who often celebrate the Supper only twice or four times a year. I was raised in the Church of Christ in Australia in the fifties, when the Lord’s Supper was part of every (morning) church service, and it was an empty ritual most of the time. This problem is widespread in evangelical churches and cannot be solved by Covenantalism alone. Many churches have sought to reform the empty practice of the Supper by integrating it with fuller teaching, or including it with a *community meal* every Sunday. This is one element in the recovery of serious community thinking over against the fragmentation and individualism of much modern culture as it affects Christian practice. Clark’s term “covenant renewal” is helpful as pointing to the effects of the New Covenant Supper on a local assembly.

We come now to Clark’s final 21 Theses, under the heading “Polemics” (as if the first 120 were not “polemical,” a term relating to Apologetics), which gives him an opportunity to criticize New Covenant Theology. Readers should recall that the Apostle Paul did not see Apologetics as applying to unbelievers only, for he was “set for the defense (*apologia*) and confirmation (*bebaiōsei*)” of the Gospel (Phil 1:7 and 16), indicating that *believers also* need apologetical confirmation of their faith. I believe that our young people also, should hear the usual skeptical objections to Christianity in a Christian educational context, before they encounter them in the secular colleges and schools they may attend. That way they will be prepared to “give an answer,” and not be overawed by plausible professors who have them at a disadvantage in the secular classroom. So poorly is Apologetics united with Evangelism in our churches, that some parents have despaired of their kids getting proper preparation for college and have sent them to summer schools like those offered in Colorado Springs by Summit Ministries to have them inoculated (or at least warned) against secular worldviews. It is therefore quite appropriate for Dr. Clark to seek to respond at least briefly, to a competing theory of the Covenants.

9:1. Like Dispensationalism, “New Covenant” theology (NCT) is not sufficiently Trinitarian in its hermeneutic.

This is a very bad start. It’s a standard polemic move designed to confuse NCT with the background of some of its supporters. The whole point of the NCT project is that neither traditional Covenantalism *nor* Dispensationalism are adequate constructs for doing theology, and must be replaced. We have accepted Murray’s challenge to “recast” the Bible’s teaching about the Covenants (plural). We need to recall that the standard Westminster attack on Dispensationalism (starting with O. T. Allis in his famous *Prophecy and the Church* of 1945) is really an excuse to refute Premillennialism, which has existed in the Church since the patristic age, and has nothing to do with the “dispensational” construct, which was unknown to Evangelicalism until propagated by the Darbyites after 1830. Any number of covenantal Presbyterians have been premillennial in their eschatology, and this had nothing to do with J. N. Darby. Treating premillennial thinking as if it were always “dispensational” (think Dallas or C. I. Scofield) is not very scholarly. You need to understand people before you refute them. The accusation of a weak trinitarianism is preposterous. Some NCT people are Van Tillian (like me) and have a very high view of the integration of orthodox theology with its Trinitarian base, and no NCT person known to me thinks the Trinity unimportant. That goes for eschatology too. Theology matures into eschatology.