Covenant Theology  
(6ST601, 2 Credits)

Revised Syllabus  
Reformed Theological Seminary  
Washington D.C.

McLean Presbyterian Church  
Winter 2008  
Monday-Wednesday, January 28-30, 9 AM – 5 PM

Dr. Howard Griffith  
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703-830-3553

Office Hours: make an appointment – I will be delighted to meet with you.

Course Description:

“Covenant” is a meta-issue in theology, affecting the formulation of everything else. This course will seek to provide an examination of covenant theology from exegetical and historical perspectives. Consideration is given to such issues as the relation of the Old and New Testaments, the significance of the covenants for sacramental theology, and the hermeneutics of dispensationalism and theonomy. Emphasis is placed on the role of the biblical doctrine of the covenants in preaching and pastoral ministry.

Lectures:

Encounters with covenant theology from Zwingli to Kline.  
The complex ‘covenant of works,’ ‘covenant of grace,’ and ‘covenant of redemption.’  
The Noahic Covenant and “common grace.”  
The Abrahamic Covenant.  
The Mosaic Covenant.  
The New Covenant.

Assignments:

Reading:

Before the first class, students are required to read

• Tim J. R. Trumper, “Covenant Theology and Constructive Calvinism” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64/2 (Fall 2002): 387-404 and either

Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God, Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*. Ed. R.A. Muller (Baker, 2001),

Or,


(You are required to read *both* books for the class, preferably before the class begins; you must read one beforehand.)

**Seminar Presentation:**

Each student will give a seminar presentation of 30 minutes. The presentations will be made on the last day or so of the class. Presentations should include description and evaluation. Each presenter will provide the class with an outline and questions for discussion. If you present on the history of the doctrine, read Lillback first; if on theology itself, read Jeon first.

Suggested Presentation Topics:

Covenant in the epistle to the Hebrews.
Christ as covenant Servant in Isaiah.
Prayer as an expression of the covenant relation.
Blessing and curse in Calvin’s *Sermons on Deuteronomy*.
Sacrament as sign and seal of the covenant in ________ (R. Rollock, H. Witsius, F. Turretin, R. Sibbes).
Charles Hodge on the covenant of grace.
John Frame and Michael Horton on “Law and Gospel.”
Vern Poythress on judgment in the Mosaic Covenant.
Bruce Waltke on the hermeneutics of the land promise.
The hermeneutics of Theonomy.

**Term Paper:**

A major paper (20 pages). This paper may develop the subject of the seminar presentation. It must include serious research, biblical exegesis and argument. I will be happy to help you narrow your subject.

I expect you to use standard paper conventions found in Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Failure to follow these will reduce your grade.
The paper is due in hard copy, postmarked by March 1, 2008. Please mail it to me at 13939 Malcolm Jameson Way, Centreville, Virginia 20120.

**Grading System for Papers:**

A: Good grasp of basic issues, plus something extraordinary, worthy of publication in a technical or a popular publication. That special excellence may be of various kinds: formulation, illustration, comprehensiveness, subtlety/nuance, creativity, argument, insight, correlations with other issues, historical perspective, philosophical sophistication, and research beyond the requirements of the assignment. One of these will be enough!

A-: An A paper, except that it requires some minor improvement before an editor should finally accept it for publication.

B+: Good grasp of basic issues but without the special excellences noted above. A few minor glitches.

B: The average grade for graduate study. Good grasp of basic issues, but can be significantly improved.

B-: Shows an understanding of the issues, but marred by significant errors, unclarities (conceptual or linguistic), unpersuasive arguments, and/or shallow thinking.

C+: Raises suspicions that largely these terms and concepts are used appropriately. Does show serious study and preparation.

C: Uses ideas with some accuracy, but without mastery or insight; thus the paper is often confused.

C-: The student has a relatively poor, but barely competent, understanding of the subject.

D: I don’t give D’s on papers.

F: Failure to complete the assignment satisfactorily. Such performance would disqualify a candidate for ministry if it were part of a presbytery exam.

Most of my students get B’s. I try to keep A’s and C’s to a relatively small number. F’s are extremely rare.¹

**Grades:**

- Presentation 50 %
- Term Paper 50%

Grading Scale: The standard RTS grading scale will be used.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>(97-100)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>(94-96)</td>
<td>3.66</td>
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¹ Adapted from Professor John M. Frame.
Policy on Late Papers:

Simply put, late papers are not accepted based on the following rationale:

“a. The issue is not so much an inconvenience to the professor. If that were the primary issue, then he would grade late papers because it is fundamental to his Christian commitment to put the interests of others before his own.
b. The issue concerns the apparent laxity with which extensions are often granted. This is not Christian education. Wisdom is living within boundaries. The cosmos exists because the Creator provided boundaries for air, water, land. Moreover, he provided temporal boundaries for seasons. Without boundaries, the cosmos would degenerate back into anarchy. It is the essence of Christian living that we live within boundaries. Liberals want no boundaries. They want freedom without form, liberty without law, lovemaking without marriage. This is a fundamental battle. It is distressing when Christians do not show respect for boundaries and when students do not respect temporal boundaries.
c. Wisdom also entails knowing the goal and devising a strategy to achieve it. Students must be aware from the syllabus what is required of them and should be able to strategize a successful model to achieve it. Laxity and uncertainty with regard to deadlines actually confuse the students and militate against a good Christian education. Paradoxically, “grace” sounds Christian and pastoral and “law” sounds non-Christian; but, sometimes so-called “grace” and “pastoral concerns” encourage libertarianism and in truth is non-Christian and non-pastoral. Consciously or unconsciously students realize that there is a fudge factor here, enabling them to rationalize their not turning in work on time.
d. The issue also pertains to spiritual life, a subject on which a seminary rightly prides itself. However, the spiritual life includes self-control, discipline, etc. Students reap good fruit from hard work.”

Bibliography:


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2 Adapted from Professor Bruce K. Waltke.


