

ST 5300 Covenant Theology Syllabus

Reformed Theological Seminary (Athens)

Summer 2023

Meeting Information:

Time: Class will meet on Friday-Saturday over three consecutive weekends:

- July 14 (6-9 pm); July 15 (9 am - 4 pm)
- July 21 (6-9 pm); July 22 (9 am - 4 pm)
- July 28 (6-9 pm); July 29 (9 am - 3 pm)

Location: Faith Presbyterian Church 2191 Mars Hill Rd. Watkinsville, GA 30677

Contact Information:

Professor: Rev. Dr. Nathan Parker

Email: nathanparker@yahoo.com

Phone: (706) 224-4539

Hours: by appointment

Course Description:

This course is 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, hermeneutics, and the role of the covenants in preaching and pastoral ministry.

Course Objectives:

1. For students to master the Bible's teaching of covenant theology and to be able to critique differing theologies
2. For students to be able to outline the history of the development of covenant theology
3. For students to be able to appropriate the riches of covenant theology in various ministry settings
4. For students to write a research paper which demonstrates a deep grasp of some aspect of covenant theology

Required Reading:

1. Richard Belcher. *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God* (Christian Focus, 2020) (All)
2. Guy Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, John Muether. *Covenant Theology* (Crossway, 2020) (Foreword, Introduction, chapters 1-12, 25)
3. Geerhardus Vos. "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology" in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (P&R, 1980, reprinted 2001), pp. 234-67 ([Link to article¹](#))
4. J. I. Packer. "Introduction: On Covenant Theology," preface to Herman Witsius' *Economy of the Covenants between God and Man* ([Link to article²](#))
5. Vern Poythress. *Understanding Dispensationalists* (P&R, 1994, 2nd edition) ([Link to book³](#)) (All)
6. John Flavel. *The Balm of the Covenant* (within *The Whole Works of John Flavel* (London, 1820), Vol. 6, pp. 83-119 ([Link to book⁴](#)))
7. *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) 7-8, 19, 27-29
8. *WLC = Westminster Larger Catechism* (WLC) 20-27, 30-36, 94-97, 162-166, 168-169, 174-176
9. *WSC = Westminster Shorter Catechism* (WSC) 12-13, 15-21, 92-97

Suggested Reading:

1. Louis Berkhof. *Systematic Theology* (GLH, 2017). Sections "Man in the Covenant of Grace" [pp. 217-51] and "The Means of Grace" [pp. 516-64]
2. John Flavel, *Vindiciae Legis & Foederis* (1690) in Flavel's Works Vol. 6, pp. 318-378 ([Link to book⁵](#))
3. Paul Helm. *Calvin & the Calvinists* (Banner of Truth, 1998)
4. Jonty Rhodes. *Covenants Made Simple: Understanding God's Unfolding Promises to His People* (P&R, 2014)
5. O. Palmer Robertson. *The Christ of the Covenants* (P&R, 1980)
6. Herman Witsius. *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man* (den dulk Christian Foundation, 1677, reprinted 1990)

¹ https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/vos_covenant.html

² <https://www.monergism.com/introduction-covenant-theology>

³ <https://frame-poythress.org/ebooks/understanding-dispensationalists/>

⁴ <https://ia904706.us.archive.org/10/items/wholeworksofjohn06flav/wholeworksofjohn06flav.pdf>

⁵ <https://ia904706.us.archive.org/10/items/wholeworksofjohn06flav/wholeworksofjohn06flav.pdf>

Class Schedule and Due Dates

Weekend #1:

- Friday, July 14 (6-9 pm)
 - Topics: Course introduction, review syllabus
 - Required reading:
 - Vos* "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology"
 - Belcher chapter 1
 - Waters "Foreword" and Introduction
 - WCF 7-8; WLC 20-27, 30-36; WSC 12-13

* Students *must* carefully read Vos prior to Saturday's class or they will not be able to participate in the afternoon seminar.

- Saturday, July 15 (9 am - 4 pm)
 - Topics: History of Covenant Theology, Covenant of Redemption, and Covenant of Works
 - Required reading:
 - Packer "Introduction: On Covenant Theology"
 - Belcher chapters 2-3
 - Waters chapters 1-3

Weekend #2:

- Friday, July 21 (6-9 pm)
 - Topic: Covenant of Grace, Part 1 (Adamic & Noahic)
 - Required reading:
 - Belcher chapters 4-5
 - Waters chapters 4-6
 - Flavel, *Balm of the Covenant*
 - WCF 19; WLC 94-97; 162-6; WSC 15-21
- Saturday, July 22 (9 AM - 4 PM)
 - Topics: Covenant of Grace, Part 2 (Abrahamic & Mosaic)
 - Reading:
 - Belcher chapters 6-7
 - Waters chapters 7-9
 - **DUE:** Mid-term must be emailed Wednesday, July 26th

Weekend #3:

- Friday: July 28 (6-9 PM)
 - Topics: Covenant of Grace, Part 3 (Davidic & New Covenant)
 - Required reading:
 - Belcher chapters 8-10
 - Waters chapters 10-12
 - *WCF* 27-29; *WLC* 168-169, 174-176; *WSC* 92-97
- Saturday: July 29 (9 AM - 3 PM)
 - Topics: Covenant of Grace, Conclusion; Dispensationalism
 - Required reading:
 - Belcher chapters 11-14
 - Waters chapter 25
 - Poythress (all)

Course Requirements:

1. Reading (20%): Students must complete required reading prior to each class. This component is vital because student-led in-class seminars (see course requirement #5) are based on readings.
2. Mid-term exam (20%): Mid-term will be taken in Canvas by **Monday, July 26th**.
3. Final exam (30%): Final will be taken in Canvas by **Saturday, August 12th**.
4. Research paper (20%): students must write a 4,000-word (~13-14 page) research paper on a topic relating to covenant theology. Due date: **Saturday, August 26th**. The paper must be master-level quality. That is, it must have a clear thesis, coherent structure, interact with popular and scholarly sources (at least 3 each), and demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the topic. Paper must use Turabian format.

Potential topics:

- a. State and critique the strongest arguments for the Covenant of Works. Interact with objections.
- b. State and critique the strongest arguments for the Covenant of Redemption. Interact with objections.

- c. Explain the unity and diversity amongst the various administrations of the Covenant of Grace: Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenant.
- d. What did Perry Miller get right and wrong about covenant theology?
- e. Explain and respond to the validity of Karl Barth's objections to covenant theology.
- f. How does Adam and Eve's failure to keep the Covenant of Works necessitate substitutionary atonement?
- g. How might covenant theology provide the believer with assurance?
- h. Is there a difference between Calvin and the Calvinists?
- i. What are the best arguments for infant baptism? Grapple with the strongest credobaptist arguments.
- j. What is the fit between the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Works? Between the Covenant of Redemption and Covenant of Grace?
- k. Was the Mosaic covenant a republication of the Covenant of Works?
- l. Other topics may be approved with professor's permission.

5. Student-led seminars (10%):

Each student will participate in a 30-minute seminar in which he/she leads students in a discussion of a portion of the required reading (select one chapter, article, or *Balm of the Covenant*). The student's aim is to draw the participants into a deeper understanding of the material.

Effective seminars involve posing questions to participants, probing their understanding. When run well, each student will thoughtfully engage with the material and refine other participants' understanding. The professor will demonstrate this approach during class on Saturday, July 15, based on the Geerhardus Vos article, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology." Therefore, students must come to class prepared to engage this reading at an in-depth level.

Seminar discussions will be based on assigned readings. The first weekend students will sign up for a time slot to lead a seminar on weekends two or three. The reading must have been assigned by that date (e. g. by the 3rd

weekend this would include Packer, Flavel, Belcher [up to chapter 7], or Waters [up to chapter 9]). Thus, students leading a seminar the 3rd weekend will have more options. The three time slots for seminars are as follows:

- Saturday, July 22: 11:00 am - 12:00 pm
- Saturday, July 22: 01:00 pm - 02:00 pm
- Saturday, July 29: 11:00 am - 12:00 pm

Computer and Phone Policy:

Internet use is not permitted during class lectures, whether on laptops or phones. Students must keep their phones on silent and internet turned off during class time.

Zoom Policy:

Your professor may allow you to Zoom into class or watch Zoom recordings for excused absences based on the professor's discretion and subject to the availability of equipment. Students should contact their professor well in advance of the class meeting. For a third absence the Registrar should be consulted. Your professor may require additional interactive assignments to offset the absence of classroom interaction. Sync or Remote Live courses have priority for the limited Zoom equipment.

Extension Policy:

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an extension request form from the registrar's office. The request must be approved by the professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed (RTS Catalog p. 46 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 18).

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request (RTS Catalog p. 49).

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: ST 5300

Professor: Dr. Nathan Parker

Campus: Athens, GA

Date: July 14-29, 2023

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None 	
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	Students will be able to convey the central insights of Covenant theology as the overarching and integrating principle of the whole Bible. This will take place through two exams, a research paper, and leading a 30-minute seminar.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Strong	Students will be able to unfold God's beautiful story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation within the covenants of redemption, works, and grace.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Students will learn to appreciate the covenantal framework within which Reformed theology functions as well as its importance for understanding the Westminster standards.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	Learn how the insights of Covenant theology are a help, not a hindrance, to holiness.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Moderate	Students will gain a greater appreciation for the applicability of Covenant theology to all of life.
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Moderate	Man's radical fallenness should lead Christians to deeper humility before God. This reality should foreclose the idea of an arrogant Covenant theologian, an absolute contradiction. Students will learn to convey the truths of Covenant theology in an attractive way.

Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading, and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	Strong	Students will develop the ability to apply the truths and insights in Covenant theology in a local church setting, as pastoral needs arise. This is the payoff of adherence to Covenant theology.
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