

## Introduction to Covenant Theology- Part 5

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Thursday, 18 September 2008 14:51 - Last Updated Thursday, 02 October 2008 13:36

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Reformed Christians argue about the difference between the so-called invisible Church, meaning the Elect and the visible Church meaning the institution in which are both the Elect and the non-Elect together. I believe the latter is what we should consider to be the primary and functional meaning of "Church".

God the Son not only died for the Elect, He actually founded an organization: "I will build my Church". He meant an institution of which the Elect would be members. He was not talking about an invisible Body of the Elect. The Church He would build has ordained Leaders (Apostles), a Doctrinal Foundation (based on revealed Truth and grounded in who Christ is), Sacraments (Baptism and Lord's Supper), Regulated Worship, and Discipline. This is not an invisible, spiritual Body, but a very visible one. There is no union with Christ apart from union with His Body. This Body, while definitely not synonymous with it, is inseparable from the organized Church. Those who come to saving faith and enter into union with Christ also enter into union with the corporate Body of all other Covenant People.

The Covenant Community under the old Mosaic version of the Covenant is the model for the new version. The latter is analogous to the former in essential ways. Old Israel was a visible body. The New Israel (the Church) is a visible body. It would greatly help the debate on this subject if the Church were considered, first and foremost, to be a Covenant Community.

Inasmuch as the sign of initiation and the seal of membership in the Community under the Old Covenant was circumcision of believing men and their male children. The equivalent sign and seal in the New Covenant is Baptism of all Believers and their children. Likewise, as the means by which Covenant obligations were renewed in the Old Covenant were Passover and other Festivals, the means for covenantal renewal under the New Covenant is frequent Communion at the Lord's Table. These are very public and visible signs and seals for a very public and visible Community.

Obedience to the Torah, interpreted now by Christ and the Apostles, remains a necessary condition for Covenant membership and the blessings of God upon His People.

The analogy also holds in the matter of judging membership. No one knows who is truly regenerate and among the Elect. That, of course, is determined completely by God and known only to Him. Therefore, all the Baptized should be considered publicly as Chosen, true Believers unless and until they should publicly disavow God and their faith by their words and actions. Every member of the Church is to claim both the Promises and to be held accountable for the responsibilities spelled out by God in the Covenant. Of course, that does not mean that all the baptized members of a local Covenant Community are regenerate. Many will not be. But we move forward by doing as Paul did in his letters to such Communities, addressing all their members together as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ- their Lord and ours." 1 Cor. 1:2