

Covenant Theology (ST5300)

Course Syllabus

Thomas Keene

tkeene@rts.edu | x.com/tommykeene | signandshadow.com

Peter Lee

plee@rts.edu | x.com/vosian | redeemingchillingworth.com

Reformed Theological Seminary
Washington DC

FALL 2026

(Last updated: September 1, 2026)

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Description

God speaks to us because he has established a relationship with us. This relationship, or “voluntary condescension on God’s part” (WCF 7.1) is what we call a covenant. Covenant therefore circumscribes and conditions every aspect of our relationship with God and His world.

Covenant Theology is often described in antithetical ways to other theological “systems,” such as dispensationalism. It also intersects with a variety of specific topics and controversies, like paedobaptism, the role of the law in the life of the believer, the nature of creation, and the role of the church in the world. These are all very important “advanced” aspects of Covenant Theology, but in reality the topic is much more basic, fundamental, and simple. Covenant Theology is, to put it simply, the study of a relationship. When we study the covenants, we are studying the dynamics of God’s relationship with us, his chosen image bearer.

This class therefore has a two-fold purpose. The first is to better understand the nature of our relationship with God, the dynamics of his “voluntary condescension.” During the course of that study we will come to appreciate that there are actually two covenants, not just one, and that the second is further subdivided into “various dispensations” or administrations (WCF 7.6), the dynamics of which subtly but profoundly impact the way in which we relate to our God.

However, since the point of studying a relationship is to cultivate and better it, our second ongoing purpose will be to apply our learning to the task of loving God. We will do this by applying

Covenant Theology to the interpretation of God's words, to the workings of the church, to the means of grace, and to daily life.

1.2 Learning Goals

Upon conclusion of this course, the student will:

- Understand the fundamentals of Covenant Theology and its implications for hermeneutics and theology
- Describe the continuity and discontinuity involved in the various administrations of the Covenant of Grace
- Be able to articulate the differences between similar and competing approaches to Reformed Covenant Theology
- Apply what they have learned in class within the church through a Ministry Application Project

1.3 Dates and Times

Class will be held from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm on Tuesdays, starting 9/14 and concluding 11/23, excluding Reading Week on 10/12. Unless otherwise noted all materials are due December 14th.

1.4 Course Website

You can find all course documents and some of the readings online via Canvas. All announcements will be made through that site and all assignments should be submitted there. There will also be opportunities to discuss via the forums. Make sure you have access to Canvas before the first day of class. Do **not** use Canvas to message us; please use our rts.edu email accounts.

2 Required Reading

The following readings are required and are a graded portion of the class. You will be required to fill out a "reading completion form," stating on-your-honor the percentage of each reading that you completed. Partial credit will not be given for article-length readings.

Many of the readings are article or chapter length and will be provided to you (no need to purchase). I have used a star (*) to indicate books (or articles in books) that I recommend purchasing (they will not be provided online).

Note: These readings are not being assigned to give you "the right answers" but rather to call you to engage in an ongoing dialog with Scripture and with those who interpret the Scriptures. Please read with humility and "critical appreciation."

2.1 Main Textbook

Choose from the following and read in full:

- O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (P&R Publishing, 2017)

- Richard P. Belcher, *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2020)

2.2 Other Readings

- Selections from Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether, eds., *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2020). Read chapters 14-17, 20-22.
- Read one of the following:¹

Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2nd ed. edition (P&R Publishing, 1993)

Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2022)

2.3 Self Study

You will be required to read an additional book or book-length set of articles of your choosing, reporting on your findings. See “Book Report” below.

3 Assessment

3.1 Reading Response (10%)

There is a lot of reading. I am not requiring you to turn in notes or digests or “book-reports,” but I do expect you to engage the readings. To that end I will require you to fill out a form listing the percentage of reading that you completed and a one or two sentence description of what you “got out of it.” This is really to help you—I want you to get credit for the work you put into this material.

3.2 Class Engagement(10%)

You are expected to be actively engaged in class. This of course includes regular attendance, but in addition you should be interacting with readings, asking questions, sharing your insights, and debating the issues. Discussion will be a regular part of the course rhythm, in addition to lecture material.

There will be occasional primary source reading assignments during the class. You will be given two weeks to complete these readings (they will be short) in preparation for class discussion, during which you will be expected to critically engage the material and winsomely participate in the class conversation.

I do realize that everyone participates in a different way, and so other avenues for engagement are available, including through the online course discussion forums and other means. If

1. Both of these are excellent resources for understanding and dialoging with the alternative tradition. Poythress is more hermeneutically attuned and is aiming at understanding and cooperation, rather than polemics, but he is in the Covenantal tradition and this was written prior to more recent developments in “progressive covenantalism.” The Four Views book is more polemically oriented and up-to-date.

you think you might have trouble meeting the requirement, don't hesitate to ask me how to move forward.

3.3 Ministry Application Project (25%)

Apply what you are learning by intentionally and substantively using it to serve the church.

3.3.1 Pick a Project This is a fairly open-ended assignment and can be accomplished in several ways:

- Preach sermons, teach Sunday School classes, guide an inductive bible study, that self-consciously engage “covenantal-theological” issues
- Write up devotional material for your study group about the “stages of redemption”
- Conduct a debate or “disputatio” on some controversial subject matter that we have been discussing in the class.
- Write a hymn or poem or other creative work that thoughtfully utilizes material from class
- Council a family through concerns they might have with infant baptism (be careful here though; don't make people your project)

3.3.2 Write a Report Once you have completed your project, you will report out about it in a 500-1000 word well-written document that addresses the following:

- What was your project?
- To what extent did you draw on material from the class in your endeavors, and how was it helpful (or why was it not helpful)?
- How did it go?
- What did you learn? What would you like to do differently? What do you need to learn or study or meditate on or practice to do what you did better?

Your grade for this project is largely based on completion, but also takes into account the effort and quality of your work. You will find a grading rubric on Canvas if you are interested in such things.

3.4 Book Review (25%)

Provide an “appreciatively critical” review/response to an additional book-length reading or readings of your choosing (there's a bibliography in Canvas). The requirements are as follows:

- First and foremost, your review should be “appreciative.” You may not agree with the author, but you should engage their argument, accurately represent their viewpoint in your analysis, and seek to learn from their perspective in substantive and tangible ways.

- Secondly, your review should be “critical,” by which I mean “probative and investigative” (rather than “polemical and argumentative”). Your goal here is not to demolish but to critique and improve. What about the argument is praiseworthy? Are there flaws in the overall argument? How might those flaws be addressed? What was missing that can be added? What was lacking that could be improved? If you are reading something you disagree with, you should avoid a “take-down” rebuttal, but it is appropriate to state the nature of the disagreement and provide an argument for an alternative.
- 1000 words (+/-), standard academic formatting (cite your sources, use formal language, etc.), great papers will use external sources (but this is not a research paper).

3.5 Position Papers (30%)

There will not be a traditional final exam for this class. Instead you will be given the opportunity to respond to four technical or controversial matters related to Covenant Theology. The responses should be no more than three pages in length and should follow all of the ordinary expectations for academic paper writing. The intent is to give you an opportunity to carefully work through some of the knotty problems we will encounter along the way.

You can approach this assignment as an “open note, open book, take home exam,” though, as mentioned above, it should be formatted like an academic paper. Good answers will reflect an integration and appropriation of material derived from lectures, course readings, primary sources, and personal reflection and critique. Great answers will additionally utilize independent research, and to that end a Bibliography of helpful resources will be provided for each topic above. The use of independent research is not required, but it will assist you in working through the issues.

4 Schedule and Outline

A detailed schedule of required and suggested readings and due dates will be provided on the first day of class, as will an outline of lecture material. Those wishing to get ahead should start by reading the Bible Reading and then the Special Introduction material for each book.

5 Grading Scale

96-100 A	87-89 B+	77-79 C+	etc.
90-95 A-	83-86 B	73-76 C	
	80-82 B-	70-72 C-	
			<60 F