

**What is covenant theology? Contrast the “Covenant of Works” and “Covenant of Grace.”
In what ways did covenant theology have a significant impact upon American colonial
Church and society (give several examples)?**

Covenant theology is the idea that God enters into a covenant or contract with mankind. It is seen in the Old Testament when God made a covenant with Abraham that he would bless him if Abraham followed God and walked before him.

In 1588 C.E. when the Spanish Armada was defeated, the British felt that God was fighting for them and that somehow they were God’s chosen people.

The Puritans in England took this thought even further in the 17th century, feeling that they were the remnant of the "pure". They were very much in line with William Tyndale’s view of contractual covenant with God.

Covenant theology had a large role in the development of early colonial America and lasting ramifications after that time. When the Pilgrims and other puritans came to America, they felt very strongly that they were in a covenant with God in the new world.

They believed in the ‘Covenant of Grace’ and the ‘Covenant of Works’. The ‘Covenant of Grace’ was a covenant that God made with unbelievers. All that God required from humans was faith, and in return he gave them salvation. However, once a person was saved, the way that he maintained God’s blessing was by obedience. This explains the ‘Covenant of Works’, which applied to all believers; God’s continued blessing was contingent upon a believer’s obedience to God.

Not only were the American Puritans in covenant with God, they also were in covenant with one another. God’s blessing was not just based upon a single person’s obedience, but was based on the obedience of the whole community.

The implications of this kind of thinking were far reaching. They became very legalistic and believed in living an outwardly religious life. Even if they sinned in secret, they were being watched by other members of the community and therefore had to outwardly be moral, righteous, and upstanding.

They were so concerned about keeping God’s blessing in the hostile new world; they felt that if God withdrew his blessing, they would lose this land. Since this blessing was contingent upon the obedience of the whole community this led to the ‘witch craze’ at the end of the 17th century. They felt that they had to seek out the evils that were lurking within their community. This led to more than 20 people being hanged as witches.

This also caused them to practice holding Jeremiads, in order to root out the sin from their community.

Another example of what this mindset caused was seen in the way Anne Hutchinson was handled. She was seen to be a rebellious and disobedient person, so she and her whole family were forced out of the community. When they were killed by Native American Indians, the Puritans in the community saw this as God’s judgment upon her.

However, this kind of legalistic living caused a decline in religion in the second generation Puritans. As legalism and outward religion was forced on the children, they eventually rebelled and wanted nothing to do with it.

In dealing with issues that are more social in nature, covenant theology also had a huge impact. First of all, the Puritans felt that as God’s people, God was “giving them the nations as their inheritance.” This caused them to justify the practice of owning slaves. They first took slaves of Native American Indians, then from Barbados, and eventually from Africa. In believing in their supremacy as God’s chosen, slavery was perfectly normal and would help spur their success in the new nation.

Because covenant theology was a community-wide agreement, and not merely individualistic, the Puritans also believed very strongly in both a social and an ecclesiastical statehood. They felt that religion could never be separated from statehood or government since it would ultimately affect the success of the whole community.

Eventually, the strong belief in 'covenant theology' was one of the factors that validated the Revolutionary War in the minds of the early American Colonists. The early American's believed in the idea of a covenant with the monarch. The king was in covenant with the people to seek after their happiness and well-being. They also picked up on John Locke's idea of the "right to revolt" if the king was not keeping his side of the covenant to look after the best interest of his subjects. So this seems to be one of the justifications for the Revolutionary War and fighting for freedom from England's rule.