



Abstract from Article

OF METAPHORS AND ANALOGIES: LEGAL LANGUAGE AND COVENANT THEOLOGY

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Abstract

For some years I have been interested in exploring the use made of legal language by Paul and other New Testament writers. Recently, however, I have been reading a fair amount of Covenant Theology, and have become increasingly aware of the problems that arise from the application of 'covenant' terminology and related metaphors. Accordingly, in this article I want first to consider the general nature and function of metaphors and analogies as I see their role in the transmission of the truths of Christianity, and then to apply these generalities to the field of Covenant Theology. It seems to me that much discussion in that field comes down to argument about the content of the metaphoric language involved, and that some of the argument arises from an improper approach to metaphor. However, as I am aware that my reading has been limited and patchy, and that, as a lawyer, I am intruding into another discipline, I will refrain from attempting the scholarly citation of precise examples from theological writing, in the hope that ideas from my discipline will not be dismissed merely on grounds of error of example. Some of the difficulties of metaphors and analogies can be seen at work in Covenant Theology. The concept of covenant is one which has received extensive discussion since the Reformation. In particular Ch. VII of the Westminster Confession of Faith outlines the relationship between God and man in covenant terms. There is reference to what is called a 'covenant of works' with Adam, and a second covenant 'commonly called the covenant of grace'. There are, however, many other examples of the Bible where the language of covenant is used. One area which has provoked much discussion is Heb. 9.16, 17 where many translators use the word 'testament' instead of 'covenant'. We well return to this in due course. The difficulties I wish to consider arise from the idea that 'covenant' means a 'contract', and the incidents of a contract being 'made', being 'enforced', and being subject to 'conditions'. Certainly there is also a part of the Covenant Theology which can be illuminated by study of the actual and theoretical political context of the theology. Here I restrict myself solely to the legal realm.