

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 7.1 (Part 1) – The Importance of Covenant in Scripture

“The friendship of the Lord is with those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.” – Psalm 25:14

I. The Importance of “Covenant” Idea

A. Many Theologians See “Covenants” as the Biggest Category in the Bible

1. *“The doctrine of the Covenant lies at the root of all true theology. It has been said that he who well understands the distinction between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace is a master of divinity. I am persuaded that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scriptures are based upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenants of law and the covenants of grace. May God grant us now the power to instruct and you the grace to receive instruction on this vital subject.”* – Who said it?!
2. *“God says nothing to man apart from the covenant ... For which cause all the Scripture, both old and new, wherein all God’s word is contained, bears the name of God’s covenant or testament.”* – Scottish theologian Robert Rollock (1555–1599).

B. What You Already Know about “Covenant” Theology ...!

1. “Old Testament” vs. “New Testament.” (Latin word for covenant: *testamentum*)
2. God makes covenants with Adam (post-fall), Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and in Christ. NB: * Subsequent covenants do not replace, they expand/modify the previous covenants. All post-fall covenants are pointing towards Christ’s work and its benefits for us.
3. God assures his people of his favor in terms of covenant promises (read Gen 15:17–18, Heb 6:13–20), and confirms those promises through covenant signs of circumcision, Passover, Sabbath, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.
4. The Ten Commandments that regulate the moral lives of God’s people are “the words of the covenant” (Ex 34:28) and the tablets containing those words were placed in the “ark of the covenant” (Deut 31:26).
5. God frequently ratifies (i.e., solemnly confirms) his covenants in the Bible with covenant signs (e.g., rainbow, circumcision, Sabbath, baptism, Lord’s Supper).
6. Paul works out the covenant blessings and curses involved in the Supper (1 Cor 11:25, 11:29).
7. God’s people are a “covenant community,” those who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice (Ps 50:5).
8. Jesus summed up the whole of his ministry as establishing/ratifying a “new covenant” (Luke 22:20).
9. Covenants have wonderful existential/personal relationship aspects, characterized by: “I am to be your God, and you are to be my people.” (Exod 6:7, Jer 31:33, Ezek 37:26, Zech 8:8, Matt 1:23, 28:20, 2 Cor 6:16, Heb 8:10, Rev 21:3).

II. Definitions of a Biblical Covenant

- A. H. Bullinger: “. . . a pact and agreement and promise.” (Of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God)
- B. F. Turretin: “*Yet strictly and properly, covenant denotes the agreement of God with man by which God promises his goods (and especially eternal life to him), and by man, in turn, duty and worship are engaged (certain external signs being employed for the sake of confirmation).*” (Institutes of Elenctic Theology)
- C. Thomas Brooks: “*a mutual agreement between parties, upon articles or propositions on both sides, so that each party is tied and bound to perform his own conditions*” (Paradise Opened).
- D. O.P. Robertson: “. . . a bond in blood sovereignly administered” (Christ of the Covenants)
- E. Meredith Kline: “. . . a relationship under sanctions” (By Oath Consigned)
- F. Ligon Duncan: “. . . a binding, mutual relationship with attending obligations”
- G. C. Wynne: “*a divinely established solemn bond with mutual obligations and attending sanctions.*”

III. Introducing WCF 7.1

“The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.” (WCF 7.1)

- A. What truths does the Confession claim stand behind God’s establishing of a covenant with humanity?
- B. What blessing or comfort should we take from the stated purpose of God’s covenant making (namely, “fruition” of God)?

“And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.”
– Leviticus 26:12

“That is as if he said, You shall have as true an interest in all my attributes for your good, as they are mine for my own glory ... My grace, saith God, shall be yours to pardon you, and my power shall be yours to protect you, and my wisdom shall be yours to direct you, and my goodness shall be yours to relieve you, and my mercy shall be yours to supply you, and my glory shall be yours to crown you. This is a comprehensive promise, for God to be our God: it includes all.”

– Thomas Brooks, *Works*, 5:308.