

**The Theology of the Westminster Standards**  
**WCF 7.1 (Part 2) – God’s Condescension in Covenant**

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

**I. Review: The Importance of “Covenant” Idea**

A. The Biggest Category in the Bible?

1. *“God says nothing to man apart from the covenant ...”* – Robert Rollock (1555–1599)
2. *“[A]ll theology . . . is founded on covenant.”* – John Owen (1616–1683)

B. You Already Know a Lot 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: \* After the fall, subsequent covenants do not replace, they expand/modify the previous covenants, all pointing towards Christ’s work and its benefits for us.
3. God assures his people of his favor in terms of covenant promises (Heb 6:13–20), and confirms those promises through covenant signs of circumcision, Passover, Sabbath, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.
4. Covenants involve promises and commands (Heb 6:13–14; Gen 17:1), blessings and curses (Lev 26, Deut 28), a suzerain and his vassal(s) (i.e., a superior and his subjects) (Ex 19:7–8), meals (Ex 24:11, Mark 14:22–25), mediators (Heb 9:15), covenant representatives (Ps 89:3; 1 Cor 15:22), law (Jer 11:3–5; Heb 10:16), renewal ceremonies (Josh 24), households/children (Deut 6:6–7; Acts 2:38).
5. 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).

*“To be a Christian is to live one’s life not merely in obedience to God, nor merely in dependence on God, nor even merely for the sake of God; it is to stand in conscious, reciprocal fellowship with God, to be identified with Him in thought and purpose and work, to receive from Him and give back to Him in the ceaseless interplay of spiritual forces. It is this direct confrontation of the religious mind with God which finds in the covenant-idea its perfect expression. To be in covenant with God—what finer and what more adequate definition of the perfect religious life could be conceived than this?”*

– Geerhardus Vos, “Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke,” 186

**II. Westminster Confession of Faith 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. The eternal triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is unchanging, true, self-sufficient, and full of glory, in need of nothing and no one, eternally satisfied and blessed in and of himself.
1. **Ex 3:14** – “*God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”*”
  2. **Acts 17:24** – “*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,<sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*”
- B. When God freely (!) creates, all his creatures reflect his glory and owe him worship and service.
1. **Luke 17:10** – “*So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’*”
  2. **Ps 113:5–6** – “*Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high,<sup>6</sup> who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?*”
  3. How does this fact challenge common evangelical understandings about God (see: “moralistic therapeutic deism”)?
- C. In a revelation of his own infinite goodness, God “condescends” (stoops!) to covenant with us, offering his image a reward of unimaginable glory: God Himself.
1. **Hosea 2:19** – “*And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.<sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.*”

*“To bring out his own image in Israel is the delight of Israel's lover and husband. This is the reason why the likeness is represented as beginning with the day of betrothal ... [T]he meaning of the word [“know”] goes far beyond the intellectual sphere; to know is not a mere act or process of becoming informed, but an act of sympathetic absorption in the other's character. It describes Jehovah's original choice of Israel as a most affectionate determination of what Israel was to be, and the attitude of the people as a passionate searching after the perfections of the divine nature. It is that self-projection of the lover into the beloved which is more than knowledge through the understanding. Hence also the trait of eagerness which the prophet ascribes to it. It is not a state of contentment, but partakes of the extreme restlessness of love in motion: ‘O let us know, let us follow on to know Jehovah!’ (Hos. 6:3). This is to such an extent the heart and soul of the marriage that the one great adultery consists in this: that Israel does not know and does not care to know Jehovah. For that is to fail of the end for which the covenant exists; it makes the marriage idle and fruitless.” – Vos, “The Wonderful Tree,” Sermon preached on Hos 14:8*

2. How should the purpose of God’s covenant-making – knowing God! – inform our daily life? Our worship? Our fellowship with other Christians? Our friendships with others?

*“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,<sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.<sup>3</sup> **And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**”’ (John 17:1–3)*