

## The Theology of the Westminster Standards WCF 7.3 – The Covenant of Grace (Part 2)

*“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.”*  
– Charles Spurgeon

### I. Review: The Covenant of Works

*“The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” (WCF 7.2)*

### II. The Covenant of Grace

*“Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.” (WCF 7.3)*

#### A. Who are the **parties** of the Covenant of Grace?

1. **Ps 25:14** – *“The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.”*
2. **John 6:37** – *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”*

WLC Q. 31. *With whom was the covenant of grace made?* A. The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.

3. **Heb 10:26, 29** – *“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins ... <sup>29</sup> How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?”*
4. **Acts 2:38–39** – *“Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.’”*

WLC Q. 166. *Unto whom is baptism to be administered?* A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.

#### 5. Geerhardus Vos on the two senses in which one may be “in” the covenant of grace:

*“[T]he covenant is one and the same. But they all are not in the covenant in one and the same way. **Some are in it only through external privileges, but some are also in it through whole-hearted acceptance**, for the enjoyment of the saving benefits by means of those privileges ... Every covenant in the first sense looks forward and is intended to become a covenant in this second sense, a living fellowship or a fellowship of life.”*

– G. Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:102, 105

*“One asks, ‘Who is in the covenant of grace?’ If one has in view **the legal side** of the matter, that is, if one poses the question, ‘Who is included and of whom can it be expected that they will live in the covenant?’ the answer is, ‘All who by stipulation or by birth have become members of the covenant’; thus, believers and their seed. If one looks at **the actual side**, one poses the question, ‘In whom has this legal relationship become a living fellowship?’ The answer is, ‘All who have been regenerated and have faith, at least in principle.’” – Vos, RD, 2:105*

*“There are two sorts of Covenanting, one external, professed, visible, conditional, another internal, real, [and] absolute.” Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened* (1655), ch. 13.*

## 6. The Visible vs. Invisible Church

- a. **1 Cor 1:2** – *“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”*
- b. **1 Cor 11:18** – *“For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.”*

WLC Q. 62. *What is the visible church? A. The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children.*

- c. **Rom 9:6** – *“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup> and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring ...”*
- d. **2 Tim 2:19** – *“But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his.’”*

*“Holy Scripture speaks of the church in two ways. Sometimes by the term ‘church’ it means that which is actually in God’s presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Then, indeed, the church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. Often, however, the name ‘church’ designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ. By baptism we are initiated into faith in him; by partaking in the Lord’s Supper we attest our unity in true doctrine and love; in the Word of the Lord we have agreement, and for the preaching of the Word the ministry instituted by Christ is preserved.” – John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.7*

## III. DETOUR: What about Jeremiah’s prophecy that, in the new covenant, **“they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest”** (Jer 31:34)? What is Jeremiah talking about?

A. In context, he’s talking about the accomplishment of Christ’s redemption in the new covenant.

1. **Jer 31:34** – *“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*
2. **Heb 10:17–18** – *“Then [God] adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’ <sup>18</sup> Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.”*
  - a. [Note: Hebrews 10 provides an infallible interpretation of Jer 31:34 and concludes that it implies that Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient to accomplish our redemption.]

- B. In context, he's talking about the *greater reception* of Christ's redemption in the new covenant, over against the prevailing unbelief of Israel in the old covenant era.
1. **Jer 6:13** – “*For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.*”
    - a. [Note: Some argue that “*from the least to the greatest*” is an idiom for “all types of people” (since not every single individual in Old Testament Israel, without exception, was “greedy for unjust gain”)]
  2. **Jer 9:4–5** – “*Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer.*”
- C. In context, he's talking about the *effectiveness* of redemption in the new covenant, expressed in terms of the *consummation* of the new covenant on the last day, when all of God's gathered people will be the regenerate elect.
1. **Jer 9:25–26** – “*Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh—<sup>26</sup> Egypt, Judah, Edom ...*”
  2. **Jer 51:47–48** – “*Therefore, behold, the days are coming when I will punish the images of Babylon; her whole land shall be put to shame ...<sup>48</sup> Then the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, shall sing for joy over Babylon.*”
    - a. [Note: These verses refer to the last day, and the same language (“*Behold, the days are coming ...*”) is found in Jer 31:31, “*Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant ...*”]
- D. According to Hebrews, he's *exhorting covenant members today* to believe the gospel and make sure they belong to Christ before the consummation arrives.
1. **Heb 10:15–16, 19, 22–23** – “*And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us ... saying, [quoting Jer 31:33]<sup>16</sup> ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them ...’ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus ...<sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ...<sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering ...*”
  2. **Heb 10:26, 29** – “*For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins ... How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?*”
    - a. [Note: If it is possible to “*profane the blood of the covenant*” by which one is “*sanctified*” (i.e., set apart), then Jer 31 does not promise an exhaustively regenerate church today.]

**Conclusion = Jer 31:31–34 foretells a new covenant in which:**

- (a) redemption will be accomplished by Christ; and**
- (b) faith, not unbelief, will be the prevailing mark of the covenant community;**
- (c) leading to a consummation, when all in the covenant community “will know the Lord,” such that**
- (d) professing Christians today should press on today in true faith, not fall away out of a false profession of faith (i.e., commit apostasy) before the end arrives.**

E. What is the **condition** of the Covenant of Grace?

1. **Eph 2:8** – *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God ...”*

*“The covenant of grace is nothing other than a covenant of works accomplished in Christ, the fulfillment of which is given to us by grace.” (Geerhardus Vos)*

F. What was **promised/threatened** in the Covenant of Grace?

1. **John 3:16–18** – *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.<sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”*
2. **1 John 2:19** – *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”*

*“Yet what if it were true? ‘So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too’—God’s own Son delivered up for us all, freedom from the world, sought by philosophers of all the ages, offered now freely to every simple soul, things hidden from the wise and prudent revealed unto babes, the long striving over, the impossible accomplished, sin conquered by mysterious grace, communion at length with the holy God, our Father which art in heaven!”*

– J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 114