

The Theology of the Westminster Standards WCF 7.4–5 – The Covenant of Grace

“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 Covenants of Works and of Grace

“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)

“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 were the **parties** of the Covenants of Works and Grace, respectively?
- B. What was **promised/threatened** in the Covenants of Works and Grace, respectively?
- C. What was the **condition** of the Covenants of Works and Grace, respectively?

“[W]e justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.”

– Belgic Confession (1561), Article 22

*“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*

II. The Covenant of Grace as a “Testament”

“This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.” (WCF 7.4)

- A. What is a “last will and testament”? How does WCF 7.3 point us to the “testamentary” (i.e., relating to a “last will and testament”) character of Christ’s work?

- B. **Heb 9:15–18** – *“Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant [diatheke], so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. ¹⁶ For where a will [diatheke] is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will [diatheke] takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. ¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant [diatheke] was inaugurated without blood ...”*
- C. How does the work of Christ (as Testator) differ from our ordinary experience with a “last will and testament”?

“The gospel can be described in the dialect of covenant theology, or in the language of a last will and testament ... And what a powerful picture this is ... For we all know who must die before a last will and testament can come into effect. It is the one who made it. And so it is that the Son of God bled out his life for us so that we would receive an everlasting inheritance.” – Chad Van Dixhoorn, Confessing the Faith, 102

III. The Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament Era

“This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament.” (WCF 7.5)

- A. What does WCF 7.5 mean by “the time of the law” and “the time of the gospel”?
- B. According to WCF 7.5, did God reveal the gospel to Old Testament people? If so, how?
1. **John 5:46** – *“For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”*
 2. **Gal 3:8** – *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’”*
 3. **Heb 4:2** – *“For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.”*
- C. Two Illustrations
1. Eating a bowl or a burrito at Moes – “Welcome to Moes!”
 2. The Jetway to an Airplane
 - a. **2 Cor 3:10–11** – *Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹ For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.*
 - b. **Heb 8:13** – *In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*
- D. What are some of the privileges of living in the “new covenant” era?