

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 7.5–6 – The Covenant of Grace Across Human History

*'Tis mine, the covenant of his grace,
 And every promise mine;
 All sprung from everlasting love,
 And sealed by blood divine.*

*On my unworthy favored head
 Its blessings all unite;
 Blessings more numerous than the stars,
 More lasting, and more bright.*
 (Phillip Doddridge)

I. Introduction: The “Substance” of the Covenant of Grace

“Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant [i.e., covenant of works], 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. **Acts 4:12** – *“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*
1. Versus classic dispensationalism¹
- B. **John 5:46** – *“For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”*
- C. **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.’”*
- D. **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.”*

“[The Covenant of Grace] always has the same Gospel (Rom 1:2 and Gal 3:8), the same Christ (John 14:6 and Acts 4:12), the same faith (Acts 15:11 and Rom 4:11), and always confers the same benefits of forgiveness and eternal life (Acts 10:43 and Rom 4:3). The light by which the believers travel differs, but their route is always the same.”

– Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, 257–58

II. The “Administration” of 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”?

¹ See Ligon Duncan: <https://ligonduncan.com/dispensationalism-1205/>

- B. According to WCF 7.5, how did God reveal the gospel to Old Testament people?
- C. What does the “administration” of the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament have to do with eating at Moes (“Welcome to Moes!”)??

III. The “Administration” of the Covenant of Grace in the New Testament Era

“Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.” (WCF 7.6)

- A. What does WCF 7.6 say is different about the “administration” of the Covenant of Grace today?
- B. What does WCF 7.6 say is better about the “administration” of the Covenant of Grace today?
- C. How does affirming the “organic progress” of the Covenant of Grace balance both the one substance and the changing administrations of the Covenant?
 1. **Gen 3:15** – *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* (God speaking to Satan)
 2. **Rom 16:20** – *“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”*
- D. What are some of the privileges of living in the “new covenant” era?

“The proclamation of the Word of the Gospel has left behind all the old reserve and restrictions and limitations under which Moses and his successors labored. Its ministers can now speak fully and freely and plainly the whole counsel of God. Paul glories in being able to do this. He uses great boldness of speech. There is nothing to withhold, nothing to conceal: the entire plan of redemption has been unfolded, the mystery hidden through the ages has been revealed, and there is committed to every ambassador of Christ an absolute message, no longer subject to change. Not the delicate procedure of the diplomat, who hides his aim, but the stately stepping forward of the herald who renders an authoritative pronouncement, characterizes his task to Paul’s own mind” (Geerhardus Vos)

