

**Westminster Confession of Faith**  
**OHCC 2011 | Week 12—God’s Covenant with Man (Chapter 7)**

Major themes in WCF Chapter 7

- a. The importance of covenants in Scripture
- b. The interconnection between the covenants in Scripture
- c. The ultimate nature of Jesus Christ’s covenant of grace

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.

1. God’s unique exaltedness and our unique creatureliness
  - a. We bear God’s image (posse peccare, posse non peccare), however...
    - i. God is not bound to make covenant
  - b. Our obedience earns nothing
    - i. Covenant of Works and grace
    - ii. Adam’s favor in God’s eyes
  - c. Yahweh condescends to covenant with Adam

2. 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.

2. Covenant of works
  - a. Key ideas
    - i. Adam’s probation
    - ii. Federal headship
  - b. Adam’s probation: Implied promise of life to Adam and us
    - i. Gen 2:15-17
      1. Man given work & responsibility/stewardship
      2. Man given stipulation not to eat
      3. Man given threat of death
      4. Man given implicit promise of life
  - c. Adam’s Federal Headship: Adam as representative regent for the human race
    - i. Our Democratic sensibilities
    - ii. Implicit good news in Adam & Jesus Christ’s representative work
    - iii. Rom 5:12-21
      1. Reign of death through Adam’s sin
      2. Condemnation of all through the wrong of one
      3. Life through the one who has fulfilled Adam’s probation

3. 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.

3. Covenant of grace
  - a. Preparatory covenants (see handout)

4. 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.

#### 4. Jesus the Testator

- a. Old and New Testaments' focus on the coming Messiah and his arrival
- b. Character of Testaments-(Heb 9:15-17)
  - i. Testaments refer to someone's death
  - ii. Testaments assume an inheritance
- c. Implications-Language of purpose, purchase, adoption, and inheritance in Eph 1-2
  - i. God the Father purposed to save us from the very beginning
  - ii. We inherit salvation through Christ's redemptive work
  - iii. We are sealed with his Holy Spirit
  - iv. We belong to Christ's family

5. 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.

#### 5. Unique administrations of the one covenant

- a. Key distinction between time of the law and gospel
  - i. Law—time of anticipation of promises
  - ii. Gospel-time of fulfillment of the promises
- b. Time of the Law-God's foreshadowing, promises, and anticipation
  - i. Promises-Ps 2, Ps 110, 2 Sam 7
  - ii. Prophecies-Heb 10:1-10
  - iii. Sacrifices-Heb 9:6-14
- c. Same faith-God would provide a final answer for sin
  - i. Abraham and David as examples of faith (Rom 4)
  - ii. Sufficient and efficacious
- d. Denial of dispensations
  - i. Different "tracks" for salvation.
  - ii. Different modes of salvation
  - iii. Promise-fulfillment, not varying modes of salvation
  - iv. Grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone

6. 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.

#### 6. Ordinances of the covenant

- a. Preaching of God's Word
- b. Sacraments
- c. Evidential and efficacious

## 7. Shared covenant and implications

### a. How we read Scripture

- i. God's word to his people in the OT is his word to his people at all times
- ii. Requires careful exegesis and hermeneutics
- iii. "The new is in the old concealed, the old is in the new revealed."<sup>1</sup>

### b. Covenant of Works & Covenant of Grace?

- i. Doesn't this intimate that man not only was able to fall, but likely would?
- ii. Truth about glory to come
- iii. Truth about Covenant of Works

- able to sin, able not to sin (*posse peccare, posse non peccare*) the state of man in innocence, before the Fall
- not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*); the second the state of the natural man after the Fall
- able not to sin (*posse non peccare, non posse esse perfectum*) the third the state of the regenerate man
- unable to sin (*non posse peccare*) the fourth the glorified man.

## 8. Bibliography on God's Covenants

Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of God*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub, 2002.

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology. With a Complete Textual Index*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1959.

---

<sup>1</sup> Augustine quoted by R.C. Sproul in *Truth's we Confess*.

## Covenants in the Ancient World

Covenants were a common occurrence in Abraham's world. There were two main types of covenants, either between equals, called a covenant of brotherhood, or one between a greater King and a subordinate, vassal known as a Suzerain Covenant. There are several commonly shared aspects of this latter covenant.

1. Preamble
  - a. The great king is introduced with accompanying titles and attributes
2. Historical Prologue
  - a. The historical relationship between the two entities is sketched, usually with a heavy emphasis on the greater king's accomplishments and his benevolence towards the vassal.
3. Treaty Stipulations
  - a. What is required by both the greater king and vassal in their contractual relationship. Includes how they are to trade with each other, relationships with non-covenant countries, etc. (NATO is a contemporary example).
4. Covenant Reminders
  - a. The treaty required that it be read regularly in public places to remind each other of its stipulations (Deut. 6).
5. Witnesses to the Covenant
  - a. Human, natural and divine witnesses were called upon to confirm, in their presence, the signing of the treaty.
6. Curses and Blessings
  - a. Certain curses, of a human and supernatural nature, were promised for breaking the covenant. These included war with the covenant breaker, embargos, crop failure, etc.
  - b. Blessings promised were also both of human and divine character.
7. Covenantal Meal
  - a. An animal sacrifice was made to commemorate the covenant, part of which was offered up to their gods, the other was consumed in a ceremonial meal.

### Biblical Covenants

1. Life Covenant [Covenant of Works]-(Gen 1-2) Yahweh creates humans in his image, provides fruitful garden, gives humans purpose and rule over it, presupposes eternal life [Rom 5]
2. Noatic Covenants-(Gen. 6:18 & 9:8-17) Yahweh's agreement to never again destroy the earth
3. Abrahamic Covenant-(Gen. 12, 15 & 17) Yahweh's promise to Abram of innumerable offspring, blessing to the nations, and inheritance of Promised Land. [Gal 3 & Matt 28]
4. Sinaitic Covenant-(Exodus 19-24) Yahweh's institution of Israel's nationhood and giving of the law [Rom 3]
5. Davidic Covenant-(2 Sam. 7, Psalms 2 & 110) Yahweh promises to be David's father and promises an eternal heir from his family will sit upon the throne. [
6. NT Covenant in the Lord Jesus Christ-(Mark 14:22-25 & 1 Cor. 11:23-25) Unique in that the greater King Jesus both is the initiator of the covenant and the sacrifice confirming it. Communion thus is the covenant meal for us.

**Westminster Confession of Faith**  
**OHCC 2011 | Week 12—God’s Covenant with Man (Chapter 7)**

Major themes in WCF Chapter 7

- d. The importance of covenants in Scripture-Why Ralph spent 14 months on this topic
- e. The interconnection between the covenants in Scripture
- f. The ultimate nature of Jesus Christ’s covenant of grace

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.

9. God’s unique exaltedness and our unique creatureliness

- a. We bear God’s image (posse peccare, posse non peccare), however...
  - i. God is not indebted in any way to make covenant with us, either pre or post-lapsarian
- b. Our obedience to him earns nothing
  - i. Covenant of Works no less an act of grace than God’s covenant of redemption in Christ
  - ii. Adam would never earn favor in God’s eyes, God must always grant it
- c. He condescends to covenant with Adam (see first section of Ancient Covenants handout)

2. 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.

10. Covenant of works

- a. Key ideas
  - i. Adam’s probation
  - ii. Federal headship
- b. Adam’s probation: Implied promise of life to Adam and us
  - i. Gen 2:15-17 [Note the number of covenant-like references]
    - 1. Man placed in the garden for work & responsibility/stewardship
    - 2. Man given stipulation not to eat
    - 3. Man given threat of death
    - 4. Man given implicit promise of life (would he have died if he hadn’t sinned? No!)
- c. Adam’s Federal Headship: Adam as regent for the human race represented us as would a president or an ambassador...what he did, we did.
  - i. This is foreign and even offensive to our ears that are trained in a Democracy
  - ii. Note the implicit good news however, that in Adam we had a representative, colossal failure, in Christ we have a representative, obedient and completely triumphant in his mission
  - iii. Rom 5:12-21 [Note the covenant-like implications of Adam’s sin]
    - 1. Reign of death through Adam’s sin
    - 2. Condemnation of all through the wrong of one
    - 3. Life through the one who has fulfilled Adam’s probation

3. 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.

## 11. Covenant of grace

- a. Preparatory covenants (see handout)
  - i. Noaitic Covenant (Gen. 6:18 & 9:8-17)
    1. God will never destroy the earth because of sin
    2. How will sin be dealt with justly then? Rom 3:25-26
  - ii. Abrahamic Covenant
    1. Land, seed, and blessing
      - a. Gal 3:15-18 & seed-Galatians focuses the promise of the seed to come through one man, Jesus Christ
      - b. Blessing to the nations and Matthew 28
  - iii. Mosaic Covenant
    1. God's law and Romans 2-3-Life for those who obey, sure death for those who refuse
  - iv. Davidic Covenant
    1. Promise of eternal heir and Acts 2:34-35 (Ps 110), Acts 3:25-26 (Ps 2), Heb 1 & 5 (2 Sam 7)

4. 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.

## 12. Jesus the Testator [One who dies leaving a valid will]

- a. Old and New Testaments are focused upon the coming Messiah and his arrival
- b. Character of Testaments-(Heb 9:15-17)
  - i. Testaments refer to someone's death
  - ii. Testaments assume an inheritance
- c. Implications-Language of purpose, purchase, adoption, and inheritance in Eph 1-2
  - i. God the Father purposed to save us from the very beginning
  - ii. We inherit salvation through Christ's redemptive work
  - iii. We are sealed with his Holy Spirit
  - iv. We belong to Christ's family-Eph 2:11-22

5. 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.

## 13. Unique administrations of the one covenant (Hebrews 8-10)

- a. Key distinction between time of the law and gospel
  - i. Law—time of anticipation of promises
  - ii. Gospel-time of fulfillment of the promises
- b. Time of the Law-God's foreshadowing, promises, and anticipation
  - i. Promises-Ps 2, Ps 110, 2 Sam 7
  - ii. Prophecies-Heb 10:1-10
  - iii. Sacrifices-Heb 9:6-14
  - iv. Circumcision
  - v. Passover Lamb
- c. Same faith-God would provide a final answer for sin
  - i. Abraham and David as examples of faith (Rom 4)
  - ii. Sufficient and efficacious

1. They received enough (sufficient) revelation to anticipate God's final Passover, his final sacrifice for his people's sin
- iii. They simply looked forward to Christ fulfilling the covenant in the same manner in which we look backward
- d. Denial of dispensations
  - i. Multiple dispensations of God's working with different "tracks" for salvation
  - ii. People are saved differently depending on the dispensation
  - iii. We operate under promise-fulfillment, not varying modes of salvation
  - iv. We are all saved by grace, through faith in God's provision for sin, anticipated in the oblations, sacrifices, temple, etc. and fulfilled in Christ

6. 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.

#### 14. Ordinances of the covenant

- a. Preaching of God's Word
- b. Sacraments
  - i. Baptism
  - ii. Lord's Supper
- c. Evidential and efficacious
  - i. They are sign-posts of God's working
  - ii. They are completely sufficient to lead us to Christ and remind us of Christ

#### 15. Shared covenant and implications

- a. How we read Scripture
  - i. God's word to his people in the OT is his word to his people at all times
  - ii. Requires careful exegesis and hermeneutics
  - iii. "The new is in the old concealed, the old is in the new revealed."<sup>2</sup>
- b. Covenant of Works & Covenant of Grace?
  - i. Consider again Augustine's formulation and wonder with me at the alteration between the pre-lapsarian state of man and the glorified state
  - ii. Doesn't this intimate that man not only was able to fall, but likely would?
  - iii. We are not simply returned to an Eden-like state in glory, but are altered so we will not ever again wish to sin
  - iv. This implies that the Covenant of Works required more than man's obedience but also God's powerful alteration of humans as an act of his goodness to humanity
  - v. Hence there is some interconnection between the Covenant of Works & Covenant of Grace
    - able to sin, able not to sin (posse peccare, posse non peccare) the state of man in innocence, before the Fall
    - not able not to sin (non posse non peccare); the second the state of the natural man after the Fall

<sup>2</sup> Augustine quoted by R.C. Sproul in *Truth's we Confess*.

- able not to sin (*posse non peccare, non posse esse perfectum*) the third the state of the regenerate man
- unable to sin (*non posse peccare*) the fourth the glorified man.

#### 16. Bibliography on God's Covenants

Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of God*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub, 2002.

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology. With a Complete Textual Index*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1959.