

o The WCF Use of “Covenant”

- i. A gracious condescension by God (WCF 7.1)
- ii. Condescension in the form of an ancient Near Eastern (Hittite) Treaty: (Eg. Gen-Exodus and Deut.)

- a. Preamble: name, title, etc—to motivate fear and respect "I am..." (Dt. 1:1-5)
- b. Historical Prologue: what the sovereign has done to motivate love, respect, etc. (Dt. 1:6-4:49)
- c. Stipulations: commitments from vassals, both general and specific (Dt. 5-26)
- d. Sanctions: curses and blessing or covenant ratification as qualified by the breaking or keeping of the covenant (Dt. 27-30)
- e. Document Clause and Witness: what to do with the treaty document—where and when to read it, who witnesses the oaths made, etc. (Dt. 31-34)
- f. Oath of Ratification and “Cutting” (Berith) Ceremony: the word “covenant” derived from the word “to cut”

Important Interpretive Observation: We see the "covenantal" nature of Biblical revelation if by the mere fact that the Hebrew word for covenant ("berith") is used 289 times in the Old Testament. The "berith" language is used explicitly to summarize the Genesis histories in Exodus 2:24, “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Clearly God was acting in covenant through Moses as noted in Exodus 24:7, “Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’” 8 Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, ‘See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’” As we will see, even the prophets themselves were those appointed by God as the covenant executors, to proclaim the terms of the covenant as especially related to the curses and blessings attached to them—this will account for the prophets constantly applying the curses of Deuteronomy to the sufferings of the Israelite people and the hope for blessings to the future Israel.

iii. Two Covenants

1. Covenant of Works (WCF 7.2) “Pre-Redemptive”
2. Covenant of Grace (WCF 7.3-4) “Redemptive”
 - a. Perhaps better, “Promise of Grace” which then maintains the importance of works/obedience in gaining the blessings of the covenant (e.g. It is called by Paul a "promise" rather than a "covenant" in Gal.3:18) as related to God’s taking upon himself the obligations of the eternal treaty on behalf of humanity in the work of Christ!

The difference between the pre-redemptive and redemptive covenant is not then that the latter substitutes promise for law. The difference is rather that redemptive covenant adds promise to law. Redemptive covenant is simultaneously a promise administration of guaranteed blessings and a law administration of blessing dependent on obedience, with the latter foundational. The weakness of the traditional designation, "Covenant of Works" for the pre-redemptive covenant is that it fails to take account of the continuity of the law principle in redemptive revelation and therefore is not a sufficiently distinctive term. The principles of "works" continues into redemptive covenant administration, not only in the sense already stressed that the blessings of redemption are secured by the works of a federal head who must satisfy the law's demands, but, in the sense, too, that none of the many represented by Christ attains to the promised consummation of the covenant's beatitude except he attains to that holiness without which man does not see God." (p.13-14)... "Coherence can be achieved in Covenant Theology only by the subordination of grace to law. (Meredith Kline, “Law Covenant”, p. 17)

Note: Depending on who “swears,” the covenant is “gracious-righteousness” or “works-righteousness.”

"Every divine-human covenant in Scripture involves a sanction-sealed commitment to maintain a particular relationship or follow a stipulated course of action. In general then a covenant may be defined as a relationship under sanctions. . . . It is this swearing of the ratificatory oath that provides an identification mark by which we can readily distinguish in the divine covenants of Scripture between a law covenant and one of promise. For it is evident that if God swears the oath of the ratification ceremony, that particular covenantal transaction is one of promise, whereas if man is summoned to swear the oath, the particular covenant thus ratified is one of law. " (Meredith Kline, “Law Covenant”, p. 3, 5)

Compare then the Abrahamic Promise in Gen. 15 where an oath is taken by God (flaming torch) vs. where an oath is taken by people in Ex. 19. Note also the oath of man in Gen. 2:23ff vs. the promise oath of God in Gen. 3:14ff.

See further Paul’s discussion in Galatians—Promise is added to law and can’t then be annulled by Law

Gal. 3:15-17 Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. 16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, "And to offsprings," as of many; but it says, "And to your offspring," that is, to one person, who is Christ. 17 My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. 18 For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

- The WCF Use of "Law"
 - i. Law= Covenant of Works Generally or "Creation Covenant" (WCF 19:1)
 - ii. Law= Mosaic Covenant differentiated into three types/aspects (WCF 19:2-4)
 - 1. Rule of Faith and Practice (Moral)
 - 2. Rule of Worship (Ceremonial)
 - 3. Rule of Geo-Politic (Civil)
 (Note: Categories are clear enough, but differentiating between them is not always so clear — e.g. are all of the Ten Commandments "moral" and if so, how to understand #1 and #4? — see below on continuity/discontinuity)
 - iii. Moral Law "for ever bind all" (WCF 19:5) whereas the ceremonial and civil, in so far as they are typological as per the ceremonial laws are fulfilled in Christ" and "OT geo-political laws are fulfilled in eternal heavenly kingdom life" these are therefore "abrogated under the new covenant." (WCF 19:3)
- Not then to be confused with Paul's Use of "Law": "Mosaic Covenant" compared to "gospel"
 - i. Principle of Continuity ("covenant of grace" *differently administered*) (WCF 7:5)
 - One Church under different administrations (Rom. 9:1ff)
 - One Promise fulfilled in Christ (Gal 3:7-9)
 - "Moral law" as a rule of faith and practice still (WCF 19:6) *yet...*
 - *Temple, albeit administered differently (Eph. 2, e.g. Sabbath moving from 7th day to 1st): entrance rite (circumcision to baptism) and renewal rite (Sacrificial system to Lord's supper)*
 - i. Principle of Discontinuity
 - No longer under the law (works righteousness principle) as temporal "covenant" (Mosaic) or even as an eternal covenant (Creation)
 - E.g. Temporal (Geo.Political works-righteousness conditioned) vs. Eternal (Heavenly faith-righteousness conditioned): Gal 3:19-29 no longer national — "Jew" vs. "Greek", Gal 4:1ff — not according to "elemental spirits" (seasons, etc),
 - E.g. Fulfillment Motif: Shadows/Types vs. Real/Antitype (Mt. 5:17, Heb. 10:1ff "only a shadow"...) WCF
 - **Note then WCF summary in 7.4-6**
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.
 - Purpose of Mosaic "Law" ("*Law as a covenant of works-righteousness*") (WCF 19:6) as a basis for temporal blessing or curse) served as a tutor to discover "spiritual poverty leading to faith in Christ's sacrificial atonement for sins.
 - How then should we live? The ethics of Fulfillment... thus continuity and discontinuity
 - Temporal Typifying to Eternal: Expect no necessary "covenantal" relationship (not to be confused with a "natural relationship") between obedience and eternal blessing — in fact "suffering" is the motif of New Covenant faithfulness! (compare Dt. 11:13-17, 26-28 with Phil. 3:10, Col. 1:24, 1 Peter, etc.)
 - Israel Nation to Israel Church: Ecclesial Ethics vs. Individual or Political Ethics (Epistles and New Covenant "temple" ethics —Rom 12:1-5)