

GOD’S COVENANT
The Privileges of the Christian Life
Westminster Presbyterian Church
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I. Introduction: A Return to WCF 7.1

“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.” – Westminster Confession of Faith, 7.1 (“Of God’s Covenant With Man”)

Luke 17:7, 9–10 – *“Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? ...⁹ Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”*

Rev 21:3 – *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”* (cf. Gen 17:7; Ex. 6:7; 2 Cor 6:16–18)

II. Definition and Key Features of “Covenant”

A. Definition(s) of Covenant - a divinely established solemn bond with mutual obligations and attending sanctions.

1. Heinrich Bullinger: “. . . a pact and agreement and promise.”
2. Thomas Brooks: “a mutual agreement between parties, upon articles or propositions on both sides, so that each party is tied and bound to perform his own conditions”
3. Francis Turretin: “... strictly and properly, covenant denotes the agreement of God with man by which God promises his goods (and especially eternal life to him), and by man, in turn, duty and worship are engaged (certain external signs being employed for the sake of confirmation).”
4. Meredith Kline: “. . . a relationship under sanctions”
5. Ligon Duncan: “. . . a binding, mutual relationship with attending obligations”

B. Key Features of a Biblical Covenant – Two or more parties, a condition, threat/promise, dual sanctions (blessing or cursing)

C. Two Major Covenants

1. 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

Gen 2:15–16 – *“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”*

Hos 6:7 – “*But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.*”

2. 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

1 Cor 15:21–22 – “*For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*”

Rom 5:12, 18b – “*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ... ¹⁸ ... so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.*”

“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, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:33

Gen 3:22–23 – “*Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—’ ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.*”

Rev 2:7 – “*To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*”

III. The Covenant (of Grace) as a Christian Privilege!

- A. God has made a way, beyond anything we could naturally concoct on our own, by which we may know him as our “blessedness and reward.”
- B. In the wake of our sin, in spite of our deserving the covenant curse, God has provided the One who has satisfied the covenant’s condition and won the covenant blessing, which he shares with us!

Heb 9:15 – “*...[Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.*”

Heb 7:22 – “*This makes Jesus the guarantor [‘surety’!] of a better covenant.*”

- C. God welcomes us into the visible community of the Covenant of Grace, in which all the means of grace (preaching, prayer, sacraments, fellowship, etc.) build up the Christian in faith and love.

*‘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.* – Philip Doddridge