

The Westminster Confession of Faith

Lesson 23: Of God's Covenant With Man (¶ 7.5 – 7.6)

High Plains Fellowship PCA

February 26, 2023

prepared by J.R. Dickens

Introduction

This chapter concerns the manner in which God relates to his creatures—and indeed, to his whole creation. Our confession says (in so many words) that we would have no possibility of a relationship with our Creator unless he stooped down to our level. And in this chapter we will see how he has done that by way of something called a “covenant.”

We will describe two covenants in this discussion—the “covenant of works” and the “covenant of grace”—but as we look more closely we’ll see that they are part of one and the same covenant. The second covenant (“grace”) is the fulfillment of the first covenant (“works”) by another representative. Thus where Adam *failed* in regard of the first covenant, Christ *fulfills* in regard of the second.

This week we will conclude our study of Chapter 7 with a reminder that the covenant of grace is the same since the Fall, though its outward administration has changed many times.

Opener

- What do we mean when we talk about worship “styles”?
- Where do we find the first recorded difference of worship practices? How does it begin to point to the idea of “regulated” worship?
- How has the manner of worship changed since Genesis?

WLC Q/A #33-35

Q33: Was the covenant of grace always administered after one and the same manner?

A33: The covenant of grace was not always administered after the same manner, but the administrations of it under the Old Testament were different from those under the New.[1]

1. **2 Cor. 3:6-9** – Who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.

Q34: How was the covenant of grace administered under the Old Testament?

A34: The covenant of grace was administered under the Old Testament, by promises,[1] prophecies, [2] sacrifices,[3] circumcision,[4] the passover,[5] and other types and ordinances, which did all foreshadow Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah,[6] by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation.[7]

1. **Rom. 15:8** – For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.
2. **Acts 3:20, 24** – That times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus. . . . And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.
3. **Heb. 10:1** – For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.
4. **Rom. 4:11** – He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,
5. **1 Cor. 5:7** – Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.
6. **Heb. ch. 8-10** – (not included here) **Heb. 11:13** – These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.
7. **Gal. 3:7-9, 14** – Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 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.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. . . . So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Q35: How is the covenant of grace administered under the New Testament?

A35: Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same covenant of grace was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the word,[1] and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism [2] and the Lord’s Supper;[3] in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fulness, evidence, and efficacy, to all nations.[4]

1. **Mark 16:15** – And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”
2. **Matt. 28:19-20** – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

3. **1 Cor. 11:23-25** – For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

4. **2 Cor. 3:6-9** – For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. **Heb. 8:6, 10-11** – But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. . . . “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” **Matt. 28:19** – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

WCF 7.5-7.6

5. This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel:^a 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 fore-signifying Christ to come,^b 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,^c by whom they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.^d

a. **2 Cor 3:6-9** – Who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.

b. **Rom 4:11** – He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well. **Col 2:11-12** – In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. **1 Cor 5:7** – Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **Hebrews 8-10** throughout. (not included here)

c. **John 8:56** – “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” **1 Cor 10:1-4** – For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. **Heb 11:13** – These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

d. **Gal 3:7-9, 14** – Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 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.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham,

the man of faith. . . . so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

- the differences in administration illustrate the progressive revelation of the person and work of Christ
- looking *forward* (before Christ) versus looking *backward* (after Christ)

“The covenant of grace has from the beginning remained in all essential respects the same, in spite of all outward changes in the mode of its administration.”¹

- the “time of the law”—which law points to God’s holy character and his holy requirements; the constant repetition of sacrifices pointing to the ongoing sin of man and the inadequacy of “the blood of bulls and goats”
- the “time of the gospel”—where the perfect Lamb of God (“Seed of the woman” and “Seed of Abraham”) is the full and final sacrifice for sin: both to *expiate* (remove) and to *propitiate* (satisfy wrath)
- Christ is the fulfillment of all the OT “types” and prophecies
- how do law and gospel connect? is there *gospel* without *law*?
- man knew, from the beginning, that grace would come through an innocent substitute (Gen 3:21)

“Under the old dispensation the covenant of grace was administered with constantly increasing fullness and clearness . . . from Adam to Abraham . . . From Abraham to Moses . . . From Moses to Christ.”²

- changes in the *outward* elements of worship give us clues about the unfolding revelation of grace
- while “The Law” came through Moses (with ceremonies numerous and complex), there has always been a “law” that constrains our expression of worship (Gen 8:20)

6. Under the gospel, when Christ the substance^a 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;^b which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fulness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy,^c to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles;^d and is called the New Testament.^e There are not,

¹ Hodge, p. 129.

² Hodge, p. 130.

therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.^f

a. **Col 2:17** – These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

b. **Mat 28:19-20** – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[fn] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” **1 Cor 11:23-25** – For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

c. **Jer 31:33-34** – “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” **Heb 12:22-28** – But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.

d. **Mat 28:19** – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” **Eph 2:15-19** – By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

e. **Luke 22:20** – And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

f. **Psa 32:1** – Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. **Rom 4:3** – For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” **Acts 15:11** – “But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” **Rom 3:21-23, 30** – But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. . . . since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. **Rom 4:6, 16-17, 23-24** – Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: . . . That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. . . . But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be

counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord. **Gal 3:14, 16** – So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. . . . Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. **Heb 13:8** – Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

- when the Confession uses the term “dispensation,” it does *not* refer to the false teaching known as “*dispensationalism*”
- always remember that an “*ism*” is a *belief system*—and proceed with caution
- *dispensationalism* is the view that God deals differently with man in different *ages*
- while there are many variants of theology, the common element is the interpretation regarding OT Israel in relation to the NT church
- early 19th-century teaching (England): John Darby (1800-1882) is considered the “father” of modern dispensationalism; popularized by C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) in his 1909 study Bible
- taught by Lewis Sperry Chafer who founded Dallas Theological Seminary (1924)
- other well-known exponents include: John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Dwight Pentecost, Harry Ironside, Eugene Merrill, Merrill Unger, Bruce Waltke, Chuck Swindoll (all taught at DTS)
- graduates of DTS include: Tony Evans, David Jeremiah, Hal Lindsey, J. Vernon McGee, Andy Stanley, Bruce Wilkinson
- in our day, John MacArthur describes himself as “a leaky dispensationalist”
- Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind* books (with Jerry Jenkins) are based on dispensational theology

“The two most recognized features of Dispensationalism involve belief in (1) seven dispensations [more or less] and (2) a pre-tribulational rapture of the church in which the church will be snatched to heaven before a coming seven-year Tribulation Period.”³

- along with a belief in the pre-trib rapture, dispensationalists are premillennial (teaching a literal one-thousand year reign of Christ)
- dispensationalists deny that seven dispensations are seven different plans of salvation; Scofield, however, describes a difference between salvation in the *dispensation of law* (by works) and the salvation by faith in the present *dispensation of grace*; Chafer is even more

³ Vlach.

explicit in regard of this difference; the future *millennial dispensation* will be a return to salvation by law

- but what of scripture? Gen 15:6 is quoted three times in the NT: “Abraham believed God and *it was counted to him as righteousness*” (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jam 2:23)
- Hebr 11 makes it clear that the OT saints were saved by faith just as the NT saints—though they did not “see” the fulfillment of the promises except from a distance
- those who believe by faith are “children of Abraham” (Gal 3:7—see footnote WCF 7.5)
- Hebr 13:8 is footnoted (above) to remind us that *Jesus has not changed*—nor has the basis for him bringing his people to salvation

“Dispensationalists are clearly in opposition to the Confession of Faith, in that they teach that God has employed, in different periods of history, entirely distinct . . . principles of redemptive dealing with mankind.”⁴

- if all men are saved under one and the same *covenant of grace* since Adam, then all are part of the one true church; keep in mind as well that our soteriology must account for a primitive church that precedes Israel by *thousands* of years

“Upon the basis of this one covenant, there is on true Church extending through all ages.”⁵

- the fullness of the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) is now realized in the command to take the gospel to all people (Matt 28:19-20)

Concluding Thoughts

- In this chapter we have learned how there are two “covenants” under two “testaments” that offer one salvation and one true church.
- The next few lessons will focus on the *Mediator* of this covenant of grace.

“The covenant of grace has not changed, but because it is now fully revealed and wholly accomplished, it may be seen with greater simplicity, clarity, fullness, and efficacy than was the case in any previous era.”⁶

⁴ Williamson, p. 66.

⁵ Williamson, p. 67.

⁶ Williamson, p. 68.

Upcoming Lessons

- March 5: [congregational meeting—budget review]
- March 12: Chapter 8, Paragraph 1
- March 19: Chapter 8, Paragraph 2
- March 26: Chapter 8, Paragraph 3

Resources & Bibliography (new items added to the top of the list / older items removed)

- [“Dispensational Theology,”](#) Michael Vlatch, n.d.
- [“What is Dispensationalism?”](#) Keith Mathison, February 2, 2022.
- *An Examination of Dispensationalism*, William E. Cox, 1963.
- “Covenant,” Gerard Van Groningen, pp. 124-132 in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, W.A. Elwell, ed., 1996.
- *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof, 1949. (PDF version [here](#))
- *The Confession of Faith*, A. A. Hodge, 1869.
- *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, G. I. Williamson, 1964.

All scripture quotations are ESV unless otherwise noted.

© 2023 by J.R. Dickens. All Rights Reserved.