

CHAPTER 8

OF CHRIST THE MEDIATOR

The covenant of redemption

“1. It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Savior of his Church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.”

This paragraph summarizes what some have called the covenant of redemption. This covenant actually is the decision by God that was made before the world began (Rev 13:8), by which we were chosen as the beneficiaries (Eph 1:4).

Notice all the things that the Son was to become:

- Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5)
- The prophet, priest, and king (Acts 3:22; Heb 5:5-6; Luke 1:33)
- The head and Savior of his church (Eph 5:23)
- The heir of all things (Heb 1:2)
- The judge of the world (Acts 17:31)

As far as we are concerned, the most important blessing conferred upon the Son is that God the Father “did, from all eternity, give a people to be his seed.” This truth is taught in Isa 53:10 and John 17:6. We are a part of Christ’s reward. As such, Christ has promised to make us totally his by redeeming, calling, justifying, sanctifying, and glorifying us. Each of these works is discussed in a chapter of our Confession.

The covenant of redemption may be charted as follows:

Parties	Condition	Reward	Punishment
God the Father & God the Son	Perfect active and passive obedience by the Son to the will of the Father	An eternal kingdom and a people for his name (the elect)	(not applicable in this covenant)

Many theologians, along with our Confession, call this covenant the covenant of grace; the other covenant (between God and the sinner) would simply be a subsidiary form of this covenant of grace, as it applies to us.

Christ, the God-man

“2. The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man’s nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.”

Jesus Christ is the second person of the Godhead; he is truly God. These are terms used to describe his person in the Confession, reflecting what he is called in the Bible:

- Son of God (1 John 5:20)
- Second person in the Trinity (Matt 28:19)
- Very and eternal God (John 1:1)
- One substance with the Father (John 10:30)
- Equal with the Father (John 17:5)

The full deity of the Son was already discussed in WCF 2:3.

In addition to being fully God, Jesus Christ is fully human. The Confession says that he took “upon him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin.”

- Jesus took all the essential properties of humanity:
 - Physical body (2 John 7)
 - Awareness dependent on senses (Luke 22:64)
 - Must learn in order to know (Luke 2:51-52)
 - Limited to one place at a time (Luke 13:31-33; cf. John 11:17, 21)
 - Must belong to a certain sex, nationality, social status (Luke 2:7; John 4:9; Matt 13:55; Luke 2:24, cf. Lev 12:8)
 - Mind and emotions tied to the body (Luke 22:44)
- Jesus took all the common infirmities of humanity:
 - Hunger and thirst (Luke 4:2; John 19:28)
 - Weariness (John 4:6)
 - Anxiety (John 12:27; 13:21)
 - Sickness (not expressly stated of Jesus, but we assume)

- Temptations (Heb 2:14, 17-18; 4:15 [yet without sin])
- Death (1 Cor 15:3)
- Jesus was born as a man:
 - Born in the normal way (Luke 2:6-7)
 - Born of the substance of Mary (Gal 4:4)
 - Yet conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by Joseph (Luke 1:26-37; Matt 1:18-25)

As a result of this combination of God and humanity in one person, Jesus is unlike any other person in the universe. He is one person—when he says “I,” he does not mean “we.” Yet he has two natures. He is perfect God, with nothing missing; and he is perfect man, with nothing missing. He is not just part God and part man. This combination of two natures in Christ is a mystery that we cannot fully understand, yet is the clear teaching of the Bible. These two natures are present in Christ with these characteristics:

- Without **conversion**—his God nature did not change into a human nature.
- Without **composition**—the two natures are not mixed together to form one nature.
- Without **confusion**—his two natures are distinct, so that he can at one time act as a man and at other times act as God.

Because Jesus is both perfect God and perfect man, he alone is suited to be our Mediator. Until he had tasted our humanity, with its frailties and sufferings, he was not the perfect Mediator. God desired that Christ should share our nature, that he might be both sympathetic to our needs and still able to meet those needs (Heb 2:10, 14-18).

Christ’s obedience to the Father

The terms of the covenant of grace (or covenant of redemption) required the Son to perfectly obey the will of the Father, in giving himself as a sacrificial substitute for this people. This obedience has two aspects, active obedience and passive obedience. Both were necessary to fulfill the terms of the covenant and to obtain our salvation.

Christ’s active obedience

“3. The Lord Jesus, in his human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of Mediator and Surety. Which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father; who put all power and judgment into his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same.”

Christ's active obedience refers to that obedience which he rendered to his Father in his perfect character, his thoughts, words, and deeds. He perfectly obeyed the law of God. Our Confession uses several biblical phrases to express this obedience, and the divine support that helped bring it about:

- Sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure (John 3:34)
- Having treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3)
- In whom all fullness dwells (Col 1:19)
- Holy, harmless, undefiled (Heb 7:26)
- Full of grace and truth (John 1:14)

Not only did Jesus himself perfectly obey the law of God, but his teaching perfectly expounded that law. For example, he showed the real significance of the law against murder (Matt 5:22), the law against adultery (Matt 5:28), and the law to keep the Sabbath (Luke 6:5, 9).

Not only did the Father fully equip the Son to fulfill his ministry, but he appointed him to this office with all his authority:

- He called Jesus to this office (Heb 5:4-5)
- He put all power and judgment into his hand (John 5:22, 27; Matt 28:18)
- He commanded him to assume this office (Ps 2:7-9)

Christ's passive obedience

“4. This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it; endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died; was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day he arose from the dead, with the same body in which he suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the age.”

By Christ's passive obedience, we mean his willingness to undergo great sufferings that he did not deserve, which sufferings paid the price for our sins. This the Father desired him to do (Isa 53:10), and Christ did it in obedience to his Father's will (Luke 22:42). Jesus Christ himself was willing to suffer for us (compare Ps 40:6-8 with Heb 10:5-10).

Christ was under the law, and fulfilled the law perfectly (Gal 4:4; Matt 3:15; 5:17).

The sufferings of Christ lasted his entire lifetime. Most of them have been mentioned under Paragraph 2, above. In this paragraph we note especially the sufferings surrounding his death, often called his Passion. These sufferings were by far the most severe and important.

Jesus suffered severely in body during his Passion:

- Terrible scourging (Matt 27:26; cf. Isa 53:5)
- Crown of thorns (Matt 27:29)
- Beatings with rods and fists (Matt 27:30; Luke 22:64)
- Agonizing crucifixion (John 19:18; cf. 20:25 and Ps 22:14-18)

An understanding of the horrors of the cross can help us have a greater love for our Lord Jesus, and to more fully understand the significance of the cross in the many references to it in the NT (for example, 1 Cor 1:17-18; Gal 5:11; 6:12-14; Col 1:19-20; Phil 2:8; Heb 12:2).

In addition to the sufferings of his body, Jesus experienced terrible agony of soul as he bore our sins and the wrath of the Father (Luke 22:44; Matt 26:37-38; 27:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24; Isa 53:11). It is this suffering that made the death of Christ the most awful death in the world.

Jesus was truly dead and buried. He did not swoon; he was not drugged; there was no “plot.” His death was firmly attested (Isa 53:9; Matt 27:50; John 19:33-35; 1 Cor 15:3; Phil 2:8). Notice that even the unbelieving Jews admitted that Jesus had died (Matt 27:62-66; 28:11-15).

The actual physical death of Jesus on the cross is consistent with modern medical knowledge; see William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255:11 (Mar. 21, 1986) 1455-1463 (online at <http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/deathjesus.pdf>).

Even though Jesus was buried in a tomb, he “saw no corruption” (Ps 16:8-11, quoted in Acts 2:22-32 and 13:35-37). His body was preserved by the spices, and he was raised again to life on the third day (from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning; John 19:38 – 20:1; 1 Cor 15:4).

The physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. It is taught in all four gospels and in many other places in the Bible (for example, 1 Cor 15). His resurrection was not only “spiritual,” but physical—the same body was raised which had died; only now his body was glorified, as ours will be at the final resurrection.

After spending forty days appearing to his disciples on various occasions, Jesus ascended into heaven. He is to return from there to the earth (Acts 1:9-11). Now he is making intercession for us before the Father (Isa 53:12; Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 9:24).

The “end of the age” is a reference to the second coming of Christ. The original Confession had “end of the world,” but it is changed in our Confession to more correctly translate the phrase of Jesus in Matt 28:20 (*aion* = “age”). When Christ returns to the earth, he will judge all humans and angels (Rom 14:9-10; Jude 6). This subject will be discussed more thoroughly under Chapter 33, “Of the Last Things.”

The results of Christ's obedience—salvation for all the elect

“5. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.

“6. Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof, were communicated unto the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed and signified to be the Seed of the woman, which should bruise the serpent's head, and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world, being yesterday and to-day the same, and for ever.”

Paragraph 5 shows how the sacrifice Christ made affects us. When he died, he purchased for us forgiveness of our sins, reconciliation with the Father, and an everlasting inheritance (Rom 3:25-26; Eph 1:7, 11, 14; Col 1:19-20; Heb 9:11-15; 10:14).

Notice too that Christ purchased these benefits “for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.” While the offer of salvation is made to all people, its benefits are given only to those who believe. Since no one is able in their sinful natures to believe in Christ, only the ones chosen are enabled by God to accept him, because he effectually calls them. The Bible calls these ones who are led to believe “the elect.” These are the ones for whom Christ died in a special way. He died, not so much to make salvation possible for everyone, as to make salvation certain for the elect. If he had died to pay for the sins of the unbelievers, then their sins would be forgiven and God would have saved them by his Spirit; but God in his wisdom chose not to save everybody. This important doctrine usually is called the doctrine of the “limited atonement,” but many prefer the name “particular redemption” as giving a more precise description. This doctrine is taught in many passages (such as Heb 10:14; John 17:2, 6, 9, 11; Eph 5:25).

Some people (often called “hyper-Calvinists”) take this doctrine to mean that we should not seek to win all people to faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. This false view contradicts many plain statements and commands of Scripture (as Paul in 2 Cor 2:14-16, and Peter in Acts 2:40), and it overlooks the fact that we do not know who the elect are until after they are saved (and glorified!). In order to avoid this error, the first Bible Presbyterian synod in 1938 adopted the following Declaratory Statement:

“This General Synod declares its firm and glad belief in the reality and universality of the offer of the Gospel to mankind. We believe that Christ's atonement is sufficient for the sins of all, adapted to all, and is freely offered to all men in the Gospel. We believe that no man will be condemned except upon the ground of his sin.”

Paragraph 6 of this chapter teaches how people were saved before Christ came to the earth. Since he died for all the elect, and since they too are a part of the elect, therefore he died for them (Rom 3:23-26; Gal 4:4-5). They were saved through faith in the promise of God—the

Messiah who was coming—just as we are saved through faith in the Messiah who has come (Rom 4).

God showed them these truths in shadows, figures, and types, as well as direct prophecies. Our Confession mentions the following; also are included some examples of each:

- **Promises**—Gen 12:3-7; 13:15; 24:7; all the prophecies about the Messiah (e.g., Ps 22; Isa 53; cf. Luke 24:25-26, 44-47)
- **Types**—the smitten rock (Exod 17:6; Num 20:8; 1 Cor 10:4); the bronze serpent (Num 21:9; John 3:14-15)
- **Sacrifices**—the five offerings in Lev 1-7: sin offering, burnt offering, trespass offering, grain offering, fellowship offering
- **Seed of Eve**—bruising the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15)
- **Passover lamb** (Exod 12:5, 13; John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7; Rev 13:8)

Christ is always the same (Heb 13:8), and the salvation he provides is the same for all ages and dispensations.

The nature of Christ’s obedience

“7. Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures; by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.

“8. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them; and revealing unto them, in and by the word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey; and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways, as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.”

Because Jesus is the God-man, sometimes the Bible uses names that refer to his humanity when describing something he did in his divine power (for example, John 3:13; 6:62). On the other hand, sometimes it uses his divine names when describing something he did in his human nature (for example, Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 2:8; Rev 1:7-8). The reason for this “mixing” of names for Christ is that he is one person, and that both of his natures were needed in his obedience to the Father.

We saw already that Christ purchased redemption for all the elect on the cross. Christ not only purchased it for them; he also makes sure that they will receive its benefits:

- Makes intercession (cf. Paragraph 4)
- Reveals plan of salvation (through the Word, John 15:15; 17:6)
- Persuades by the Holy Spirit to believe (Rom 8:9)
- Governs our hearts (John 14:16; 17:17; Rom 8:14)

- Overcomes our enemies (1 Cor 15:25-26)

As Christ does all these things for the elect, he does them in his own time and fashion, in the way “most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.”