

Chapter 8: Of Christ the Mediator

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1 His ordination to the office of Mediator/The Covenantal Context (1)

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man;(1) the Prophet,(2) Priest(3) and King;(4) head and Saviour of His church,(5) the heir of all things,(6) and judge of the world;(7) 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.(8)

- *pactum salutis*
 - Reference to the eternal Covenant of Redemption
 - God the Son
- *historia salutis*
 - Mediator
 - Prophet, Priest, King
 - Savior of his Church
 - Heir of all things
 - Judge of the World
- *ordo salutis*
 - Seed of the Mediator
 - * redeemed
 - * called
 - * justified
 - * sanctified
 - * glorified

2 His incarnation for the office of Mediator/The Identity of the Mediator (2)

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with Him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things He hath made, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof,(9) yet without sin;(10) being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures;(11) so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures 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.(12)

God the Son as 2nd person of the Trinity.

Harmony with the Apostles' Creed, Nicaea, and Chalcedon.

The Son was an "equal efficient cause with the Father in creation;" not an instrument.

From the Athanasian Creed¹:

. . .

He is God from the essence of the Father,
begotten before time;
and he is human from the essence of his mother,
born in time;
completely God, completely human,
with a rational soul and human flesh;
equal to the Father as regards divinity,
less than the Father as regards humanity.

Although he is God and human,
yet Christ is not two, but one.

¹No one is sure when or where this creed is from. The oldest surviving manuscripts of it are from the 8th century, but some of the terminology is to be found in works as old as 415 AD. Athanasius' name is probably attached to it due to its stout declaration of orthodox Trinitarian doctrine.

He is one, however,
not by his divinity being turned into flesh,
but by God's taking humanity to himself.
He is one,
certainly not by the blending of his essence,
but by the unity of his person.
For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh,
so too the one Christ is both God and human.
. . .

Our confession's phrase "joined together in one person without conversion, composition, or confusion," is a quick way of deliberately referencing the Chalcedonian Definition (451). The Chalcedonian Definition discusses those three errors in some detail, and isn't quite as quotable as the creeds. I just want to point out these older creeds, confessions, and definitions to show that Reformed theology was not only *not* a novelty, but was self-consciously adhering to the historic orthodox theology going all the back.

3 The qualifications for the office of Mediator/Jesus Christ's Suitability for this Work (3)

The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, in the person of the Son, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure,(13) having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;(14) in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell,(15) to the end that being holy, harmless, undefiled,(16) and full of grace and truth,(17) He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator and surety;(18) which office He took not upon Himself, but was thereunto called by His Father;(19) who also put all power and judgment in His hand, and gave Him commandment to execute the same.(20)

- Again what is a mediator? This is a reference to the office of priest.
- What is a surety? [Heb 7:22: "This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant."] What's a guarantor? One who guarantees. The New Covenant is backed by the faithfulness of God the Son.

This uniting of two natures, human and divine, is unique in the Universe. Being unique means it's not like anything, so, just as making analogies to

explain the Trinity leads to heresy, we need to take the same kind of care here. We're safest to stick with the abstract language the Church has used for more than a dozen centuries: two distinct, un-confused natures in one person. The technical jargon for this is "hypostatic union."

This is necessary for Christ's qualification as a mediator. A mediator has to have one foot in both camps. Jesus, in his divinity, has a foot in the camp of the offended party; and in his humanity has a foot in the camp of the offender. None of us alone has the right to step forward to cut a deal. Even if we could get a hearing, we don't have the means to make things right. And if the Son didn't identify with humanity, how could he represent us as a federal head?

When I discussed some of the historical background of our confession a few weeks ago, I mentioned that some anabaptists held to a "Hoffmannite Christology." That is that Jesus didn't take his humanity from Mary, and that really she was a conduit for the celestial flesh of Jesus to come to earth. This doctrine, if true, would make Christ an unqualified mediator; he wouldn't be able to identify with his people. Oneness Pentecostalism is the same, in effect.

So what were Old Testament priests about (¶ 6)? They had to cleanse themselves (temporary at best) to approach God.

4 The execution of the office of Mediator (4-10)

4.1 Its historical description/The Identity of His Work (4)

This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake,(21) which that He might discharge He was made under the law,(22) and did perfectly fulfil it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have borne and suffered,(23) being made sin and a curse for us;(24) enduring most grievous sorrows in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body;(25) was crucified, and died, and remaining in the state of the dead, yet saw no corruption:(26) and on the third day He arose from the dead(27) with the same body in which he suffered,(28) with which He also ascended into heaven,(29) and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father making intercession,(30) and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.(31)

In paragraph 3, it says Jesus was "thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator and surety; which office He took not upon Himself, but

was thereunto called by His Father.” This paragraph makes it clear that he took this office most willingly, despite being called, rather than simply taking it to himself.

This paragraph has Christ’s whole execution of the office of mediator and surety in historical bullet points.

It says that God suffered pain in his body, and sorrow in his soul. It really cost him something to redeem us. It says he was made sin and a curse for us. This is a reference to 2 Corinthians 5:21:

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

And Galatians 3:13:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree

It says he “continued in the state of the dead.” This section of the paragraph is exactly parallel (I think intentionally) with the Apostles’ Creed, where it says,

[He] was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.

The WCF, and the Savoy both say that Christ “remained under the power of death” here. Why do you think our confession says he “continued in the state of the dead,” rather than just echoing the WCF, or the Apostles’ Creed?

I think it’s to specify that he didn’t go to a place of torment, but rather to what the Old Testament called *Sheol*, and the New Testament calls *Hades*. The phrase “state of the dead” wasn’t new. It came up at the Westminster Assembly where John Lightfoot argued for it.

Acts 2:27 says,

Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Hades in Greek],
neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Commenting on this passage, Lightfoot said:

It is well [known] what the word [] signifies in Greek Authors: viz. the state of the dead, be they just or unjust. And their Eternal state is distinguished not so much by the word it self as by the qualities of the persons. ... the word Hades is not used in opposition to Heaven, or the state of the blessed, but to this world only, or this present state of life; ... The Soul of our Saviour therefore , descended into Hell, *i. e.* he passed into the state of the dead, viz. into that place in Hades, where the Souls of good Men went. But even there did not God suffer his Soul to abide, separate from his body, nor his body to putrifie in the Grave, because it was impossible for Christ to be holden of those bands of death, seeing his death was not some punishment of sin, but the utmost pitch of obedience, he himself being not only without sin, but incapable of committing any.

Jesus wasn't waiting around, or unconscious for three days. First Peter 3:18-20, says,

By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;
Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering
of God waited in the days of Noah

Taking up the same idea a few lines later, Peter says that, because Christ is ready to judge the quick and the dead, "the gospel [was] preached also to them that are dead." This bit of First Peter is by no means an easy, or clear passage, but I do think it's clear that Jesus was up to something for three days. He was doing the work of a prophet.

Then our confession says he "rose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered." His body was glorified, not replaced. There's evidence of his crucifixion on his body; John 20 says:

²⁷ Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold
my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side:
and be not faithless, but believing.

The Gospels also make it clear that he ate and drank with them after his resurrection. He wasn't a ghost. The Gospel of John is especially at pains to show this because of the Gnostic heresy becoming prevalent at the time he was writing.

Then, with this same body, he ascended into heaven. God the Son, the head of the Church, is at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for us with a glorified human body right now. This is the work of a priest.

He will return again at the end of the world, with this same body to judge men and angels. This is the work of a king.

4.2 Its central operation/The Godward Success of His Work (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 God,(32) procured reconciliation, and purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.(33)

The last paragraph talked about how he underwent the punishment due to us. This alone would get us halfway saved—this is his “passive obedience.” It also referenced Christ’s “active obedience,” saying, “He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it.” So, not only is our debt paid, we’ve received an alien righteousness—a righteousness not our own—as well. We’re not just reconciled, but we have this everlasting inheritance he purchased.

In Jeremiah, it says,

⁵ Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. ⁶ In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

James Renihan points out that the phrase “procured reconciliation” is a change from the WCF, and the Savoy. He makes the case that this change was informed by Owen, and the Socinian controversies of the time. He says,

In all likelihood, this was a result of the doctrine of the Socinians. In their view, Jesus’s death did naught but show men how to be reconciled to God so that reconciliation becomes nothing more than sinners turning to God. The adoption of the term procure emphasized the fact that the Savior’s death was more than an example to be followed—it was the real means by which reconciliation with God is achieved. What is reconciliation, if not the cessation of hostility and the restoration of broken relationship? And this is only found via the death of Jesus Christ.

He also points out the that three items listed here—satisfying God’s justice, procuring reconciliation, and purchasing righteousness—were three points Owen stressed in his arguing against Socinian notions of satisfaction.

The last phrase references phrases found John 6 and John 17 and the doctrine of particular election. In John 6, Jesus says,

³⁷ All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. ³⁸ For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. ³⁹ And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

John 17:

Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: ² As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

When a priest works, he mediates for a particular people. When Christ intercedes for us, he does so *in particular* for those the Father has given him. More John 17: Jesus prayed,

⁷ Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. ⁸ For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. ⁹ I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.

4.3 Its ancient communications/The Retrospective Benefits of His Work (6)

Although the price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefit thereof were communicated to 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 which should bruise the serpent’s head;(34) and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,(35) being the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.(36)

This paragraph answers a question that came up earlier. If no mediator before or after Jesus was qualified, what was going on with the priesthood of the Old Testament? Even Hebrews 10:4 says “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”

This paragraph says that the “virtue, efficacy, and benefit” of redemption was really communicated “in and by” the promises, types, and sacrifices in which Christ was revealed.

James Renihan comments,

Through [promises, types, and sacrifices], the Lord revealed Christ as the promised Messiah who would bruise the serpent’s head and who was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The eye of faith recognized in these words and actions the purpose of God—one day all would be fulfilled in Christ. Salvation for those who lived before the cross was by prospective faith, looking forward to the time of fulfillment. The final clause, being the same yesterday, and today, and forever, cited from Hebrews 13.8, hearkens back to the doctrine of divine immutability (2.1). Because God does not change, His promise is as good as its accomplishment.

So does this mean that the elect are justified from all eternity?

Renihan says “The 1689 General Assembly debated this matter as recorded in their narrative:”

Q. Whether Believers were not actually reconciled to God, actually justified and adopted when Christ died?

A. That the Reconciliation, Justification, and Adoption of Believers are infallibly secured by the gracious purpose of God, and merit of Jesus Christ. Yet none can be said to be actually reconciled, justified, or adopted, until they are really implanted into Jesus Christ by Faith; and so by virtue of this their Union with him, have these Fundamental Benefits actually conveyed unto them. And this we conceive is fully evidenced, because the Scripture attributes all these Benefits to Faith, as the instrumental cause of them. Rom. 3.25. Chap. 5.11. Chap. 5.1. Gal. 3.26. And gives such Representation of the state of the Elect before Faith as is altogether inconsistent with an actual Right in them, Eph. 2.1,2,3,12.

Another important fact follows from this: there was never redemption in anyone other than Christ. OT Jews were not saved, redeemed, or reconciled

directly by the ceremonies of the Mosaic Covenant. And it follows moreover from this that there are not two covenant peoples. Dispensationalism holds that Jews were saved by one covenant, and the Church by another. But Jesus said, “other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” (John 10:16) Sometimes we’re charged with “replacement theology,” but really it’s “grafted in” theology. Paul says, “if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches.” (Romans 11:17ff)

4.4 Its mysterious communion/A Clarification to Avoid (Heretical) Confusion (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.(37)

This paragraph is saying that we have to apply a little “let the reader understand,” when reading the Scriptures.

For instance, John 3:13 says,

And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

Strictly speaking, the Son of God came down from Heaven, and the Son of Man from the womb of Mary.

Acts 20:28 says,

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Strictly speaking, God doesn’t have blood. But because of the two natures united in Christ the Scriptures sometimes speak this way.

Even the Chalcedonian Definition references Mary as “theotokos,” which means “God-bearer.”

The point is that this way of speaking doesn’t give us license to confuse the natures of Christ, but he “acteth according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself.”

4.5 Its effectual application/The Manward Success of His Work (8)

To all those for whom Christ that obtained eternal redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them;(38) uniting them to Himself by His Spirit, revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mystery of salvation, persuading them to believe and obey,(39) governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit,(40) and overcoming all their enemies by His mighty power and wisdom,(41) in such manner and ways as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation; and all of free and absolute grace, without any condition forseen in them to procure it.(42)

In paragraph 5 we spoke of Christ's satisfaction of God's justice—that his work was a success in God's column of the balance sheet. In this paragraph we see what's in our column. Redemption is applied to us. This paragraph lists six ways this application is accomplished; all of which will be further explained in chapters 10-15 of this confession. This paragraph summarizes: Christ, by the Spirit,

1. **Makes intercession for us** He's supplicating the Father on our behalf, for our forgiveness.
2. **Unites us to himself** Owen says "Profession may be without union, but union will bring forth profession. There may be a form of Godliness without power: but where the power is, there will be the appearance also. Now when Christ is thus present with a people, that is, they are united to him by his spirit, they are members of his mystical body, that is, their glory."
3. **Reveals to us the mystery of salvation by the Word** That is, he makes us understand the mystery as revealed in His Word.
4. **Persuades us to believe and obey** This, will be brought out more in Chapters 14, and 15.
5. **Governs our hearts by the Word, and the Spirit** likewise
6. **Overcomes all our enemies** The confession references God's "wonderful and unsearchable dispensation," and his "free and absolute grace," bringing our minds back to the doctrine of providence. If we keep our antennas up for our Father's Providence, we'll see him working out all things in our favor—even hard things.

4.6 Its inalienable possession/The Exclusive Position of Christ (9)

This office of mediator between God and man is proper only to Christ, who is the prophet, priest, and king of the church of God; and may not be either in whole, or any part thereof, transferred from Him to any other.(43)

This follows by necessary consequence from the very uniqueness of Christ's two-nature qualification for the job. And it's obviously directed against Roman Catholicism.

This paragraph answers questions like,

1. Is the pope the head of the church?
2. Does Mary effectually intercede on our behalf?
3. Do saints effectually intercede on our behalf?

Mary, and any other saint approach the throne of God on the merit of Christ. Only Christ can approach by his own merit. Christ satisfied God's justice, and guaranteed the covenant, not Mary.

This paragraph directly connects to chapter 26, paragraph 4, where the pope is said to be "that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." What does "antichrist" mean? The word only appears in two of John's epistles. In First John, he says "He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." He also says that one who denies that Christ comes in the flesh is an antichrist. There's obviously some additional theology going on to put a definite article before the word "antichrist," and identify him as the Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians.

Article 4 of our Constitution makes an exception with regard to the identifying the pope as the antichrist. This'll probably be discussed more in chapter 6, but I'll quote 16th century writer, Andrew Willett (from Renihan) to show the thinking behind identifying the pope as the antichrist:

So the Pope denieth Christ to bee our Prophet, King, and Priest: His propheticall office he defaceth, and in effect denieth, in disgracing the scriptures, saying, they are imperfect, and containe not all matters necessary to salvation, that their authoritie bindeth us not without his allowance: His Kingly office, in making himselfe Christs Vicar and Vicegerent upon earth, in making new

lawes, sacraments, ordinances beside Christs, as necessarie to salvation as the rules of the Gospell: His priesthoode, in setting up a new propitiatorie sacrifice in the abominable Masse, beside the onely sacrifice of attonement upon the Crosse, in making other mediators and intercessors beside Christ: and such like, whereof wee shall have occasion to entreat afterward more at large. Ergo, the Pope in denying the offices of Christ, denieth Christ, and so is Antichrist.

4.7 Its necessary functions/The Magnitude of Our Need (10)

This number and order of offices is necessary; for in respect of our ignorance, we stand in need of His prophetic office;(44) and in respect of our alienation from God, and imperfection of the best of our services, we need His priestly office to reconcile us and present us acceptable unto God;(45) and in respect of our averseness and utter inability to return to God, and for our rescue and security from our spiritual adversaries, we need His kingly office to convince, subdue, draw, uphold, deliver, and preserve us to His heavenly kingdom.(46)

“This number and order of offices” is a reference to Christ as Prophet, Priest and King.

I like how Renihan comments about Christ’s offices.

We are ignorant, we are alienated, and we are utterly unable. God, in sending Christ as the promised covenant mediator, fully accomplishes salvation; He meets our ignorance and sends a prophet to teach us. He sees us in our alienation when we are enemies, and reaches out to restore us, to reconcile us [this is the work of a priest]. Further, He knows that we are dead in our trespasses and sins, and so Christ is the king—the king who has power, and expresses His power by calling us out of death and into new life, and keeping us in this life until the coming of His heavenly kingdom.

The confession refers to “our averseness, and utter inability.” That means even if we *could* return to God, we *wouldn’t*. So notice how many ways God must act bring us into his heavenly kingdom. He convinces, subdues, draws us. After doing that, he upholds, delivers, and preserves us. Is there any room in there for us to take credit? “Where is boasting then? It is

excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.” (Romans 3:27)

Do we need to comprehend all this stuff to be saved?