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OF COVENANTS AND MEDIATORS





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Tom Nettles

Introduction Of Covenants and Mediators

In proclaiming the superiority of Jesus Christ to all types, shadows, ceremonies, and preparatory operations, the writer of Hebrews says that “Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:22 NKJV). Soon after, the writer says, in comparison to the high priest of Jewish ceremony, “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6 NKJV). In Christ therefore, we find the surety for all that was promised and typified in the old covenant, thus giving substance to the shadow and fulfillment to the promise through the final realities conveyed in the New Covenant. We find in Jesus also the perfect mediator of the “better,” this new, covenant. This is in fact the unfolding of all the provisions of the “eternal covenant” in which the Father gave a people to the Son and provided all the means by which that people would be drawn to the Son, would live and reign with Him forever in the full enjoyment of God. The Father grants the people, the Son purchases them by redemption, and the Spirit unites them to the Son in that redemptive work. As Prophet, Priest, King and Chief Shepherd, Jesus has fulfilled everything; the redemptive work is done, all things are under his feet, and he awaits the calling of his final purchased one, and then will descend from heaven with a shout. The writer of Hebrews finalizes his argument with a benediction: “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever” (Hebrews 13:20, 21).

This biblical emphasis sets the stage for chapters VII and VIII of the *Second London Confession*. Entitled “Of God’s Covenant” and “Of Christ the Mediator,” these two chapters bring together a synthesis of the covenantal theology of Scripture and demonstrate how vital and central Christ is to the complete fulfillment of all the covenantal provisions. Chapter VII speaks of the “Eternal Covenant transaction, that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the Elect.” Chapter VIII begins by affirming that Jesus Christ as the mediator of this covenant, as prophet, priest and king for the people “to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.” The chapters are concerned to give a precise, clear, faithful, and encouraging statement of the biblical themes of covenant and Christ and to show that the salvation of the sinner is most assuredly in Christ alone. Christ alone is the person in whom such redemption could take place, and Christ alone is the person who has done all that should be done—“in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of trespasses” (Ephesians 1:7).

Three writers tackle the chapter on covenant. Fred Malone, Jeff Johnson, and Pascal Denault—all serious pastor theologians—make excellent contributions on this subject. Each of these has written a book on covenant theology. In this issue, they give a concise, doctrinally clear, and energetic treatment of this vital theme of biblical theology. The effect is, in my judgment, quite bracing. The clarity of the confession in bringing forth from three different writers such affirming unity could, on a very personal level, make one shout for joy. The approaches governed by the three personalities and ministerial orientations show the freshness and abiding relevance of the doctrinal themes within this subject.

Justin McClendon, an instructor in theology at Grand Canyon Theological Seminary & College of Theology has written three articles on chapter VIII. He gives a robust treatment of the confession in its emphasis on the person, work, and offices of Christ. He applies this doctrinal treatment then to its relevance as a model for pastoral ministry. His presentation is vigorous and Christ-honoring.

Our prayer is that each reader of this Journal will be edified and more thoroughly prepared to do works of service to Christ the King by contemplating the truths resident in this soul-enlarging subject.

—Tom J. Nettles



Fred Malone

Of God's Covenant

Chapter 7 of the *1689 London Baptist Confession*

To study this chapter “Of God’s Covenant,” we must recognize the two contexts of the composition: Scripture and history. Although first composed in 1677 while under persecution from the Church of England, the *1689 Second London Baptist Confession* (hereafter, *2LBC*) was published two months after the 1689 Act of Toleration granted by William and Mary of Orange.¹

As the *First London Baptist Confession of 1644/1646* (hereafter, *1LBC*) used much common language with the *1596 True Confession* of the Congregationalists to show their unity with the Protestants, so the 1689 *2LBC* used common language with the Presbyterian *Westminster Confession of Faith* (hereafter, the *WCF*) and the Congregational *Savoy Declaration* (hereafter, *SD*) in order to display their theological unity with other Protestants. However, the fact that *2LBC* VII:1–3 differs from both confessions on such a major issue as the covenants shows the courage of the Baptists rather than theological compromise. Those today who make such a claim of compromise in the *2LBC* have no historical foundation for such opinions.²

How then shall we explain the distinctive Baptist theology of the *2LBC* VII—Of God’s Covenant? First, there will be a brief commentary on each paragraph followed by, second, a unified explanation of the covenant theology of the *2LBC*.

I. Commentary

A. The first paragraph explains the necessity of the form of covenant as God's chosen way to relate to man:

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 attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.(1)

(1) Luke 17:10; Job 35:7, 8.

This paragraph identifies innocent Adam as the first creature who owed obedience to God as a creature. If he had continued to live upright as God's creature (Ecclesiastes 7:29),³ without the additional command of God (Genesis 2:16–17), he would have done only what he ought to have done without any obligation from God to reward his owed obedience (Luke 17:10; Job 35:7–8). For God justly to bless Adam and his posterity (Romans 5:12–21) further with “the reward of life,” God would have to condescend to a further arrangement by way of a “covenant.” That “reward of life” for perfect obedience should be understood as the glorified state with God where in it would be impossible to sin.

The basic definition of a covenant is an oath, bond or promise involving two or more parties, whether human or divine. Each biblical covenant must be further defined by the revelation concerning it. We must be careful not to impose elements from one covenant upon another by logic without clear revelation so explaining. Therefore, a divine covenant is an oath, bond, or promise of God, “a sovereign arrangement of God by which man may be blessed.”⁴

This covenant concept, designated “the law” in *2LBC* VII:2, is exactly what we see in the garden in God's command to Adam (Genesis 2:16–17). Although the word “covenant” is not used in the context, the introduction of God's command for further obedience, whereby Adam may be blessed if he obeys and cursed if he does not, is the very form of a conditional divine covenant in Scripture (Genesis 26:4–5; Exodus 19:5). This is why this paragraph explains that initial condescension of God with Adam as a “covenant” (Hosea 6:7). It was a conditional covenant of law (works).

To say that Baptists never believed in covenant theology is inaccurate. They just held their own construction of it.

B. The second paragraph explains the reason for and the institution of the Covenant of Grace.

2. Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace,(2) wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved;(3) and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.(4)

(2) Genesis 2:17; Galatians 3:10; Romans 3:20-21. (3) Romans 8:3; Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:16. (4) Ezekiel 36:26, 27; John 4:44, 45; Psalm 110:3.

Here the first covenant arrangement (*2LBC* 7:1) is described as “the law” followed by the institution of the redemptive Covenant of Grace. Although the *WCF* VII:1 and the *SD* VII:1 both describe that original arrangement as “the covenant of works,” Baptists chose to designate here that first covenant as “the law.” Although they did so believe that “the law” to Adam was a covenant of works (*2LBC* 19:6, 20:1), apparently they desired to emphasize that one Covenant of Grace to clear up any misunderstanding of how they conceived that covenant. It is not a covenant of works; it is a Covenant of Grace alone.

So, what was “the law” our forefathers understood was given to Adam which he broke? The *2LBC* 19:1–2 explains the “law” to Adam as including both the law written in his heart by nature, revealed more clearly on Mount Sinai as the ten commandments (19:2; Romans 2:14–16), as well as that further “precept” not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (19:1).⁵ Having broken God’s law, both of nature and precept, and having no way to satisfy God’s just curse, the only way of salvation had to be by grace alone in a further Covenant of Grace.

Although God was not morally obligated to give another covenant opportunity to Adam or to his descendants now condemned in Adam (Romans 5:12–25), He was pleased to condescend to establish a Covenant of Grace as a gift of salvation undeserved and mercifully given (Ephesians 2:8-9). In this promised Covenant of Grace, fulfilled in history by the revelation of Jesus Christ’s New Covenant (*2LBC* 7:1), God offers sinners life and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, the promised seed of the woman.

Therefore, this Covenant of Grace not only offered all sinners life and salvation through faith in Christ to come, but also promised the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit to regenerate all those elect ordained to eternal life before the foundation of the world, thus

making them willing and able to believe in the Savior of the Covenant (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:8–10).

Therefore, Baptists proclaim to all men the only Savior of the world and their duty to believe in Him (Acts 17:30–31), knowing that God will save His elect people from their sins. This is the missionary theology which sent William Carey and Adoniram Judson to foreign fields.

C. The third paragraph explains the Covenant of Grace in terms of the revelation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ:

3. This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman,(5) and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament;(6) and it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect;(7) and it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all to the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocency.(8)

(5) Gen. 3:15. (6) Hebrews 1:1. (7) 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2. (8) Heb. 11:6, 13; Romans 4:1, 2; Acts 4:2; John 8:56.

First, the Covenant of Grace is the progressive revelation of the gospel of Christ, first to Adam in the promise of Genesis 3:15, then “by farther steps” through the Old Testament prophets and “the covenants of the promise” (Hebrews 1:1; Ephesians 2:12). The full revelation of that Covenant of Grace was completed in the New Testament as the New Covenant of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why it is appropriate to identify the New Covenant as the Covenant of Grace itself, superior to every Old Testament covenant of the promise (Hebrews 8:1–10:18).

This paragraph is distinctively different from the *WCF* and the *SD* paragraphs, which explained the Covenant of Grace as one covenant under two administrations: “the time of the law” and “the time of the gospel.” These designations may have intended to show that the one Covenant of Grace was operative in both testaments, but instead they placed the Old Testament “covenants of the promise” as equivalent covenants of grace to the New Covenant itself. In so doing, it seemed logical to transfer elements from “the covenants of the promise” into the promised New Covenant itself, even though the New Covenant revelation itself contains no such instruction (i.e., Abrahamic circumcision permitting infant baptism by “good and necessary consequence”). Such a construction diminishes the

superiority and finality of the New Covenant to every previous postlapsarian “covenant of the promise.” It is itself the Covenant of Grace fully revealed and justly accomplished (Hebrews 8:1–10:18). For both the Old and New Testaments, only those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit are members of the one Covenant of Grace, thus exercising the gift of faith alone in the virtue of the New Covenant accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:26–27; John 3:3–5).

Second, the third paragraph sails back on the seas of eternity beyond the horizon of creation and takes us into the hallowed counsels of the Father and the Son and into that eternal covenant transaction for the redemption of God’s elect people before the foundation of the world. This is often called the Covenant of Redemption or the Counsel of Peace. There we find the eternal ignition of grace in the heart of God to send His only begotten Son to be the effectual Savior of His elect people (2 Timothy 2:9; Titus 1:2; Ephesians 1:4–11). He is, literally, the only Savior the world has. The Covenant of Grace is the historical institution of that eternal covenant transaction consummated and historically accomplished in the New Covenant of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, the third paragraph concludes with the fact that the only creatures saved in the Old Testament and New Testament to the present day have been saved by “the grace of this covenant [of grace].” And this is because:

... and it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all of the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocency.

From this paragraph we can see that our Baptist forefathers clarified their Baptist covenant theology from the perspective of the covenant of “the law” in Adam and the Covenant of Grace in Christ. None are now capable of being saved by the covenant of works. There had to be a Covenant of Grace for any man to be saved at all. Thus we have the biblical dynamic of Law and Grace operative from Genesis 3:15 through the Old Testament covenants by further steps until that completion of the promise of grace in the New Covenant of our Lord Jesus Christ. From this understanding of the two great covenants carried out in biblical history we preach the Law and the Gospel of each to all men, calling all men everywhere to repent of sin against God’s law and to believe in gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30–31).

II. A Unified Explanation of the Covenant Theology of the *2LBC*

In the running commentary above, we have the crafting of a distinct Baptist Covenant Theology consistent with the Covenant of Grace instituted by promise in Genesis 3:15 and fulfilled in the New Covenant as the superior historical covenant of the Bible. Grace, conceived in the eternal counsels of God, was the only possible method justly to save an elect people from their sins under law. The New Covenant gospel is that promised grace fulfilled in the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, salvation must be by faith alone in that promised seed who defeated Satan, sin and death, moving the sinner from under law to under grace (Romans 6:14). Those who believe in this Savior desire to love Him and keep His commandments in their life (John 14:15; Revelation 12:17, 14:12).

This Baptist covenant theology treats the Old Testament covenants properly for what they were, “covenants of the promise,” each revealing by farther steps the condemnation of man under law and the salvation of the Covenant of Grace completed in the New Covenant. This means that the revelation of the New Covenant itself must determine its members as the regenerate so that its baptism is of those disciples professing faith and regeneration. Although no one can infallibly read the hearts of those baptized as truly born again, yet their confession of faith presumes that state. Therefore, the church is to be composed of those professing disciples who seek to love Christ and to keep His commandments (Jeremiah 31:31–34; John 14:15, Romans 13:8–10, *2LBC* XIX:1–2). For they alone are members of the saving Covenant of Grace.

Conclusion

This is the covenant theology of the Bible. It is not meant to be studied or debated by sterile minds and cold hearts. It is the exciting truth of the Eternal Father giving to His Beloved Son a fallen people for His own to redeem by His incarnate blood and righteous life; it is the humbling truth that One so divine would gladly agree to His own suffering for such sinners; and it is the miraculous truth that the Holy Spirit would invade the rebels’ hearts to free them from their enemy’s grip and to resurrect their dead souls to embrace by faith alone the covenant Mediator of their covenant Father. Truly, the covenant theology of the Bible is a wonder of God’s infinite grace which brings Him eternal glory from the lips of those covenant sons and daughters who eternally give thanks to His glorious name.

It is my hope that this exposition of God’s covenant grace by Reformed Baptists will once again inflame the hearts of Baptists everywhere to embrace the wonder of God’s covenant theology and to live joyfully and obediently under that covenant grace forever.

NOTES:

¹ Nehemiah Coxe, *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ* (Palmdale: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005). It is likely that Nehemiah Coxe edited and/or composed much of the *2LBC*.

² Richard P. Belcher and Tony Mattia, *A Discussion of the Seventeenth Century Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Columbia, S. C.: Richbarry Press, 1983). See this work for a detailed explanation.

³ All biblical references or quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible* (Dallas: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

⁴ Walter J. Chantry, *The Covenants of Works and of Grace* (Pensacola, Florida: Chapel Library), 3.

⁵ Having identified the law upon Adam's heart by nature the same as the ten commandments at Mt. Sinai, we have the identity of God's Moral Law for man also established for the New Covenant Christian (Romans 2:14-16; Jeremiah 31:31-34). The Covenant of Works was not republished as the Sinai Covenant for salvation, but the Moral Law of the Covenant of Works was republished to engrave upon their hearts (Deuteronomy 5:29, 6:6; 11:1-37). Under grace, the Christian seeks to keep the same ten commandments out of love to Christ (John 14:15; Romans 8:4, 13:8-10). Although the day of the weekly Sabbath has changed under the New Covenant into the Lord's Day, the principle of a Sabbath rest and worship was written on Adam's heart from the beginning. This is what the *2LBC* confesses.

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Jeff Johnson

The *Confession of 1689* and Covenant Theology

Historically, Reformed Baptists are covenantal. Though they differ from their Presbyterian brothers on a few key issues, according to the *1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith*, Baptists were equally committed to a robust covenantal framework of the history of redemption. In fact, every chapter of the confession is built on a covenantal matrix. Though chapter 7 is devoted entirely to the covenants, the chapters on creation, providence, the fall of man, Christ, justification, repentance, the gospel, good works, and perseverance are explained from a covenantal perspective.

For our Baptist forefathers, an alteration of the doctrine of the covenants is an alteration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel, in its broader context, includes the fulfilling of the covenant of works by the Second Adam, Jesus the Christ, that was broken by the first Adam; the Second Adam endured its curses and established its blessings for all those who are chosen by God to be represented by the Second Adam in the covenant of grace.

With this in mind, chapter 7 of the confession stresses three essential truths relating to its covenantal framework. Paragraph 1 confesses a prelapsarian covenant of works. Paragraph 2 confesses a postlapsarian covenant of grace. Paragraph 3 confesses an eternal covenant of redemption.

The Covenant of Works

Paragraph 1 confesses a prelapsarian covenant of works. Though the phrase “covenant of works” is located in 7:1 of the *Westminster Confession*, but is missing in 7:1 of the 1689, it is not because the 1689 denies that God’s pre-fall arrangement with Adam was a covenant of works. This is made clear in 20:1, where the 1689 calls it “*the covenant of works*.” Moreover, in 19:1, the 1689 explains that this prelapsarian covenant was based on works:

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it.

Adam, in his state of innocence (7:3), was to merit eternal life through obedience to God’s moral law. Anything short of perfect obedience would result in death. And, as Nehemiah Coxé reminded us, this covenant did not include “the least iota of pardoning mercy.”¹

The Necessity of the Covenant of Works

Moreover, the 1689 states that the covenant of works was necessary for *eternal life* to be promised to man. As 7:1 says: “Although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to him as their creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.”

This implies that the quality of life that God promised to man was of a greater value than what man possessed in his innocence and of a greater value than that which God was obligated to reward man for his obedience. Without this covenant, according to the confession, eternal life couldn’t have been offered to man.

The Perpetuity of the Covenant of Works

Of course, the confession states that the covenant of works was broken (20:1). A broken covenant, however, does not mean an abrogated covenant. Though the covenant of works

was broken by Adam, the 1689 teaches that it remains binding on all of Adam's posterity. That is, the same covenant of works that was established with Adam before the fall continues to be enforced on all of Adam's unredeemed posterity after the fall.

First, the covenant of works continues after the fall because its curses continue to plague the human race after the fall. The confession teaches that the first Adam was the federal head of the human race and that he brought universal condemnation and death to all his descendant by his failure to keep the covenant of works (6:1, 2, 3). Because universal condemnation and original sin continue, the covenant of works continues.

Two, the covenant of works continues after the fall because its legal demands continue to bind the human race after the fall. The terms of the covenant of works consisted of more than just refraining from eating from the forbidden tree; it required complete obedience to God's moral law that was written on Adam's conscience (19:1). And though it is impossible for Adam's descendants to eat of the forbidden tree, they are able to violate God's moral law that is equally written in their conscience. As the confession states: "The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall" (19:1).

Three, the covenant of works continues after the fall because man's moral inability does not nullify man's moral *culpability*. Though the confession clearly teaches that fallen man is unable to keep the demands of the covenant of works: "The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life" (20:1), it states that the terms and promises/threats of the covenant of works continue to all of Adam's children. For instance, according to the confession, Israel was reminded of the terms of the prelapsarian covenant of works in the postlapsarian covenant that was established with them at Mt Sinai. The "same law" that was written on Adam's heart, according to the confession, was "delivered by God upon Mount Sinai" (19:2). So even though fallen man cannot obey, they are still required by God to obey.

Four, the covenant of works continues after the fall, as 19:6 strongly implies, because the only way to be free from the demands of the law "as a covenant of works" is to be justified by Christ and brought into the covenant of grace by faith. Unlike our Presbyterian friends, Baptists do not believe in any dual covenantal membership. According to the 1689, Adam's descendants are either under the covenant of works or they are under the covenant of grace. It is one or the other: for it is impossible for those represented by the first Adam (i.e., the natural seed of believers) to be members of the covenant of grace. Moreover, just as it is impossible for those represented by the first Adam to keep the

covenant of works, it is impossible for those represented by the second Adam to break the covenant of grace. This is a major Baptist distinctive that is confirmed by the 1689.

In summary, the covenant of works consisted of God's promising Adam and his children eternal life for perfect obedience, and threatening eternal death for a single act of disobedience. Though Adam broke the covenant of works and brought death and condemnation on all his seed, the demands and curses of the covenant of works continue to be enforced on all of Adam's seed who are outside of faith in Jesus Christ.

The Covenant of Grace

Because the covenant of works leaves sinners hopeless, sinners need the gospel. Because of this, paragraph 2 introduces the gospel by introducing the covenant of grace: "Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace, wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ" (7:2). The union between the covenant of grace and the gospel is reaffirmed in chapter 20: "The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give forth the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect, and begetting in them faith and repentance: in this promise of the gospel" (20:1).

The Covenant of Grace is the Only Means of Salvation

Though the confession teaches the perpetuity of the covenant of works throughout the Old and New Testament dispensations, it strongly affirms that salvation in both dispensations is by grace and grace alone. The continuation of the covenant of works was not to drive sinners to the law, but to drive them to their knees. Because the law is unable to bestow eternal life to covenant breakers, God revealed the gospel immediately after the fall (20:1). Adam and all his fallen offspring were given hope of eternal life through the proclamation of the gospel, and through the proclamation of the gospel alone.

What is interesting about paragraph 2 is the absence of the main distinctive of Presbyterian covenant theology: that the Old and New Covenants are two different administrations of the same covenant of grace. The *Westminster Confession* states: "There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various

dispensations” (7:6). This allows for Presbyterians to incorporate unbelieving children into the covenant of grace. This phrase was removed from the 1689, and for good reason. The 1689 does not claim that the Mosaic Covenant was an administration of the covenant of grace. Rather, it simply says that the covenant of grace was innately revealed in the *protoevangelium* (Genesis 3:15), and then with greater clarity it was revealed throughout the progression of the Old Testament dispensation until it came to its fullest manifestation in the New Testament: “This covenant is revealed [not established] in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by further steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament” (7:3).

More explicitly, the 1689 says that the covenant of grace, which was established by the blood of Jesus, was retroactive during the Old Testament dispensation: “Although the price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ until after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefit thereof were communicated to the elect in all ages” (8:6). This is in agreement with Benjamin Keach who said: “All believers, who lived under the Old Testament, were saved by the covenant of grace, which Christ was to establish.”²

This implies that the covenant of grace is identical to the New Covenant. So rather than the covenant of grace being established through various administrations of the different covenants of the Old Testament (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic), it was established by Christ in the New Covenant. Therefore, Old Testament believers were saved by faith in Christ, in the same way New Testament believers are saved by faith in Christ. Or as paragraph 3 states: “It is alone by the grace of this covenant that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality” (7:3).

And, if membership in the covenant of grace is by faith in Christ alone, then only believers alone, and not their unbelieving children, are in the covenant of grace. In fact, this is one of the main distinctives of Baptist covenant theology: only believers, in any dispensation, are members of the covenant of grace. This formation of covenant theology makes the 1689 distinct from the covenant theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The Covenant of Grace is the Fulfillment of the Covenant of Works

Moreover, according to the 1689, Christ established the covenant of grace by fulfilling the legal demands of the covenant of works: as the 1689 says, “[the Lord] was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it” (8:4). Not only did He obey the same demands of the

covenant of works that we were obligated to obey, He “underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have borne and suffered, being made sin and a curse for us” (8:4).

This is why we are saved by works, but the works that save us are the imputed works of Christ that come by faith alone and grace alone. The covenant of grace is the fulfillment of the covenant of works, or it could be said that the New Covenant is a covenant of works for Christ, but a covenant of grace for believers. As Benjamin Keach stated:

As it refers to Christ...it was a conditional covenant. Christ receives all for us, wholly upon the account of His own merits. But whatsoever we receive by virtue of this covenant, it is wholly in a way of free grace and favor, through His merits, or through that redemption we have by His blood.³

In this covenantal framework we see the unity of the Scriptures and a single plan of redemption throughout the Old and New Testaments. Adam’s children are either condemned by the first Adam, or they are justified by the second Adam. They are either under the covenant of works or under the covenant of grace—and this depending on who is their federal head. Again, this separates Baptists from Presbyterians, as it does not allow for either unbelieving children or covenant breakers to be members of the covenant of grace.

The Covenant of Redemption

The last paragraph of chapter 7 explains why the history of redemption does not depict God as adjusting his plans on the fly. The covenant of grace was established by Christ enduring the penalty of the covenant of works in His death and by His meriting the reward of the covenant of works in His resurrection. Yet, all this was in accordance with God’s eternal plan that was established between the Father and Son before the foundation of the world (7:1). Or as chapter 8 explains it: “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” (8:1). Thus, the history of redemption, including the prelapsarian covenant of works and the postlapsarian covenant of grace, is the outworking of the eternal covenant of redemption.

Conclusion

The covenant theology of the 1689 is brilliantly laid out. It clearly states the main distinctives of Baptist covenant theology. There is (1.) a prelapsarian covenant of works that was broken by the first Adam and condemns *all* unbelievers, (2.) but that was fulfilled by the second Adam who established the postlapsarian covenant of grace for *only* believers, (3.) and this was in accordance with the eternal covenant of redemption.

With a clear distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, and with a clear distinction between unbelievers and believers, the 1689 presents a distinct covenant theology that is thoroughly baptistic.

NOTES:

¹ Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), 49.

² Benjamin Keach, "The Display of Glorious Grace" in *The Covenant Theology of Benjamin Keach* (Conway: Free Grace Press, 2017), 110.

³ *Ibid.*, 157.

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Pascal Denault

From the Covenant of Works to the Covenant of Grace

Just as their paedobaptists predecessors did in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the Particular Baptists affirmed, in the *London Baptist Confession of 1689*, a single covenant of grace and only one people of God from Genesis to Revelation. Not only did the Baptists share this conviction of the same salvation by the covenant of grace in the entire Bible, but they fully endorsed the concept of the covenant of works which was broken by Adam and accomplished by Christ.

Nonetheless, the LBC is not a mere copy of the WCF and chapter 7 “Of God’s Covenant” is an important witness of the way in which the Particular Baptists modified the prevalent understanding regarding federal theology. I write “modified” rather than “rejected” because even concerning the covenants, the Particular Baptists shared a lot of what the WCF teaches. Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the LBC are nearly identical to the WCF; the difference can be observed *negatively* from what was left out (especially paragraphs 5 and 6 of the WCF) and *positively* from paragraph 3 of the LBC which articulates distinctly the Baptist view of the covenant.

In this article we will first look at paragraph 1 and the covenant of works in order to set the stage for paragraphs 2–3 and the covenant of grace. The first paragraph explains what

needed to be done by man to receive eternal life. After the fall, the covenant of works was replaced by the covenant of grace freely given to the believers because Christ has accomplished the law of works stated in paragraph 1. Let's follow this progression.

How Could Man Merit Eternal Life Before God?

The goal of God's covenant is to bring eternal life to man. The first covenant would bring man to life by works. God gave Adam "a righteous law, which had been unto life had he kept it" (LBC 6:1). Adam, by accomplishing the covenant of works, was to earn eternal life, i.e. he was to seal his communion bond with God (John 17:3) in righteousness by his obedience in order to attain incorruptibility and immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53–54). But could a finite and natural creature really merit eternal life before an infinite and eternal God? The first paragraph of chap. 7 explains how this could be so:

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to him as their creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

The distance between God and the creature is also called the distinction Creator/creature. This distinction and distance is so great that it is impossible for man to merit anything from God. The confession backs this view of the impossibility for man in his natural standing before God to merit anything by two biblical passages: Luke 17:10 and Job 35:7–8. God owes nothing to man and man owes everything to God. But by way of a covenant, God condescends to remunerate the obedience of man by eternal life. This is what paragraph 1 refers to by recalling the covenant of works that was presented in chapter 6.

What is the Covenant of Grace?

The covenant of grace is the means by which God gave eternal life to men after the fall; it brings together all the elect of all times. This covenant is introduced by the confession at paragraph 2:

Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a 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.

The covenant of grace is, simply put, salvation by grace alone, by faith alone, through Christ alone. Basically, any man is either under the curse of the broken covenant of works in Adam or under the blessing of the covenant of grace in Christ.

Even though the Scriptures don't use the expression "covenant of grace", the substance of this particular covenant is found everywhere from Genesis 3:15, through the history of redemption, until its accomplishment in the NT. The Epistle to the Hebrews attributes directly to the grace of the New Covenant (the covenant of grace), the salvation of those who were called since the fall:

And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15).

Even if the sacrifice of the covenant of grace by which all blessings proceed was not shed till long after the promise was made, many had already been called and did possess by faith the eternal inheritance. The retroactive efficacy of the New Covenant is one of the main reasons why many Particular Baptists equated the covenant of grace with the New Covenant.

Distinguishing Works and Grace

Now that we have briefly introduced the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, it is extremely important to distinguish them in order that we don't confuse the law and the gospel. The covenant of works, even if it originates "*by some voluntary condescension on God's part*" is a conditional covenant. The nature of these two covenants is as distinct as works and grace are (Romans 11:6). The question is not if Christians have to obey the law; indeed, as a moral law, it requires their obedience (John 15:9–10). The question is whether the covenant of grace is conditional or unconditional. According to Scripture, this covenant is entirely unconditional: "For this reason *it is* by faith, that *it might be* in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants" (Romans 4:16). Faith, which is sometimes called a condition, is none meritorious; it is not so much a

condition as a means to enter the covenant of grace. It is not even from man, but from God (Ephesians 2:8). Every notion of a conditional covenant of grace, whether to *get in* or to *stay in* the covenant, compromises the gospel of free grace (Galatians 5:4).

Even if it seems quite simple to distinguish between the covenant of works in Adam and the covenant of grace in Christ, the principles involved in their relation are often confused. One reason for this confusion comes from the way that the covenant of grace is sometimes connected with the covenants of the Old Testament (Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic). The Reformed, before the Particular Baptists, had identified these covenants as *administrations of the covenant of grace*. Since the Old Covenant, which included Abraham, Moses, and David, as most reformed theologians thought, was conditional in its nature (Genesis 18:19; Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:12, 27:26; 2 Samuel 7:14). By presenting it as an administration of the covenant of grace, we encounter the risk to fall into conditional grace. This is how the church, in the course of its history, often mixed unmerited grace with meriting works. The Baptists completely rejected from their confession the idea that the covenant of grace was administered by the covenants of the O.T. Thus, they avoid the confusion between the law and the gospel.

Rejecting Also Paedocovenantalism

Furthermore, by considering the Old Covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace, the reformed theologians easily justified paedobaptism. By teaching that the Old Covenant was the covenant of grace formerly administered, they could declare that the children of any member of the covenant of grace is also in the covenant of grace by natural birth privilege (Genesis 17:7). Since the children ought to receive the covenant sign at birth (Genesis 17:10), it's only normal that they receive it under the *new administration of the covenant of grace*.

On the other hand, if the covenant established with Abraham was not the covenant of grace but another covenant subservient to the covenant of grace, we can maintain the Baptist principle that it is not natural descent by birth, but spiritual birth, that gives entry into the covenant of grace and all of its privileges (John 1:12–13, 3:3–6). This is why the sign of the covenant should be reserved only to those who profess faith in Christ. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6 NKJV) .

Where Was the Covenant of Grace During the Old Covenant Time?

If the Old Covenant was not an administration of the covenant of grace what was it and where was the covenant of grace during this time? The first part of LBC 7:3 answers this question:

This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament...

The 1689 federalism replaced the paedobaptist concept of *one covenant of grace under different administrations* by the *one covenant of grace revealed by farther steps* model. The understanding of this particular federalism is that the covenant of grace was not formally established during the O.T. period, but was revealed through the different covenants. Therefore, according to this view, the Old Covenant was both *distinct from* and *subservient to* the covenant of grace. Let's now examine how it was connected to the covenant of grace by pre-stating the conditions of the eternal covenant of redemption.

The Eternal Covenant of Redemption

The confession roots the covenant of grace in the pre-temporal covenant of redemption. The rest of paragraph 3 expresses this understanding thus:

[...] it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect; and it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocency.

From all eternity the plan of redemption exists in God. This plan involves the incarnation of the Son in order to redeem the fallen posterity which was given to Him and bring them to eternal life (2 Timothy 1:9–10). This covenant of redemption is revealed in Scripture through the doctrine of election (Ephesians 1:3–5). It is also revealed by the mission that Christ received from His Father (John 6:38–39; 1 Peter 1:20).

If we define the plan of redemption in terms of a covenant, it is necessary to state what the terms of this covenant were. The Son was to come into the world by taking on a human

nature as a man under the law (Philippians 2:7; Galatians 4:4). He was to live a sinless life and obey perfectly the will of God expressed in the moral law and keep whatever the Father would ask in addition to the law (Matthew 5:17, 26:42; John 8:29). He had to become the sacrificial representative of all the elect in order to undergo the curse of the law by dying in their place on the cross (Galatians 3:13; Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 2:14-17). In exchange, the Father was going to give Him life by raising Him from the dead, sitting Him at its right-hand, giving him a people that would serve Him and inherit with him eternal life (Acts 2:24; Philippians 2:9-11; Titus 2:14). This was the eternal covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son.

Scripture tells us that this divine plan arrived only “when the fulness of the time came” (Galatians 4:4). By this we ought to understand that not only did the time before the incarnation put in place *what was necessary for the Son to execute the redemption*, but also provided *the necessary frame of reference to understand this redemption*. How could we understand the covenant of works that the Son had to accomplish without the Old Covenant to reveal its meaning and understand what Adam had broken? How could we grasp the atoning death of Christ without the sacrificial system of the Old Testament to reveal it? How could we contemplate our eternal redemption without its prefiguration in the history of redemption? All this was “a *mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ*” (Colossians 2:17). The Old Testament revealed Jesus Christ and his work (John 5:39) in such a way that we can contemplate the breadth and length of God’s love revealed in Christ once the covenant was accomplished (Ephesians 3:1-21).

Just as we understand Adam in the light of “Him who was to come” (Romans 5:14), we understand all of the Old Testament Scriptures in the light of their accomplishment in Christ (Luke 24:27). The covenant of redemption accomplished by Jesus helps us understand the Old Testament that shows us, in return, the divine glory that shines in the New Covenant from Genesis to Revelation (2 Corinthians 3:14-18). The New Covenant is the concrete manifestation of the heavenly realities in the visible world. It’s only by this covenant (New Covenant) that the eternal inheritance (eternal covenant of redemption/ covenant of grace) is given (Hebrews 9:15).

The confession ends this section by affirming that “it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality”. Thus, from all time, all those that were saved, were saved by the grace offered in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Before it was established in the form of a covenant sealed in the blood (Hebrews 13:20) it was revealed by a promise guaranteed by God’s oath (Hebrews 6:17). This covenant of grace revealed and concluded in history

is founded on the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son for the redemption of the elect. It is the exclusive source of salvation according to what Scripture expressly declares: “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

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Justin McLendon

Jesus Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King

Chapter eight of the *Second London Confession of Faith 1689* (2LC) is titled, “Of Christ the Mediator.” Tom Nettles notes the importance of this chapter and its precise description of Christ the mediator by observing its “carefully crafted language [which] protected the unity of Christ’s person” and the 2LC “claims this important teaching as fundamental to Baptist life.”¹ Nettles’ praise is not an overstatement. Just a brief glance into church history reveals a vast array of Christological heresies that have challenged the church’s witness. Every generation must remain vigilant in its quest to stifle any teaching subverting the biblical portrait of our Lord, and chapter eight of the 2LC provides the church with a framework from which to mount a substantive defense. In fact, this crucial chapter establishes necessary truths that buttress a confessional framework of a biblical Christology. Denial of the doctrinal statements in this chapter could portend a perilous fate.

In his exposition of the 2LC, Samuel Waldron divides chapter eight into two main sections. Perhaps there are other helpful ways to convey the emphases of this chapter, but Waldron serves us well in his observations. He treats paragraphs one through three individually, and paragraphs four through ten as one unit. Paragraph one distinguishes Jesus’ ordination to the office of mediator, paragraph two describes His incarnation for the office of mediator, and paragraph three summarizes the specific qualifications necessary for the office of mediator.

Waldron acknowledges the close similarity of this chapter in the 2LC with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF). In fact, the 2LC is nearly identical in its first eight paragraphs with the WCF, but the last two paragraphs in this chapter are “an expansion of the First London Confession by the authors of the 1689 confession.”² The two additional paragraphs focus on Jesus’ exclusivity in His role as prophet, priest, and king, and the impossibility of any bifurcation of these roles to another. Christ alone is the mediator, and He does not share this role with another. The final paragraph beautifully summarizes the eschatological hope believers share through Christ’s work on their behalf by connecting it to the heavenly kingdom. This article explains chapter eight, paragraphs one through three, of the 2LC, which focuses on Christ’s role as mediator. The text of 2LBC, chapter eight, paragraph one reads as follows:

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 savior of the 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)

(1) Isaiah 42:1; 1 Peter 1:19,20. (2) Acts 3:22. (3) Hebrews 5:5, 6. (4) Psalm 2:6; Luke 1:33. (5) Ephesians 1:22, 23. (6) Hebrews 1:2. (7) Acts 17:31. (8) Isaiah 53:10; John 17:6; Romans 8:30.

The Pleasure of God in the Ordination of Christ the Mediator

Paragraph one summarizes God’s pleasure displayed in His sovereign purposes of ordaining the Lord Jesus as man’s only mediator. God’s purposes are always doxological, meaning God is concerned with and committed to his glory and renown. Thus, this paragraph begins with the stunning admission of this great truth, “It pleased God” to act. Human motivations to act on behalf of others are often plagued by self-interest and convenience. Stated simply, humanity cannot boast of selfless virtues apart from saving grace. This striking admission of God’s pleasure in His work serves as a reminder of a common refrain in sacred Scripture. God is “in the Heavens; he does all that he pleases” (Psalm 115:3), and “whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps” (Psalm 135:6). It is impossible to read Psalm 135 (and many other biblical texts) and miss the sheer fact that God is great, and He does what He pleases in heaven and on earth.

Jesus' role as mediator between God and man was not the result of random chance or unforeseen circumstances. Or stated differently, Christ the mediator was not plan B or a rushed attempt on God's behalf to remedy man's unforeseen fall. A mediator intervenes between two parties in opposition to influence reconciliation or peace. Regarding Jesus' role as mediator, His work of reconciliation was due to His being "foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you" (1 Peter 1:20). Jesus' entire redemptive work must be viewed as an eternal one stretching beyond the limitations of human conceptions of time. Certainly, Jesus saves sinners through the Spirit's regenerating work whereby sinners hear the word of truth and the gospel of salvation, and upon hearing and believing, they are sealed and secure (Ephesians 1:13). Or as the 2LC notes, "in time" Jesus redeems, calls, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies His seed. Yet this life-altering salvation encompasses eternity because the triune God determined to magnify His great name through the salvation of His people before the world began.

Paragraph one of chapter eight of the 2LC affirms Jesus as being the "only begotten son according to the covenant that was made." Recall here Tom Nettles' helpful work in the Summer 2016 edition of *Founders Journal* for an in depth look at how the 2LC speaks of Jesus being the "eternally begotten of the Father."³ Contemporary debates regarding eternal generation linger throughout many discussions of theology proper these days, but the 2LC's affirmation remains valid. It is God's only begotten Son who is the sole qualified and ordained mediator.

Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King

The 2LC carefully notes Jesus' mediating role is not merely an idea that is sequestered to the New Testament. Christ the mediator serves not as a fancy of a wild-haired apostle with a creative imagination. Rather, the 2LC aptly describes the biblical evidence of both testaments. Christ as mediator between God and man seems deeply rooted in the Old Testament roles of prophet, priest, and king, and Jesus' fulfillment of these roles is due to the covenant made between God the Father and God the Son. In the Old Testament, mediators were selected individually among the people of Israel, but their role foreshadowed what was to come. As Graeme Goldsworthy notes, "one of the messages of the New Testament, and especially of the letter to the Hebrews, is that human, sinful mediators foreshadow the true mediator, but they do not themselves mediate saving grace."⁴ Jesus, the true mediator, stands between God and His rebellious, alienated image bearers to mediate saving grace upon His elect. Therefore, Jesus is the mediator of a "new

and better covenant” (Hebrews 8:6), and as the God-man, Jesus relates to both sides of the dispute.

John Calvin is often attributed with elevating the importance of acknowledging Jesus’ fulfillment as prophet, priest, and king. Ignorant of God, born into sin, and willing and active participants in pervasive corruption, the gift of Jesus as man’s triple cure is surely a gracious gift. Calvin attests to the wonder of this gift by acknowledging that “in order that faith may find a firm basis for salvation in Christ, and thus rest in him, this principle must be laid down: the office enjoined upon Christ by the Father consists of three parts. For he was given to be prophet, king, and priest.”⁵ Jesus’ prophetic role addresses sinners ignorance, His priestly role addresses man’s guilt, and His kingly role addresses man’s corruption.

The 2LC notes the close relationship between Jesus’ fulfilling of these roles and His headship of the church. Regarding this central truth, John Dagg asserts, “Jesus Christ is head over all things to the Church. He exercises his supreme authority for the benefit of his people, for whose sake he sanctified himself to undertake the work of mediation.”⁶ Jesus’ headship alerts us to His sovereign rule and authority over His people, and humble submission to His will is the church’s response. But His sovereign rule and authority is not limited to the redeemed. The 2LC insightfully includes His sovereign rule over all things because He is the “heir of all things” and he will “judge the world.” Sacred Scripture is pointedly clear that the risen Jesus “is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42).

Paragraph 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 upholds and governs all things He has made, did, when the fullness of time was complete, take upon Him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities of it,(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)

(9) John 1:14; Galatians 4:4. (10) Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:14,16, 17, 4:15. (11) Matthew 1:22, 23. (12) Luke 1:27, 31, 35; Romans 9:5; 1 Timothy 2:5.

Jesus Christ the God-Man

Paragraph two is an important account affirming Jesus' deity and humanity. The biblical narrative of Jesus' birth reveals a staggering truth: Jesus' conception was extraordinary. Jesus was foreordained before the world's foundation, prophesied by God's servants beforehand, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and humbly brought into human history at the precise moment of God's choosing (Galatians 4:4). The doctrinal exhortations and commitments contained within this paragraph separate orthodoxy from heresy. In this brief paragraph, three crucial areas are noted: Jesus' deity, Jesus' humanity, and the hypostatic union.

The Deity and Humanity of Christ

The deity of Jesus Christ is one of the most crucial doctrines of Christianity. In a sense, the Christological errors of the past lurk in the background of the weighty declarations of this paragraph. As examples, Ebionism and Adoptionism were heresies essentially claiming Jesus was not God but received God's power to become the Messiah by either His obedience to the works of the law or through God's adopting Him (perhaps through His birth or baptism).⁷

The Arian controversy was more influential in its scope. Condemned at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, the doctrinal claims of Arianism arose from Arius of Alexandria denying the eternal, fully divine nature of Christ. For him, Jesus was the first created being. In response, Athanasius demonstrated that Jesus is fully God; he is of the same essence as the Father. The first statement of this paragraph is a clear refutation of Arianism: "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." Jesus is "very" God. His place as the second person in the holy Trinity does not detract from his equality with the Father. In the economy of the godhead, Jesus is not inferior to God, but is, according to Hebrews 1:3, "the radiance of God's glory."

We can ask, with Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur deus homo* (Why the God-man)? Why the incarnation? The 2LC demonstrates the biblical answer to this question rests in Jesus' determination to complete His work as God's appointed mediator. Jesus is "one substance and equal with him [God]." In the gospel of John, Jesus is presented as the eternal Logos, the incarnate Word, who condescended and became flesh and dwelt among us

(John 1:1–14). The Nicene Creed defined this through its use of *homoousion*, “of one substance” against the Arians. The Arian controversy was the most significant threat to orthodox Christianity in the fourth century. The church’s response established a formidable defense that all persons of the godhead are of the same divine essence and substance. The implications of Jesus’ divinity are numerous. Through Christ, God can be known and salvation can be received. We do not have to wonder what God is like, nor do we have to question His interactions with humanity. Additionally, as the 2LC recognizes, Jesus evidences His divine nature through His making and upholding of the world mentioned above.

Docetism (from the Greek verb *dokeo* meaning “to seem” or “to appear”) arose in the second century and it called into question the true humanity of Christ. This heresy arose from its Gnostic roots which bifurcated a strict distinction between physical and spiritual. Gnosticism subjugated the physical order to worthlessness, and these beliefs influenced docetic teaching. In Docetism, Jesus only appeared to be human and die. Jesus’ appearances, as real as they may have seemed, were essentially ghostlike manifestations. This attack on Jesus’ humanity obscures what the New Testament affirms in the incarnation. Jesus is God in human form.

Apollinarianism challenged Jesus’ humanity through its belief that “Jesus’ human spirit was replaced with the divine Logos.”⁸ Apollinarius affirmed that Jesus was God in the flesh, but he believed the divine Logos fulfilled Jesus’ mind so that His humanity was different than the rest of humanity. In other words, this view held that Jesus was human in body and soul, but not in spirit. The second paragraph listed above responds to this heresy by acknowledging Jesus’ human nature had “all the essential properties and common infirmities of it.” Scripture establishes Jesus’ humanity by revealing the human attributes we all recognize. Jesus was born, He grew from childhood to adulthood, His body endured exhaustion, hunger, and pain, and He expressed human emotion in the face of common human circumstances. Jesus’ audience saw Him as a human and interacted with Him in human terms and greetings. As the 2LC notes, Jesus had these “essential properties and common infirmities.”

The 2LC affirms two important aspects of Jesus’ two natures. The divine and human natures are united in the person of Christ, but they are also distinct. For Jesus to be the mediator between God and man, He had to be both. The doctrine of the hypostatic union refers to Jesus’ two natures being united in one person, while maintaining that Jesus is not two persons. It is critical to note two additional Christological heresies that the 2LC is combatting: Nestorianism and Monophysitism (sometimes called Eutychianism). The

former view taught that two separate persons existed in Jesus, one human and one divine. Horton adds that Nestorianism believed “the divine Logos indwelt Jesus morally rather than essentially.”⁹ The latter view held Christ had only one nature, and His union with God eliminated His human nature.

The 2LC doctrine rejects all Christological heresies by affirming Jesus “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.” Of course, The Council of Chalcedon (451) rejected all six Christological heresies when it affirmed the full humanity and full divinity of Christ. Michael Bird claims, Chalcedon affirmed that Christ’s “divine nature is exactly like the Father and the human nature exactly like the rest of human nature. The natures are united, but unmixed.”¹⁰ The clearest proof of these attributes is Scripture, and the 2LC offers us the parameters of our theological defense.

Paragraph 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 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 judgement in His hand, and gave Him commandment to execute the same.(20)

(13) Psalm 45:7; Acts 10:38; John 3:34. (14) Colossians 2:3. (15) Colossians 1:19. (16) Hebrews 7:26. (17) John 1:14. (18) Hebrews 7:22. (19) Hebrews 5:5. (20) John 5:22, 27; Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36.

Sanctified, Anointed, and Empowered

This paragraph brings to light an important component to Jesus’ two natures. The 2LC states that the human nature of Christ was sanctified and anointed by the Holy Spirit. This work of the Holy Spirit united Jesus’ two natures together. In His divine nature, Jesus did not need this anointing, but His human nature received this anointing “above measure” to endure what was required of His mediatorial work. Also, here the 2LC mirrors the wording of Colossians regarding the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” in His

person (see Colossians 2:3). The exaltation and empowerment of his human nature had teleological applications. The fully human, fully divine mediator is “thoroughly furnished to execute” His office. The end is certain. The Father determined to exalt the Son, and the Son willingly sought and secured redemption for a people destined to be saved. The union of Jesus’ divine nature with His human nature exalts His human nature by the sanctifying and anointing work of the Spirit to accomplish the office of mediator. John Owen was right when he proclaimed that “the revelation made of Christ in the blessed gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, and more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness than the whole creation and the just comprehension of it.”¹¹ In addition to protecting us from doctrinal error, the 2LC chapter eight, paragraphs one through three compels us to worship the triune God whose kindness toward our helpless estate is seen in provision of our mediator, Jesus Christ, who was sanctified, anointed, and empowered by the Spirit of God.

Conclusion

The first three paragraphs of this chapter expound critical aspects of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Space does not permit the lengths to which we could go in discussing the depths of His work on our behalf. The 2LC speaks of these benefits in soteriological terms (note what amounts to an *ordo salutis*: redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified). Scripture is clear that God has spoken to us by His Son, the Lord Jesus, who is the ultimate revelation of God. He is the Prophet, the Word made flesh. Jesus establishes a new covenant with His people through His high priestly work. He reconciles us to the Father through His sacrificial intercession. He transfers us into the kingdom of Christ where He rules in our hearts and lives with justice and peace.

NOTES:

¹ Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming A Baptist Identity*, Vol. 1, *Beginnings in Britain* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2005), 38.

² Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 3rd ed. (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1999), 127.

³ Tom Nettles, “God and the Holy Trinity,” *Founders Journal*, Summer 2016, Issue 105, 19–27.

⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Son of God and the New Creation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 36–37.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T McNeil and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1:494.

⁶ John Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 225.

⁷ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 470–471.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 474.

¹⁰ Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 485.

¹¹ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1949; 1980 edition), 25.

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Justin McLendon

The Accomplishments of Christ the Mediator

One consequence of the modern transformation of congregational singing is the ignorance many Christians have regarding classic hymns. Countless Christians today do not know the depth and beauty of songs previous Christian worshippers enjoyed. These songs sought to capture the affections believers have for the Trinitarian work of grace in the lives of God's people. One such hymn, "Praise Him," written by the famous American poetess, Fanny Crosby, captures the subject matter of paragraph eight of the 2LC. The Baptist church of my youth sang this Crosby hymn often, and I was always struck by the third stanza: "Crown Him, Crown Him, Prophet and Priest and King." Over the years, I wondered what this could mean. How do I crown Jesus, and what does it mean for Jesus to be crowned as a prophet, priest, and king? Paragraphs four through ten of chapter eight of the 2LC offer answers to this perplexing question.

Samuel Waldron groups paragraphs 4–10 into one theme regarding the execution of the office of mediator. In this article, these seven paragraphs will be evaluated into three units. I summarize paragraphs four and five on Jesus' humiliation and exaltation and His sacrifice and inheritance. Paragraphs six and seven focus upon Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament promises. Paragraphs eight through ten focus on Jesus' intercessory work, His governing authority, and His sovereign preservation of the elect.

Paragraph 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 fulfill it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have born 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 remained in the state of the dead, yet saw no corruption:(26) 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 sits 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)

(21) Psalm 40:7, 8; Hebrews 10:5-10; John 10:18. (22) Galatians 4:4; Matthew 3:15.
(23) Galatians 3:13; Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 3:18. (24) 2 Corinthians 5:21. (25) Matthew 26:37, 38; Luke 22:44; Matthew 27:46. (26) Acts 13:37. (27) 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4. (28) John 20:25, 27. (29) Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11. (30) Romans 8:34; Hebrews 9:24. (31) Acts 10:42; Romans 14:9, 10; Acts 1:11; 2 Peter 2:4.

Paragraph 5

The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit once offered up to God, has 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 has given unto Him.(33)

(32) Hebrews 9:14, 10:14; Romans 3:25,26. (33) John 17:2; Heb. 9:15

Humiliation and Exaltation

The cross appears disastrous for Jesus' credibility. The gospels portray in detail His life and ministry, which includes unexplainable miracles and remarkable claims of deity. Yet there He is, seemingly helpless, tried and convicted, sentenced to death on a criminal's cross. It is not uncommon for non-Christians to stumble over how we portray Jesus' death in victorious proclamations. What is so wonderful about a crucified king? What is so glorious about a defeated miracle worker? Of course, we lean on the Spirit's help to provide needed patience when sharing biblical truths to others. We humbly respond that it may appear as if His mission failed when He was killed, but the cross is not a failure, and it was not a surprise.

The 2LC declares that Jesus “willingly” undertook His role as mediator. He was not coerced, and He did not owe anyone a favor. He was not duped into trickery or fooled by the devil. His work of active and passive obedience was intentional. In His active obedience, Jesus obeyed the law perfectly and earned righteousness for His people; through His passive obedience, He endured the “most grievous sorrows in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body” (paragraph four, above). He suffered through the anguish of God’s wrath poured on Him for our sin. Note how paragraph four includes both Jesus grievous sorrow of soul and that wrath He endured in His body. Both were necessary, both were real, both were a part of His saving act.

It is important to note what is imbedded in the paragraphs above regarding what theologians refer to as Jesus’ exaltation and humiliation. As Wayne Grudem notes, these two states refer to “the different relationships Jesus had to God’s law for mankind, to the possession of authority, and to receiving honor for himself.”¹ Understanding Jesus’ work through these two distinctions helps clarify all that surrounds Jesus’ death for the elect. The incarnation, suffering, death, and burial of Jesus comprise His humiliation. In Philippians 2:7–8, Paul states that Jesus “made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Our salvation required each of these actions, but Jesus’ work of humiliation for us is only part of His work.

Paul affirms Jesus’ exaltation in the same context: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11). Jesus’ resurrection, ascension, His seat at God’s right hand, and His future return all comprise His exaltation. Herman Bavinck was correct when he declared, “The whole New Testament teaches the humiliated and exalted Christ as the core of the gospel.”² When we are confronted by skeptics or in general conversation with unbelievers, we must affirm both His humiliation and exaltation, and in doing so, we begin to convey how His atoning work accomplished its purposes.

Sacrifice and Inheritance

As we deserved God’s wrath due to our breaking of God’s law, the punishment “we should have born and suffered” Jesus endured. Scripture is clear: cursed is anyone who hangs

on a tree, yet Jesus “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). The 2LC states plainly that Jesus died physically. This declaration is crucial for our salvation, and it also includes the emphasis that his body “remained in the state of the dead.” Two important issues emerge. First, Jesus really died. He was not near death or unconscious. His heart stopped beating in death. Sometimes Christians are guilty of taking this truth for granted because of the resurrection, but it is of great theological and evangelistic importance (Muslims, for example, deny Jesus’ actual death on the cross).

Second, we are told that Jesus remained in the state of the dead, and “his body saw no corruption.” Space does not permit an extensive treatment here, and an explicit view is not described here in the confession, but at this point in His humiliation, the issue of whether Jesus went to hell emerges. Interestingly, John Dagg addresses this issue in his treatment of Christ’s humiliation. He notes how “some have thought that he descended into hell; but this option has arisen from misinterpretation of the Scripture.”³

From my perspective, Grudem’s explanations are clear and persuasive.⁴

On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead with the same body that was crucified. The testimony of Scripture makes it clear that the grave could not keep Jesus. He revealed himself to male and female witnesses, to individuals and groups. He confronted disbelief by expressing His wounds, calling upon the doubters to observe and touch; to demonstrate that He was not a spirit, he asked for and ate broiled fish. Paul claims that the risen Lord appeared to him, and the resurrection serves a vital importance showing how preaching is pointless and faith is futile if death won. After his resurrection, Jesus ministered and taught for forty days and ascended to heaven and sat at the right hand of the father. In His fully exalted state, Jesus Christ intercedes on behalf of His people as their mediator. Even in this heavenly realm, Jesus remains the elect’s prophet, priest, and king.

Definite Atonement

What did Jesus’ death accomplish? Answering this question is crucial, and it demands careful interaction with New Testament revelation. In His death, Jesus atoned for sins. Through His sacrifice, Jesus restored right relationship between God and man, and a price was required for this relationship to be secured. All of humanity is rendered guilty in Adam, and we are by our sinful nature, objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). God is pure and holy, a righteous judge who does not overlook sin or excuse ungodliness. His nature demands justice, and the Old Testament provides graphic pictures of the necessity of atonement.

Forgiveness is impossible without payment, and the shedding of blood was God's requirement for mercy.

In the New Testament, Jesus demonstrates in himself what the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed. The blood of bulls and goats is insufficient; our only hope was His precious blood. The great value in studying other atonement theories is that one can find aspects to affirm in their presentations, but in the end, penal substitution captures all the biblical emphases of reconciliation found within propitiation, expiation, and purification. The 2LC clearly affirms this view. Jesus' work of humiliation and exaltation accomplished all that was intended. The 2LC explicitly states the intentionality of Jesus' atonement in that it "purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father has given unto Him." While debates linger over the extent of the atonement among Baptists and the broader evangelical community, the biblical evidence supporting definite atonement is overwhelming.

Tom Nettles defines definite atonement as Christ dying "for the same people for whom he intercedes; these are the same ones the Father has elected and the Spirit has effectually called."⁵ It is impossible to mount an adequate defense of definite atonement in this brief article, and the 2LC does not intend to defend this doctrine in detail, but a few statements are necessary. First, at the very least, penal substitution *suggests* definite atonement. Jesus made a real substitution for a certain people to a secured inheritance. Second, as Nettles noted above, Christ's priestly role of intercession is an integral aspect of this doctrine. In his thorough treatment of this point, Stephen Wellum shows a unified summary of Old Testament priesthood, and he contrasts their roles with Jesus' work as our high priest. Wellum demonstrates why Jesus' role as high priest of the new covenant necessarily calls for his atonement of a particular people.⁶ The high priestly prayer of John 17 is significant here. Jesus has in mind a definite people as He prays, and He acknowledges the particular work He will accomplish for them alone.

Tom Schreiner poses an interesting question regarding Jesus' atonement. He asks, "Could Jesus have atoned for our sins as a ten-year old?" This is not a trick question, and it is not an unimportant one either. Schreiner states Jesus could not have atoned for our sins as a ten year old because "he would have lacked the maturity and experience as a human being to suffer for the sake of his people at such a tender age. He had to experience the full range of temptation and resist allurements to sin to qualify as an atoning sacrifice (Heb. 4:15)."⁷ Thus, the high priestly prayer of John 17 is a coming together of all that He had done in his life and ministry. Every aspect of his ministry leading up to this point prepared him to provide definite atonement.

Paragraph 6

Although the price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ until 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 today and forever.(36)

(34) 1 Corinthians 4:10; Hebrews 4:2; 1 Peter 1:10, 11. (35) Revelation 13:8. (36) Hebrews 13:8.

Paragraph 7

Christ, in the work of mediation, acts 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)

(37) John 3:13; Acts 20:28.

Promises Fulfilled

Amid all that encompassed Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Genesis narrative, they were privileged to hear the promise of future salvation. The deceiver would be crushed. From this moment on, God unfolded a plan only He could have designed. The progressive nature of revelation allows us to piece together how subsequent acts and promises relate to the original declaration that the woman's seed would come. Throughout the Old Testament there is a consistent witness that God is accomplishing His plan, and the people through whom He worked "searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Peter 1:10–11). In order to convey the Bible's overarching testimony to God's plan, the 2LC declares Jesus as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. In other words, long before the garden, and long before the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection, Jesus purchased redemption and it was applied to His people (the specific ones he mentions in John 17).

Paragraph seven explains important distinctions in Christ's person whereby He fulfills these promises. Both His divine and human nature are required in crushing Satan. As the 2LC notes, each nature accomplished that which is consistent within that nature. In other words, we needed a better Adam, and in His human nature, Christ lived under the law without sin. His full human nature contributed to His fulfillment of his task. Similarly, His divine work is consistent with His full deity in His person. The 2LC carefully reiterates how these two natures were distinct and so too were the works associated with each nature. As Stephen Wellum notes, there "is no union of natures that obscures the integrity of either nature."⁸ Scripture affirms this by its repetitive indications of both his divine and human qualities (his holding up the universe, and his hunger).

Paragraph 8

To all those for whom Christ has obtained eternal redemption, He does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them;(38) uniting them to Himself by His Spirit, revealing to them, in and by His 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 almighty 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 foreseen in them to procure it.(42)

(38) John 6:37, 10:15,16, 17:9; Romans 5:10. (39) John 17:6; Ephesians 1:9; 1 John 5:20.

(40) Romans 8:9, 14. (41) Psalm 110:1; 1 Corinthians 15:25, 26. (42) John 3:8; Ephesians 1:8.

Paragraph 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)

(43) 1 Timothy 2:5

Paragraph 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 to 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)

(44) John 1:18. (45) Colossians 1:21; Galatians 5:17. (46) John 16:8; Psalm 110:3; Luke 1:74, 75.

Total Intercession

The strength of these paragraphs rests in the affirmation of God's faithfulness. God intends to save a people through Christ, and He will see to it that this salvation is complete. Thus, salvation is accomplished through Christ and applied in Christ, and He is faithful to accomplish every aspect of this work. God's purposes are everlasting and immutable. At this point we must make sure our understanding of intercession is inclusive of all His work. In other words, when we focus upon Christ's intercessory ministry, we must not think only in terms of His present intercession of prayer. As paragraph eight notes, He intercedes through applying and communicating the gospel to us through the power of the Spirit. It is through this work that we are "persuaded to believe." Paul makes this point in Ephesians 1 when he describes our hearing the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, we then believe and are sealed. Each component of this gracious act is evidence of Jesus' total intercession. Additionally, His intercession includes His governing our lives by His Word and Spirit.

He Preserves His People

Paragraph ten's origins stem from the *First London Confession*. This paragraph summarizes much of what has been covered in the previous nine. Jesus Christ the mediator was faithful in the execution of his roles and prophet, priest, and king. The order of these three offices is important. Like the prophets of old, Jesus was anointed by God's Spirit to proclaim God's Word. Moses foretold of a future prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15), and Peter attributed that prophecy to Jesus (Acts 3:22). Due to our ignorance, we need Christ to declare and provide the gospel for us. In light of our enmity with God, our high priest sought to reconcile a chosen people on the basis of His sovereign decree. Our great high priest makes us acceptable in God's sight, and his work of intercession is eternal. At all times Christ is our righteousness, our defense, and our sustainer. Christ the king rules in our lives because His lordship extends to every crevice of our lives. His sovereign rule assures our preservation. In each of these ways, Jesus is preserving his people.

How do we respond to the gracious provision we have in Christ? Well, as the song says, we praise Him. God created us to worship, and we do so with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. How do we crown Jesus prophet, priest, and king? I suppose there are several answers, but our answers must not be less than our humble recognition that God provided us everything we need in Christ. Crowning Him prophet, priest, and king is something God has already done, so our crowning Him in these ways is essentially our joyful admission in our worship and lifestyle that we belong to Him. He enriches our souls through His prophetic word, He reconciles and intercedes for us as our priest, and He rules over all things as king of kings.

NOTES:

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 620.

² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 418.

³ John Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 206.

⁴ See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 586-594.

⁵ Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory* (Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002), 298.

⁶ Stephen J. Wellum, "The New Covenant Work of Christ: Priesthood, Atonement, and Intercession," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, edited by David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 517-540.

⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 388.

⁸ Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Incarnate Son: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 307.

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Christ the Mediator

Current Dialogue for Theology and Ministry

Introduction

Over the last few years, a surplus of books, conferences, and ministries have emerged which seek to ground pastoral ministry within a theological framework (rather than a pragmatic one). For example, Kevin Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, in *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, urge pastors to view their ministerial role as the church's primary theologian.¹ Todd Wilson and Gerald Hiestand produced two recent books calling upon pastors to "resurrect an ancient vision" and embrace their roles as pastor theologians.² Of course, long before these books were published, Tom Ascol argued convincingly in the *Founders Journal* that pastors must return to a theologically rooted ministry.³

These contributions provide a sweeping rebuttal to a common approach of pastoral ministry, which emerged from the popular mega-church culture and the residue of the modern church growth movement.⁴ Thankfully, a passionate plea for pastors to recover a historical and biblical view that pastoral ministry is first and foremost a theological calling exists, and contemporary ministers must dispel a mentality seeking to bifurcate pastoral ministry and theological reflection. Pastors are theologians. They may not be pastor-scholars, but they most certainly are theologians as they form congregational doctrine and practice. In addition, and they are the church's first defense against false doctrine infiltrating the body.

One question emerging within these discussions relates to theological models for ministry: If the pastor is the church's primary theologian, how should he organize ministry to lead his people faithfully from a theologically robust perspective? In other words, is there a theological model within Jesus' person and ministry pastors can use to integrate into their own ministries? Answers to this question have been varied, but there is a trend to ground a pastor's ministerial duties in Jesus' threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. My purpose is to summarize how theologians speak of Christians functioning as prophets, priests, and kings in their Christian witness and the life of the church and overview how some theologians and church leaders advocate for an integration of the prophet, priest, and king model as a ministry typology.

Christians as Prophets, Priests, and Kings

Before looking specifically at the question of pastors viewing Jesus' mediating roles as a typology for modern ministry, observing how these Christological roles are present within the lives of believers is helpful. For example, John Dagg connected Jesus' mediating roles to Christian character. He observed,

These offices of Christ are also adapted to the graces which distinguish and adorn the Christian character. The chief of these, as enumerated by Paul, are faith, hope, and love; in the exercise of *faith*, we receive the truth, revealed by Christ, the prophet; in the exercise of *hope*, we follow Christ, the priest, who has entered into the holiest of all, to appear before God for us; and we submit to Christ, the king, in the exercise of *love*, which is the fulfilling of the law, the principle and sum of all holy obedience.⁵

Dagg's remarkable insight of pursuing Christ in a life of humble submission and personal holiness necessarily including faith, hope, and love, and seeing those virtues through Christ's mediatorial roles proves encouraging and instructive.

A brief survey across evangelicalism's broad spectrum reveals similar appeals for believers to grasp the practical implications of Christ's mediatorial roles. For example, Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainwright suggests Christ's three-fold office should be used as an archetypal function throughout the Christian life, and we must "retain or regain a living context in the devotional and liturgical life of the church, for it is in image and rite that archetypes dwell, persist, and exercise their power."⁶ Presbyterian Old Testament scholar and theologian Richard Belcher also sees a connection by stating, "The roles of prophet, priest, and king demonstrate how the church can carry out its mission as the body of Christ."⁷ Thus, in the individual devotional life and throughout the life of the church body,

Christ' mediatorial roles function in practical ways of personal and corporate holiness and devotion. Believers must not restrict the merits of Christ's sacrificial work through these roles to soteriology alone; rather, believers model these roles in numerous ways through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In his popular *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem develops a thorough analysis of Christ's three-fold office from theological and practical perspectives. He contrasts Adam's pre-fall reality with the believer's future reign with Christ when considering believers' roles as prophets, priests, and kings.⁸ These mediating roles were God's *design* for man, and believers can capture a glimpse of their future heavenly fulfillment while here on earth in their fulfilling of these roles in the body of Christ by observing Adam and Eve's usage of these roles prior to their fall into sin.

Grudem understands Adam to function in a prophetic role, pre-fall, in that "he had true knowledge of God and always spoke truthfully about God and about his creation."⁹ Additionally, Adam had no need of a sacrificial system for sin, but he and Eve acted as priests in offering their good works to God in thankful allegiance to and humble submission for his generous provision. Adam and Eve displayed their kingly rule through their dominion over the creation under their care. In each of these ways, Adam and Eve enjoyed these roles in their pre-fall relationship with God, which in some way provide a glimpse into a future realization for God's people in the new heavens and new earth.

Because of the fall, however, these mediatorial roles shattered. According to Grudem, human beings no longer served as prophets because "they believed false information about God and spoke falsely about him to others."¹⁰ Additionally, the role of priest was maligned due to the absence of God's presence because of man's lust for sin, and humanity's subjection to the harsh realities of a post-fall world of decay and unrighteous rulers revealed the collapse of the kingly role. As Grudem states, "the nobility of man as God had created him—to be a true prophet, priest, and king—was lost through sin."¹¹ Although there is a revival of hope at times in the Old Testament through godly men acting in these roles, by and large there was not a full recovery until Jesus' ministry. Like the 2LC and other reformed theologians before him, Grudem connects Jesus' role as the perfect prophet because God has disclosed His word fully through Christ. Jesus' sacrificial gift of himself and His intercessory work for His people evidences His priestly duties, and Jesus reigns now and for eternity as King of the new heavens and new earth.

Believers have a participatory role in these offices, according to Grudem, although the participation is in a subordinate manner. Currently, believers accomplish prophetic

work through the proclamation of the gospel. Priestly work is viewed through believer's participation in the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), and offering sacrifices of praise to God. Finally, believers currently participate in the kingly work of Christ through the authority given to the church. Grudem believes these current mediatorial roles foreshadow what lies ahead for believers in the new heavens and new earth where these roles will encompass the normal activity of God's people.

In Vern Poythress's recent book, *The Lordship of Christ*, he describes from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* the theological backbone of the doctrine, and then he argues Christ's "work as Prophet, King, and Priest is perfect. All who believe in him are united to him and receive the benefits of his work; ... by being united to Christ, the believer receives the power to function in some ways as imitators of Christ in their own tasks."¹² At that point, Poythress mirrors the work of Grudem in the description of these three offices in the life of believers, but Poythress then applies these truths into a biblical understanding of vocation. He argues, "we can use the categories of prophet, king, and priest in a metaphorically extended sense to see that many human activities involve service to God that imitates the 'big' versions of these offices that appear in Scripture."¹³ With the prophet, priest, and king model used as application for constructing a biblical model of vocation, one could potentially create an expansive list of practical connections.

Clearly, theologians across the evangelical spectrum expand upon Christ's role as mediator and its implications for the lives of the church and individual believers. In Baptist ecclesiology, the priesthood of believers proves a closely related area of conversation, and those discussions often rest their cases upon the New Testament's teaching of Christ's priestly accomplishments for His people. The evidence suggests theologians advocate for a wide variety of applications regarding these truths to believers. In addition, recent developments indicate there has been a shift to link these benefits to the pastoral duties as a ministry typology. For brevity, I will just mention three specific works within the broader Reformed community.

Prophet, Priest, and King as Typological for Ministry

Richard Belcher's approach is broad as he seeks to integrate these roles for ministry. He suggests, "when one understands the roles of Prophet, Priest, and King and how they relate to Christ, it affects preaching and teaching."¹⁴ He addresses each of these roles through the lens of elder responsibility and privilege. Elders accomplish the prophetic role through teaching Scripture, fulfilling the ministry of prayer, and discipleship of future

generations. In their priestly roles, elders guard and promote worship gatherings and serve God's people through prayers, pastoral care, and encouragement. In their kingly duties, elders proclaim Christ's kingdom and promote the biblical tactics of engaging spiritual warfare. Elders govern God's people under the authority of Christ and use oversight to engage in restorative discipline. Regardless of whether one fully accepts all that he suggests, Belcher develops a thoughtful and enriching approach to integrating Jesus' mediatorial roles as a typological structure for elder ministry.

In his helpful volume edited with Kevin Vanhoozer, Owen Strachan dedicates a chapter to the prophet, priest, and king model as a biblical theology of the pastorate. Strachan claims to "make the crucial and rather commonsense point that the work of priests, prophets, and kings informs our understanding of the work of the pastor."¹⁵ Strachan builds an excellent case from these specific roles in their Old Testament contexts and using Scripture, he parallels their qualifications and responsibilities to those expected of the church's elders in the New Testament. These roles offer ministers a theological grid in which ministers can pursue their responsibilities.

Strachan writes with acute awareness of how the pastor theologian model is missing from contemporary ministry emphases. He believes the Bible offers pastors a helpful structure that sustains theological longevity and fruitfulness, and envisioning pastoral duties as prophetic, priestly, and kingly duties does not advocate the latest gimmicky ministry fad; instead, it is a recovery of one rooted in sound biblical practice and unquestionably evidenced through historical reflection. Ministers of the new covenant serve as priests by ministering grace, serve as kings by ministering wisdom, and serve as prophets by ministering truth. These ministries are emphatically theological, and they are the work of an ecclesial, public theologian.

John Frame and Vern Poythress are major contributors to this conversation through their work in Reformed epistemology. Their advocacy for "tri-perspectivalism" provides the theological nuance some rely upon for integrating Jesus' three-fold office as a typology for ministry.¹⁶ Simply stated, tri-perspectivalism is Frame's summary of how we have true knowledge, and this comes from three perspectives—*normative* (referring to God's law), *situational* (referring to the world), and *existential* (referring to oneself). Frame argues that these perspectives are equally important and equally ultimate. Thus, one cannot exist without the others.¹⁷

When this structure is applied to Christology through Jesus' threefold office, then one can form a ministry typology acknowledging how each office embraces one of the

three perspectives. Frame believes “these offices have been seen as models for church officers: the teaching elder (1 Tim. 5:17) represents especially God’s authority; the ruling elder (same verse) God’s control, and the deacon the priestly ministry of mercy.”¹⁸ The prophetic office corresponds with the normative knowledge found within sacred Scripture. The priestly office corresponds with existential knowledge of oneself. The kingly office corresponds to the situational knowledge of the world.

Belcher, Strachan, and Frame are not alone in viewing Christ’s threefold office as a ministry typology. Another recent example is theologian J. Todd Billings who writes,

We have the great privilege of testifying to the truth in Christ as prophets; of worshipfully offering our lives to God as priests in a way that can ‘show and communicate’ the gospel; of opposing the sinful ways of the world that resist Christ’s lordship, knowing that we share in Christ’s kingly victory. But it is always Jesus Christ alone who is the redeemer—Jesus Christ who is the true prophet, priest, and king. While we should seek for our ministries—whether to youth or to people in urban or cross-cultural settings—to be relational, full of a servanthood that meets people where they are at, we can never be the true prophet, priest, and king to those around us. It is only derivatively, subordinately, as witnesses to the true redeemer, Jesus Christ.¹⁹

These statements form the concluding section of Billings work where he calls upon a reframing of ministry through the lens of union with Christ. His approach is a tempered combination of submission to Christ’s sufficiency and a humble responsibility of ministers to integrate Christ’s life in service to others.

A Way Forward

On the one hand, we should be grateful for a renewed interest in recovering a theological grounding for pastoral ministry. The church has suffered long enough under the shockingly superficial paradigms of modern ministry discourse. Often the televised versions of Christianity are embarrassing at best and blasphemous at worst, and in a rapidly changing world, the church needs a recovery of ministry prizing theological acumen. Thus, I applaud the authors mentioned above for their efforts because pastors can benefit from what is being encouraged. In addition, because of the recent attention of the pastor-theologian model and the conversations it has produced, one can expect further reflection from the emerging generation of ministers graduating out of theologically strong seminaries. While there is much to praise about these shifts, legitimate questions exist regarding this

approach. Questions linger concerning whether or not adjusting to this typology is the best summary of the New Testament's emphasis.

At the 2016 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Timothy Paul Jones presented a research paper titled, "Prophets, Priests, and Kings Today? Theological and Practical Problems with the Use of the *Munus Triplex* as a Leadership Typology."²⁰ Jones argued that the threefold office is indeed a rich biblical structure warranting a serious investigation, but in the end, pastors should not appropriate a prophet, priest, king model as ministry construct.

Throughout his presentation, Jones interacted with a common conception of prophet, priest, and king as it has been developed in pastoral training and church planting networks. Some advocates believe these roles can be separated and assigned to leaders possessing the best skills for each. For example, a church's elder body should fulfill the prophetic role because of their duties of teaching and proclaiming the word; counselors and caregiving ministers should be assigned the priestly roles, and kingly duties should belong to deacons, church organizers, or even an elder body depending upon how their responsibilities are distributed. As Jones notes, essentially the prophet, priest, and king typology is reduced to skill set and the needs of the church.²¹

In his critique of this approach, Jones first presented substantive theological and exegetical analysis of the development of these roles throughout the Old Testament. While affirming Christ's fulfillment of these roles as the mediator between God and man, Jones focuses upon a new covenant view of priesthood where service to God's people is viewed as a guardianship. Ministers of God's Word are tasked with the consecrated lives of devotion and service. In this structure, justice is pursued and the good news of the kingdom is proclaimed.

While I affirm much of Jones' critique, I think another important factor must be addressed if pastors are going to adopt this typology. There may be nothing inherently wrong with pastors understanding their roles through the mediating roles of prophet, priest, and king, but pastors embracing this typology as a ministry construct must show how it relates to biblical shepherding. The roles of prophet, priest, and king are already subsumed under a biblical understanding of pastor as shepherd. In other words, while it is necessary to encourage pastors to embrace a theological stewardship of their ministries, we should urge them to do so as they "shepherd the flock of God" that is among them (1 Peter 5:2). The shepherd's role includes everything that the above authors seek to accomplish through using the threefold office typology. As I understand it, one danger of adopting this

typology could be the professionalization of ministry. If prophetic work remains isolated from priestly work due to skill sets and local church complexities, then kingly work will seem harsh and will be unwelcomed. In other words, a danger of this methodology is that one could adopt it and miss biblical shepherding, when biblical shepherding, properly understood, necessarily includes each of these roles.

Timothy Witmer's contribution is crucial in this discussion. In his work, *The Shepherd Leader*, he argues that biblical shepherds function in four primary ways: shepherds know, feed, lead, and protect their sheep.²² Every role that a pastor would want to practice through the lens of prophet, priest, and king typology can be seen best as a shepherd's normal duties. Through Witmer's "comprehensive matrix for ministry," shepherds know their sheep, and this gives shepherds the wisdom necessary for feeding, leading, and protecting. To be clear, a proponent of the prophet, priest, and king typology for ministry could claim that these roles conceptualize feeding, leading, and protecting, but my only concern is that the clear New Testament emphasis of shepherding remain the lens through which pastors minister.

It is easy to be discouraged with the proliferation of ungodliness in our day. Depending on which statistics are in view, Christianity is at best in a holding pattern, and at worst, it is declining in the U.S. While churches must give considerable attention to the factors that contribute to the current status of our witness, one thing is clear in Scripture. Pastors are to shepherd their flocks until the Chief Shepherd appears. When he does appear on that glorious day, Jesus Christ, the great mediator between God and man, will gather his bride that he has been ministering to through his under shepherds. In the meantime, ministers must embrace the reality of their theological calling to be pastor-shepherds who know, lead, feed, and protect the sheep. These duties are perfected through Christ's threefold office, and they are in some way administered through duties of shepherds. After all, all the redeemed share in the joys and benefits of Christ's threefold office.

NOTES:

¹ Kevin Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

² Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015). Also, Hiestand and Wilson followed with an edited volume that addresses the pastor theologian from the perspective of church leadership constructs. See Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *Becoming a Pastor Theologian: New Possibilities for Church Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

³ Tom Ascol, “The Pastor as Theologian.” *Founders Journal*. Winter 2001, 1–10.

⁴ One could also include the ministries of Mark Dever (*9 Marks*) and Brian Croft (*Practical Shepherding*) as examples of incorporating intentional theological reflection within the church from a shepherding perspective. Also, one could see Al Mohler’s helpful treatment in “The Pastor as Theologian,” in *A Theology for the Church*, edited by Daniel L. Akin (Nashville, TN: 2007), 927–934.

⁵ J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 231.

⁶ Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 173.

⁷ Richard Belcher, *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 160.

⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 629–630.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 629.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Vern Poythress, *The Lordship of Christ: Serving our Savior all of the Time, In all of Life, With all of our Heart* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 130.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴ Belcher, *Prophet, Priest, and King*, 165.

¹⁵ Owen Strachan, “Of Prophets, Priests, and Kings: A Brief Biblical Theology of the Pastorate,” in *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 39.

¹⁶ John Frame, “A Primer on Perspectivalism,” <http://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/>. Sometimes “tri-perspectivalism” is called “multi-perspectivalism.”

¹⁷ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), 163.

¹⁸ Frame, “A Primer on Perspectivalism,” paragraph 34.

¹⁹ J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 165.

²⁰ I moderated this session, and Jones graciously offered all attendees a copy of his paper. References to his argument are from the paper he provided. Audio of the session can be found at etsjets.org.

²¹ Timothy Paul Jones, "Prophets, Priests, and Kings Today? Theological and Practical Problems with the Use of the *Munus Triplex* as a Leadership Typology" (lecture, 2016 ETS Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX, November 15, 2017), 3.

²² Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2010).

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