

Lesson 55: Chapter 8: Paragraph 1: The Covenant of Redemption

As we come back to the 1689 we come to study one of the greatest chapters of the confession, chapter 8, Christ the Mediator. We come to fill our hearts and minds with the glories of Christ. The beauty of Christ is beyond description and more than our hearts can hold, listen to the sentiments of Samuel Rutherford: 'If there were ten thousand thousand millions of worlds, and as many heavens full of men and angels, Christ would not be pinched to supply all our wants, and to fill us all. Christ is a well of life; but who knoweth how deep it is to the bottom? This soul of ours hath love, and cannot but love some fair one. And oh, what a fair One, what an only One, what an excellent, lovely, ravishing One, is Jesus! Put the beauty of ten thousand thousand worlds of paradises, like the garden of Eden in one; put all trees, all flowers, all smells, all colours, all tastes, all joys, all sweetness, all loveliness, in one: oh, what a fair and excellent thing would that be! And yet it would be less to that fair and dearest Well-beloved, Christ, than one drop of rain to the whole seas, rivers, lakes, and fountains of ten thousand earths. Oh, but Christ is heaven's wonder, and earth's wonder! What marvel that His bride saith (Cant. v. 16), "He is altogether lovely!" Oh that black souls will not come and fetch all their love to this fair One! Oh, if I could invite and persuade thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand of Adam's sons, to flock about my Lord Jesus, and to come and take their fill of love! Oh, pity for evermore, that there should be such a one as Christ Jesus, so boundless, so bottomless, and so incomparable in infinite excellency and sweetness, and so few to take Him!'¹ There is more in Christ than we can want, than we can hold, than we can conceive, and so it is our joy then to come to a chapter that sets forth Christ in His various glories.

The 1689 has 10 chapters to the WCF and the Savoy's 8. The various controversies connected to the Baptists and the clarifications of this chapter were a major reason for the publishing of the 2nd London Baptist Confession in the first place. Various Christological errors were being spread both by General Baptists as well as those associated with their own number, so the Reformed Baptists were keen to publish this confession, especially with this chapter to prove their orthodoxy and not be associated with those errors.

The chapter has a basic structure of chapter 1 introducing Christ as our Mediator; chapters 2-3 look at the qualifications of Christ, as God and man to be our Mediator; chapters 4-7 look at the nature of His work as Mediator; and 8-10 look at His threefold office of prophet, priest and King.

Today as we begin paragraph 1 we will be looking at the Covenant of Redemption

Paragraph 1: 'It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest, and king; head and saviour of the church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.' The thought flow of the 1689 to this point is a logical one. We looked at the fall. There we saw sin entering into the world, and the effects of sin. Instead of jumping ahead to the doctrine of the judgement, we see the covenant instead. This is God's

¹ https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42557/42557-h/42557-h.htm#Page_445

provision for sinners who have plunged themselves into sin and are unable to rescue themselves from it. Well upon having mentioned the covenant, the 1689 deals with the identity of the mediator of the covenant—The Eternal Son. A mediator is one who stands between two parties and negotiates the terms for a reconciliation. In this instance humanity is an enemy of God, and Christ is the mediator who will reconcile us back to God. This is one of the longer chapters in the confession and it covers the whole area of doctrine that is traditionally called Christology where we look at the person and the work of Christ.

The language of this opening paragraph reminds us of chapter 3 and God's Decree, 'It pleased God in His eternal purpose'; the deity of the Son chapter 2, 'to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son'; and the covenant of redemption from chap. 7 para. 3, 'according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man.' If you go back to the last paragraph of the last chapter talking about the covenant of grace, it says, 'and it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect.' The CoG is founded in the CoR. As we open this chapter we must stop and explore this covenantal foundation for the all the work of Christ.

What is the CoR? Here is a definition from Fesko: 'At its most fundamental level, the covenant of redemption is the pre-temporal, intra-trinitarian agreement among Father, Son and Holy Spirit to plan and execute the redemption of the elect. The covenant entails the appointment of the Son as surety of the covenant of grace who accomplishes the redemption of the elect through His incarnation, perfect obedience, suffering, resurrection and ascension. The covenant of redemption is also the root of the Spirit's role to anoint and equip the Son for His mission as surety and to apply His finished work to the elect.' P132.

As Reformed we believe in the three basic covenants of the CoR; the CoW; and the CoG. Both the CoW and the CoG flow from the CoR. At the times of the writing of the various Reformed confessions there were certain central discussions going on. What is the nature of Christ's work for us? In other words what is our theory on the atonement? Is the ransom theory of the atonement; the moral government theory; or the substitutionary view the correct one? The biblical doctrine of the CoR helps you answer this question. For whom did Christ die? Is the Arminian view of Christ's death correct; or the hypothetical universalist view; or particular redemption? Once again the CoR is critical in answering these questions.

Our simple goal today is to look at the Biblical foundation for this teaching.

Because we are dealing with one of the three salvific covenants, we will be using the same biblical hermeneutic in establishing any of these covenants? There are those who reject covenant theology in general. For example they reject that there is a Covenant of Works between God and Adam in the Garden of Eden because the word 'covenant' does not even appear there. But this we have seen is a very simplistic hermeneutic. The OT was written to people whose lives were governed by all sorts of covenants whether they were covenants of marriage; the buying and selling of land; making oaths; peace agreements; or political situations where a vassal king would submit to a suzerain, all of life was shaped by covenants. If we are going to employ good hermeneutical common sense we have to try and put ourselves in the original writers and readers shoes and ask if

they would see any evidence of a covenant. What is a covenant? Here is Pat Abendroth's definition of a covenant that we have used in an earlier study, 'A covenant is a solemn agreement. Such an agreement is between two or more parties and may be accompanied by signs and ceremonies. Swearing and oaths underline the solemnity of covenants. This is sometimes underscored by the use of blood. But simply put, a covenant is a solemn agreement.'² This helps us to know what we are looking for. A covenant can be seen as being present when we see more than one party present; entering into an agreement; that agreement can be discerned through the presence of things like conditions/stipulations where one party gives a work to another to do. A covenant can also be discerned where there are rewards or punishments for the fulfilling or failing of the agreement. So if there are promises or threats, these too indicate the presence of a solemn agreement. So the question is, can we find in the Bible evidence of an agreement, in eternity, between the Father and the Son, that concerns itself with Christ standing in the stead of his people, doing what is required to save them from sin? Let's turn to the Biblical evidence:

Firstly, there are two proof texts provided in the confession, Is. 42:1 and 1 Pet. 1:19-20. Is. 42:1, 'Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.' Who is the Servant of Isaiah? We know that this is a Messianic prophecy where God is revealing His provision of His Servant to redeem Israel, Is. 42:1 is quoted in Matt. 12:28 as fulfilled by Christ. This is the servant of Is. 53, 52:13. He is the anointed one, 61:1, who will save His people. The idea of a servant of God is an idea that establishes an agreement or arrangement between the Father and Son. There are several texts in the NT which indicate that the Son has come to do the Father's will, John 6:38, 'For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.' The Son whose food it is to do the will of the Father has been commissioned to do the Father's will, a will as with all the will of God is from eternity. God does not make up plans on the fly but from an eternal decree.

He is the predestined and prophesied Savior of His people. This Servant of Isaiah is linked with 1 Pet. 1:19-20, 'but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.' Christ is the spotless lamb who dies for our sins, and He was foreknown from before the foundation of the world. This is an eternal plan of God. Or as someone has put it, unlike God's servants set apart from their mother's wombs; Christ has been set apart from eternity, before the foundation of the earth.

There are other verses which show this eternal plan to save the elect to be done 'in Christ.' Eph. 1:4, 'even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.' 2 Tim. 1:9, 'who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.' These verses which speak of election speak of how God elected us 'in Christ' 'before the ages began.' No doubt this can be confusing language, but when we realize that Christ as a covenant representative was standing in the stead of His people, we can easily discern God's dealings with Him as God's dealings with us in Him.

² — Covenant Theology by Patrick Abendroth
<https://a.co/7LaecWL>

One of the clearest sections of the Bible that speaks about an agreement in eternity is John 17. Here is Jesus on the night He was betrayed revealing much to the disciples about the future and the deep plans of God. Jesus reveals that the Father has given a people to the Son, v2, 'since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.' the 1689 in chap. 8 para. 1 alludes to this when it says, '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.' Jesus speaks of having been given a task a work to do, and He has now accomplished it, v4, 'I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.' Jesus prays for a return to the eternal glory He shared with the Father before creation, v5, 'And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.' So here we have three of the key ingredients of the CoR. The Father and Son in eternity past; the Son is given a people; a people He will receive as a reward when He completes His work. Christ reveals that His actions are fulfilling the requirements of a previous agreement. He reveals that all His work is in fulfillment of a previous arrangement that when completed results in salvation for the elect. Jesus says as much Himself in Luke 22:29, 'and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom.' The word assign is literally 'covenanted'.

Hebrews 10:5-7 quoting psalm 40 tells us that that OT messianic prophecy was written in order to let us overhear a conversation between the father and the Son, 'Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' " Once again we see the Father and the Son in conference, and the Son Himself reveals that God has prepared a body for Him, namely the incarnation; the sacrificial way in which He will offer His body; the Father's will which He is fulfilling; also the self-conscious way the Son sees Himself fulfilling scripture.

Some have highlighted what is called 'prosopological exegesis'.³ Prosopon is the Greek word for person. The early church fathers read the Bible asking the basic question of which person is speaking when reading OT prophecies for example. What we learn from them is that God for our sake not His own records words that the Father says to the Son or the Son to the Father. This is a reading strategy that reveals the intra-trinitarian nature of scripture. God allows us to eaves drop on conversations that we might learn certain things about God and His plans for us. Just as Jesus words about doing the Father's work reveals a plan and an agreement to save by Him fulfilling a work, we see some striking things are revealed in the conversations we are allowed to overhear. We overhear the Father appointing the Son as a priest forever, Ps. 110:4, 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." As a King and giving Him the nations as His inheritance, Ps. 2:7-8, 'I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.' We see the Father on account of the Son's

³ <https://www.reformation21.org/blogs/the-trinitarian-depth-of-scrip.php#:~:text=Prosopological%20exegesis%20helps%20us%20see,person%2Dcentered%20end%20of%20Scripture.>

righteousness appointing Him to His throne, Ps. 45:6-7, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.' Christ is anointed in the roles of prophet, priest and king because He was eternally appointed for this task. Jesus Himself reveals that He was consecrated by God before He came into the world, John 10:36, 'do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?'

All of this goes to show that the Bible speaks, all over the place every time it speaks about the Son's work; His offices; His obedience; the way the church is described as being given to Him; even the receiving of the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of a promise upon completion of His work Acts 2:33, all of this and more clearly reveal the covenantal nature of the arrangement between the Father and the Son. For me it is obvious that the eternal God who is one in will has from eternity made a plan that has been executed in history according to His unchanging plan. The details reveal an agreement where the Father sends and the Son is sent; the Father issues His will and the Son performs that will; the Father appoints the Son for the roles of prophet, priest and king the Son fulfills them.

Some have surprisingly claimed that this covenant would violate the essential unity of the Trinity, Karl Barth being one such critic. Wilhelmus a Brakel anticipating this criticism writes in defense:

'Since the Father and the Son are one in essence and thus have one will and one objective, how can there possibly be a covenant transaction between the two, as such a transaction requires the mutual involvement of two wills? Are we then not separating the persons of the Godhead too much? To this I reply that as far as personhood is concerned the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. From this consideration the one divine will can be viewed from a twofold perspective. It is the Father's will to redeem by the agency of the second person as surety, and it is the will of the Son to redeem by his own agency as surety.'⁴

What are the pastoral applications for the covenant of redemption? The biggest implications for believers is that we can be absolutely sure that we will be saved. God, Father; Son and Holy Spirit are all covenanted, invested and working to fulfill a promise made to one another. God who cannot lie; whose power cannot fail; who will fulfill all that He sets out to do has set His love upon sinners, upon you. He has sworn not only to call you to Christ; but to raise you up at the last day and no one can snatch you from His hand. To add another layer of depth to this, think of it this way. Can a promise the Father made to the Son fail? Can the Son who promised to fulfill the Father's will for the promised reward of a people? Will the Father who has already raised the Son in confirmation of His work fail to save those He has promised to the Son? God cannot deny Himself, He cannot break an agreement with Himself or a promise made to Himself, our salvation is as sure as God's promise to Himself. Our salvation does not finally rest upon our obedience but the obedience of the Son.

A second application has to do with how we view the plan of redemption. Sadly many do not realize that the plan that God made in eternity past, is the same plan that the Son dies to fulfill, is the same plan that the Spirit applies. There is

⁴ <https://www.reformation21.org/blogs/defending-the-covenant-of-rede-2.php>

a unity to the plan and work of God. This has huge implications for the doctrine of election and limited atonement.

Another implication is how this doctrine casts light on the present heavenly intercession of Christ. all that Christ continues to do as the exalted and resurrected Savior is an ongoing execution of that one plan from eternity past. He has started a work and He has all power and authority to finish it.