

The Westminster Confession of Faith

Lesson 29: Of Christ the Mediator (¶ 8.5–8.6)

High Plains Fellowship PCA

April 23, 2023

prepared by J.R. Dickens

Introduction

Having addressed the covenants in Chapter 7, we are now reaching the doctrinal “mountaintop” in Chapter 8. Much of what follows in the rest of the Confession is “details”—the *outworking* of the Mediatorial office of Christ in relation to his elect.

In the next two paragraphs, we will return to the legal and transactional language of salvation, then we will consider that all men since Adam have been saved in the same manner under the covenant of grace. No man since the fall is able, by his own effort, to save himself. Any yet every man is under the moral obligation to “repent and believe the gospel.”

Opener

- How many of you have ever made a false profession and/or held onto a false assurance of your salvation? What were the circumstances?
- How tempting is it to make a false profession just to get the pesky evangelist off your back?
- How many of you grew up in the church and simply assumed you were saved? Or how many of you assumed that because you grew up in “Christian” America, you were automatically saved?

WCF 8.5–8.6

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

a. **Rom 3:25–26** – Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith, for a demonstration of His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. **Rom 5:19** – For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were appointed sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be appointed righteous. **Eph 5:2** – And walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. **Heb 9:14, 16** – How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? . . . For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. **Heb 10:14** – For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

b. **Dan 9:24, 26** – “Seventy weeks have been determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to

seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Holy of Holies. . . . Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are decreed.” **John 17:2** – Even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. **Eph 1:11, 14** – In Him, we also have been made an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will. . . . Who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory. **Col 1:19–20** – For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross—through Him—whether things on earth or things in heaven. **Heb 9:12, 15** – And not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy places once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. . . . And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the trespasses that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

- The wording of this paragraph seems to leave no room for man’s “decision.”
 - Christ has “fully satisfied . . . *justice*”—i.e., the debt of sin owed to God.
 - Christ has “*purchased* reconciliation” and “an everlasting *inheritance* . . . for all those whom the Father has *given* to him.”
- Is there “choice” in salvation? Yes—God’s choice. “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” (Exodus 33:19; quoted in Romans 9:15)
- When was that choice made? *In eternity past*. The elect are not those who *choose*, but those who were *chosen* before the world began.
 - Chosen by the Father – redeemed by the Son – secured by the Spirit.
- “Justice” is a profoundly important concept here—because of how it reflects God’s unchangeable character; “*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice?*” (Abraham to Yahweh, Genesis 18:25)—Yes, because he can do no other.
 - Justice means specific sin is punished specifically—that no sin is unpunished, and no sin is punished more than it deserves. Either situation would violate perfect justice!
- The *purchasing* language is back—the debt of sin must be paid in full for anyone to be saved; it is an entirely one-sided transaction.
 - The biblical imagery is that of a Master purchasing slaves off the auction block. (See Hos 3; Rom 6.)
 - But wait! Besides *reconciliation*—the cessation of hostilities and the declaration of peace—salvation also includes an *inheritance*.
 - An inheritance by definition is not something you *own* or something you’re *owed*—it is the possession of another that is graciously given to the *heir*.

- And what makes the saved man an heir to the kingdom? *Adoption* as sons.
- We'll have a lot more to say about adoption in WCF Chapter 12. For now we need to notice that it is another "order" of *grace* beyond the grace of justification.
- Justification is a specific "moment" in time, but those who are truly saved in that moment are saved forever.
- Salvation is described as the *possession* of eternal life—not merely the *potential* for it. (See Rom 6 again: "But now having been *freed from sin and enslaved to God*, you have your benefit, leading to sanctification, and the end, **eternal life**. For the wages of sin is death, but *the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*.")
- The doctrine of assurance (a.k.a., perseverance or preservation) is part and parcel of salvation. What God accomplishes for us he also secures for us. *Our treasure is kept in heaven. Of those whom the Father gives the Son, none can be lost. None can be snatched out of his hand. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ*, etc. In these ways, scripture uniformly teaches the security of the believer. And the only way this is possible is if God works salvation for us *from start to finish*.
 - Adam should have taught us that man doesn't have the power in himself to preserve himself—even if he has a big head start.
- The fact of justification—and the particular moment in time when it occurs—was part of God's eternal, infallible, immutable decree.
- The Arminian wants to dodge the implications of his own theology of the atonement: since Christ "died for all" and the decision of salvation is now left up to man, it is possible that: (1) *no one* may be saved in the end; (2) *everyone* may be saved in the end.
 - Hence the first possibility is that Christ's death was infinitely valuable and yet totally wasted. God's wrath for sin was placed on Christ but no one took the offer—hence they all suffer for the sin that Christ already died for *in some respect*. This is legal double jeopardy. God is unjust.
 - The second possibility is that Christ fully paid for the sin of the whole world and all received the gift of salvation. God's justice is fully satisfied. But scripture gives no allowance for this possibility. Christianity is not universalism. If it were, and everyone is saved, then the message of the gospel is pointless.
 - Evangelism can be rightly seen as a process of separating the elect from the reprobate; the same message can accomplish both purposes at the same time. (See Is 55:11.)

- The only biblical understanding is therefore that some are saved and some are lost. (In fact, scripture gives us reason to believe that *most* will be lost.) Then the question is, who is saved—and by whose will?

“All who maintain the historic Christian faith in even the broadest sense agree that only some shall be saved. . . . If the work of Christ is the same for all men, then it cannot actually do for any what it does not do for all. *Since the work of Christ does not secure salvation for all, it must not secure salvation for any.*”¹ (emphasis added)

- Scripture also makes it clear (and so does our Confession) that the fallen man is *unable*, by his own effort, either to be saved under the *covenant of works*, or to prepare himself to be saved under the *covenant of grace*.
- In the past we (in the Reformed camp) were more honest about calling Arminianism a heresy (see for example, the Canons of the Synod of Dort). Why do we speak this way about Arminianism? *Because so many may be lost thereby.*
 - Specifically, Arminianism sets up a false assurance of salvation by the act of a personal choice.
- Man’s choice is necessarily reversible. God’s choice is immutable.
 - The irony is that the man who thinks he can choose himself in and out of salvation would ever be foolish enough to have confidence in his spiritual security.
- I have heard the Arminian explain it this way: “God can’t violate man’s free will.” But the Bible makes it clear that the pot has no claim to freedom under the Potter’s hand. He will always serve the Potter’s purposes—even when he’s busy “choosing” stuff.
- The Arminian response to Calvinism is to remind us that every man is *commanded* to repent—and that every man must ultimately “choose” whether to submit to the Lordship of Christ.
 - If the gospel were not a command, the Great Commission command would be pointless. “*God is now commanding men that everyone everywhere should repent.*” (Acts 17:30) We are commanded to preach the gospel and men are commanded to repent.
 - A better way to understand this “choice” is to describe it as a *response*. As we have seen in earlier paragraphs, Christ had to act first. And by virtue of his sovereign choice, man is made willing and able to lay hold of salvation by grace through the gift of faith (Eph 2:8-9).
 - Man’s part is “*receiving and resting*” in the finished work of Christ. (See WCF 11.1.)

¹ Williamson, p. 79.

- We will consider “effectual calling” in WCF Chapter 10.
 - Remember that God *owes* man nothing but justice and that man cannot lay *claim* to salvation unless it is offered as a gift.
 - Nevertheless, most men *reject* the offer. Why? Because they remain *dead* in sin. Spiritual regeneration (“rebirth”) must precede faith (John 3:3, 5). And that work is by the Spirit acting without man’s help *or* permission (John 3:8).
- What about Roman Catholic theology? We note that it is distinctly Arminian and that Rome explicitly condemns anyone who holds to Reformed soteriology.
- Nearly every expression of Christianity in the world today is Arminian. This is a profound problem because it diminishes the finished work of Christ and it leads man to an assortment of false assurances of his salvation. The church is thereby crippled with tares!

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

a. **Gen 3:15** – “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.” **Gal 4:4-5** – But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. **Heb 13:8** – Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. **Rev 13:8** – And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

- This paragraph retraces ground previously covered when we discussed dispensationalism: men in every age since the Fall are saved under the *covenant of grace*.
- The person and work of Christ is first portrayed for mankind as a blood sacrifice in the third chapter of the book of _____.
- Here we are reminded that the work of Christ was of such a certain nature in its “virtue, efficacy, and benefits” that it could be applied to the saints before it happened in time and space.
- A little math tells us that the age “before Christ” was much longer than the time since his crucifixion.
- The types of the “old” sacrificial system show in part that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebr 10:4).

“The salvation of God’s people in all ages was through the cross of Christ alone. . . . The very design of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was partly to show that these ‘could not make him who did the service perfect’ (Heb 9:9).”²

Concluding Thoughts

- The “practical” implications of Calvinism are summarized nicely by Paul: let your “boasting” be in the Lord (Rom 5:11; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17; Gal 6:14).

Tribute

- This week I learned that G.I. Williamson died on April 12th at the age of 97.

Upcoming Lessons

- April 30: Chapter 8, Paragraphs 7 & 8
- May 7: [Dominic Aquila Q&A]
- May 14: Chapter 9, Paragraphs 1 & 2
- May 21: Chapter 9, Paragraph 3
- May 28: Chapter 9, Paragraphs 4 & 5

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

- *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof, 1949. (PDF version [here](#))
- *The Confession of Faith*, A. A. Hodge, 1869.
- *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, G. I. Williamson, 1964.
- *Roman Catholicism*, Loraine Boettner, 1962. (online version [here](#); PDF version [here](#))

All scripture quotations are *Legacy Standard Bible* (LSB) unless otherwise noted.
Screenshots are taken from [BlueLetterBible.org](#).

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

² Williamson, p. 83.