

WCF 08: OF CHRIST THE MEDIATOR

The whole of Christianity is centred on Christ. All biblical history and prophecies centre on Christ. Our relationship with God and one another as believers is founded upon Christ. Our redemption is built upon the work of Christ and enjoyed because of Christ. Nothing in the Christian life and nothing in Christian theology can be divorced from Christ and considered apart from him. Whether we are studying theology proper, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, pneumatology or eschatology, we cannot leave out Christ without falling into imbalance in one way or another.

In this chapter, we shall study what the Scripture has to teach us about Christ in His central role as our Saviour, our Covenant Head, or as our Mediator.

On the Mediatorial Offices of Christ

8.1 It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man;¹ the Prophet,² Priest,³ and King;⁴ the Head and Saviour of His Church;⁵ the Heir of all things;⁶ and Judge of the world:⁷ unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed,⁸ and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.⁹

¹Isa 42:1; ²1 Pet 1:19–20; ³Jn 3:16; ⁴1 Tim 2:5; ⁵Acts 3:22; ⁶Heb 5:5–6; ⁷Ps 2:6; ⁸Lk 1:33; ⁹Eph 5:23; ¹⁰Heb 1:2; ¹¹Acts 17:31; ¹²Jn 17:6; ¹³Ps 22:30; ¹⁴Isa 53:10; ¹⁵1 Tim 2:6; ¹⁶Isa 55:4–5; ¹⁷1 Cor 1:30.

We have already seen two facts referred to in this section: (1) God has from eternity chosen a definite number of people to be His people, the elect, the seed of Christ (*WCF* 3.3–6); (2) God the Father, representing the entire Godhead has made a Covenant of Grace with God the Son in which the Father promises the Son the elect to be His seed,—through calling, justification, sanctification and glorification,—on condition of His fulfilment of the conditions of the Covenant.

In this section, we learn that Christ entered the Covenant not as the Second Person of the Godhead, but as the *theanthropos* (God-man) who has been appointed to the following offices:

- a. *The Mediator between God and man.* A mediator is a person who intervenes between two parties at variance for the sake of making reconciliation. Before the Fall, there was no need for a mediator between God and man since there was no variance between them though their distance in nature was very great. But after the Fall, man was alienated from God by his sin and subjected to God’s judicial wrath. A mediator became absolutely necessary. Christ was appointed for that purpose: “there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). This appointment was, of course, “set up from everlasting” (Prov 8:23) and “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet 1:20).

To fulfill His role as the Mediator of the elect, Christ would function as their Prophet, Priest and King. In this way, Christ qualifies as the Head and Saviour of the Church, the Heir of all things and the Judge of the World.

- b. *A Prophet.* A prophet is a man who declares the will of God to man. The prophetic office of Christ is clearly taught in the Scripture. He was the Prophet like unto Moses (Deut 18:15, 18; cf. Acts 3:22–23, 7:37). He was known as “the messenger of the covenant” (Mal 3:1). It was the “spirit of Christ” who revealed the plan of redemption to the prophets of old (1 Pet 1:11). In the New Testament, Christ declares that He alone reveals the Father (Mt 11:27); He was the “teacher come from God” (Jn 3:2); and He alone “hast the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68). Thus the Apostle John calls Him “the Word” (Jn 1:1) and the Apostle Paul calls the Psalms, “the word of Christ” (Col 3:16).

How does Christ execute the office of a Prophet? The *WLC* 43 answers: “Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in His revealing to the Church, in all ages, by His Spirit and Word, in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.” In other words, Christ declares to His Church, through all ages, including those under the Old Covenant, the whole counsel of God, or whatever God would have us know, believe and do as it pertains to our salvation.

- c. *A Priest.* While a prophet is God’s representative to men, a priest is a man who represents men to God by offering up sacrifices and making prayers on their behalf (Heb 5:1; 8:3). This is what Christ, as the Great High Priest, does for His Church throughout the ages. Indeed, even in the Old Testament, when the Aaronic priesthood was still functioning, the entire order of priests and the ceremonial system were typical of Christ. “Even he [The BRANCH, i.e., Christ] shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and *he shall be a priest upon his throne*: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zech 6:13; cf. Isa 53:10; Dan 9:24–25).

How does Christ execute the office of a priest? The *WSC* 25 answers beautifully: “Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once *offering up of Himself* a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in *making continual intercession* for us.”

The author of Hebrews tells us that this was one of the chief reasons why Jesus took on the nature of man rather than of angels, for only as man can He represent us as a merciful high priest (Heb 2:16–17). But how could Jesus be a priest when He is descended from Judah rather than Levi? The answer lies in the fact that He was anointed a priest in the order of Melchizedek with an oath (Heb 5:6; 7:15–17; cf. Ps 110:4). By design, the Melchizedek priesthood is already a higher priesthood than the Aaronic priesthood since Abraham who is the ancestor of Levi gave tithes to Melchizedek (see Heb 7:1–10). But more than that, Jesus’ priestly ministry is far superior to the ministry of the Aaronic priests.

- **Firstly**, He needs not offer any sacrifice for Himself since He is without sin though He was in all points tempted like as we are (Heb 4:15; 7:27).
- **Secondly**, rather than offering animal sacrifices which were but shadows and types which cannot take away sins (Heb 10:4), Jesus offered Himself, the antitype which all the OT sacrifices were pointing to (Heb 9:14, 28; Col 2:17). In doing so, He not only propitiated the wrath of God by vicariously taking the punishment for sin that is due us upon Himself, but reconciles us to God (Heb 2:17; Eph 2:16).
- **Thirdly**, unlike the Aaronic priests, Jesus continues ever to make intercession for us (Heb 7:24–25; 12:24–25). Moreover, He does not intercede for us on earth as the Aaronic priest would have, rather, He is exalted to the right hand of God the Father, and He intercedes for us there (Rom 8:34). What does He intercede for? As our Advocate, He pleads with God that, on account of the merit of His death, our sins may be pardoned; our consciences quieted and our souls preserved: “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn 2:1). As our Mediator, Christ beautifies our prayers by removing all impurities and sin, and then, presenting them to the Father, pleads that such as made in His name and in the will of God may be answered: “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

- e. *A King.* A king is the ruler of a kingdom. Christ is such a King. His kingship was early prophesied in the OT, when Jacob blessed Judah by saying: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen 49:10). Shiloh refers to the one to whom tribute belongs, i.e., an ultimate king. This prophesy was made a little more specific by Nathan the prophet in his delivery of God’s promise to David: “And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the

throne of his kingdom for ever” (2 Sam 7:12–13). Although this prophesy appears to refer directly to Solomon (cf. 1 Chr 28:6), a comparison of Scripture shows us that it actually refers to him only as a type of Christ (Cf. 2 Sam 7:14 with Ps 2:7; cf. Ps 2:7 with Heb 1:5b; cf. 2 Sam 7:12-14, 16 with Lk 1:32). Moreover, the fact that the kingdom will be forever suggests to us a King who will be eternal (cf. Isa 55:3; Acts 13:34). Thus David, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recognised that this King is his Lord: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies” (Ps 110:1–2).

Under the ministry of the writing prophets the prophesy of the coming King became more and more distinct. For example, Jeremiah calls Him “a righteous Branch” and “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:5–6; cf. Acts 13:23). Isaiah is even more specific. He not only calls Him the Branch and Root of Jesse (Isa 11:1ff, 10; cf. Rom 15:12); but makes it clear that He is God, and to dwell among man, He would be born of a virgin: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever” (Isa 9:6–7; cf. Isa 7:14).

Under the NT, the kingship of Christ is unveiled completely and proclaimed openly. It becomes clear that His Kingdom is not an earthly, political one, but one in which His subjects are the elect or redeemed people of God (Mt 5:5–10; 6:33; 13:38; Lk 17:20; Jn 1:49; 3:3; 1 Cor 15:50, etc.). This does not mean that Christ is not rightly the King of His and their enemies. He is (Ps 110:2), but His absolute dominion is not presently evident, and will one day become manifest (1 Cor 15:25; Phil 2:9–11; Rev 11:15, etc.).

In the meantime, Christ executes His kingship in three ways.

- **Firstly**, He subdues us to Himself by making us willing to obey Him (Col 1:21; Ps 110:3; Acts 15:14–16). This, He does so by effectually calling us by His Word and Spirit and then working in our heart a disposition to yield to Him the obedience He requires (Phil 2:13; Eph 3:16–19; 2 Cor 3:3).
 - **Secondly**, He rules and defends us by giving us laws to guide and protect us (Isa 33:22; 32:1–2); and then to implement these laws. He appoints officers in the Church not only to proclaim the law but to exercise Church discipline where necessary (Mt 16:19).
 - **Thirdly**, He currently restrains and finally puts down all who oppose us and Him, including Satan and the world (1 Cor 15:25; Ps 110). See also *WLC* 45.
- f. *The Head and Saviour of the Church*: “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Eph 5:23).
- g. *The Heir of all things*: “Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1:2). To be heir of all things is to have the dominion and possession of all things.
- h. *The Judge of the World*: “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). This subject will be covered in *WCF* 33.

On the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ

8.2 *The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man’s nature,¹ with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin;² being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her*

substance.³ So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.⁴ Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.⁵

¹Jn 1:1, 14; ¹Jn 5:20; ^{Phil} 2:6; ^{Gal} 4:4; ²Heb 2:14, 16–17; ^{Heb} 4:15; ³Lk 1:27, 31, 35; ^{Gal} 4:4; ⁴Lk 1:35; ^{Col} 2:9; ^{Rom} 9:5; ¹Pet 3:18; ¹Tim 3:16; ³Rom 1:3–4; ¹Tim 2:5.

The deity of Christ has already been taught in *WCF* 2.3. Section 8.2 teaches that Christ, the eternal son of God, in the fullness of time, took to Himself a human nature with a true body and a reasonable soul, and so became the God-Man—one Person with 2 natures.

Although the doctrine of the Person and Nature of Christ can be easily derived from the Scriptures, in the first 400–500 years, the New Testament Church battled with numerous heresies on the subject. It was only in A.D. 451, during the Council of Chalcedon where 630 Church Fathers met, that a definitive statement of the Person and Nature of Christ that does not admit to any misinterpretation was written. That statement was that, “Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, [is] to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” This statement settled most of the Christological conflicts that the Church had to fight with in those days.

The following table describes the heresies

Party	Time	Human Nature	Divine Nature	Remarks	Condemned by
Docetists	1 st C.	Denied	Affirmed	Jesus only appeared to be a man. He did not really come in the flesh	1 Jn 4:1-3
Ebionites	2 nd C.	Affirmed	Denied	Generally denied Christ’s pre-existence, and so His deity.	Irenaeus, etc.
Arians	4 th C.	Affirmed	Reduced	Christ is the greatest created being. similar to God, <i>homoiousian</i> but not the same as <i>homoousian</i> .	Nicea, 325
Apollinarians	4 th C.	Reduced	Affirmed	Jesus has a human body and human soul. The human body is so elevated as to be scarcely human.	Constantinople, 381
Nestorians	5 th C.	Affirmed	Affirmed	Christ was 2 distinct persons, one eternal Son of God; the other the human Jesus.	Ephesus, 431
Eutychians	5 th C.	Reduced	Reduced	Christ had one mixed, half-human, half-divine nature.	Chalcedon, 451
Orthodox	-	Affirmed	Affirmed	Christ is one Person with 2 natures one fully human, the other fully divine, in hypostatic union.	Affirmed at Chalcedon, 451
Monothelites	5 th C.	Reduced	Reduced	Variant of Eutychianism. Conceded that Christ has two natures, but insists He has one will.	Constantinople III, 680

Orthodox View (Creed of Chalcedon, A.D. 451)

- a. Jesus Christ is *one* Person (contra Nestorianism).
- b. He has a *fully* divine nature (contra Ebionites, Arians, Eutychians, Monthelites) and a *fully* human nature (contra Docetists, Apollinarians, Eutychians, Monthelites); the two natures are *without confusion* (contra Eutychianism), *without change*, *without division* (contra Nestorianism), *without separation*.
- c. He had *two* wills, one divine and the other human (contra Monothelites)

With this in mind, the assertions of our Confessional statement can be proved as follows:

1. *The full humanity of Christ* is shown in the Scriptures from three angles. Firstly, Christ is called “the Son of Man” (e.g., Mt 8:20) or “man” (1 Tim 2:5) in the Scripture. Secondly, the

Scripture ascribes the attributes of an human being to Him: He has a body (Mt 26:12; 27:58, etc.); He grew in stature and wisdom (Lk 2:52); He ate and drank (Mt 11:19, etc.); He experienced the feelings of the body, such as thirst (Jn 19:28), hunger (Lk 4:2), pain and tiredness (Lk 8:23; Jn 4:6); and He had feelings which a reasonable human soul has, such as agony (Lk 22:44), grief (Mk 3:5; Jn 11:35), compassion (Mt 9:36, etc.) and anger (Mt 21:12). Thirdly, we note that the human body of Christ was not extraordinarily created. Rather, like us, He was conceived and developed in a womb. Thus Christ is contrasted to angels who were individually created: “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham” (Heb 2:16; see also Gen 3:15; Gal 4:4, etc.).

2. *The full deity of Christ* has already been shown in *WCF* 2.3. Christ has always existed in His divinity: “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58); “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). The humanity of Christ was added in the fullness of time when He took to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul: “The Word was made flesh” (Jn 1:14); “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:6–7).
3. *The distinction between these two natures* is seen in the fact that Scripture clearly attributes acts and attributes of humanity to Christ (above); and also acts and attributes of divinity to Him. Also, in many passages in the Scripture, it can be seen quite clearly which of His two natures is in focus. For example, Christ was probably referring to His human nature when said: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mk 13:32). But when He saw Nathanael under the fig tree (Jn 1:48), His divinity was in focus. Theologically and logically, moreover, it is impossible for the two natures to be mixed or confused: For if the human nature is made infinite, self-existent, eternal and absolutely perfect, then it is no more human; and then the obedience, suffering and death of Christ would be meaningless. On the other hand, if the divine nature were to take any of the limitations of the human nature, then it would cease to be divine. If Christ were to have a mixed nature, He would be neither man nor God, which would contradict the Scriptural assertions of His humanity and deity.
4. *The sinlessness of Christ* is clearly stated in Scripture: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15); “[He] did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet 2:22); “In him is not sin” (1 Jn 3:5); He is “holy” and “undefiled” (Heb 7:26). He did not have Original Sin because (a) The power of the Holy Ghost overshadowed Mary in the conception and the bearing of the child, so that He did not inherit her corrupt nature: “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). (b) He was born of a virgin, and therefore was neither seminally present in Adam nor represented by Adam.
5. *The unipersonality of Christ*, or the hypostatic (inseparable, indivisible) union between His divine nature and His human nature, is taught in section 8.7. Scripturally, it can be seen **firstly**, in the fact that the Scripture does not anywhere attribute any action, word, or attribute to Christ which suggests that He is other than a singular individual. **Secondly**, Scripture does not use the plural pronoun for Christ, unlike the reference to the Triune God. **Thirdly**, there are passages in which Christ is designated by a divine title while an attribute or action that properly belongs to His human nature is being describes. Thus we read of “the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28); and “crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8). **Fourthly**, there are passages in which the reverse is true, e.g.: “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which

is in heaven” (Jn 3:13). *Fifthly*, there are passages in which both divine and human attributes and actions are predicated to the same person, e.g.: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created...” (Col 1:14–16a); “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9).

It must be noted that the unipersonality of Christ is a mystery which cannot be fully grasped. It may be weakly illustrated in the unity between the soul and body in man, but note that the human nature is finite while the divine nature is infinite. Also, in the unity of Christ there are two spiritual natures—God as spirit and a human soul, whereas in man there is only one. The Confession again makes no attempt to explain the mystery.

On Christ’s Qualification for the Mediatorial Office

8.3 The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure;¹ having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;² in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell;³ to the end, that being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth,⁴ He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety.⁵ Which office He took not unto Himself, but was thereunto called by His Father;⁶ who put all power and judgment into His hand, and gave Him commandment to execute the same.⁷

¹Ps 45:7; Jn 3:34; ²Col 2:3; ³Col 1:19; ⁴Heb 7:26; Jn 1:14; ⁵Acts 10:38; Heb 12:24; 7:22; ⁶Heb 5:4–5; ⁷Jn 5:22, 27; Mt 28:18; Acts 2:36.

This section teaches us that the Father not only prepared a body for the Son (Heb 10:5) that He might be capable of suffering and dying; but He also conferred upon His human nature the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit in an immeasurable degree that He be thoroughly furnished to execute His mediatorial office. The Scripture reveals this in the following verses:

- Psalm 45:7,—“Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows”;
- John 3:34—“God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him”; and
- Colossians 1:19—“For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.”

The result of this fullness is that Christ is fitted for His work, being “holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth.”

Without going into a lot of details, it may be seen that the Westminster divines see the unity of the human and divine natures as the basis for the Holy Ghost anointing and sanctification without measure. What this means is that because the human nature is united to the divine nature, it is from the first moment of its existence adorned with all kinds of rich and glorious gifts, particularly of intellect, will and power. As such the human nature of Christ is exalted far above any other creature.

For this reason, Christ as a person becomes an object worthy of worship, and,—as most theologians believe,—*non posse peccare* (not possible to sin). Some theologians (e.g., Gerstner, Sproul) believe that Christ in so far as His human nature is concerned was *posse peccare, posse non peccare*, in order for His temptations (Heb 4:15) to have any meaning. This is helpful apart from the fact that because of the union of the two natures, Christ would never have sinned.

On the Humiliation and Exaltation of Christ

8.4 This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake;¹ which that He might discharge, He was made under the law² and did perfectly fulfill it;³ endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul,⁴ and most painful sufferings in His body;⁵ was crucified, and died;⁶ was

buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption.⁷ On the third day He arose from the dead,⁸ with the same body in which He suffered,⁹ with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father,¹⁰ making intercession,¹¹ and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.¹²

¹Ps 40:7–8; ²Heb 10:5–10; ³Jn 10:18; ⁴Phil 2:8; ⁵Gal 4:4; ⁶Mt 3:15; 5:17; ⁷Mt 26:37–38; ⁸Lk 22:44; ⁹Mt 27:46; ¹⁰Matt 26; 27; ¹¹Phil 2:8; ¹²Acts 2:23–24, 27; 13:37; ¹³Rom 6:9; ¹⁴1 Cor 15:3–4; ¹⁵Jn 20:25, 27; ¹⁶Mk 16:19; ¹⁷Rom 8:34; ¹⁸Heb 9:24; 7:25; ¹⁹Rom 14:9–10; ²⁰Acts 1:11; 10:42; ²¹Mt 13:40–42; ²²Jude 6; ²³2 Pet 2:4.

In the previous section, we are taught that Christ took not the office of a Mediator and Surety upon Himself, but that He was commissioned and commanded by the Father. This is clearly seen in Scriptures:

“And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee” (Heb 5:4–5).

So we read that the Father “hath given him authority to execute judgment” (Jn 5:27) and that “all power ... in heaven and in earth” is given to Him (Mt 28:18).

This section begins by teaching us that Christ, being same in substance and equal in power and glory with the Father, “did most willingly undertake” the office. This has to be the case not only because it would otherwise be manifestly unjust to punish Him for the sins He did not commit, but also because He Himself has declared:

“Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God” (Heb 10:5–7).

Then in regards to His laying down His life in propitiatory death, He says:

“No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (Jn 10:18).

This section goes on to teach how Christ discharged His duties both in the estate of humiliation and exaltation.

- *WSC 27. Wherein did Christ’s humiliation consist?*

A. Christ’s humiliation consisted in His *being born*, and that in a *low condition*, made *under the law*, undergoing the *miseries of this life*, the *wrath of God*, and the *cursed death* of the **CROSS**; in being *buried*, and *continuing under the power of death* for a time.

There is a very popular uninspired hymn by Charles Wesley, “And Can it be That I Should Gain,” which contains a very pietistic phrase which had often moved me to tears. This statement declares that Christ “emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam’s helpless race.” Apart from the fact that this statement must have been intended by Wesley to teach universal atonement (though it can be sang with Calvinistic filters), it contains another pernicious error (though perhaps not intended), namely, that in the incarnate Christ, emptied Himself of His deity too! This idea is known as the *kenosis* theory, and is derived from a false interpretation of Philippians 2:6–8.

What then did Christ empty Himself of? Not His deity, else His death would not be sufficient for us all. Christ emptied Himself, rather of His position, glory and dignity. Christ was the Son of God, and very God Himself, but He “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men,” and as such was made a vicarious sacrifice for us. Theologically, the process that Christ went through for our sakes is known as His humiliation. Christ’s humiliation may be understood in three stages: in His birth, life and death.

1. *Christ's humiliation in His birth* comprises: (1) His being born, in the first place—though He is infinite and eternal; and (2) His being born in a low condition—not in a rich and regal family, but in a poor family with a stable for His nativity—though He is the eternal Son of God and owns the cattle upon a thousand hills.
 2. *Christ's humiliation in His life* comprises: (1) His being made subject to the law—though He is the Law-Giver; and (2) His suffering the sorrows of this life—though He not only created the world, but upholds the universe. It should be noted that Christ's earthly sufferings was not a result of sin, but are the natural infirmities of the flesh, such as weariness, hunger, thirst, and the like (cf. Jn 4:6; Mt 4:2); and the affliction of the soul such as grief and sorrow: "He is ... a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3).
 3. *Christ's humiliation in His death* comprises: (1) His suffering an intense separation from His Father and enduring the infinite wrath of God's judgment on the sin of all the elect throughout the ages, which was imputed on Him—though He is eternally beloved of the Father; (2) His being crucified; a cruel, painful and lingering form of punishment reserved for the accursed criminals—though He did not sin at all; (3) His being buried; and (4) His remaining in the grave for three days—though He raised Lazarus and others.
- *WSC 28. Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?*
 - A. Christ's exaltation consisteth in His *rising again from the dead* on the third day, in *ascending up into heaven*, in **SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD the Father**, and in *coming to judge the world* at the last day.

Christ's exaltation refers to His being raised to a position of high dignity and glory with a Name that is above every name. Four steps are involved:

1. *His Resurrection. Firstly*, it occurred on the third day (in Jewish reckoning) after Jesus was buried (1 Cor 15:4). This is why Christians keep the Sabbath on the first day of the week (cf. Ps 118:22–24; Acts 4:10–11). *Secondly*, it involves the human soul of Christ reuniting with His body. When Christ died, His divine nature did not separate from His human nature, but His soul was separated from His body, the body being left behind and then buried in the tomb while the soul entered Paradise (Lk 23:43). At the resurrection, His soul was reunited with His body. *Thirdly*, the body that was raised was the same body that was laid in the tomb, but it was now healed of all the blows, stripes and wounds that it suffered and was no longer encumbered with the limitations of the earthly body, including mortality (Rom 6:9). *Fourthly*, His resurrection was testified by "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3), including 500 witnesses (1 Cor 15:5–6). *Fifthly*, His resurrection fulfilled OT prophecies (1 Cor 15:4; Isa 53:10; cf. Ps 16:10 and Acts 2:31; 13:35). *Sixthly*, His Resurrection is necessary not only that He may be the captain of our salvation (Heb 2:10; 1 Cor 15:17, 20), but that He may fulfil His Mediatorial office (cf. Ps 110:4; Heb 7:23–25). *Seventhly*, Christ Himself is the author of His own resurrection. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19; cf. Jn 10:17).
2. *His Ascension. Firstly*, it occurred forty days after His resurrection, during which time, He confirmed the faith of His disciples (Acts 1:3). *Secondly*, He ascended visibly in His physical body (Lk 24:50–51; Acts 1:9). *Thirdly*, He ascended in triumph as a glorious conqueror (Eph 4:8; Ps 47:5). *Fourthly*, He ascended that He might be glorified as God-Man with the original glory that He had (Jn 17:5). *Fifthly*, He ascended that He might, as head of the Church, take possession of heaven on behalf of His Church (Jn 14:2; Heb 6:20).
3. *His Enthronement*, or His sitting on the Right hand of the throne of God. *Firstly*, it must be noted that the phrase "the right hand of God" (Heb 1:3; Mk 16:19; Eph 1:20; cf. 1 Pet 3:22) must be taken metaphorically as meaning a position of highest majesty and honour

(cf. Phil 2:9–10). **Secondly**, in that position, Christ is making continual intercession for us (Rom 8:27, 34; Heb 7:25).

4. *His Return.* **Firstly**, Christ's return will be visible to all (Acts 1:11; Matt 24:30), glorious (Lk 9:26; Mk 13:26); and sudden (Mt 24:37–39; 1 Thes 5:2). **Secondly**, His return will be on the very last day of this present world (2 Pet 3:10). **Thirdly**, He will come to judge the world (Acts 17:31; 2 Cor 5:10).

On the Work of Redemption

8.5 *The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father;¹ and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father has given unto Him.²*

¹Rom 5:19; Heb 9:14, 16; 10:14; Eph 5:2; Rom 3:25–26; ²Dan 9:24, 26; Col 1:19–20; Eph 1:11, 14; Jn 17:2; Heb 9:12, 15.

This section teaches us the effect of Christ's mediatorial work on earth:

1. Christ made satisfaction on behalf of "all those whom the Father has given unto Him," namely the elect, by: (a) His "perfect obedience",—sometimes called His Active Obedience,—by which He fulfilled the demands of the Law in the Covenant of Works, and so purchased an "everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven" for them. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). (2) His "sacrifice of Himself",—sometimes called His Passive Obedience,—by which He took upon Himself the sin of His people, and offered up Himself to satisfy divine justice, to propitiate the wrath of God and so purchased reconciliation on their behalf. "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb 10:14; cf. Eph 5:2; Rom 3:25). We have also seen this in our commentary on *WCF* 7.3.
2. Christ's work of redemption was perfectly sufficient. **Firstly**, we note that Christ did not die as an ordinary person. He died as the God-Man, the infinite and transcendently glorious Person of the eternal Son of God. This is why Paul referred to the Church as being purchased by God's own blood: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Christ's death is therefore of infinite value and sufficiency. His death fully satisfied God, and no more payment of any kind is needed. **Secondly**, it follows that Christ's death purchased eternal life for the elect rather than simply making it possible for sinners to be reconciled to God on condition of faith. This is the uniform testimony of Scripture: "[Christ] gave himself for our sins, *that he might deliver us from this present evil world*, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal 1:4); NOT: "to make it possible for us to be delivered...." "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, *To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*" (Gal 4:4–5); NOT: "to make the initial down payment so that it is much easier for all to pay the rest and receive the adoption of sons." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit 3:5–6).

8.6 *Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein He was revealed and signified to be the Seed of the woman, which should bruise the serpent's head, and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world, being yesterday and to-day the same, and for ever.¹*

¹Gal 4:4–5; Gen 3:15; Rev 13:8; Heb 13:8.

This section teaches us that though Christ’s work of redemption was accomplished only after His incarnation, yet the full benefits of it was already available and applied to the elect throughout the ages, including those who lived under the Old Covenant. This is why Christ is said to be “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8). Indeed, Christ is explicitly said to be a propitiation also for the sins committed under the Old Covenant:

- “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:25).
- “And for this cause he is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).

See commentary on *WCF* 7.5–6.

8.7 Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures; by each nature doing that which is proper to itself:¹ yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person dominated by the other nature.²

¹Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 3:18; ²Acts 20:28; Jn 3:13; 1 Jn 3:16.

We saw in *WCF* 8.2 that though Christ has two natures and two wills, He is one person and not two persons. And neither does He act sometimes as God and sometimes as man. It is always as the God-Man. We have already seen the biblical proof of His unipersonality, including what is highlighted in this paragraph, namely that in certain places of Scripture Christ is referred to as God, but recorded as doing something that only man is capable of, such as dying and shedding his blood (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Jn 3:16) and vice versa when He is referred to as man, but recorded as doing something that only God is capable of, such as coming from heaven and being in heaven while he is on earth (Jn 3:13).

A failure to understand this doctrine has led to the errors of Nestorianism where Christ is spoken of as dying as man; or loving as God. But this if Christ died only as man, then His death could not have been sufficient for us. No; no, he suffered and died for us as the God-Man. Likewise, it is wrong to say that Christ loved the rich young man (Mk 10:21) as man, but not as God; or to say that God desires to save the reprobate because Christ spoke of His desire to gather the unbelieving in Jerusalem (Lk 13:34).

Christ indeed has two wills, but let us remember that His human will is completely sanctified and concurs completely with His divine will so that whatever He does, He does as the God-Man.

However, we must at the same time insist the two natures of Christ are united into one person in such a manner that each retained its own properties; though under some circumstances during His earthly ministry, His Divine nature was in,—as Calvin puts it,—“a state of repose” such that it did not at all exert itself.

One such circumstance would be as Christ headed to the Cross, for we remember how He cried out in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Lk 22:42). In distinguishing between His will and His Father’s will, He is, in fact, distinguishing between his divine will and his human will, for we must remember that His Father’s will is really His divine will, for He and His Father are one in essence. There is only one will in the Godhead.

Apparently, as Christ headed to the Cross, the Divine nature, as it were, went deeper and deeper into “a state of repose,” until our Lord cried out on the Cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46). Christ, the God-Man could say these words because at that moment on

the Cross, His consciousness of divine nature was, as it were, completely eclipsed by a sense of the wrath of God.

Another circumstance in which the divine nature was, in a sense, ‘in a state of repose’, would be when Christ was a child, and growing and waxing strong in spirit (Lk 2:40). While the Scripture does not explicitly say that the child grew in knowledge, it does appear that His interaction with the scholars in the temple (Lk 2:46) was a process of learning. If this is so, it would appear that Christ the God-Man actually grew in knowledge. That is: As God He was omniscient; but as the God-Man his knowledge had to be acquired. Of course, as the perfect man, no errors could ever be entertained in his mind, and no knowledge acquired would ever be lost.

If this is true, then certain knowledge that is propriety of the divine nature might not be made known to Christ the God-Man during His earthly ministry. I believe that as soon as He ascended to heaven after His resurrection, He attained to the fullness of knowledge as the God-Man. But during His earthly ministry, He was not omniscient. But He knew whatever the divine nature actively brought to His consciousness as the God-Man. It is in this way that He “knew all things” (Jn 21:17).

It is for this reason that in Mark 13:32, we are told that the Son, the God-Man did not know the day of His return. The knowledge of this when this day would be, had,—by the appointment of God,—not surfaced from the divine nature of our Lord into His consciousness as the God-Man.

8.8 To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same;¹ making intercession for them;² and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation;³ effectually persuading them by His Spirit to believe and obey; and governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit;⁴ overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.⁵

¹Jn 6:37, 39; 10:15–16; ²1 Jn 2:1–2; Rom 8:34; ³Jn 15:13, 15; Eph 1:7–9; Jn 17:6; ⁴Jn 14:16; Heb 12:2; 2 Cor 4:13; Rom 8:9, 14; 15:18–19; Jn 17:17; ⁵Ps 110:1; 1 Cor 15:25–26; Mal 4:2–3; Col 2:15.

This section expounds the mediatorial functions of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King, which we have already seen above. Take note again how our Confession once again reiterate (see *WCF* 3.5–7, 5.6, 7.3, 8.1, 8.5, *WLC* 59) that Christ’s entire mediatorial work is intended for the salvation of the elect and no one else. Christ not only suffered and died on behalf of the elect, but made sure that they would come unto salvation by the application of His Holy Spirit. He did not die for all to make salvation possible for all. Neither did He die for the elect, and then woo all to salvation by His Spirit.

