

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH VIII: 1

(Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Numbers 12:1-16)

Who God Chose To Do It Through

A Presbyterian minister was visiting Florence in Italy, on a hot summer's day. The first thing he did that day was to visit the great *Duomo*. This was the cathedral where Savonarola thundered against the iniquities of the city with his reformational preaching just before the reformation.

While there was a huge tide of repentance then, it was the Pope of Rome who made sure that this godly man was condemned to death by hanging, with his body being burned. The leader of the Church then made sure he wasn't going to have any threat to his rule - especially from the King of kings! The city returned to its old ways and the corrupt Medicis once more took over.

In that city where Roman Catholicism had ruthlessly purged any revival, that Presbyterian minister looked for a Protestant church. He found one. It was a small evangelical church, in an obscure part of the city.

The service was one many Protestants know. And although he couldn't understand much of what the preacher was saying he could tell that that man was very earnestly addressing his people.

On the wall over that man's head were the words that summed up this worship. For there were the words of 1st Timothy 2 verse 5, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." The very thing Savonarola had died for was living still!

That thing is the simple truth of Scripture. For no one can read the Bible through and not fail to see that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of redemption and mediation. You cannot fail to miss in that holy book that the Mediator, the One who stands between man and God and who reconciles man to God and God to man, is the eternal God-man, Christ Jesus.

So when the Westminster Confession of Faith turns to summarising what God's Word says about this mediator, we know we have reached a vital point. Because now we really get to the point! You see, the word 'Mediator' tells us of someone who brings two parties together - two parties who otherwise wouldn't be able to have a relationship together. Usually a mediator is called in when there's division and separation. His job is to bring them back together - to reconcile them. In 2nd Samuel 14 we read of how Joab acted as a mediator between David and Absalom. And Job, in chapter 9 verse 33 of the book of Job, expresses how important this is when he cries out to the LORD, "If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more."

This is no ordinary position. To facilitate a coming together between human beings is terribly difficult. It requires much skill, patience, wisdom, and understanding. So when Scripture speaks of the mediator God has appointed to come between Himself and us we know He will have the most perfect person possible. As indeed He did. And so our first aspect is about THE ONE GOD CHOSE TO BE THE WAY.

The One God Chose To Be The Way

When we considered Scripture's teaching about the covenant of grace we saw that this was the type of covenant God takes with us. It's got nothing to do with us to start off with. And even when we're joined in it it's not us who can keep its conditions anyway. It's the operation of the Holy Spirit that does that.

It's no different when we come now to consider what the Bible says about how God fulfilled that covenant in His Son. This is why Article 1 begins, "It pleased God." And that simply means that God decided to do it. In the words of Peter's first letter, chapter 1 the verses 18 till 20, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."

From time immemorial the Almighty God thought to send His Son to bridge over that huge gaping chasm He knew we would make between us and Him through sin. How much different to modern mediation can you get! Because any mediation done between two people needs their co-operation – they have to both agreed to go this way and use this certain person. So here we have something quite the opposite because it's only one party deciding to this while the other party doesn't even have a clue to how far that huge chasm goes!

And still the mediator has to be able to relate to both. When John 3:16 declares those most famous words, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life," that's help to the helpless alright! This is also the way that we move, in the Westminster Confession, into the place and work of the second Person of the Triune Godhead.

It helps us here to look at what we've covered so far in the Confession of Faith. Chapter 1 laid out the place of Scripture for us to come to know this; chapter 2 spoke of the Trinity; and then chapters 3 till 5 outlined the person and work of the first Person of the Godhead - God the Father. Chapter 6 described the Fall into Sin, with chapter 7 showing how God was already working out the way through which He would save to Himself a certain people. And now, in chapter 8, one of the longest in the Confession, the central theme of Christ as Mediator is set out. What was already implicit in Chapter 7 is made quite explicit here.

You see, Christianity has a very different relationship to the person of Christ than the other religions do to whoever has founded them. Jesus was not the first adherent of the religion named after His name. He wasn't the first and the most important Christian. He has a completely unique place in Christianity. He's not the founder of it, but He is the Christ, the One who was sent by the Father, and who founded His Kingdom on earth and now extends and preserves it to the end of the ages.

Christ is Himself Christianity. He doesn't stand outside of it but is inside of it. Without His name, person, and work there's no such things as Christianity. So Christ is not the one who points the way to Christianity, but is the way itself. He's the only, true, and perfect Mediator between God and men. He is **THE ONE GOD CHOSE TO BE THE WAY**.

This is what our Lord Jesus was very clear about during His ministry on earth. The Gospels quite clearly say that He is sent out for the preaching of the Gospel (Luke 4:43), that it is the Father who sent Him (Matt.10:40 & John 5:44ff), that He has come from the Father and has come in His Name (John 5:43; 8:42), and that He came down from heaven and came into the world (John 3:16; 6:38; 12:46; 18:37).

How Christ Is The Perfect Way

Jesus Christ received the divine appointment to be Mediator between God and man. As the incarnate God-man He was THE ONE GOD CHOSE TO BE THE WAY. And so the Westminster moves on next to confess HOW CHRIST IS THE PERFECT WAY. This is the second aspect to this Article. This is where we see why Christ is described as “the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Saviour of his church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world.”

Prophets, priests, and kings are what we meet plenty of in the Old Testament, and for a reason, too. For God shows in these three distinct and separate offices, carried by separate lines of individuals, what had originally belonged to sinless man. Because hadn't Adam before the fall been able to think God's thoughts after Him, like a prophet does? Hadn't Adam's life then been a “living sacrifice”, which is what a priest is meant to do? And hadn't Adam ruled over his life and all around him with the right knowledge and holy devotion?

It's through instituting those three offices God shows the terrible imperfection of man's nature and also the perfection required of His Son. And so we consider how He does this. The prophet speaks God's Word. He reveals to mankind God's Will. And we see right throughout the Old Testament those who did that. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all said to prophesy.

The first to stand out as a prophet, though, was Moses, and even today he is regarded as the greatest Old Testament prophet. We read that in Numbers 12, as there was the incident of some professional jealousy of his position. The Lord then spoke clearly as to the place that Moses had. A place that would be filled by many more throughout the rest of the Old Testament, but a place that one day would be filled once-and-for-all time. For in Deuteronomy 18, the verses 15 till 20, God promised Moses that there would come one day the great prophet from among His people.

The priest offers himself as a living sacrifice. He is set apart to especially bring offerings on behalf of the people. The mysterious Melchizedek is the first priest mentioned in Scripture, in Genesis 14. In Psalm 110 Jesus is said to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek because, like him, there's no beginning or end.

All the way along, though, since Genesis 4, there have been the offerings of blood sacrifices. The Patriarchs offered them up. But it was in the Mosaic era that the priesthood became instituted as a special office. For this the tribe of Levi was set apart. They were those “anointed”. They were those who are to be consecrated, free from defects, and specially clothed.

The king reigns. He has authority and to him there must be submission. This is why we see ruling happening already early in Genesis. Abraham is regarded as equal to other kings in Genesis 14. Sarah was called a princess in Genesis 17 verse 15 and she's told she'll be the mother of kings.

While God was unhappy with the kind of king Israel first wanted, and that's why He gave them Saul, He had already foretold, through Moses that there was to be a king.

Deuteronomy 17, the verses 14 till 20, sets out the qualities for such a king. And when that kingship was there, despite its many failings, the Lord promised that there would come a king greater than them all – the King whom He would bring forth through the earthly royal line. In 2nd Samuel 7 we read God's promise to David of how his house and his kingdom will last for all eternity.

This was an office that also required anointing. And so we see the origins of the word "Christ" or "Messiah" as it was known in the Hebrew. For Messiah and Christ mean "anointed". In the Lord Jesus the true fulfilment of these offices all came together. He is the prophet who has revealed to us the will of God for our salvation. He did this through his ministry on this earth. And He also keeps doing it as His Spirit applies His Word to hearts and lives. He is the priest who offered Himself as the once-and-for-all sacrifice. That's the offering He keeps laying before His Father through His constant intercession in heaven for us. And He is the king. He is ruling over our hearts and lives, extending His dominion through His people. That's why He said in the Great Commission to His disciples in Matthew 28 verse 20, "And surely I will be with you, to the very end of the age."

With these three offices combined in the God-man, He is "the Head and Saviour of his church." And where He isn't acknowledged as such there His Church cannot be. As it was in late 15th century Florence so it is today in many countries around the world.

It is this Christ who is also called here "the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world," for to ensure that all things come together in Christ the Father has given Him everything. He's not only the Saviour - He's also Lord. And one day all will bow before Him, whether they have come to faith in him or not.

Who Christ Is Given This Way

But for us, congregation, the Lord Jesus is the Redeemer. And that's how this Article ends. In the words of the third aspect to this Article, we see WHO CHRIST IS GIVEN THIS WAY. For we confess that it is to Jesus that God "did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified."

Our redemption, calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification, will be further confessed later in the Westminster. But let's be in no doubt that this is about the Church. In the words of Ephesians 1 verses 22 and 23, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Dear friends, we can often think that our day and age is the worst that any time in human history has ever been. We lament the decline in the church, the ignorance of God's Word amongst even the ministers of churches, we grieve at the godlessness of our political leaders, and we wonder: However is the Lord fulfilling His will?

Then we need to put it in a much bigger picture - the Lord's picture. For there have been times of apathy and apostasy in the church's history before.

One of those times was the early 18th century in England. Samuel Wesley, the father of John Wesley and Charles, looked forward to when the Lord would restore and resurrect spiritual life and power. He said to his son Charles, "Charles, be steady. The Christian faith will surely revive in these kingdoms. You shall see it, though I shall not."

Years afterward, John Wesley remembered those words. Forbidden to preach from his father's pulpit, he did it standing on the flat stone of his father's grave. And how much didn't he bring home that day as he preached the gospel to a huge crowd!

Out of every eclipse the cause of Christ comes out more glorious and resplendent than ever. So if our present age seems spiritually dark, if the glory of the Church seems obscured, have faith in God. He who was pleased to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus to be the Mediator between God and man did that because nothing He does can fail. He will achieve the purpose which He has for it. Though we may stumble, He won't let us fall. The only begotten Son is the faithful One. In the words of Hebrews 13 verse 8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

He has come – and He has won! You yourself know that! Come on, let's now show it!