

## **WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH VIII: 6-8**

*(Reading: Galatians 3:26-4:7; John 14:15-27)*

### **Where Christ's Redemption Works Through and To**

Here we come to the end of the first part of the Westminster Confession. Like the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster is divided into three. But that might surprise us. The table of Contents of the Westminster Confession doesn't say this. It will tell us that there are 33 chapters and the titles for each of them. But, unlike the Heidelberg, it doesn't say anything more about the overall structure.

We know, of course, there is one. There has to be. A summary of Scripture's teaching has to be in order because that's how God is.

So, we naturally ask, what part does this chapter 8 conclude?

Well, these chapters have laid down the foundations of Christian truth. These are the facts we need to know first. Before anything else we need to realise that the Bible is God's Word, that it tells us about God, about our sin, and about how He has saved us in His Son.

The next part, the chapters 9 till 18, will apply that redemption. We will hear about where we were, what God did, and how we respond to that.

Then the third part, the chapters 19 till 33, is about the Christian life. There the laws of God and man, the Christian Church, and the Christian hope, are outlined.

So let's see then how these last three articles of Chapter 8 effectively end this first part. In the words of the sermon's title, here is "Where Christ's Redemption Works Through and To".

### **Christ's Work is for All who Believe**

As we consider this let's note, in the first place, that CHRIST'S WORK IS FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE. Now we might have thought that was plain enough at the end of Article 5. That stated quite plainly that Christ's perfect obedience and sacrifice has gained for all whom the Father has given Him reconciliation and an eternal inheritance.

But here the question is often asked: What about those who lived before Jesus came? Now we live A.D. - Anno Domino - after the year of our Lord. But then it was B.C. - Before Christ. How could they be saved?

We can compare this with the discovery of penicillin. It was discovered in World War II and helped people from then on. But what use was it to the wounded in World War I?

Well, the Confession has answered this in the 5th Article of Chapter 7. We saw this in how believers of all ages have been saved only through faith in Christ alone. That's why our Lord can say to the Jews in John 8 verse 56 "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

Turning to the Old Testament itself, it's clear that David saw that the sacrifices were not saving in themselves. In Psalm 51 verses 16 and 17 he says, "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

The way those Old Testament sacrifices were designed was partly to show, as Hebrews 9 verse 9 says, "the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper." And so in Hebrews 10 verse 14 we read of Christ that it was by his "sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."

The law was a shadow. But it was the shadow of the good things to come. And so CHRIST'S WORK IS FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE.

There is a beautiful picture of this in the book of Revelation. In chapter 13 there it has the terrible vision of the beast out of the sea. And in verse 8 it says, "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the book belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."

So from when the first sign was given in Genesis 3 verse 15 - the words about the man crushing the serpent - there has been the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Church which Revelation pictures so gloriously resplendent in Christ's blood in heaven.

### **Christ's Work is through Who He is**

And so we turn now to Article 7. This tells us that CHRIST'S WORK IS THROUGH WHO HE IS. The second part to this sermon.

This too is something we have heard about earlier in the Confession. In Article 2 of this same Chapter we saw that Jesus was a true man, that He was true God, that He was nevertheless one person, that His personality is eternal and divine, and that these two natures remain one person - yet distinct and unchanged divinity and humanity, without mixture or confusion.

Here it's added that Christ's mediation involves both these natures working at the same time, while yet remaining distinct. So the divine nature of Christ is the fountain from which His revelation as prophet comes from. Other prophets reflect His light, or transmit what they receive from Him. He is the original source of all divine knowledge.

At the same time, however, His humanity is the form through which His godhead is revealed. His body is the veil through which its glory is transmitted. For example, Scripture in Acts 20 verse 28 says that God purchased the church with His own blood, and in John 3 verse 13 says the Son of Man came from heaven, but it doesn't say that the human nature of Christ came down from heaven, or that his divine nature suffered for his church.

It may seem an obscure point. But don't forget that it was exactly at this point that Martin Luther tripped up. You might remember the position he held that the two natures in one person demand the participation of the exalted humanity of Christ in the omnipresence of God. That became the Lutheran doctrine of 'consubstantiation' in the Lord's Supper. It teaches that Christ is really present by, with, and under the elements of bread and wine.

Now, we know historically Luther had tried to move away from the Roman Catholic doctrine of 'transubstantiation', which is an actual change in the elements. But it wasn't scriptural. It undermined the perfection of Christ as Mediator. CHRIST'S WORK IS THROUGH WHO HE IS. Anything unbiblical here is quite dangerous.

So we have seen that CHRIST'S WORK IS FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE and that CHRIST'S WORK IS THROUGH WHO HE IS. There is one Article left in Chapter 8 - so one point to go. What do you think should now be in that point? Considering this part concerns the foundations of Christian Truth what haven't we yet separately touched?

Mind you, we won't see this separately dealt with here, either. That's why some Presbyterian churches have added a chapter after this chapter to make up for what they think is lacking. But they didn't add anything. They simply re-stated what is found elsewhere in the Confession.

Are you busy looking through Article 8? Do you think you've found it? For if indeed this part is about the foundation of the Christian faith there has to be teaching about how it comes to us. And so what - or rather, who - can this about but the Holy Spirit!

### **Christ's Work is Applied to Us**

Our third point then is CHRIST'S WORK IS APPLIED TO US. For here is the plan of salvation. Here we see that those chosen of the Father were bought by Christ. And those bought by Christ are called into His kingdom. As the Lord says in John 6 verse 37, "All that the Father gives me will come to me." And in John 10 verse 16, "I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice."

So Christ made satisfaction for those the Father gave to Him. And Christ, through the Spirit, effectively applies this redemption to those for whom He died.

G.I. Williamson says that in grasping this truth, we will find it helpful to remember the following four truths:

First – Christ freely offers salvation to all those who hear the gospel, whether they are elect or not. As He says in Matthew 22 verse 14, "For many are invited but few are chosen." Then in Matthew 11 verse 28, He cries, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Second – Christ promised that no one who accepted His offer would be cast out. This is why He says in John 6 verse 37, "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." So to say that Christ applies redemption only to His elected mustn't be twisted to say that He holds back others from accepting His grace.

Third – the difficulty with those who are not called is completely in themselves. In the words of Ephesians 2 verse 1, they are dead in their trespasses and sins. They will not come to Christ, as the Lord Himself says about the people of Jerusalem in Matthew 23 verse 37.

They consider His gospel a foolish thing. As Paul says in 1st Corinthians 2 verse 14, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Therefore, it is not because of what Christ does, but because of what they are and what they do, that they cannot come to Christ. As Jesus said in John 6 verse 44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." And the phrase "draws him" is literally "drags him along"!

Fourthly – this means that the elect come only because Christ enables them to do so. He creates a new heart within them so that they will want to accept the salvation He freely offers to all who will receive it. As the Lord says in Luke 10 verse 22, "no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Once the wife of William Romaine, the 18th century evangelical, met a clergyman from Tiverton. The clergyman spoke quite strongly against this irresistible grace. He alleged that "such grace would be quite incompatible with free will."

To this Mrs Romaine replied, "Not at all so, grace operates effectually, yet not coercively. The wills of God's people are drawn to Him and to divine things, just as your will would be drawn to a bishopric, if you had the offer of it."

Very sharp - but very true! She knew this well enough from her own husband, because William Romaine had himself experienced it in his life. He had been attracted to seeking honours in the Church. He had had an intellectual arrogance and believed he knew everything. It was the Lord's Spirit who humbled him.

This quote of his is what is found on his memorial plaque, "I was even as others are by nature a child of wrath and an heir of misery; I was going on in the broad way of destruction, careless and secure, and am quite astonished to see the danger I was in; I tremble to behold the precipice over which I was ready to fall, when Jesus opened my eyes and by the light of His Word and Spirit showed me my guilt and danger and put it into my heart to flee from the wrath to come. O what a merciful escape!"

CHRIST'S WORK IS APPLIED TO US. And here we may draw something else from Article 8. For as Article 1 of Chapter 8 began in describing the meditational work of Christ in terms of His being prophet, priest, and king, so here we see that happening in us. The three-fold office is what is being now worked through Christ's own.

Because notice how the Article speaks of "revealing" and "persuading". There is the "prophetic" work. The phrase "making intercession" is the priestly task. And the words "governing" and "overcoming" are all about his kingly action.

Do you see? Since God's purposes are eternal and unchangeable, the Father and the Son will apply it now precisely to those to whom they planned to apply it when Christ hung upon the cross. That's what's happening in our lives. We are part of the great move of God Himself. For despite how well we know our own sin, we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. And this is all because, to continue the quote from 1st Peter 2 verse 9, we are declaring "the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light." How blessed is that! And how much of a blessing won't that be?