



***God's Progressive Revelation
of His Redemptive Purposes***

A Paper Presented in Exposition of the 20th
Chapter of the Savoy Declaration of Faith, to the
Reformed Confessional Conference, March 25,
2014

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“Are We Preaching the Gospel?”

Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	A Survey of the Progressive Revelation of the Gospel.....	2
	Adam to Moses	2
	Moses to David	8
	To David and Solomon.....	11
	The Gospel as Taught by the Prophets	12
	New Testament.....	14
III.	Hints for Pastoral Application.....	18
	Hermeneutics	18
	Edification.....	18
	Apologetics and Evangelism: Mission and Message	19
IV.	Conclusion	20

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I. Introduction

In approaching the subject of this paper I think it is important to ask, “Why is this chapter in here at all? It is not even included in Westminster and it seems the topics have been addressed in previous chapters.” It is true, the topics have been addressed previously, but if we pause to consider the likely reason for the inclusion of the chapter as it is, we will appreciate why it deserves to be emphasized afresh to our contemporary churches.

The opinions opposed in this chapter, growing in popularity in the mid 17th century and reaching widespread acceptance in the period of the Enlightenment, are the natural outgrowth of the Renaissance philosophy of man's inherent goodness and perfectibility.¹ This chapter is important to us because these same opinions are so generally, almost universally held as indubitable principles, even today. God, if there is one, it would be argued, would have to reward all men for doing well, despite their beliefs. Many professing Christians hold it as beyond doubt that God loves all men equally and has atoned for all sin but the sin of rejecting Christ. He would not be so unfair as to condemn to hell anyone who has not had the opportunity to hear the gospel.

As we undertake our survey we will endeavor to focus on these features:

- The progressive revelation of the *condition* of man and his requirement of a grace-based redemption by a God-given Redeemer.
- The progressive revelation of the person and work, or “office,” of that Redeemer.

¹The issues raised in this chapter are discussed by John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 15 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 73–77. This provides valuable background to Savoy, John Owen being one of its principal authors. Cf. Franklyn L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1600-1950* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc. 1977), 62-95. Earnst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), esp. Chapter IV, “Religion.”

- The progressive revelation of the unique relationship in which the Redeemer's *people* stand with Him as the result of their reception of this redemption.

The objective of this study will be your edification, pastor, as you proclaim that “there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,” than the name of Jesus Christ, and that, consequently, we must be going into all the world proclaiming the gospel to men who must be born again if they would see and enter the kingdom of God.

II. A Survey of the Progressive Revelation of the Gospel

The Bible is about the salvation of the world by Christ. The main characteristic of the Old Testament, as seen from the New, is that it is preparatory: it is about the beginning of the world, what happened in the world to require the need of Christ, and what God did in the world to preserve it and prepare it for its recovery by Christ. The main characteristic of the New is that it displays, and then explains the consequences of, the coming of Christ into the world.²

ADAM TO MOSES

Genesis is about “beginnings:” the beginning of the universe, of man, of sin, of salvation. We must linger a little longer here if we would appreciate what man fell from, in order to appreciate the depths of that fall, and we must appreciate the depths of that fall, in order to appreciate what God will do in redemption in order to accomplish His original purpose.

In words that scripture will yet more clearly expound as the actions of the Triune God, the Father acting through the Son and Spirit, the story begins at the creation of the universe. The importance of Genesis 1:1 is so profound. It tells us that there is God and there is His creation. That alone sets biblical belief apart from all of the world's religions which merge the two (God and creation) into one, and all religions and philosophies that set the creation and god, mind, or spirit, as coequal inhabitants in time. The creation was for His pleasure and glory, and, as we learn later, for the praise of His glorious grace through its redemption by His Son. He delighted in intra-trinitarian counsels concerning man, concerning man's participating in eternal life and an eternal likeness to Himself, conformed to the image of His only begotten Son, in joyful and God-glorifying fellowship with Him in righteousness (but

² The following works were helpful for the present study : Gerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), John Owen, *Biblical Theology* (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1991), John Owen, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* ed. W. H. Goold, vol. 18-24, *Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), Ernst. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1861), O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984), Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God: Vol.1, God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing Co., 2009).

that is something to be revealed later).³ Unto this end God created man in his own *image*. This image is something that gives to man a “likeness” to God: not a physical likeness, for God is a Spirit, but a spiritual likeness in having a *spiritual* aspect to his being, an *intellectual* likeness of being able to reason and to know, an *esthetic* likeness, in being able to enjoy beauty and creativity, a *moral and ethical* likeness in knowing and approving of what is good and being opposed to what is bad, an *official* likeness, in acting in cooperation with God as his vice-gerent in the administration of the creation to His glory, and a *social likeness*, being, like the members of the Trinity, able to know, relate to and enjoy God and His likeness in others, and cooperating in loving unity, responding to Him in a worshipping community to carry out his “chief end.” These features of the image in man’s creation were manifested in roles that were given to him in the “creation ordinances.” There was a Tree of Life, the eating of its fruit was apparently a *sacrament* of fellowship with God (an object lesson of, and means for, participating in union with the Source of Life.) This “natural” state of known created obligation to God together with the revealed specific will, commands, and promises and sanctions of his creator (such as “creation ordinances,”⁴ the law of moral excellence and rightness “written on his heart” and the warning of death for eating of the forbidden tree with the promise of participation in everlasting life for obedience), constitute the basis for, and terms of, the “covenant of works.” All this, so far may be called *pre-redemptive* revelation.

The third chapter of Genesis tells us of the beginnings of sin, when Adam, representing all mankind, and his wife Eve, endeavored to do something which was profoundly evil. They were created to honor, glorify and enjoy God, and they dishonored Him by deciding to think and act as though they could find truth, beauty, happiness, and meaning independently of Him.

The result was that they died spiritually, they began to die physically, sin entered into their hearts, further affecting their understandings, their values, and consequently their choices. Thus rendered totally, i.e., in every part, depraved in their “hearts,” every thought, intent, word and deed became sin that would shortly and surely show itself as the outflow of this polluted source (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 12:34). They had defied their Lord and maker, had attempted to cover their guilt and shame with fig leaves only to learn the utter insufficiency of these man-contrivances to hide them from the face of God. Guilty, ruined, hopeless, estranged-- they had never heard of mercy, pardon, or reconciliation—had no reason at all to expect it. *That is very important to remember, apart from a new divine revelation, there is no reason to expect anything but death, nor has there ever been any other divine revelation of forgiveness in God but consequent to this one.* No sooner has mankind entered his abode of darkness, however, than the lover of men, the shepherd of the wanderer, the Word of God,

³ See John Owen, “Exercitation XXVII: The Original of the Priesthood of Christ in the Counsel of God” in *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. 19: 42, and John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Volume II Systematic Theology (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth; Reprint edition, 1991).

⁴⁴ See John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), Chapter 2, “Creation Ordinances,” pp. 27-44.

comes seeking them-- “Where are you?”, confronting them-- “Who told you that you were naked,” revealing the cause of their condition in their disobedience-- “have you eaten of the tree?”, announcing the penalty for this breach of the covenant of works—“Cursed is the ground for your sake, dust thou art, and to dust you will return,” and proclaiming the good news, the first gospel message.

I know Dr. Vickers has more fully expounded on this,⁵ but for the sake of those who might have missed his more thorough explosion, let us look at the elements of that first evangelistic message. There is, first, an announcement of a God-initiated, God-performed spiritual transformation—“I will put enmity between her seed and your seed.” This is an assertion of the creation of an offspring, of descendants, that would be in opposition to the offspring of the evil one. They would not be allies, but enemies. There is the announcement of the way the friendship between the serpent and the woman’s offspring, and indeed the whole power of the serpent is to be broken: “He,” one among them, one born of woman, “will bruise you head, and you shall bruise his heel.” It is the promise of the undoing of the work of the devil.

This is most important! If the promised seed merely crushes the head of the serpent, i.e., if he literally smashes him to death (as He could), then the serpent, who slandered God and persuaded the epitome of the Divine creative wisdom to exchange the glory of God to glorify a creature, still wins. The wisdom of God becomes no wisdom after all. No, if there is to be any meaning to the crushing of the serpent’s head there must be a reversal, a removal of the *cause* of the breach between God and man and a restoration of humanity’s attributes and role of son, worthy of the name, to the glory of God. The promised seed must restore man in the knowledge of God, his mind, his heart, and will. He must cure the defect in man’s affections, make up the lack in man’s understanding of God, the creation, and himself. He must deliver man from sin’s power, from the devil, the devil’s seed, and the influence of sin in man’s fallen nature. Man would know God’s blessing as His children, in whom He would delight dwelling in His presence, participating in Him in the most intimate, personal, fellowship with him, with that image restored, like Him in righteousness and holiness of character, in a God-glorifying community, free from sin and its guilt, power, and presence, free from Satan, lords of a restored “good” creation and established in that state forever. Where all was thick darkness and frightful gloom, there was now a light, which through the succeeding millennia would grow brighter, until the candle would give way to the blazing sun of righteousness, who would arise with healing in his wings.

God had told Adam and Eve that on the day they eat the forbidden fruit they would die, but even though they died then and there in a certain sense, it is also true that their lives in this world were spared. The first thing God did after making the promise of a redeemer was to do something that would preserve them in a relationship with God. He, introduced, by

⁵ Douglas Vickers, “What is the Gospel Promise,” paper presented to the 2014 Reformed Confessional Conference. Sharon Massachusetts, March 25, 2014

means of a *new sacrament*, the principle of *substitutionary atonement* by His killing of animals to provide skins for the covering of the “shame” of Adam and Eve. This is often disputed, but it is the best and only acceptable explanation, in the light of later scripture, for the origin of propitiatory animal sacrifice approved by God as a sweet smelling savor.⁶ As the Bible makes clear in many places, “the wages of sin is death.” This is one of the most important things to grasp in the study of the Bible. Until Jesus would come and settle all accounts for his children’s debts, God instituted that animals would be sacrificed as a way of putting people perpetually in mind that their sin deserves death and that another promised One would bear the cost of their reconciliation with God. As he would say later, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and *I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls*, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Lev. 17:11, emphasis mine). Unless you get this you can make no sense whatever of the Old Testament or the gospel of Christ. However, at this point, *how this actually works* was not extensively revealed. The principle of substitutionary atonement will become progressively detailed, through many kinds of examples, until it becomes quite clear in the prophecy of Isaiah 53 and brilliantly sharp (“Ultra HD!”) with the New Testament exposition of that final sacrifice on Calvary (cf. Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21).

In some ways the Old Testament promises of Jesus are like looking at a projection of an image when somebody is turning the focus knob. At first it is blurry, you can see basic shapes, you recognize a person, the focus comes in better and it looks like a boy, but it is still blurry. You adjust the focus further and you recognize the boy. A little more and you can see the scales on the fish he is proudly holding up for the camera!

As you move down the hall of biblical history in the Old Testament, this picture achieves higher resolution in several ways. For one thing, the promises of the Savior become more precise, more specific, more detailed, and more descriptive. He is coming, a member of this family, a descendent of this man, born in this town, doing these things. In addition to these new and more specific promises, there are a wide variety of pictures of the person and saving work of the promised One. Sometimes they are actual redemptive appearances of Jesus prior to his incarnation, in which we see God the Savior at his work in delivering or preserving or restoring His erring people. This is important, the appearances of “God the Redeemer” are just that, mediatorial and redemptive. Sometimes, these pictures are like maps or schematic diagrams or 3-D models of his work by which you learn what he will do and be like and thus more firmly put your faith and hope in him as you wait for his coming. Sometimes these are men who bear Him some resemblance in some feature of their characters or actions which bear on their redemptive offices or functions. These things and people are called “types” of Christ. But the main point is that here in Genesis we have the beginning of the revelation of

⁶ John Owen: “At the core of the new covenant lies forgiveness of sins, something which, as the Apostle assures us, could not take place without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). His covenant was, therefore, sealed and solemnized by the shedding of blood in accord with His own eternal plan from the first, and, indeed, those skins from which the Lord fashioned tunics for the first human pair may have come from the very first sacrifices.” *Biblical Theology*, p. 180.

the Savior, His person and work, and the beginning, in the hearts of the faithful, of the developing faith and hope in that Savior as He is revealed.

In Genesis chapters 4 and 5 it becomes clear that mankind is heading *away* from their original knowledge of God-- in a tailspin! One of Adam & Eve's first two sons, Able, in faith relates to God in the way God had revealed, i.e., through animal sacrifice (cf. Heb. 11). The other, Cain, attempts to relate to God in his own way, God does not accept it, Cain rejects God's remedy and murders Able. Then he begins a new race, bearing *his* image, and we have the beginning of human culture, a culture making its own ethics, technology and religion in its own image. There is also a line of godly persons who strive with greater or lesser success, to retain the knowledge of the true God and faithfully worship Him, calling on his name. Enoch, for instance, "walked with God" and lived in hope of the coming Lord, who would deliver from evil (Gen. 5:24; Heb.11:5; Jude 14) . Eventually, however, this godly line comes down to Noah and his family. Here we see the natural tendency of fallen man, with "every thought and intention" of man's heart being "only evil all the time," the world becomes so corrupt and violent that God determines to judge mankind but save Noah through his faith in God who graciously provides him a way of salvation, an ark, by which God was the "savior of the world." Among other revelations made to Noah and his sons is the identification of the heaven-pointing bow, an instrument of death, connected with God's promise to not destroy the earth for man's sin. Another, often overlooked promise is that the children of Japeth will come to "dwell in the tents of Shem." Eventually we will see the fulfillment of this promise in the blessing of the world through the offspring of Shem, Jesus Christ, in whom the strangers scattered across the world will be gathered to their eternal dwelling place with God.

As the race began to grow again, it sought to regain the blessings of paradise by another means than the promised serpent killer, the building of a tower to heaven, which God rejected and thwarted by the proliferation of languages among the race. Interestingly, when God would declare that HIS way of regaining paradise, his "temple," had been built by the death and exaltation of Christ, it was accompanied with the signs not only of a rushing wind, like in creation and in the emerging of the world after the flood, but also with a sign of a reversal of Babel, in the temporary cessation of this confusion of languages. On the day of Pentecost men of various nations heard the praises of God in their own languages.

Within the descendants of Shem, one man was chosen by God to be the father of many nations and the father of that "seed" (singular) through which all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God called Abraham and confirmed His promise by a familiar covenant ceremony, visibly manifesting Himself as a smoking torch, passing *alone* between slain animals, thus grounding the fulfillment of the covenant upon His own eternal and self-existent life, a covenant He would keep, however, through His death in the person of His Son. He then imposed a new sacrament upon Abraham to be kept by his descendants, a "sign and seal of the covenant," which would perpetually remind them and distinguish them as the people in covenant with God. From that time on, until the coming of the Messiah, this sign of circumcision, a sign of the bloody cutting off of sin (ultimately the "cutting off" of the sin-bearer) would distinguish the people with whom God would maintain a special relationship

of mutual ownership and promise. This is basically a renewal of the first promise of the Messiah but with higher resolution. It would soon be apparent, and later emphasized and expounded, that the mere external participation in the sign did not guarantee that one participated in the grace which it signified (i.e., true faith in the covenant speaking God, and the grace-accomplished removal of the principle of sin), as people would need to be reminded of the need of “circumcised” hearts (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4).

The rest of Genesis is about how God dealt with Abraham and his descendants until He had brought them into Egypt. This history is an archetypal display of the gospel--God acting in Sovereign grace according to His promise to miraculously produce a people unto Himself, by faith heirs to the promise believed by Abraham, through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

This time in the history of redemption is marked by extraordinary revelations of God’s redemptive purpose by promise, type, and personal appearance. In addition to those already mentioned we must be careful to note God’s substitution of a ram for the sacrifice of Isaac, the appearance of the stairway from heaven to earth at God’s “house,” and its association with God’s redemptive promise to Jacob (cf. John 1:51), subsequent appearances of the “angel” or “man” to Jacob which Jacob identifies as his redeemer, and Joseph who is clearly a type of Christ, the “firstborn” who is rejected, humbled, and exalted, abundantly furnished to govern and save. The book ends with all the descendants of Jacob coming to live in Egypt but with the prophecy repeated that they will eventually return to the Promised Land. There was a promise that “the scepter,” (i.e., the symbol of authority) “shall not depart from Judah until He, for whom it is intended, comes. Here is another one of those prophecies of the coming Messiah, the ultimate ruler: he will come from the family line of Judah. Later on, this promise will become narrowed to a specific son of Judah.

I have already hinted at another beginning – the beginning of a distinctive identifiable people for God. God created a people for himself. He did not choose them because they were better than other people. No, just the opposite, He chose them in order to show that He saves sinners. Nor does this constantly backsliding people save themselves with His help, but they are redeemed despite their idolatrous “improvement” of natural revelation by their rational faculties! What are they and they *alone* to him? They are His son (Ex. 4:22; Hosea 11:1), with whom His mediator becomes solidly identified, His bride given to His Son and thus becoming “the fullness of Him who fills all in all,” They are His temple, a glorious place for worship and for appearing before the king, and his house and dwelling place (Ex. 29:45), as demonstrated in the camp in the wilderness, in which He would “walk among them,” (Lev. 26:12) the city of Zion, where He causes His “Name” to dwell (Neh. 1:9). They are His kingdom, His army, His treasure (Ex. 19:5), His flock, His vine (Ps. 80:8; John 15:5), all created for His glory. The due examination of the revelation of salvation must include a much more detailed study of all of these images of the saved, which also grows in depth and clarity.

Their deliverance from Egypt and their formation into a nation, under a new covenantal structure, form the material for the next 4 biblical books: Exodus through Deuteronomy.

MOSES TO DAVID

In the furnace of affliction and in their deliverance by Moses from that affliction God forms the descendants of Jacob into a unified nation, binding them to Him and Him to them in a covenant (“I will be your God and you will be my people”). He shows that in free and sovereign grace, apart from any virtue in them, He makes a distinction between Israel and the Egyptians, raising up Pharaoh to demonstrate His power and separating unto Himself Israel, whom alone he has “known” among all the nations of the earth and to whom alone He has given His law (Deut. 4:8; Amos 3:2; Romans 3:2).

The Law given through Moses was certainly a new epoch in the revelation of the gospel, but not a new gospel. It was a new way of living unto God, but it did not provide a new ground or means of justification, which was still faith in the coming mediator. It did, however greatly enhance the knowledge of the mediator and the manner of acting faith in Him. The Law given on Mt. Sinai, or the Sinaitic or Mosaic Covenant, had these functions. First, it was given to clearly reassert to us the definition of righteousness. It is sometimes called a “republication” of the covenant of works, but while it is a *re-assertion* of the law that constituted the criteria of that first covenant, and it reasserts the penalty attached to that covenant for the breach of the law, yet it is of the greatest importance to realize that it is not a republication that covenant *as such*, i.e., as an alternative or replacement to salvation by the Messiah promised to fallen Adam and to Abraham. This moral law is taught and expounded through Moses, reinforced by the Old Testament prophets, by Jesus, on the Sermon on the Mount for example, and by the other New Testament writings. Contrary to “the law of nature,” (actually the law written on the hearts but obscured, denied and twisted by fallen men), this law was like a newly stricken coin, in mint-condition detail, warning afresh, all who hear it, the divine standard of righteousness and the result of coming short of it (1nd use); it thus moves us to feel our need of grace (2st use), and instructs and motivates those who love God to walk agreeably to Him, that they might walk with Him. (3rd use). Even if it went no further, God’s people would have the promise given to Abraham, and the fact of God’s grace manifested in the deliverance from Egypt, to keep them in a state of repentance, faith, hope, and love, but our gracious God goes further.

Associated with the moral law were civil laws. These had two purposes. On the one hand they enforced the keeping of the whole law to make the religious point even more vividly. Sin had real consequences. Another purpose of the civil law, like the civil laws of any nation, was simply to preserve the nation whole and distinct from the nations around them. This particular nation was created for God, had God as its king, had God’s word, and it was this nation into which the Messiah would come, to a people prepared to recognize Him and receive Him. This civil Law was meant to accomplish this. Contrariwise, after the Messiah had come and the form of the assembly (i.e., church) of God’s people would change from a civil/religious nation of the world to bodies of believers scattered among nations governed by men of different principles, it is reasonable to think that these civil laws would be *instructive* for the conduct and government of God’s people in their church bodies, but not necessarily enforceable upon the civilian populace, nor even intended by God to be.

Another dimension of the Law given to Moses is commonly called the “ceremonial law.” The purpose of this part of the Law was to teach God’s people some important lessons and maintain them in the life of faith and holiness. In it, they were given additional rules as object lessons of spiritual truths, rules about unclean things, things that “defile,” things that have no real, intrinsic, wrong to them except that if you eat them or touch them or they come out of your body you become “unclean.” In other words, you become unfit to come to the presence of God, even unfit to be in the community. Indeed, some things had something bad about them intrinsically, like leprosy or mildew, but some things were just arbitrary and, as it turned out, temporary ways of teaching that evil separates from God and need God’s remedy if people were to be in fellowship with Him. This is known as “ceremonial uncleanness,” and it is dealt with by some kind of ceremony, like ritual washing or sprinkling with blood or anointing oil made with the ashes of a sacrificed animal, that makes the person or thing “clean.” Everything was ultimately cleansed “by blood,” as all the persons and objects related to the worship of God were sprinkled with the blood, the evidence of death, of a sacrificed animal. These were all great object lessons to teach us that we make ourselves unclean, indeed, out of us comes nothing but uncleanness, and that God makes us clean enough to dwell in His holy presence through His gift, unto death, of His substitute and the application of that substitute’s work to us. These ceremonies, especially the keeping of the Passover and Circumcision, but the others also, have the sacramental functions, described earlier, of both object lesson of grace and means of participation in that grace of pardon, peace, and partaking of the life of God in fellowship with Him. The emphasis in the ceremonial law is unto the multi-faceted saving work of the priesthood and thus the “much more!” salvation that there is in the Priesthood of Christ, as the author of Hebrews tells us, “For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:13–14).

The law was meant to prepare God’s people for Christ, to be their pedagogue, by helping them to recognize sin, its odious character, and its guilt, and to help them see that God had provided *the* one and only way to remove that sin and restore the sinner to fellowship with Himself in his holy community of the “chosen, called and faithful.”⁷

In this kingdom God resides as the Redeemer King indwelling enthroned in the midst of them His people, as the all-sufficient provider of everything needed, savior from sin, protector from evil and, shepherd-like, the leader of their way. The tabernacle was not a permanent dwelling place; that is yet to come, emblematically in the temple in the city, ultimately in the temple-city from heaven. Likewise, there awaits an even nearer access to Him by his people. At this time, a thick curtain, the outer walls of the tabernacle and more seriously, the threat of death prevent access to His most intimate revelation of Himself except

⁷ Please see Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus* (Banner of Truth), and Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, Publishers, Inc. 1991).

by a mediator, the High Priest, once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day, two goats and a priest vividly model what Christ would accomplish. The priest, representing the people, laying his hand upon one goat, thus identifying with it, confesses the sins of the people thus imputing them to the goat. That goat, bearing the sins of the nation, is lead away into a far country signifying the utter removal of sin from the nation. The second goat, likewise consecrated as the sin-bearer is slain, thus signifying that sin is not physically carried away geographically, but lawfully removed by the death of the substitute sin bearer. There are a host of other sacrifices and ceremonies which relate to some principle of the gospel but it is most significant that all the rites of the ceremonial law are related to the Levitical priesthood which instructs us in the crucial importance of, and functions of a priest. It is also noteworthy, that the continual repetition of priestly activities meant that the salvation provided by them was provisional, not final. When a change in this covenantal structure comes, it would be with a change in priesthood, but not in the requirement *for* a priest..

In addition to propitiation and cleansing from defilement , another very important salvation motif taught in the law is that of redemption by the payment of a price. Not only is it true that, as Hebrews says, everything must be cleansed by blood, but most everything must be redeemed. The first born sons, for example, must be redeemed in token of their being spared from death on the night of the first Passover. People must be redeemed, slaves and things and land must be redeemed, but the important thing is that God's people are under some kind of "bondage" until they are released by the payment of a price.

I mentioned earlier that the person and work of the Redeemer is depicted also by personal appearances of him speaking to, saving, sanctifying and providing for His people, and by persons who are types of Him. This, seen in Exodus and Numbers, is seen in the next three books of scripture, Joshua, Judges and Ruth. Examples of personal appearances of the mediator are "Captain of the Lord's host" to Joshua, in Joshua 5 and the appearances of "the Angel of the Lord" to Gideon and the parents of Samson.

Just as the giving of the law would never fully sanctify the people, but only keep before them their need of an "ultimate Priest," who would be both God and man, so the government of the people by the ultimate King, would be another lesson needed by the people of God. Judges takes over after the death of Joshua and tells what happened beginning with the next generation when they began to adopt the religious beliefs and practices of their neighbors. God would chasten them and the Israelites would cry out to God for deliverance. He would deliver them by raising up a hero who would thereafter become their ruler, i.e., their "judge." The book has some vivid "types" of Christ, but for the most part it is a story of failure as demonstrated by the horrible story that concludes the book and the comment that "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

The objective of the book of Judges is to illustrate why the nation needed a strong king to rule over them and so prepare us for the coming of King David, through whom Christ would be born, David's Lord and David's Son. The beautiful little story of Ruth, tells of the Moabite woman who, like Rahab of Jericho, comes "under the wing" of Yahweh, and under

the wing of *her* redeemer, Boaz, another type of Christ. This also demonstrates the outward reaching and welcoming aspect of God's separating and redeeming grace.

TO DAVID AND SOLOMON

The next two books, 1 & 2 Samuel, and their parallel in 1 Chronicles, describe the rise and history of the greatest personal type and ancestor of Christ in the O.T., David. 1 Samuel is the story of the transition from the chaotic rule state of the nation under the Judges to King David. The main point at the beginning of the book is that a king that fit the "ideal king" of the people was not God's ideal, so the failure of King Saul prepares us for the anointing of the shepherd David to become king. In keeping with the big picture I have been talking about, however, even David proves to be less than the ideal. He is a "type" of his descendent, the coming Messiah, but like other types, he is an imperfect image.

Not even in David and his son Solomon does the kingship, the God-ordained, human, leadership, of His people find perfection, and we are left looking forward to the coming of THE "Son of David." Here we have much more than a type, we have a promise. David wants to build a house, i.e., a temple, for God but God says *He* will build a "house," a dynasty, for David, and it is revealed that a son of David will sit on David's throne forever. In the Psalms, however, it is plain that this is no mere man ruling over just another national people, but that David's greater son will sit on his father's throne forever. This Davidic sonship is further developed in the Psalms and by the Prophets into a high-definition picture of the Messiah, his person, attributes, and works. He will be David's Lord, ruling over all man and nature, sitting upon the throne of the heavenly Zion. In Psalm 2, God's son is called His Christ, the first time this title is used. There, in opposition to the vain and absurd boasting of the kings of the nations, God declares that His King, His exalted Son, set by Him on His holy hill of Zion, will rule unopposed and that destruction awaits all who do not trustingly submit to him with a kiss and blessedness comes to all who do. Importantly, like David, the King of God's Kingdom is a Shepherd, who administers His kingdom with might, wisdom, love and gentleness.

The person and office of Christ is at the heart of the Psalms and Wisdom Literature. Speaking in broad categories, Psalms of Lament, for instance, give voice to the sufferings of the mediator in His role as identifying with His people and suffering with and for them (Psalm 22). Kingship Psalms expound on his role as protector and preserver. Some Psalms not only describe Him in the role of Priest, offering acceptable sacrifices, cleansing sinners (Psalm 51:7), and as a specific new kind of Priest, "after the order of Meschisedek" (Psalm 110), and many emphasize the role of God as Redeemer. The office of Christ as the word and prophet of God and the author of wisdom is revealed and manifested in other Psalms and Wisdom Literature. The office of Christ as the husband of His people is the theme of other writings of this era, such as Psalm 45 and the Song of Solomon.

THE GOSPEL AS TAUGHT BY THE PROPHETS

God continued His work of evangelism by speaking through His prophets, seeking, calling, pleading, striving, earnestly exhorting sinners to repent. The prophets had a most difficult job. As ambassadors of Christ: like Him in Eden, like Him on Mt. Sinai, they confronted Israel with its violations of the covenant, with graphic descriptions of the nature and character of sin; like Joshua (that great type of Christ), speaking at Mt. Ebal, they announced judgment in graphic detail to the covenant breakers, so as to strike sheer terror in the hearts of the impenitent; like their Shepherd in the wilderness who, “in all their afflictions ... was afflicted” they identified with His people who would be suffering judgment for their sin. To move them to repentance and hold them up in faith and hope they proclaimed the name of the Lord, self-existent covenant-faithful, loving, longsuffering and gracious Savior, and re-issued the promise of the Messiah and His Kingdom.⁸

Some particular features of this prophetic gospel revelation demand attention. In the Prophets, the gospel is sometimes a word of return from exile, but then it becomes clear that more is in view than coming home from Babylon with a return to the practice of former covenantal practices. There is an eschatological emphasis that goes way beyond this. In the Prophets those practices are apparently retained but there is an expected transformation: here the return from exile is merged with, and may be thought of as, the beginning of the coming of Christ, which is bringing with it a New Covenant with real changes, and a new Messianic Age with the expected “last days” of the present covenantal administration.

The resolution is becoming very sharp, particularly concerning the person and work of the Redeemer. We see where He will appear (Bethlehem), who He will be, and what He will do. The mighty God and everlasting Father (not depicting the person of God the Father) becomes the virgin’s son, Emmanuel. He is the Son of David, established by a covenant that cannot be broken, the king who will feed and shepherd God’s people, dealing wisely, executing justice and righteousness, and those who come to God will partake in the blessings that flow from that everlasting covenant with David also (Isa. 55:3). He is the Spirit-filled teacher, who will not give over or be discouraged until He brings His law to the distant

⁸ Compare with Calvin: “It is customary to make a great number of statements and dissertations about the office of the Prophets. But, in my opinion, the shortest way of treating this subject is to trace the Prophets to the Law, from which they derived their doctrine, like streams from a fountain; for they placed it before them as their rule, so that they may be justly held and declared to be its interpreters, who utter nothing but what is connected with the Law. Now, the Law consists chiefly of three parts: first, the doctrine of life; secondly, threatenings and promises; thirdly, the covenant of grace, which, being founded on Christ, contains within itself all the special promises. As to ceremonies, they were religious exercises which strengthened the attachment of the people to the worship of God and to godliness, and consequently were added to the First Table. The Prophets, therefore, enter more largely into the illustration of doctrine, and explain more fully what is briefly stated in the Two Tables, and lay down what the Lord chiefly requires from us. Next, the threatenings and promises, which Moses had proclaimed in general terms, are applied by them to their own time and minutely described. Lastly, they express more clearly what Moses says more obscurely about Christ and his grace, and bring forward more copious and more abundant proofs of the free covenant.” John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), xxvi.

islands, light for them that sit in the darkness of the shadow of death. He is the destroyer of the enemies of God, who comes blood-stained from His victory over Edom, the personification of all “His and our enemies.” To accomplish this, however, He becomes priest and sacrifice, the humble, obedient Servant of the Lord, who is smitten by God in a substitutionary death, opening up a fountain in Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness, not only purifying the sons of Levi, but sprinkling the nations, making intercession for the transgressors and bringing them justification, release for the captives, healing for the blind, the deaf, and lame and leprous, welcome for the eunuchs and the foreigner to the nearest access and most glorious privileges in the kingdom of God. Yes, we see what He will be like—meek and lowly and filled with the Spirit, how He will be treated—betrayed for the price of a slave, stricken smitten, afflicted, how He will die—forsaken, making intercession for the transgressors, making his grave with the rich, how He will rise again to inherit the reward of His obedience. This savior is not for Israel only. “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” which is His inheritance.. This is one of many prophecies that reveal that in the movement of redemption the holy assembly is no longer will be equal to Abraham’s physical descendants in an earthly Jerusalem in an ancient land, but forever be a universal kingdom. He is the Son of Man, the humble One who receives the throne at the right of the Ancient of Days. There will be the final end of the wicked, the transformation of fallen man and cursed creation. God dwells among His people, quenching their thirst with rivers of grace, and everything that can be represented by feasts and victories and abundant harvests and every joy producing image (Isa. 40-66).

In Micah is predicted the place of His birth and his function as the Shepherd-ruler of Israel. In Hosea He is the faithful, forgiving, husband, who redeems His whorish wife from the slave block and takes her to be only His own. In Haggai He is the one who would bring to the post-coming temple the true glory of which Solomon’s temple was but a sketch and in Ezekiel that future reality gets its greatest Old Testament depiction, which, again falls far short of the thing signified. In Malachi, we are even told of the ministry of his forerunner, who we will meet as John the Baptist. Again, in all these books, with greater or lesser detail, we meet the Mediator and Redeemer, the Prophet, Priest, and King.

Time does not allow for anything like an attempt at an exposition of God’s promise of a New Covenant to Jeremiah, nor is that needed for our objective for this paper. It is enough to say that over against the covenant which has provided the world’s only way of salvation since Israel was in the wilderness of Sinai, God is bringing in another, final covenant, which will certainly and *effectually* provide what was promised in every covenant since the beginning, what all men stand in need of, forgiveness of sins, knowledge of God, and fellowship with Him. The details of this covenant and its advantages over the Mosaic administration would be revealed with the coming of the Messiah and His exposition of them through His apostles.

NEW TESTAMENT

The progressive revelation of the gospel does not end with the birth or earthly life of Christ, for its divinely breathed-out exposition continues through the New Testament, but the most brilliant features of that revelation are in the gospels, when we actually get to see and hear the promised Prophet Priest and King in the personal exercise of His predicted work. The main thing to observe with respect to our topic today is that He, definitely, brilliantly, finally, all-sufficiently, and exclusively to all others, fulfills the role of the one promised from the foundation of the world.

Above previous revelation we come to more fully understand the sonship of the Redeemer the relationship of that sonship to us and to our sonship to God. Here is God the Son, the divine logos, becoming truly and fully incarnate through the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the virgin Mary. This 2nd Adam, representing all those who will be covenantally one with Him, finally, through His entire life, in the wilderness, under temptation of the devil, and by obedience unto the death of the cross, does what the first Adam failed to do and obtains the right for all his sons to partake of the Tree of Life and exercise the dominion their father Adam lost (cf. Ps. 8). We were told He would crush the serpent's head, now we get to witness it. In the coming of the kingdom with the coming of Christ, we see Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

In all the gospel He is depicted as the Ultimate Prophet, i.e., the one who speaks with unparalleled authority. We know this from the testimonies of Zacharias and his more famous son, John the Baptist, His being sealed and sent of the Father, His works of signs and wonders, His numerous absolute claims to authority in uniquely knowing and speaking the word of His father, the testimony of the Father to His superiority over Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son. Hear ye Him!" He, His person, work, and kingdom forms the terminus ad quem for the Prophetic Office which is that in Him, through the work of the Holy Spirit in joining us to Him and providing fellowship with Him, all the people of God from the least to the greatest receive the New Covenant promise—they finally know Him. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost is not only the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, it is the fulfillment of Moses' desire, "would that all the Lord's people were prophets," and the fulfillment of the epistemological element of all the promises of the New Covenant, "they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest." This is why the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist, the greatest of the Old Covenant, and why the glory upon the New Testament saint is greater than that fading glory upon the face of Moses.

The priestly office of the promised One predicted in the O.T. is asserted and depicted in the gospels. His very incarnation is most of all for the sake of His priestly office with a body prepared for Him so that He can fulfill his task which was predestined for Him "from the foundation of the world" to be the "Lamb of God" who comes to be a ransom, a redemption, who cleanses lepers, and proclaims forgiveness of sins, who makes intercession for the transgressors. It is in respect to his priestly office that he "cannot save Himself," at his

crucifixion and proclaims “It is finished” at His death. In the death of Christ the true meaning of death as the wages of sin is revealed more clearly than anywhere else. In His resurrection is demonstrated the ultimate meaning of justification and the ultimate answer to the ancient question, “if a man die, shall he live again?” The ancient victor has been vanquished.

In Acts and his epistles, Paul provides perhaps the best exposition of both the connection of the gospel with the O.T. history from the first beginning of the promise and the best exposition of the meaning of the fulfillment of that promise. His gospel, the gospel he expounded first to Jews and then to Gentiles is the gospel which was spoken by the prophets, believed on by Abraham and David, demonstrated in the free election of Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, etc. Now in Christ crucified and resurrected are displayed in their most clear and brilliant light, the wisdom, righteousness, power and glory of God in the salvation of helpless sinners by grace, through faith alone, bringing to them calling, regeneration, justification, union with Christ, participation in all the saving ministry of the Spirit, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, resurrection, glorification which is conformity to the image of God’s son, the firstborn of many brethren. Thus all the Old Testament promises find more than mere fulfillment, they find final and ultimate fulfillment. Christ is the “Amen!” to them all. Adam’s fall is outdone by Christ’s obedience, Abraham’s blessing not only spills over to the Gentiles, but results in their becoming full heirs, not of a land, by an “ethnic” physical lineage, but of a world, and more than a world, by their being heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. That which was glorious but fading gives over to that which is more glorious and never fading.⁹ Bloody sacraments which were object lessons of what was to come are replaced with bloodless sacraments which more clearly and deliberately point to participation in the finished work of Christ in His death and His gift of the Spirit. To mixed congregations of Jew and Gentile comes the message which breaks down every distinction regarding their belonging to, and enjoying access to, and fellowship with, God, and the people of God leave behind the restrictions of their minority and participate in the rights, privileges and responsibilities of mature adult sons. Everything previously revealed obscurely, to the point even of being a mystery, now becomes most sure and brilliant and the basis for a vivid Christocentric, pneumatic union with the resurrected exalted Christ, giving way to Christocentric pneumatic ethics, Christocentric pneumatic worship, Christocentric pneumatic world mission.¹⁰ In all this there is nothing that was not contained in the first promise, but it is now bright as noonday.

John ties his exposition of the gospel with what was already present in the beginning, and turns our attention immediately to comparison and contrast with the previous covenant:

⁹A sadly neglected treatise dealing with this is Richard Sibbes’, *The Excellency of the Gospel Above the Law*, in, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, vol. 4 (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: James Nichol; James Nisbet and Co.; W. Robertson, 1863), 202.

¹⁰ “Pneumatic” here refers to the pervasive and, practically speaking, unprecedented role of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament teaching of the life of the believer and the church in making up its union with the resurrected Christ.

the word is tabernacling with us, but bringing not the Law but grace and truth. Through Him, by the Holy Spirit, the Son and Father, “we” will dwell in the nearest intimacy with His “friends.” He is the Lamb of God, but not just for Israel, but for the world, Jacob’s ladder joining heaven and earth, the house of God, the temple of God, the purifier of that temple and builder of the final temple, the baptizer in the Holy Spirit, the giver of the wine of rejoicing, the serpent raised up in the wilderness for healing by the looking of faith, the husband of the bride, the Rock who is stricken and gives the water of life to thirsty souls, He is the El Shaddai, whose power is sufficient for filling the mouths of the hungry multitude with bread, and He is that bread of life given by the Father. He is healer of the blind, the Great Good Shepherd, the Glorious One seen by Isaiah, the light that lightens the Gentiles, the Servant who stoops from heaven to wash the feet of His disciples and then puts on His robes again, , the Passover, the Great High Priest making intercession on the ground of his own upcoming sacrifice, the Vine who gives life and fruit to the branches, the Shepherd who protects His own when the wolves come to take Him away, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, the pierced one of Psalm 22, the priest who blesses his people, the king who ascends, like Yahweh mounting up from Sanai, to a coronation (Ps. 68:17-18; Eph. 4:8).

When it comes to demonstrating fulfillment of the past promises with that which is ultimate, unique, final, not to be superseded, and not to be neglected it is most difficult to escape the force of an epistle which was written *with the explicit aim to establish that very point*. From the first verse to the end, the author expounds the fulfillment of familiar images of the Messiah. He is the superseding, not to be superseded, not to be supplemented final word, because He is the Son. As the ultimate prophet, he expounds the new and final covenant with an authority greater than Moses, with a voice that speaks not from Mt. Sinai, but from heaven. He is the ultimate King, disposing of all creation as He will. Hebrews provides the greatest scriptural exposition of the difference between the New Covenant and the Old, especially regarding the Office of the Priesthood. He is the shekinah glory,¹¹ incarnate to cleanse our sins as High Priest by the offering of his own blood, who sits down, never to offer sacrifice again. Christ’s is the ultimate Priesthood, after the order of Melchisedek, the ultimate Priest offering the ultimate sacrifice, so that (*and this is so important to our theme!*) any return to previous covenantal forms of access to God, *even though they were divinely ordained*, is impossible. This is the explanation of those familiar, horribly frightening passages concerning the impossibility of the salvation of apostates. It is not because they have committed a super heinous unforgivably evil sin in rejecting Christ’s sacrifice that their condition is hopeless. It is because they have determinatively rejected the *only* saving sacrifice available. In all these capacities, He is the ultimate object of faith, the faith of the Old Testament saints and New Testament runners in the marathon of true life.

¹¹ Owen’s exposition of the of Heb. 1:3 relates the person of the Messiah to the glory of God revealed in various Old Testament settings: “The apostle, therefore, calling them from the types, by which in much darkness they had been instructed in these mysteries, unto the things themselves represented obscurely by them, acquaints them with what that typical glory and splendour of it signified, namely, the eternal glory of God, with the essential beaming and brightness of it in the Son, in and by whom the glory of the Father shineth forth unto us. So that the words seem to relate unto that way of instruction which was of old granted unto them.” *Works*, 20: 93–94.

Finally, pervasively grounding its message on what has gone before, but bringing it to the most undeniably universal, ultimate, exclusive expression is the book of Revelation. Here is Paradise Restored, but not ultimately until the completion of a history described in familiar Old Testament terms but with New Testament clarity determined by the seal-breaking hand of the Lamb. In the process, man's depravity is clearly revealed as they follow the Great Harlot and, intractably maintaining their obstinate hatred to God, blaspheme Him against the strongest evidence of His wrath and power.

I had not mentioned this before, but along with the progressive revelation of the gospel there is a progressive revelation of the sinfulness of sin and of the work of the evil one. What begins with a brief exchange between a woman and the serpent grows throughout scripture to a rather extensive record of the outworking of sinful nature and of the activity of that old Serpent, the devil. He is the enemy of all God's people, opposing the "seed of the woman" behind the works of Pharaoh, Balaam, Antiochus Epiphanes, Herod and other anti-Christ, directly against Christ in the wilderness of Temptation and the sifting of Peter, the saints in their spiritual warfare, and here as the power behind the beast and false prophet. Yet, consistent with our primary theme, these are matched by an equally growing awareness of the understanding of the Redeemer's sanctification of His bride and His defeat of Satan on the cross, under the saint's feet through his word and Spirit, the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and his final doom in the lake of fire prepared for him and his minion angels. The issue of the distinction between the servants of God who follow the Lamb wherever He goes and those who do not, but end up cursing God and crying out for the rocks to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb could not be more definite.

The saints are encouraged by these repeated and sharpened O.T. images,¹² in this era "between the already and the not yet," to remember the God of Moses, Elijah and Ezekiel, the King who knows and holds and walks among them, The Lion of Judah who is the Lamb slain who is the Son of Man with dominion over creation, the Lamb whom they follow, and to look forward to the coming of Great Eden, the paradise and Jerusalem of God, His dwelling place, with the Tree of Life and the river that ever flows from His throne. He destroys that old serpent the devil forever, removes every trace of a fallen world, and dwells forever in holiness with the saints who enjoy fellowship with the Triune God. "In Him the tribes of Adam boast more blessing than their father lost," and God is all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

¹² See G. K Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. Co., 1999).

III. Hints for Pastoral Application

HERMENEUTICS

There is an obvious but often challenged application of this progressive Christ-centered revelation of the gospel to hermeneutics: if this is the apostolic method for the interpretation of the OT it is *the correct one*. No matter how difficult the road may be, how littered with subjective and unsupported and fanciful interpretations, any interpretation that denies it is denying a principle endorsed by Christ and His apostles by precept and in practice. To the objection, “We must stick to grammatical-historical exegesis,” our answer is, “History cannot be rightly known by a commitment to secular presuppositions, it must be understood as His--story.” So do your grammatical historical exegesis,¹³ but see that your interpretation of the historical setting of the passage include this feature of Jesus’ clearly revealed principle of hermeneutics—“these testify of me.” This makes all the difference in our preaching from Old Testament texts. They all teach something which is derives its meaning from its relation to Christ, and consequently, may *only* be, but may confidently be, rightly expounded in the light cast upon it from the New Testament. Dennis E. Johnson has done a most convincing job of arguing for the Christocentric exposition of the Old Testament, along with providing great help in putting this conviction into practice. I recommend his *Him We Proclaim* most heartily.¹⁴

EDIFICATION

One of the earliest pastoral applications of the history of redemption was the encouragement of two downcasts making their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Even earlier, a faithful servant, suffering the physical and mental depression of imprisonment in the face of hope deferred was not told to “cheer up” but simply reminded of the prophecy-fulfilling works of his cousin, works he had learned at his father’s knee, his father who had celebrated those prophecies on the day of his birth. No doubt it was all he needed. The same conviction has been a source of comfort through the ages. It is a fundamental element of our faith that it is the grounded upon the word of the ever faithful God, whose works have been told beforehand and who has now visited and redeemed His people in accordance with

¹³ Owen on *Hebrews* and E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, demonstrate that the pertinent Old Testament texts, when interpreted according to careful exegetical procedure do actually support the claims of this paper.

¹⁴ Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2007, also Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.:2000), and Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.: 1961. Most highly recommend for teaching this material on a popular level is David Murray, *Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament*, Thomas Nelson, 2013.

the covenant. Its object is the Christ who has indeed come as promised. For a hint in preaching this application, please consider the study by Jonathan Edwards.¹⁵

APOLOGETICS AND EVANGELISM: MISSION AND MESSAGE

The Mission of the Church is grounded in the progressive revelation of redemption. When the church met in Jerusalem to consider the place of Gentile believers it was led by the Holy Spirit to embrace the program announced long ago,

Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, “‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.’ (Acts 15:14-18).

What about the message? Along with the account of the Lord’s earthly life from his birth to his ascension, as seen in the Gospels, it is clear that the history of redemption forms the principle content of the apostolic message. This was the message of Peter on Pentecost, and it was Paul’s customary strategy in the synagogues:

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ” (Acts 17:2-3).

Later, testifying before King Agrippa, he says,

“To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23).

His capstone argument was not his, “you know these things were not done in a corner,” but “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe” (Acts 26:27).

For some strange reason, the assertion of the gospel as fulfilled prophecy, a common enough exercise in apostolic and post-apostolic times, has fallen into disuse and even

¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 617-19, “A History of the Work of Redemption.”

ridicule. It should not be surrendered to the skeptics; the unity of the scripture, the miraculous bringing about of its promised redemption against all the opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil, are clear divine testimonies to the inspiration of scripture, whether depraved men will receive it or not, which only also serves as evidence for the final assertion in our current chapter of Savoy, that men must be regenerate to receive these most certain truths.

IV. Conclusion

If we are to preach “the whole counsel of God,” and “Christ, and Him crucified” we will be preaching Him for what He is, namely, the only Light and Lamb and Lord of the world, ordained from before the foundation of the world and promised as the one and only hope of the whole world. Let us show this in all our preaching from all the scriptures.

V. Appendices (Not for Conference Presentation)

APPENDIX 1: JOHN OWEN ON THE ISSUES UNDERLYING THE 20TH CHAPTER OF THE SAVOY

There is, indeed, another kind of pretended charity towards this sort of men, which we profess we have not for them, although we judge we do not want it; for there can be no want unto any of an error or mistake, wherein the charity intended doth consist. And this is the judgment of some, that they, or some of them, may attain salvation or eternal blessedness in the condition wherein they are, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This, we acknowledge, we neither believe nor hope concerning them; nor, to speak plainly, can desire it should be so, unless God had otherwise revealed himself concerning Jesus Christ and them than yet he hath done. And we are so far from supposing that there is in us, on this account, any blamable defect of charity, that we know ourselves to be freed by this persuasion from a dangerous error, which, if admitted, would both weaken our own faith and impair all the due and proper effects of charity towards others: for “though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) yet to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all

things, and we by him,” 1 Cor. 8:5, 6. We know “there is no salvation in any other” but by Jesus Christ; and that “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,” Acts 4:12. Nor is this name given any otherwise amongst men but by the gospel; for it is not the giving of the person of Christ absolutely to be a mediator, but the declaration of his name by the gospel, as the means of salvation, that is intended. Hence our Lord Jesus Christ, giving that commission to his apostles to preach it, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” he adds unto it that decretory sentence concerning the everlasting condition of all men with respect thereunto, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned,” Mark 16:15, 16. As the preaching of the gospel, and the belief on Jesus Christ thereon, are the only means of obtaining salvation, so all those who are not made partakers of them must perish eternally. So when the apostle affirms that the Jews would have hindered them from preaching to the Gentiles “that they might be saved,” 1 Thess. 2:16, he plainly declares that without it they could not so be. Neither were any of them ever better, or in a better condition, than they are described by the same apostle, Eph. 2:12, and in sundry other places, wherein he allows them no possibility of obtaining eternal blessedness. Neither do we in this matter consider what God can do, or what he hath done, to the communicating of grace and faith in Jesus Christ unto any particular persons at any time, or in any place, in an extraordinary manner. We are not called to make a judgment thereof, nor can any rule be hence collected to regulate the exercise of our love: “Secret things belong to the LORD our God, but revealed things to us and our children, that we may do his will.” When and where such grace and faith do manifest themselves by their effects, we ought readily to own and embrace them. But the only inquiry in this matter is, what those that are utterly destitute of the revelation of Jesus Christ, either as made originally in the promise or as explained in the gospel, may, under the mere conduct of the light of nature, as consisting of the innate principles of reason, with their improvement, or as increased by the consideration of the effects of divine power and providence, by the strength and exercise of their own moral principles, attain unto, as unto their present acceptance with God and future eternal salvation? That they may be saved in every sect who live exactly according to the light of nature, is a doctrine anathematized by the church of England, article xviii.; and the reason given hereof is, because the Scriptures propose the name of Jesus Christ alone whereby we may be saved. And if we do believe that description which is given in the Scripture of men, their moral abilities and their works, as they lie in the common state of mankind since the entrance of sin, with respect unto God and salvation, we shall not be able to be of another mind: for they are said to be “blind,” Luke 4:18; yea, to be “darkness,” to be “dead in trespasses and sins,” not to “receive the things of the Spirit of God, because they are foolishness unto them,” and their minds to be “enmity against God” himself, Acts 26:18; Eph. 2:1–3, 4:18; Rom. 8:7. That there may be any just expectation concerning such persons, that they will “work out their salvation with fear and trembling,” we are not convinced; neither do we think that God will accept of a more imperfect obedience in them that know not Jesus Christ than he

requires of them who do believe in him, for then should he prove a disadvantage unto them. Besides, all their best works are severely reflected on in the Scripture, and represented as unprofitable; for whereas in themselves they are compared to evil trees, thorns, and briers, we are assured they neither do nor can bring forth good grapes or figs. Besides, in the Scripture the whole business of salvation, in the first place, turns upon the hinge of faith supernatural and divine: for “without faith it is impossible to please God,” and “he that believeth not shall be damned;” “he that believeth not in the name of the Son of God is condemned already;” for “neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love;” and it is “by faith that the just shall live,” Heb. 11:6, [Mark 15:16,] John 3:18, 36, Gal. 5:6, [Hab. 2:4.] That this faith may be educed out of the obediential principles of nature was, indeed, the opinion of Pelagius of old; but it will not now, we hope, be openly asserted by any. Moreover, this faith is in the Scripture, if not limited and determined, yet directed unto Jesus Christ as its necessary peculiar object: “For this is life eternal, that we may know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.” It seems, therefore, that the knowledge of the only true God is not sufficient to attain eternal life, unless the knowledge of Jesus Christ also do accompany it; for “this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life,” 1 John 5:11, 12; which is enough to determine the controversy. And those assertions, that “there is none other name given among men whereby they must be saved,” and that “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” Acts 4:12, 1 Cor. 3:11, are of the same importance; and it were needless to multiply the testimonies that are given us to that purpose elsewhere. Neither can it be made to appear that the concatenation of the saving means, whereby men that are adult are brought unto glory, is not absolutely universal; and amongst them there is vocation, or an effectual calling (Rom. 8:29, 30) to the knowledge of Christ by the gospel. Neither will the same apostle allow a saving invocation of the name of God to any but those that are brought to believe by hearing the word preached, Rom. 10:13–15. It is said that God may, by ways secret and unknown to us, reveal Jesus Christ to them, and so by faith in him sanctify their natures and endow them with his Spirit; which things it is granted, we suppose, are indispensably necessary unto salvation. Those whom God thus deals withal are not Pagans but Christians, concerning whom none ever doubted but they might be saved. It is also granted that men may learn much of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, which both require and teach many duties to be performed towards him; but withal, we believe that without the internal sanctification of the Spirit, communicated by and with the knowledge of Jesus Christ, no man can be saved. But we intend not here to dispute about these things. Instead of an effect of love and charity, it is manifest that the opinion which grants salvation unto the heathen, or any of them, upon the due improvement of their rational faculties and moral principles, ariseth from a want of due consideration of the true nature of sin and grace, of the fall of man and his recovery, of the law and gospel, and of the wisdom and love of God in sending Jesus Christ to make atonement for sinners,

and to bring in everlasting righteousness. And not only so, but it evidently prepares the way unto those noxious opinions which at this day among many infest and corrupt Christian religion, and foment those seeds of atheism which spring up so fast as to threaten the overspreading of the whole field of Christianity; for hence it will follow, by an easy deduction, that every one may be saved, or attain unto his utmost happiness, in his own religion, be it what it will, whilst under any notion or conception he acknowledgeth a divine Being, and his own dependence thereon. And seeing that, on this supposition, it must be confessed that religion consists solely in moral honesty, and a fancied internal piety of mind towards the Deity (for in nothing else can a centring of all religions in the world unto a certain end be imagined), it follows that there is no outward profession of it indispensably necessary, but that every man may take up and make use of that which is best suited unto his interest in his present condition and circumstances. And as this, being once admitted, will give the minds of men an indifferency as unto the several religions that are in the world, so it will quickly produce in them a contempt of them all. And, from an entertainment of, or an indifferency of mind about, these and the like noisome opinions, it is come to pass that the gospel, after a continued triumph for sixteen hundred years over hell and the world, doth at this day, in the midst of Christendom, hardly with multitudes maintain the reputation of its truth and divinity; and is by many, living in a kind of outward conformity unto the institutes of Christian religion, despised and laughed to scorn. But the proud and foolish atheistical opiniators of our days, whose sole design is to fortify themselves by the darkness of their minds against the charges of their own conscience upon their wicked and debauched conversations, do but expose themselves to the scorn of all sober and rational persons; for what are a few obscure, and, for the most part, vicious renegadoes, in comparison of those great, wise, numerous, and sober persons, whom the gospel, in its first setting forth in the world, by the evidence of its truth and the efficacy of its power, subdued and conquered? Are they as learned as the renowned philosophers of those days, who, advantaged by the endeavours and fruits of all the great wits of former ages, had advanced solid, rational literature to the greatest height that ever it attained in this world, or possibly ever will do so, the minds of men having now something more excellent and noble to entertain themselves withal? Are they to be equalled in wisdom and experience with those glorious emperors, senators, and princes who then swayed the sceptres and affairs of the world? Can they produce any thing to oppose unto the gospel that is likely to influence the minds of men in any degree comparably to the religion of these great, learned, wise, and mighty personages; which, having received by their fathers from days immemorial, was visibly attended with all earthly glories and prosperities, which were accounted as the reward of their due observance of it? And yet, whereas there was a conspiracy of all those persons, and this influenced by the craft of infernal powers, and managed with all that wisdom, subtlety, power, and cruelty that the nature of man is capable to exercise, on purpose to oppose the gospel, and keep it from taking root in the world; yet, by the glorious evidence of its divine extract and original wherewith it is accompanied, by the

efficacy and power which God gave the doctrine of it in and over the minds of men, all managed by the spiritual weapons of its preachers, which were “mighty through God to the pulling down of those strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God,” 2 Cor. 10:4, 5, it prevailed against them all, and subdued the world unto an acknowledgment of its truth, with the divine power and authority of its Author. Certainly there is nothing more contemptible than that the indulgence of some inconsiderable persons unto their lusts and vices, who are void of all those excellencies, in notion and practice, which have already been triumphed over by the gospel when set up in competition with it or opposition unto it, should be once imagined to bring it into question or to cast any disreputation upon it. But to treat of these things is not our present design; we have only mentioned them occasionally, in the account which it was necessary we should give concerning our love to all men in general, with the grounds we proceed upon in the exercise of it.¹⁶

APPENDIX 2: EDWARDS’ Applications¹⁷

1. Hence we may learn how great a work is this of redemption.
2. Hence we may learn how God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending of all things.
3. We may see by what has been said, how Christ has in all things the pre-eminence.
4. The consideration of what has been said, may greatly serve to show us the consistency, order, and beauty, of God’s works of providence.
5. From the whole that has been said, we may strongly argue, that the Scriptures are the word of God, because they alone inform us what God aims at, in his works. God doubtless is pursuing some design, and carrying on some scheme, in the various changes and revolutions which from age to age came to pass in the world.
6. From what has been said, we may see the glorious *majesty* and *power* of God in this affair of redemption.
7. From what has been said, we may see the glorious *wisdom* of God. It shows the wisdom of God in creating the world, in that he has created it for

¹⁶ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 15 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 73–77.

¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 615-19.

such an excellent use, to accomplish in it so glorious a work. And it shows the wisdom of Divine Providence, that he brings such great good out of such great evil, in making the fall and ruin of mankind, which in itself is so sorrowful and deplorable, an occasion of accomplishing such a glorious work as redemption, and of erecting such a glorious building, whose top should reach unto heaven, and of bringing his elect to a state of such unspeakable happiness.

8. From what has been said, we may see the stability of God's *mercy* and *faithfulness* to his people; how he never forsakes his inheritance, and remembers his covenant to them through all generations.
9. Hence we may learn how *happy* a society the church of Christ is. For all this great work is for them. Christ undertook it for their sakes, and for their sakes he carries it on; it is because he has loved them with an everlasting love.
10. And, lastly, hence all wicked men, all that are in a Christless condition, may see their exceeding misery. You that are such, whoever you are, shall have no part or lot in this matter. You are never the better for any of these things: yea, your guilt is but so much the greater, and the misery you are exposed to so much the more dreadful.