

Of Christ the Mediator (Part 8)

Jn 10:1-18; WCF 8.8

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 21 July 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

We have come to the last paragraph of the WCF's chapter on Christ our Mediator!

And this afternoon, we will attempt to study again what God's Word says about...

- Limited Atonement
- Irresistible Grace
- Perseverance of the Saints

I know: much more can be said about these three points, but I have tried to capture only the highlights of these.

So, here's point 1...

Limited Atonement

WCF 8.8 says, "*To all those for whom Christ purchased redemption, he certainly and effectually applies and communicates it.*"

Did you hear the words, "...all those for whom Christ purchased redemption...?"

Well, what do these words imply?

Don't they imply that Jesus purchased redemption only for some; that He died for the sins of only some people – not for the sins of everyone; yes, that Jesus' cross-death secured only limited atonement – atonement only for God's loved ones?

Well, where did WCF 8.8 get this theology?

Answer: from the Bible and from logic!

You see, in quite a few verses,² the Bible says that, before the creation of the world, God chose for himself loved ones; God *predestined* those whom He would save after Adam & Eve's Fall.

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. I (chapters 1-8 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² See e.g. Acts 13:48 ***And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.***

Also cf. Rm 8:29-30 ***For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*** ³⁰ ***And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.***

Also cf. God's electing sovereignty when He chose Jacob but not Esau – and even before the two were born (Rm 9:10-13): ***And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,*** ¹¹ ***though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—*** ¹² ***she was told, "The older will serve the younger."*** ¹³ ***As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."***

Also cf. Eph 1:4-6, ... ***In love*** ⁵ ***he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,*** ⁶ ***to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved*** (Emphasis mine).

And so, does it then not make sense that Jesus the Saviour would die for those whom God had chosen? I mean, why would He die and work salvation for those whom God had *not* chosen? After all does not God *Triune* work in perfect agreement so that those whom the *Father* had chosen, for the exact same group the *Son* came & died, and for the same chosen the Holy Spirit comes and applies salvation to their hearts?

See? It's logic!

You say, "But is there a Bible verse that clearly states that Jesus' atonement was/is only for the elect (His loved ones)?"

Yes, there is – in our NT passage, Jn 10:1-15, our Lord speaks in parable language and says that He is the Good Shepherd who leads His sheep into the fold. He says that He calls His sheep *by name* and that they *know His voice*.³

See Jesus' close relationship with His loved ones?

Well, a few verses further down (and still in the same passage [Jn 10:14-15]),⁴ our Lord says again that *He knows His sheep and they know Him*. And then He adds that *He lays down His life for the sheep* – i.e. for the sheep whom He has called by name and who know His voice, which means *His* sheep – not all sheep!

See? Christ Himself says that He lays down His life only for His sheep – those whom He calls by name; yes, those who know His voice?

My brother & sister (and dear children), is it now a surprise that, when our Lord prays to the Father (in Jn 17), we hear Him say that He prays only for those whom the Father has given Him? Here are Jesus' words (Jn 17:9): "***I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom You have given me, for they are Yours.***" Christ prays for them only, for He died for them only!

Well, here is a wonderful thing! You see, you might ask, "Am I included?" "Am I one of God's elect – one of His loved ones whom He chose before the world began?"

Well, let's answer it this way: If you have received God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ, as your Lord and Saviour – if you love Him and have a personal relationship with Him – then you have all the reason to believe that you do belong to this group; the group of God's loved ones.

Here's a question, though:

Can you now boast about your election, like the Pharisee in the parable of the *Pharisee and Tax Collector* boasted – and even in great assumption?

No! As the Apostle Paul says, there is no room/place for boasting about being right with God!⁵

No, there's just awe! Yes, you just stand in awe that even *you* have been chosen to belong to God! Indeed, it's in sheer awe and amazement that you & I are able to say with the

³ Cf. Jn 10:1-4 "***Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.***"

⁴ Jn 10:14-15 ***I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.***

⁵ Cf. Rm 3:27-28, ***Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law*** (Emphasis mine).

Apostle John, “*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*”⁶

How absolutely ugly and out of place would it be to boast about your salvation!

You see, I ask again (as I once asked before), “Can the person who escaped a plane crash, because, at the last minute (and without his doing), the airline had put him on another plane – can such person’s reaction now be that of boasting against the people who died in the plane in which he was supposed to be?” “Can he boast in himself that it was given him to live?”

No! That would be absolutely out of place!

So, what should the elect of God say that they have not been left in damnation but chosen for eternal life?

Well, wouldn’t it be best if they’d said in awe, “O God, I’m absolutely humbled and in awe that You chose even me, as I realise that there may be many who are not in that group!”? “I’m stunned and just still, knowing that you are God⁷ and Sovereign Lord who has done as it pleases You!”

My brother & sister, if there is such a thing as limited atonement – and, as we have seen, there definitely is – what then about evangelism and missionary work?

You see, long ago I had Pentecostal friends. They were missionaries, and they just couldn’t/wouldn’t take what the Bible says on predestination, election and limited atonement, for their question was, “How can we then go into the mission field and tell people that Jesus has died for their sins?”

See? My friends got upset when they heard that Christ did not die for everyone!

Well, the answer to their question is: Look at the Apostle Paul who was the greatest believer in predestination and limited atonement! And you know what? Apart from Christ, the very same Paul was also the greatest missionary!

And here is how Paul brought the Gospel:

He simply told Jews and Gentiles everywhere that God had finally sent the Saviour, Jesus Christ, and that *all who believe in Him* would be saved!⁸

And you & I could do the same when we pray for those who have not (not yet) received Jesus as their Saviour. And, I agree with RC Sproul that our prayer should be along these lines, “Lord, if this person is one of Your elect, please bring him to Yourself now!”⁹

Does such a prayer cause the *election* of that person?

No, such prayer is simply a means of grace which God may use to bring that person’s election to *realisation*!

So far re Point 1: “Limited Atonement.”

Here is point 2...

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Jn 3:1). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁷ Cf. Ps 46:10, “**Be still and know that I am God!**”

⁸ Cf. e.g., Paul’s preaching in Antioch in Pisidia, in Acts 13, especially verses 38-39, “**Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹ and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses**” (Emphasis mine).

Also cf. Acts 17:31 where the only thing Paul said to the Athenians re Christ was, that God “**has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.**”

⁹ Sproul (ibid:279)

Irresistible Grace

WCF 8.8 says, “To all those for whom Christ purchased redemption, he certainly and effectually applies and communicates it... He effectually persuades them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governs their hearts by his Word and Spirit...”

Did you hear the words, “...effectually applying and communicating redemption”? And did you also hear the words, “...He effectually persuades them by his Spirit to believe and obey... ”?

You ask, “But how did the Westminster Assembly know that those whom the Father had chosen and for whom the Son came and died – that the Holy Spirit would *without failing, effectually apply salvation* to their hearts & lives?”

Well, what the Westminster Assembly said, they got from several verses of Scripture!

Here’s the first one: Rm 8:29-30, “***For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*** ³⁰ ***And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.***”

My brother & sister, see? God’s effectual persuading of His loved ones comes when, after He had *foreknown* and *predestined* them, He, in time, comes and *calls* them and *justifies* them (makes them right with Him)...!

You ask, “But this calling of His elect – how does God effectually do that?”

Well, our Lord Jesus has given us the answer in Jn 6:44.

You see, Jesus says (in Jn 6:44), “***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him....***”

What a beautiful & powerful word – the word “draws!”

Some have tried to say that this word does not mean *drawing*, but rather *wooing*,¹⁰ i.e. like a young man *woos* (or *wins over* the heart of) a young woman so that she willingly, gladly & joyfully surrenders herself to him!

Now, on the one hand, one should admit: this is indeed a beautiful picture, and, to some degree, it does illustrate the way in which God softens the hearts of His elect so that they are won over by the power of God!

After all, what exactly is it that a young man does to win over the heart of a young lady?

Well, this is not easy to pinpoint exactly. Yet, I’m sure that one would not be far off if one were to say, “It is by his kind words to her – and by his caring & self-sacrificial deeds for her – and simply by who he is, that he wins her heart over!”

And one could say, “Well, that’s also – just on a much more powerful level – how God does it, i.e. through His Word; through His love-deeds for you & me – best of all: His love for us most clearly expressed on the cross.” And, indeed, such great love *will* move the hearts of God’s elect to receive Christ as their Lord & Saviour!

But, my brother & sister, this is where the young-man-young-lady illustration reaches its limit, for, you see, despite a young man’s kind words & deeds, all his efforts might still fail so that he will not be successful in winning her heart!

But *God’s drawing* of His elect to Christ never fails – it’s (as WCF 8.8 says) only ever *effectual*! And it’s irresistible!! God’s elect won’t be able to resist this powerful in-working of the Holy Spirit!

You see, the Greek word for “draws” in v.44 describes a very powerful action!¹¹ It’s not merely describing a *wooing* action – or a *pleading* action!

¹⁰ Cf. the comical incident explained and corrected by SPROUL, R.C. 2006. What is Reformed Theology?

Understanding the basics. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books. p.154-155.

¹¹ ἐλκύση Aorist Active Subjunctive of ἔλκω to pull or drag, requiring force because of the inertia of the object being dragged—‘to pull, to drag, to draw’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1).

It means to powerfully “draw” or even “drag!” Indeed, this same word is used in Jn 21:6 where we read in how the disciples were not able to *draw/drag/haul* in a net because it was overloaded with fish.

The same word is again used in Acts 21:30 where we read how some real angry Jews grabbed Paul in the temple area and *dragged* him out.

Indeed, God’s pull on the minds & hearts of His elect whom He *draws* to Christ, is powerful and will never fail in its purpose!

Those whom *God has decided* to call to Himself through Jesus Christ, He *will* call – and *effectually & irresistibly* so!

How does He do it?

The WCF 8.8 says, “...by His Word and Spirit!” After all, Rm 8:14 says, “***For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.***”¹²

And, in Jn 17:17, our Lord Jesus refers to the work of both the Holy Spirit and the Word when He prays, “***Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.***”

Surely, through His Holy Spirit, God works the right place and time – the right circumstances!

And the Spirit and the Word (spoken or written) work together to perform that strong pull on the heart of God’s elect – yes, to spiritually “drag” (“haul in”) their hearts for Christ!

So, dear Wainui member, do you want the Holy Spirit to work in your heart? Well, then immerse yourself in God’s Word! Young person (children), give time to God! Read your Bible!!

Well, so far re Point 2: “Irresistible Grace.”

Here’s the last point...

Perseverance of the Saints

My brother & sister, you remember the so-called Five Points of Calvinism. It goes by the acronym T.U.L.I.P.

And you will remember that the last letter in TULIP stands for *Perseverance of the Saints!*

But, here is something even better...

You see, some have suggested (and correctly so), that the P in TULIP rather stands for the *Preservation* of the Faith of the Saints, for, after all, is it not so that the saints will only *persevere* as long as God *preserves* their faith?

Well, WCF 8.8 is in sync with this suggestion – it puts the emphasis on the comforting fact that God will *preserve* His saints in their faith!

Look, is that not why WCF 8.8 says, “*He overcomes all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom in such a manner, and by such ways, as are most agreeable to his wonderful and unsearchable administration.*”

God overcomes all the enemies of His saints by *His wonderful and unsearchable administration!*

You ask, “Where does the Bible say that God will preserve the faith of His saints – that He will bring them to the end-stage of their salvation?”

Well, there are many such verses.

Here is one: Paul says (in Phil 1:6), “***And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.***”

¹² For the work of the Spirit, working through the Gospel/word, cf. also Rm 15:18-19, ***For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ...***

Here's another: Our Lord Himself says (in Jn 6:44), "***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.***"¹³

How does God preserve His loved ones?

Well, we can't give a complete answer. That's why WCF 8.8 says, God preserves His saints by His "*wonderful and unsearchable administration.*"

However, WCF 8.8 also reminds us of this Biblical truth, i.e. that Christ's *intercession* for the saints is one very important way by which God preserves our faith!

Well, here's an example of Christ's intercession for His saints....

You see, compare Judas' betrayal¹⁴ of Jesus with Peter's denial¹⁵ of Jesus.

How did our Lord deal with Judas? How did He deal with Peter?

Well, when Judas asked, "Is it I?" Jesus replied, "You have said it" (Mt 26:25). Then Jesus told him, "What you do, do quickly!" (Jn 13:27). Then Christ dismissed Judas into the night!

And we know what happened to Judas. He was the son of perdition!¹⁶ He was not of God's elect.

And what did our Lord do with *Peter* who disgracefully denied Jesus?

Well, for a starter: Jesus had forewarned Peter that he would deny his Lord! And Peter insisted that it would never happen!¹⁷

Then Peter denied Christ!

And what did our Lord say to Peter even before Peter denied Him?

Jesus said (in Lk 22:31-32), "***Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.***"¹⁸

¹³ Emphasis mine

Also cf. Rm 8:30-31 where, in the order of salvation, the sure promise is that those whom God has foreknown, predestined, called and justified, He will surely also glorify! In fact, so sure is it that He will glorify them that this verb is put in the past tense: "***For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified***" (Emphasis mine).

Also cf. Heb 12:1-2 which talks of Christ as the "Author and Perfecter of our faith: "***Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God***" (Emphasis mine).

¹⁴ In Mt 26:16, the Greek uses the word *paradidōmi* (παράδωμι) to deliver a person into the control of someone else, involving either the handing over of a presumably guilty person for punishment by authorities or the handing over of an individual to an enemy who will presumably take undue advantage of the victim—'to hand over, to turn over to, to betray' (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 484). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁵ In Mt 26:34, the Greek uses the word *aparnéomai* (ἀπαρνέομαι) to say that one does not know about or is in any way related to a person or event—'to deny' (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 419). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁶ Cf. Jn 17:12, where the Greek word *apoleia* (ἀπώλεια), "destruction, perdition" is used.

¹⁷ Cf. Mt 26:34-35, ***Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."***³⁵ ***Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.***

¹⁸ Cf. Lk 22:31-34, "***Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your***

My brother & sister, here is the most comforting assurance, i.e. that, if you are in Christ, He intercedes for you with the Father that your faith may not fail – that you will *persevere* while God *preserves*; that you *will* come to the end-stage of your salvation, which is glorification!

Children (and young people), I pray that, after all the years of hearing God's word and reading your Bible, you will receive Jesus as your Saviour & Lord. And that you will take comfort in the sure promise that, once you are His, He *will* preserve your faith as you persevere through good and tough days!

AMEN (2,613 words excluding footnotes)

brothers.”³³ Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”³⁴ Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”