

Studies in the Westminster Confession of Faith

Newtownabbey Free Presbyterian Church Rev Brian McClung 23rd October 2013 Chapter 3 Part 6

1 Peter 1:2

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

VI. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

Proof Texts: *1 Peter 1:2; Ephesians 1:4,5; 2:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:9,10; Titus 2:14; Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:5; John 17:9; Romans 8:28 to the end; John 6:64,65; John 10:26; John 8:47; 1 John 2:19.*

Section six of this third chapter of the Confession of Faith teaches the following five propositions:

1. God has appointed the means as well as the end by which the elect will be brought to glory.
2. That means will be through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.
3. That means will be through the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.
4. Each person of the Trinity has a specific part in the work of saving sinners.
5. None but the elect are redeemed by Christ and called by the Spirit.

1. God has appointed the means as well as the end by which the elect will be brought to glory. God is a God of means. He accomplishes His eternal purposes in His works of creation and providence. In the outworking of both He employs means to bring about the ends decreed.

This is certainly the case with respect to salvation. God predestinates sinners to salvation: *through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, 2 Thess 2:13; to the praise of the glory of his grace, Eph 1:6.* The praise of His glorious grace is the ultimate end. To bring that about He ordains that sinners will be saved through the work of Spirit and belief of the truth.

God does not ordain the means that will bring about certain ends and then abandon those means and accomplish the end in some other way. That would make the Lord a God of disorder. This is an important point generally with respect to spiritual things and particularly with respect to the matter of souls being saved.

Rest assured there will never be the accomplishing of anything in our spiritual lives without there first being the employment of the means God has ordained. That which stands true in the physical and temporal realm also stands true in the spiritual realm. We have come to this meeting this evening by employing the use of means. The ethic of work and labour needed to bring about an end is a fundamental law of the natural world. God has also established similar laws in the spiritual realm. They are not going to be turned on their head by God for anyone. God has ordained that the world will proceed according to certain laws which He ordained in creation. He has acted in the same manner with respect to the spiritual world.

It was only in very exceptional cases that those laws were suspended by God and He worked directly to accomplish something. I am referring to sparse use of miracles in Old Testament & New Testament. It is not the general rule. He only does so in very limited circumstances.

Souls will never come to an experience of God's grace, nor grow in grace without the use of the means God has ordained to bring that end about. Sometimes we think that God should overturn His own laws. There are times when we express a desire for some end to be accomplished but we have never sufficiently employed the means to bring that end about. Then we wonder why God has not done something. Neglect of God's ordained means will rob us of the end desired. For example:

- [1] If we do not preach the Gospel souls will not be saved.
- [2] If we do not stand for God the cause of God will be lost in our nation.
- [3] If we do not persist in pray answers to prayer will never come.
- [4] If we do not attend the means of grace, which are the reading & preaching of the word and the sacraments,

we will never grow in grace.

[5] If we do not forsake sin and seek after holiness we will never overcome temptation.

In the specific matter of salvation God will not save souls but by the means appointed. That is why the Scriptures needed to be translated and given to people. That is why we must evangelise and preach the gospel to the needy and take the gospel to the ends of the earth. This is the Christian's chief calling in life.

We are never to think that because we believe in election and predestination etc that somehow that justifies and excuses spiritual laziness, either regarding our own walk with God or the extension of Christ's kingdom. It most certainly does not! We don't live by that rule in other realms of life. God's sovereign purpose overrules in all areas of life. Yet we know that the business man who doesn't practice the principles of sound finance will bankrupt his business. The Christian who doesn't employ the divinely ordained means that God has given will soon be a bankrupt backslidden Christian.

2. That means will be through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. God's elect will be redeemed by Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. The words 'atonement' or 'atoned' do not appear in the WCF. The Westminster divines used the work 'redemption' instead. In scripture the word 'redemption' is employed in two ways, first to denote the payment of a ransom, cf. *Eph 1:7: In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;* and second to indicate actual deliverance from sin and its penal consequences, *Rom 8:23: And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.* Hence we can speak of 'Redemption by Price' and 'Redemption by Power'. The Westminster divines use the term 'redemption' in its first and primary sense, ie redemption by price, in the sense of atonement. This explains the absence of the word 'atonement' and its associate terms from the WCF.

The subject of Christ's redeeming atoning work will be visited again in chapter eight of the WCF.

3. That means will be through the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. The benefits of Christ's redemption will be effectually applied through the work of the Holy Spirit, to all those who were chosen of God: *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out, John 6:37.*

The elect are all in due time, by the power of the Spirit, effectually called unto faith in Christ. They are all justified, adopted, sanctified, and shall be enabled to persevere in grace unto the end, and at length their salvation shall be consummated in glory, *Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified, Rom 8:30.* These individuals topics are also revisited elsewhere in the WCF.

4. Each person of the Trinity has a specific part in the work of saving sinners. The work of the Trinity is very visible in matter of salvation. The WCF in agreement with the Scriptures, represents each of the divine persons as performing a distinct and separate part in the glorious work of human redemption. The three divine persons are to be viewed acting harmoniously in counsel and operation. God the Father chose a definite number of sinners and ordained them unto eternal life; the Eternal Son laid down His life for those who were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, and obtained for them eternal redemption. The Holy Spirit applies this redemption to each one in due season. Here all is perfect harmony. The Son fulfills the will of the Father, and the Spirit's work is in entire accordance with the purpose of the Father and the mediation of the Son.

5. None but the elect are redeemed by Christ and called by the Spirit. The closing sentence of this section is the negative of what is already stated. However, it is restated in this way to emphasis the doctrine of particular redemption or limited atonement. Christ died only for the elect and for no one else. The Spirit will only effectually call the elect and no one else to salvation.

According to the scheme of those who believe different in general redemption, or of universal atonement, the harmony of the three divine persons would be utterly destroyed. The Son would shed His blood for multitudes whom the Father never purposed to save, and the Spirit had neglected to put forth the influence necessary to secure the application of salvation to all for whom Christ died. This is madness!