



THE COVENANTAL INTERCESSION OF CHRIST

ABSTRACT

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them

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Saturday Bible Study

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

This is a study on the Covenantal Intercession of Christ. It is a continuation of the previous study on the Covenantal Satisfaction of Christ because the Intercession of Christ is a continuation of the Satisfaction of Christ. That's not to say that the Intercession is a continuation of the sufferings of Christ in the making of the Satisfaction, for "this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12); rather the Satisfaction and the Intercession are so intimately joined that they are like opposite sides of the same coin of the unified work of the High Priest. They are distinct – as Hebrew 10:12 makes clear that the Satisfaction was completed once and for all upon the cross – but the Intercession of Christ is the ongoing aspect of the work of the High Priest. Upon His resurrection and ascension, the Scripture says that the Lord Jesus sat down on the right hand of God. Zechariah had prophesied that "the man whose name is The BRANCH shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne" (Zech 6:11,12) and we are left in no doubt as to the identity of this glorious High Priest on the throne. Hebrews 8:1 declares that "we have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."

And He continues forever in that role – The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). He who is seated with His Father on His throne intercedes with Him for every good gift and every perfect gift which cometh down to us from the Father of lights (James 1:17).

There is an organic connection between the Satisfaction and the Intercession which is most clearly seen when both alike are viewed from within the framework of the Covenant. And so, to refresh our minds as to the key aspects of the Covenantal Satisfaction of Christ, I will give a very brief review.

The Covenant of Works is the all-encompassing framework in which the Holy God condescends to relate to man. God created man and imposed His holy and good commandments under the threat of eternal separation from all blessedness in God and under promise of eternal union with all the blessedness of God in God. The covenant was broken by Adam – he and all his posterity by natural generation became children of wrath, separated from God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness – thoroughly corrupted in mind, affections and will and actually under condemnation and liable to eternal separation from God in hell.

But God graciously set forth Christ to be the Mediator of the New Covenant, to make a complete satisfaction of the entire Covenant of Works for us. He was delivered up for our offenses and raised for our justification (Rom 4:25). Simply put, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1) while the wrath of God remains on him who yet remains outside of Christ (John 3:18). His perfect satisfaction of the Covenant is freely reckoned, credited, accounted to each person in union with Him as their very own, as He is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). Outside of Christ, the Covenant of Works holds sway upon each individual by the inexorable law of sin and death. In that covenant, the soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4). But Christ gave His life a ransom for many and, in Him, there is marvelous grace abounding to the chief of sinners, a grace that is greater than all our sins. As sin reigns unto death outside of Christ, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Isaiah wrote these beautiful words of Him: "a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isaiah 32:2) This is a picture of the grace found in

Christ against the backdrop of the devastation of the covenant of works. The dry and weary land is the reality outside of Christ. There is no life outside of Him -- but Christ is an oasis of life set in the barren wilderness and a covert from the consuming fire of God's terrifying wrath.

And so, Christ has accomplished an eternal redemption. That redemption is in Him. More precisely, it is Christ Himself who is the redemption – it is He who is set forth in the gospel as the only way to God, as our Righteousness, our Propitiation, our Redemption. Truly, as Calvin wrote – “so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us” [14]. And though the gospel cry go out, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1), yet the situation is as described in the Parable of the Marriage Feast in Matthew 22 where the King said, “Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready” (v.4). But no one would come! “they made light of it, and went their ways” (v.5). They “took his servants, and treated them spitefully, and killed them” (v.6). Here is the soul-searching situation of the Kingdom of God – none will come – Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

I love these words of Bunyan, “hence I infer that the souls saved by Christ are in themselves in a most deplorable condition. Oh, what ado, as I may say, is here before one sinner can be eternally saved! Christ must die; but that is not all; the Spirit of grace must be given to us; but that is not all;- but Christ must also ever live to make intercession for us. And as he doth this for all, so he doth it for each one.” [5] And so, to overcome our most deplorable condition, and to guarantee the successful salvation of the people given to Him by the Father, Christ continues the Priestly work begun at the Incarnation in order to apply the accomplished work of redemption to the elect as the Author and Finisher of our faith – *wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

1. The Unity of the Work of High Priest

- a. Let's start with a look at the work of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, as described in Lev 16.

He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these [are] holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and [so] put them on. (Leviticus 16:4)

- b. The holy garments of pure white linen were only worn by Aaron when performing the highest act of expiation under the Old Testament. They represent, as it seems to me, the holiness and glory of the true High Priest who was holy, innocent, unspotted, and separate from sinners. Yet, in comparison with the normal High Priestly garments worn for the morning and evening sacrifices, these are the very expression of humility – no ornaments, no cunning work, no colors, nothing to catch the eye.
- c. As the High Priest must change into these garments from his regular garments, and then back again, so Christ laid aside His glory in heaven, came to earth in great humility – He was in the form of God but made Himself of no reputation (Phil 2:6-7)
 - i. In these humble holy garments, the High Priest not only made sacrifice but was to take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and both hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil:

And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: (Leviticus 16:12-13).

- ii. The cloud of incense is closely connected with prayer, as we have in Revelation 8:3, an “angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne” (Rev 8:3). The need for a cloud of incense to cover the mercy seat was symbolic of the need of an all-encompassing intercession to the Most Holy One, that it would please God to accept the sacrifice for sin so that His holy wrath might not break out against the sinner, but that He might graciously accept the blood of the sin-offering in exchange for the souls of them for whom it was presented. Aaron was to bring both hands full of incense that he die not – without the intercession, all is lost.
- iii. And so, this Jesus, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, He was heard because of His godly fear (Heb 5:7).

And Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy [place], and shall leave them there: And he shall wash his flesh with water in the holy place, and put on his garments, and come forth, and offer his burnt offering, and the burnt offering of the people, and make an atonement for himself, and for the people. (Leviticus 16:23-24)

- iv. In these verses, Aaron is instructed to take off the linen garments and to put on his garments, that is, the regular High Priestly garments as described in Exodus 28. In this garment, the High Priest had an onyx stone on each shoulder on which were engraved the names of the children of Israel (v.9). And his breastplate contains four rows of three stones upon which are engraved the names of the twelve tribes. Aaron bore the children of Israel on his shoulders and upon his heart when he made sacrifice and when he went in before the Lord. Here the High Priest represented the people before God, as Advocate of the people with the blood of the sacrifice, bringing them to God’s so as to obtain the blessing of God. Here the intercession is made in terms of the representative union for the people of God.
- v. And so, the close connection between the atonement and the intercession appears in both phases of the work of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement – in His state of humiliation he must have both hands full of incense to be able to enter the Holy Place without dying. When he puts off the linen garments and puts on the glorious garments, He bears the names of God’s people on his shoulders and on his heart as he enters into the holy place. But Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: (Heb 9:24). He needeth not to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself (Heb 7:27). Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Heb 9:12). *Wherefore he*

is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb 7:25).

- d. The close connection between the Satisfaction and the Intercession is made in several places of Scripture --

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)

- i. He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. Interestingly, the same Hebrew word here rendered “made intercession” is rendered “hath laid” in verse 6, “the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The root meaning is “to cause to reach” – “our iniquity was caused to come upon Him” and “His plea on our behalf is cause to reach the Father.” The Servant is thus a true Mediator, uniting the two parties. The Father reaches out to place our iniquities on the Son and the Son bears those iniquities. On this basis, the Son reaches out to the Father to obtain the procured blessing. [7]
- ii. We see this intercession immediately on the cross, “Father, forgive them. They know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), which was needful to utter, lest the Father strike the earth for crucifying the Holy One of God.
- iii. And we see the intercession continue in the life of the church, according to the promise of the Father given to the Son in the Psalm, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psalm 2:8).
- iv. And so, because he poured out His soul unto death and bore the sin of many, *therefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Rom 8:34)

- i. Here the comfort and security of the saints is shown to be in Christ alone – our security is grounded in His death for the removal of our guilt, in the resurrection for our justification, and in His intercession “for us” for our salvation to the uttermost.
- ii. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, [how] much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life? (Rom 5:10) His death was a one-time event which had the efficacious virtue to reconcile us to God. How much more shall we be saved to the uttermost by His life, who ever lives to make intercession for us?
- iii. We see here the Priestly work as a whole piece of cloth. His intercession is of the same material as the death on the cross. The intercession of Christ is grounded in the death of Christ. Redemption is first accomplished and then applied.

If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1-2).

- i. Here again we see the close connection of the satisfaction of Christ and the intercession. We have an advocate with the Father, but not just any advocate but one who is righteous and the propitiation for our sins.
- ii. Our Advocate is both righteous and is a Propitiation. He is both Priest and Offering, He is the one who made the full and perfect offering of Himself as the perfect Satisfaction – who else could be a better Advocate than the one who is the perfect Propitiation. Who else could be an Advocate with the Father? He is the best, the perfect, the only possible Advocate, the only Mediator between God and man, because no one else can ever propitiate the Father's wrath.
- iii. For such a high priest became us, one who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; **Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.** (Hebrews 7:26,25)

2. Examples of the Intercessory Work

- a. And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired [to have] you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. (Luke 22:31-32 KJV)
 - i. It would be interesting to know how Peter conceived of Satan when Jesus said to him, "Satan desires to have you, to sift you as wheat." To me, this sounds concerning but perhaps he was over-confident based on his experience and thought "but the demons are subject to us." Certainly he was too confident in himself and placed much confidence in the flesh. Years later, seemingly much humbled, he wrote to warn God's people to "be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8) As one who had been devoured, these are the words of a man who has learned his utter dependence on the intercession of Christ.
 - ii. Jesus said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." What gracious words! And with Peter, Satan has desired to have you, dear child of God. He doesn't know whether you are elect or not – he cannot read the Lamb's book of life -- he would sift you as wheat as the Lord allows Him. But the Lord intercedes for all His children, that their faith fail not. Shall angels or principalities or powers separate us from the love of God? No, it is Christ that died, who is risen again, who is seated at the right hand of God, who ever liveth to make intercession for us.
 - iii. Bunyan gives us a delightful picture in Pilgrim's Progress. He wrote, – Then I saw in my dream, that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand and led him into a place where there was a fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter. Then said Christian, "What means this?" The Interpreter answered, "This fire is the work of God that is wrought in the heart: he that casts water upon it to extinguish and put it out, is the devil; but, in that thou seest the fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that." So then he led him about to the other side of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast, but secretly,

into the fire. Then said Christian, "What means this?" The Interpreter answered, "This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of His grace, helps the work already begun in the heart; by the means of which notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of His people prove gracious still. And in that thou sawest that the man stood behind the wall to keep up the fire; this is to teach thee, that it is hard for the tempted to see how this work of grace is kept alive in the soul." [6]

b. The High Priestly prayer of John 17

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

- i. When Jesus was standing before Lazarus' tomb, he said to His Father, "I know that You always hear Me" (John 11:42) and in 1 John we read that "if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:15) and so we have to believe that Jesus' intercession is effectual.
- ii. Here we notice
 1. that Christ is making intercession to the Father.
 2. that those for whom Jesus prayed are "those whom thou hast given me," – these are the sheep, the elect of God, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.
 - a. In verse 9, we see that He does not pray for the world but for those who will come to the Father by Him. He does not pray in general for all people that some might come. His prayers are effectual -- He prays for specific ones and they come by the irresistible grace of the Spirit whom He sends – the Father always hears Him.
 - b. In John 10, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep" (John 10:14).
 3. what he prayed for these – that they might be with Him and behold His glory. This is the Bride of Christ – He will not allow one to go missing
- iii. Finally, please notice the majestic form of the language: "Father, I will ..." which expresses a fixed and definite intention. This is striking coming from the Son to the Father. This same word is used of the wind which "bloweth where it listeth" (John 3:8), the Son who "quickeneth whom he will" (John 5:21), etc. John uses this word to express a firm intention which is what makes it so striking as a form of intercession and gives us great confidence.
- iv. In a sense, these words are the last will and testament of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Successful Savior, He declares His will and then seals it with His death -- for where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator (Heb 9:16). And so the death of the Testator was required. But now, He is raised from the dead and ever lives to make intercession for His people as the Advocate of His people. And we know that the Father always hears Him and His requests are always granted. Jesus Christ is the successful Savior who says to the

Father “I will that these be with Me where I am and behold My glory.”

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

- c. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; (John 14:16)
 - i. Here the Lord refers to the Promise of the Covenant which He Himself earned and acquired by virtue of His perfect covenantal satisfaction. The promise to Abraham was originally expressed in terms of the land but the promise of the Spirit is implicit in the covenant, as Paul writes:
 - 1. That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:14)
 - ii. And so, we have irrefutable proof of the successful satisfaction and intercession of Christ in the giving of the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. (Acts 2:33)
 - 2. In the Covenantal Satisfaction of Christ, we have clearly revealed the Second Person of the Trinity. In the Covenantal Intercession of Christ, the main procurement for His people is the glorious promise of the covenant – the Holy Spirit, the glorious third Person of the Trinity.

3. Uses of the Doctrine

- a. Encouragement to Come unto God by Jesus Christ
 - i. There are those who come unto God, but not by Jesus Christ; and these are not included in the covenant of grace but the covenant of works. They who will not come to God by Christ, who will not have Christ as their Lord, will not have Him as their Advocate on that day and will be left to miserably plead their own cause before the throne.
 - ii. As there are some who come to God, but not by Christ, so there are some who come to Christ, but not to God by him: these are the ones who, hearing that Christ is a Savior, come to him for pardon, but cannot abide to come to God by him, for that he is holy, and so will not abide their corruption, and will demand holiness of heart and life. Please pay attention to this. There are a great many who would like to be saved by Christ, but who do not want to come to God through him. [5]
 - iii. But those who come to God by Jesus Christ, He is able to save to the uttermost. He is the Successful Savior. For “this is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day (John 6:39) and he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, because He ever lives to make intercession for them.
- b. Of Comfort for the Believer
 - i. For those who groan under the oppression of sin, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who know yourselves to be wretched, poor, blind and naked – struggling with unbelief and indwelling sin ... You who say, Lord, I believe, help

my unbelief... Here is blessed comfort. Look to Christ! He *is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

- ii. Charles Wesley wrote these excellent words in the great hymn,

Arise, my soul, arise,
shake off your guilty fears;
the bleeding Sacrifice
in my behalf appears:
before the throne my Surety stands,
before the throne my Surety stands,
my name is written on his hands. [13]

- iii. Ralph Erskine wrote these good and comforting words.

This Advocate has much to say,
His clients need not fear;
For God the Father hears him aye,
Thy Husband hath his ear.
A cause failed never in his hand,
So strong his pleading is;
His Father grants his Whole demand,
Thy Husband's will is his. [12]

- c. Finally, the intercession of Christ renders much support in prayer. If one considers and believes that every prayer, every sigh, and the lifting up of the soul heavenward for God's Spirit and grace is a fruit of His intercession, whereby each believer receives the Holy Spirit (John 14:16); that He brings every motion of the soul and the expression of one's desires before the throne, presents it to His Father, and that all this transpires in His Name, in reference to His merits and by His Spirit; that on the basis of His merits these prayers can rightfully be heard, and furthermore that He makes their desires His own, adding His incense to them, thus making their prayer pleasing to Him;-- if all this is considered and believed, this will greatly stimulate prayer. It will cause us to pray attentively, fervently, and boldly. It yields confidence that our prayer, however feeble, is pleasing, is received, and will be heard. Yes, when we are not able to pray, be it due to a negative spiritual frame, or in the hour of death, and contemplate and believe that the Lord Jesus prays for us even then and remains active as the faithful Intercessor who will not neglect our affairs, but will bring them to a certain conclusion, not resting until He has brought us to Himself—this yields much strength, causing us to surrender ourselves in quiet confidence into His hands. Due to His intercession we will be able to say calmly and confidently, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me" (Ps 138:8). [4]

And so, finally the end of all this is shown in Revelation 5, where in a hymn to Christ it reads, "for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). Here we are told of the results of His intercession – a great multitude, which no man could number all clothed with white robes (Rev 7:9) of which it was said, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11) -- He suffered once for sins, bled and died, but now lives,

that he might bring us to God (1 Pet 3:18). He said to the Father, “Father, I will that those you have given me be with me where I am to see My glory” and this is guaranteed because *he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* (Hebrews 7:25)

Amen.

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