

**CHRIST THE STARTING POINT**  
**3. OLD TESTAMENT SALVATION**  
**1 TIMOTHY 2:5**

**INTRODUCTION**

I recently heard a sermon in which the preacher said, “No Old Testament saint was born again.” Later on, the same preacher asserted that Old Testament saints were saved by a mixture of “faith and works”. He then denied that any Old Testament saint was saved through Christ, as “Christ hadn’t even died yet.”

The one benefit of such statements is that they are clear – though as we shall see they are clearly wrong. However, it is to be feared that many Christians do hold these erroneous views – though perhaps much less clearly and perhaps not so consciously.

It is the purpose of this lecture to remove this confusion and to establish that Old Testament saints were saved by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. Or, to put it another way, that Old Testament saints were saved in the same way as New Testament saints. Or to put it even more bluntly – the way of salvation has been, is, and ever will be the same for all.

There are a number of New Testament verses which might establish this. For example Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn.14:6). This did not just begin to be true from Matthew 1:1. It has been true since Genesis 3:15. There has only ever been one way for sinners to approach the Father – through Christ.

Another example is, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). In the previous verses Peter makes clear that the only name which saves is Christ’s. But did this only become true after Christ was named in Matthew 1:25? Well, the fact that the verse just before this quotes an Old Testament verse and relates it to Christ would suggest not. Peter said, “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner” (Ps.118:22; Acts 4:11).

Again, referring to John 17:3, John Calvin said:

Surely, after the fall of the first man no knowledge of God apart from the Mediator has had power unto salvation (Rom.1:16; 1 Cor.1:24). For Christ not only speaks of his own age but comprehends all ages when he says: “This is eternal life, to know the Father to be the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.”<sup>1</sup>

Further examples might be furnished from the lists of Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11. They are set forth as trail-blazing examples of faith for New Testament believers. And remember, this list appears after 10 chapters full of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Their faith was faith in Christ.

In this lecture, however, we would like to consider the text found in 1 Timothy 2:5, “For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin translated by F L Battles, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 341.

We will look at three questions:

1. Did fallen humanity need a mediator in the Old Testament?
2. Did God require a mediator in the Old Testament?
3. Was faith mediator-centred in the Old Testament?

## **QUESTION 1**

### **Did fallen humanity need a mediator in the Old Testament?**

The New Testament clearly reveals not only that there is one mediator between God and man, but that fallen humanity cannot be saved apart from that Mediator. All evangelicals agree on this. However, there is considerable confusion, contradiction, and disagreement when we move into the area of Old Testament salvation.

There is no disagreement that Old Testament characters are in heaven (eg: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob [Mat.8:11], Elijah, Moses [Mat,17:3]). The disagreement is over how they got there.

Many evangelicals seem to think that they got there through a combination of a general faith in God, and trying their best. In other words, no mediator was necessary. If this is true, either one of the following conclusions follow:

#### **1. Old Testament saints were not as sinful as New Testament saints.**

The New Testament tells us that “death passed upon all men for that all have sinned” (Rom.5:12); that all humanity are in a state of enmity against God and cannot submit to the law of God (Rom.8:7); that “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn.3:3); that faith is not something we can manufacture ourselves but rather it “is the gift of God” (Eph.2:8). This is why no one can approach God except through Jesus Christ. In other words, a mediator is necessary in the New Testament

If, as some claim, no mediator is necessary in the Old Testament, then it must be because Old Testament saints were not in such a dreadful spiritual condition.

But, surely no one would attempt to argue that the Old Testament is less damning in its depiction of the universal sinfulness and spiritual deadness of humanity. Even the Old Testament saints lives are painted with very black colours. Verse after verse preaches the reign of death over all (eg: Eccl.7:21; 1 Kings 8:46; Ps.143:2; Job 9:2; 25:4; Dt.27:26).

**Conclusion:** As Old Testament saints and New Testament saints are equally sinful, so they equally needed a mediator to approach God.

#### **2. Old Testament saints were saved in the opposite way to New Testament saints.**

If we accept that Old Testament and New Testament men and women were equally sinful, and equally in need of a mediator, and yet that mediator was not provided for Old Testament folks, then they must have got to heaven by works rather than faith.

Matthew tells us that “many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt.8:11). Are there going to be sitting at that table some who got there by works and others who got there by renouncing their works and putting their faith in a mediator. Are there going to be some at the table who are proud of their works and others who say, “Not of works, lest any man

should boast" (Eph.2:9). Are there going to be some at the table who were saved by the Mediator and others who never knew him? Are there really going to be some who were saved by the blood of bulls and goats others who were saved by the precious blood of Jesus Christ? Of course not.

**Conclusion:** As Old Testament saints and New Testament saints both sit at the same table in the kingdom of heaven, they were equally saved by the same faith in the same Mediator who sits at the Head of that table.

## **QUESTION 2**

### **Did God require a mediator in the Old Testament?**

Perhaps it might be argued that although Old Testament and New Testament people were equally sinful, and that both equally needed a mediator, but that God made a special exception for Old Testament folks until the time of Christ's birth. If this reasoning is right, then one of two possible conclusions must follow:

#### **1. God changed between the Old and New Testaments**

In other words, if sinners did not change between the Old and New Testaments, then God did. As some say, although God insisted on being approached through a mediator in the New Testament, he did not insist on this in the Old.

However, the very last book of the Old Testament, which closes with a prediction of the Sun of righteousness arising with healing in his wings, connects the unchangeability of God with the salvation of sinners: "I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal.3:6). So, if God has not changed, and if He required a mediator in the New Testament, then we must conclude that He required one in the Old Testament also.

#### **2. God was more forgiving in the Old Testament than in the New.**

Some imply or suggest that God was more merciful and more forgiving in the Old Testament than in the New; that God was not so exclusive in his demand for faith, and was not so intolerant of people offering a mixture of faith and works. They say, in other words, that God's love was wider in the Old Testament than under the New!

Surely to state this is to show its absurdity. If the Old Testament trains us to expect anything, and if the New Testament makes any claims, it is that the mercy and love of God is manifested far more widely and magnificently in the New Testament than in the Old.

However, let us pause for a moment or two and consider this oft-made suggestion that God did for a time accept sinners on the basis of their works – their obedience to the moral law. Then we will look at the other frequently heard and related suggestion that God accepted sinners on the basis of faith in a lesser object – the sacrifices of the ceremonial law.

#### ***a. Did God accept on the basis of works – obedience to the moral law?***

When Paul contended with Judaisers who taught that righteousness can be merited by keeping the moral law, he argued that the law was given "because of transgressions" (Gal.3:19), that is, it was given to convict of sin and humble sinners. This has always been

true – in the Old as well as in the New Testament. “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom.3:2).

*b. Did God accept faith in a lesser object – the sacrifices of the ceremonial law?*

Apart from convicting of sin, the law, especially the ceremonial law, was given to show Israel that God required sinners to approach Him through a mediator. It was not given to encourage their faith to rest in the objects which taught them this lesson – the priesthood and the animal sacrifices. Calvin states this graphically:

For what is more vain or absurd than for men to offer a loathsome stench from the fat of cattle in order to reconcile themselves to God? Or to have recourse to the sprinkling of water and blood to cleanse away their filth? In short, the whole cultus of the law, taken literally and not as shadows and figures corresponding to the truth, will be utterly ridiculous...if the forms of the law be separated from its end, one must condemn it as vanity.<sup>2</sup>

The prophets frequently condemned Israel for putting their faith in the sacrifices of the ceremonial system. They were not to be the “end” but the “means to the end” and that end was the Mediator-Messiah, who was the fulfillment or “end” of the law (Mat.5:17-18).

Just as the ceremonies would have provided the people of the Old Covenant with an empty show if the power of Christ's death and resurrection had not been displayed therein; so, if they had not ceased, we would be unable today to discern for what purpose they were established. Consequently Paul, to prove their observance not only superfluous but also harmful, teaches that they are shadows whose substance exists for us in Christ (Col. 2:17)<sup>3</sup>

**Conclusion:** As God did not change between the Testaments, and as God was not more forgiving in the Old Testament than in the New, He has always required humanity to approach Him through His appointed Mediator, typified in the Old Testament sacrifice of animals, and enfleshed in the New Testament sacrifice of Himself. There has been, is, and always will be only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. As Calvin said:

Accordingly, apart from the Mediator, God never showed favor toward the ancient people, nor ever gave hope of grace to them.<sup>4</sup>

### **QUESTION 3**

**Was Old Testament faith merely God-centred, or was it Mediator-centred?**

If fallen humanity always needed a mediator to approach God, and if God always required fallen humanity to approach Him through a mediator, was Old Testament faith placed in God in general or in the Mediator in particular? The answer is really implied in the question and we have already suggested the answer in our previous discussion. However, let us look at this question more directly and in more detail.

In *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, after quoting numerous Old Testament verses referring to the promised Messiah, Calvin said:

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 364.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 342.

From this it is now clear enough that, since God cannot without the Mediator be propitious toward the human race, under the law Christ was always set before the holy fathers as the end to which they should direct their faith...Here I am gathering a few passages of many because I merely want to remind my readers that the hope of all the godly has ever reposed in Christ alone.<sup>5</sup>

We will prove this, firstly, by looking at the language of Old Testament faith, and then, secondly, at the effect of Christ's death on Old Testament saints.

### 1. The language of Old Testament faith

Though Messiah-centred faith is not explicit and patent in Moses' writings, yet the language of the godly who read the books of Moses shows that this Messiah-centred faith was cultivated by these books. We shall look at just a few examples out of many which demonstrate this. And, although the imagery and the terminology used to describe the Messiah differs between the Testaments, both describe the same Messiah's person and work. For example, as Calvin said, "Our Heavenly Father willed that we perceive in David and his descendants the living image of Christ"<sup>6</sup>. Hannah perceived this use of the royal office in Israel long before there even was a King David:

*The LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed [Messiah] (1 Sam.2:10).*

Who can read the Psalms without sensing that David is not singing about himself but rather is using the imagery of his life to set forth the greatest Davidic descendant. Certainly other Psalmists picked up on this (Ps.89:3, 20, 35, 49; 132).

Subsequent prophets also used this language to point Israel to the one signified by it.

*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jer.23:5-6).*

*And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd (Ezek.34:23).*

*And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever (Ezek.37:24-25).*

*Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days (Hosea 3:5)*

Is it, therefore, any wonder that when the Messianic Mediator came in the flesh the people asked, "Is not this the Son of David?" (Mat.12:23); the blind cried, "Thou Son of David,

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 344-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 343.

have mercy on us,” (Mat.9:27); and the children sang, “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Matt.21:9).

Jesus confirmed that Old Testament believers had Messiah-centred faith when he said to his disciples, those of his own day who eagerly and expectantly looked towards Him in faith:

*Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them (Luke 10:23-24).*

## 2. The effect of Christ's death on Old Testament saints

Another proof that Old Testament faith was Mediator-centred rather than just God-centred is the effect of Christ's death on Old Testament saints who had died before his coming. Calvin put it like this:

At the moment of his resurrection, he deemed many of the saints worthy of sharing in his resurrection and let them be seen in the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 27:52-5,1). In this he has given a sure pledge that whatever he did or suffered in acquiring eternal salvation pertains to the believers of the Old Testament as much as to ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

These resurrected Old Testament saints were not “surprised” to see the Messiah when he raised them from the dead. He was not unknown to them. They had believed on Him while alive on earth. They had communed with him when glorified in heaven. And now they received an early taster of the resurrection purchased by His person and work.

**Conclusion:** There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, the same, yesterday, today and forever (Heb.13:8). The Old Testament saints were no less saved, no less regenerate, no less justified, no less accepted, no less Christ-centred than New Testament believers.

### PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

- No Old Testament saint was ever saved by morality, or by ceremony, or by theism – a general faith in God – or by any combination of them.
- Every Old Testament saint was saved through faith alone in the one and only Mediator between God and man.
- The Mediator was set forth in the Old Testament using categories and concepts with which Old Testament believers were familiar.

### APPLICATION

#### 1. Relation

He is **the man** Christ Jesus. He came to be our relative and so relate to us. He sympathises, listens, cares, and understands. Let us pour out our hearts to him and remember that “the heart of a brother beats on the throne of the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 449.

universe.”

## 2. Representation

As mediator Christ stands in the great chasm between God and man, the holy and the unholy and represents the interests of both. He is qualified by his relation to both parties – God and man – and has demonstrated his concern for the glory of good of both. Let us put our faith in him as he is set before us so clearly in the Gospel.

## 3. Redemption

He is a successful Mediator. The blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin but his blood can and does. “And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb.10:12-13). Don’t make the mistake of many in the Old Testament who put their trust in morality and ceremony, but believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

## 4. Rejection

A Mediator whose mediation is rejected leaves the offending person open the full severity of the law. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation” (Heb.2:3).