

The Exercise of the Mediatorial Office of Christ in Heaven

by John Owen

The sermon explores the mediatorial office of Christ in heaven, where he represents the church before God, intercedes on their behalf, and provides atonement and protection.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:14

Topics: "Mediatorial Office of Christ", "Communion of Saints"

Description

John Owen emphasizes the mediatorial office of Christ in heaven, illustrating that Christ's role is not merely one of glory but also of active ministry on behalf of the church. He serves as King, Priest, and Prophet, ensuring the church's safety and salvation through His continual intercession and representation before God. Owen highlights that without Christ's mediatorial work, believers would lack the assurance and strength needed for their faith and obedience. He also discusses the communion between the church triumphant in heaven and the church militant on earth, underscoring the importance of Christ's ongoing ministry in maintaining this connection. Ultimately, Owen calls believers to recognize and appreciate the profound implications of Christ's mediatorial role for their spiritual lives.

Transcript

III. The third and last thing which we proposed unto consideration, in our inquiry into the present state and condition of the person of Christ in heaven, is the exercise and discharge of his mediatorial office in behalf of the church; -- especially as he continueth to be a "minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man."

All Christians acknowledge that his present state is a state of the highest glory, -- of exaltation above the whole creation of God, above every name that is or can be named; and hereon they esteem their own honour and safety to depend. Neither do they doubt of his power, but take it for granted that he can do whatever he pleaseth; which is the ground of their placing all their confidence in him. But we must show, moreover, that his present state is a state of office-power, work, and duty. He leads not in heaven a life of mere glory, majesty, and blessedness, but a life of office, love, and care also. He lives as the Mediator of the church; as the King, Priest, and Prophet thereof. Hereon do our present safety and our future eternal salvation depend. Without the continual acting of the office-power and care of Christ, the church could not be preserved one moment. And the darkness of our faith herein is the cause of oft our disconsolations,

and most of our weaknesses in obedience. Most men have only general and confused notions and apprehensions of the present state of Christ, with respect unto the church. And by some, all considerations of this nature are despised and derided. But revealed things belong unto us; especially such as are of so great importance unto the glory of God and the saving of our own souls, -- such as this is, concerning the present state of the person of Christ in heaven, with respect unto his office-power and care.

Thus he is at once represented in all his offices, Rev. v. 6, "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." The whole representation of the glory of God, with all his holy attendants, is here called his "throne;" whence Christ is said to be in the "midst" of it. And this he is in his kingly glory; with respect also whereunto he is said to have "seven horns," or perfect power for the accomplishment of his will. And with respect unto his sacerdotal office, he is represented as a "Lamb that had been slain;" it being the virtue of his oblation that is continually effectual for the salvation of the church. For, as the "Lamb of God," -- in the offering of himself, -- he "taketh away the sin of the world." And as a prophet he is said to have "seven eyes," which are "the seven Spirits of God;" or a perfect fulness of all spiritual light and wisdom in himself, with a power for the communication of gifts and grace for the illumination of the church.

The nature of these offices of Christ, what belongs unto them and their charge, as was before intimated, I have declared elsewhere. I do now no farther consider them but as they relate unto the present state and condition of the person of Christ in heaven. And because it would be too long a work to treat of them all distinctly, I shall confine myself unto the consideration of his priestly office, with what depends thereon. And with respect thereunto the things ensuing may be observed.

1. The Lord Christ entered into heaven, the place of the residence of the glory of God, as into a temple, a tabernacle, a place of sacred worship. He did so as the high priest of the church, Heb. ix. 24. He "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." He is entered into heaven, as it was figured by the tabernacle of old; which was the place of all sacred and solemn worship. And therefore is he said to enter into it "through the veil," Heb. vi. 19, 20, x. 19, 20; which was the way of entrance into the most holy place, both in the tabernacle and temple. Heaven is not only a palace, a throne, as it is God's throne, Matt. v. 34; but it is a temple, wherein God dwells, not only in majesty and power, but in grace and mercy. It is the seat of ordinances and solemn worship. So is it represented, Rev. vii. 15, 17. It is said of the whole number of the saints above that have passed through the tribulations of this world, that they are "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them;" and "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of water." See also chap. viii. 1-4. The worship of the church below may also be herein comprised; but it is by virtue of communion with that above. This is that heaven which the souls of believers do long for an entrance into. Other apprehensions of it are but uncertain speculations.

2. In this temple, this sanctuary, the Lord Christ continueth gloriously to minister before the throne of grace, in the discharge of his office. See Heb. iv. 14-16, ix. 24. As the high priest went into the holy place to minister for the church unto God, before the ark and mercy-seat, which were types of the throne of grace; so doth our High Priest act for us in the real presence of God. He did not enter the holy place only to reside there in a way of glory, but to do temple-work, and to give unto God all that glory, honour, and worship, which he will receive from the church. And we may consider, both -- (1.) What this work is, and

(2.) How it is performed.

(1.) In general; herein Christ exerteth and exerciseth all his love, compassion, pity, and care towards the church, and every member of it. This are we frequently called unto the consideration of, as the foundation of all our consolation, as the fountain of all our obedience. See Heb. ii. 17, 18, iv. 15, 16, v. 2. Thoughts hereof are the relief of believers in all their distresses and temptations; and the effects of it are all their supplies of grace, enabling them to persevere in their obedience. He doth appear for them as the great representative of the church, to transact all their affairs with God. And that for three ends.

First, To make effectual the atonement that he hath made for sin. By the continual representation of it, and of himself as a "Lamb that had been slain," he procures the application of the virtues and benefits of it, in reconciliation and peace with God, unto their souls and consciences. Hence are all believers sprinkled and washed with his blood in all generations, -- in the application of the virtues of it unto them, as shed for them.

Secondly, To undertake their protection, and to plead their cause against all the accusations of Satan. He yet accuseth and chargeth them before God; but Christ is their advocate at the throne of grace, effectually frustrating all his attempts, Rev. xii. 10; Zech. iii. 2.

Thirdly, To intercede for them, as unto the communication of all grace and glory, all supplies of the Spirit, the accomplishment of all the promises of the covenant towards them, 1 John ii. 1, 2. This is the work of Christ in heaven. In these things, as the high priest of the church, doth he continue to administer his mediatory office on their behalf. And herein is he attended with the songs and joyful acclamations of all the holy ones that are in the presence of God, giving glory to God by him.

(2.) As unto the manner of this glorious administration, sundry things are to be considered.

[1.] That this transaction of things in heaven, being in the temple of God, and before the throne of grace, is a solemn instituted worship at present, which shall cease at the end of the world. Religious worship it is, or that wherein and whereby all the saints above do give glory to God. And it is instituted worship, not that which is merely natural, in that it is God's especial appointment, in and by Christ the mediator. It is a church-state which is constituted hereby, wherein these glorious ordinances are celebrated; and such a state as shall not be eternal, but hath its time allotted unto it.

And believers at present have, by faith, an admission into communion with this church above, in all its divine worship. For we "are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel," Heb. xii. 22-24.

A church-state doth the apostle most expressly represent unto us. It is Zion, Jerusalem, the great assembly, -- the names of the church state under the Old Testament. And it is a state above, the heavenly Jerusalem, where are all the holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect in themselves, though not in their state as to the restitution of their bodies at the resurrection. And a holy worship is there in this great assembly; for not only is Jesus in it as the mediator of the covenant, but there is the "blood of sprinkling" also, in the effectual application of it unto the church.

Hereunto have we an entrance. In this holy assembly and worship have we communion by faith whilst we are here below, Heb. x. 19-22. O that my soul might abide and abound in this exercise of faith! -- that I might yet enjoy a clearer prospect of this glory, and inspection into the beauty and order of this blessed assembly! How inconceivable is the representation that God here makes of the glory of his wisdom, love, grace, goodness, and mercy, in Christ! How excellent is the manifestation of the glory and honour of Christ in his person and offices! -- the glory given him by the Father!

How little a portion do we know, or can have experience in, of the refreshing, satiating communications of divine love and goodness, unto all the members of this assembly; or of that unchangeable delight in beholding the glory of Christ, and of God in him, -- of that ardency of affections wherewith they cleave unto him, and continual exultation of spirit, whereby they triumph in the praises of God, that are in all the members of it! To enter into this assembly by faith, -- to join with it in the assignation of praises unto "him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for evermore," -- to labour after a frame of heart in holy affections and spiritual delight in some correspondence with that which is in the saints above, -- is the duty, and ought to be the design, of the church of believers here below.

So much as we are furthered and assisted herein by our present ordinances, so much benefit and advantage have we by them, and no more. A constant view of this glory will cast contempt on all the desirable things of this world, and deliver our minds from any dreadful apprehensions of what is most terrible therein.

[2.] This heavenly worship in the sanctuary above, administered by the High Priest over the house of God, is conspicuously glorious. ²⁵⁶The glory of God is the great end of it, as shall be immediately declared; that is, the manifestation of it. The manifestation of the glory of God consists really in the effects of his infinite wisdom, goodness, grace, and power; -- declaratively, in the express acknowledgement of it with praise. Herein, therefore, doth the solemn worship of God in the sanctuary above consist, -- setting aside only the immediate acting of Christ in his intercession. It is a glorious, express acknowledgement of the wisdom, love, goodness, grace, and power of God, in the redemption, sanctification, and salvation of the church by Jesus Christ, with a continual ascription of all divine honour unto him in the way of praise. For the manner of its performance, our present light into it is but dark and obscure. Some things have an evidence in them. As, --

1st, That there is nothing carnal in it, or such things as are suited unto the fancies and imaginations of men. In the thoughts of heaven, most persons are apt to frame images in their minds of such carnal things as they suppose they could be delighted withal. But they are far remote from the worship of this holy assembly. The worship of the Gospel, which is spiritually glorious, makes a nearer approach unto it than that of the Temple, which was outwardly and carnally so.

2dly, It is not merely mental, or transacted only in the silent thoughts of each individual person; for, as we have showed, it is the worship of a church assembly wherein they have all communion, and join in the performance of it. We know not well the way and manner of communication between angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. It is expressed in the Scripture by voices, postures, and gestures; which, although they are not of the same nature as absolutely ours are, yet are they really significant of the things they would express, and a means of mutual communication. Yea, I know not how far God may give them the use of voice and words whereby to express his praise, as Moses talked with Christ at his transfiguration, Matt. xvii. 3. But the manner of it is such as whereby the whole assembly above do jointly set forth and celebrate the praises of God and the glory hereof consisteth in three things.

[1.] The blessed and beautiful order of all things in that sanctuary. Job describes the grave beneath to be a "place without any order, and where the light is as darkness," chap. x. 22. All above is order and light, -- every person and thing in its proper place and exercise. 1st, Heaven itself is a temple, a sanctuary, made so by the especial presence of God, and the ministration of Christ in the tabernacle of his human nature. 2dly, God is on the throne of grace, gloriously exalted on the account of his grace, and for the dispensation of it. To the saints above he is on the throne of grace, in that they are in the full enjoyment of the effects of his grace, and do give glory unto 257him on the account thereof. He is so, also with respect unto the church here below, in the continual communications of grace and mercy through Christ. 3dly, The Lord Christ, in his human nature, is before the throne, acting his mediatory office and power in behalf of the church. 4thly, All the holy angels, in the various orders and degrees of their ministration, are about the throne continually. So -- 5thly, Are the spirits of just men made perfect, in the various measures of light and glory. And these things were obscurely represented in the order of the church at its first erection in the wilderness; for the ordinances of God among them were patterns or figures of heavenly things, Heb. ix. 23. (1st,) In the midst was the tabernacle or sanctuary, -- which represented the sanctuary or temple above. (2dly,) In the most holy place were the ark and mercy-seat, -- representatives of the throne of grace. (3dly,) The ministry of the high priest, -- a type of the ministry of Christ. (4thly,) The Levites, who attended on the priest, did represent the ministry of angels attending on Christ in the charge of his office. And, (5thly,) Round about them were the tribes in their order.

[2.] In the full, clear apprehensions which all the blessed ones have of the glory of God in Christ, of the work and effects of his wisdom and grace towards mankind. These are the foundation of all divine worship. And because our conceptions and apprehensions about them are dark, low, obscure, and inevident, our worship is weak and imperfect also. But all is open unto the saints above. We are in the dust, the blood, the noise of the battle; they are victoriously at peace, and have a perfect view of what they have passed through, and what they have attained unto. They are come to the springs of life and light, and are filled with admiration of the grace of God in themselves and one another. What they see in God and in Jesus Christ, what they have experience of in themselves; what they know and learn from others, are all of them inconceivable and inexpressible. It is well for us, if we have so much experience of these things as to see a real glory in the fulness and perfection of them. The apprehensions by sight, without mixture of unsteadiness or darkness, without the alloy of fears or temptations, with an ineffable sense of the things themselves on their hearts or minds, are the springs or motives of the holy worship which is in heaven.

[3.] In the glorious manner of the performance of it. Now, whereas it ariseth from sight and present enjoyment, it must consist in a continual ascription of glory and praise unto God; and so it is described in the Scripture. See Rev. iv. 9-11, with Isa. vi. 3. And how little a portion of the glory of these things is it that we can apprehend!

3. In this solemn assembly before the throne of grace, the Lord 258Jesus Christ -- the great High Priest -- doth represent and render acceptable unto God the worship of the church here below. So it is expressed, Rev. viii. 3, 4, "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." It is a representation of the high priest burning incense on the golden altar on the day of atonement, when he entered into the most holy place; for that altar was placed just at the entrance of it, directly before the ark and mercy seat, representing the throne of God. This angel, therefore, is our High Priest; none else could approach that altar, or offer incense on it, the

smoke whereof was to enter into the holy place. And the "prayers of all saints" is a synecdochical expression of the whole worship of the church. And this is presented before the throne of God by this High Priest. And it is not said that their prayers came unto the throne of God, but the smoke of the incense out of the hand of the angel did so; for it is the incense of the intercession of Christ alone that gives them their acceptance with God. Without this, none of our prayers, praises, or thanksgivings, would ever have access into the presence of God, or unto the throne of grace. Blessed be God for this relief, under the consideration of the weakness and imperfection of them! Wherefore, in him and by him alone do we represent all our desires, and prayers, and whole worship to God. And herein, in all our worship, do we ourselves "enter into the most holy place," Heb. x. 19. We do it not merely by faith, but by this especial exercise of it, in putting our prayers into the hand of this High Priest.

There are three things in all our worship that would hinder its access unto God, and acceptance with him, as also keep off comfort and peace from our consciences. The first is, The sin or iniquity that cleaves unto it; secondly, The weakness or imperfection that at best is in it; and, thirdly, The unworthiness of the persons by whom it is performed. With reference unto these things the Law could never consummate or perfect the consciences of them that came unto God by the sacrifices of it. But there are three things in the sacerdotal ministration of Christ that remove and take them all away, whereon we have access with boldness unto God. And they are -- (1.) The influence of his oblation; (2.) The efficacy of his intercession; and, (3.) The dignity of his person. Through the first of these he bears and takes away all the iniquity of our holy things, as Aaron did typically of old, by virtue of the plate of gold with the name of God (a figure of Christ) on his forehead, Exod. xxviii. 36-38. He hath made atonement for them in the blood of his oblation, and they appear not in the presence of God. Through the second, or the efficacy of his intercession, he gives acceptance unto our prayers and holy worship, with power and prevalence before God. For this is that incense whose smoke or sweet perfume comes up with the prayers of all saints unto the throne of God. Through the third, or the dignity of his person, wherein he appears as the representative of his whole mystical body, he takes away from our consciences that sense of our own vileness and unworthiness which would not suffer us to approach with boldness unto the throne of grace. In these things consists the life of the worship of the church, -- of all believers; without which, as it would not be acceptable unto God, so we could have neither peace nor consolation in it ourselves.

4. Herein hath the church that is triumphant communion with that which is yet militant. The assembly above have not lost their concernment in the church here below. As we rejoice in their glory, safety, and happiness, that having passed through the storms and tempests, the temptations, sufferings, and dangers, of this life and world, they are harboured in eternal glory, unto the praise of God in Christ; so are they full of affections towards their brethren exercised with the same temptations, difficulties, and dangers, which they have passed through, with earnest desires for their deliverance and safety. Wherefore, when they behold the Lord Jesus Christ, as the great high priest over the house of God, presenting their prayers, with all their holy worship unto him, rendering them acceptable by the incense of his own intercession, it fills them with satisfaction, and continually excites them unto the assignation of praise, and glory, and honour unto him. This is the state of the saints above, with respect unto the church here below. This is all which may be herein ascribed unto them; and this may safely be so. What some have fancied about their own personal intercession, and that for particular persons, is derogatory unto the honour of Jesus Christ, and inconsistent with their present condition; but in these things consists their communion with the church here below. A love they have unto it, from their union with it in the same mystical body, Eph. i. 10. A sense they have of its condition, from the experience they had of it in the days of their flesh. A great concernment they have for the glory of God in them, and a fervent desire of their eternal salvation.

They know that without them they shall not be absolutely consummate, or made perfect in their whole persons, Rev. vi. 11. In this state of things they continually behold the Lord Jesus Christ presenting their prayers before the throne of grace, -- making intercession for them, -- appearing to plead their cause against all their adversaries, -- transacting all their affairs in the presence of God, -- taking care of their salvation, that not one of them shall perish. This continually fills them with a holy satisfaction and complacency, and is a great part of the subject-matter of their incessant praises and ascriptions of glory unto him. Herein lies the concernment of the church above in that here below; this is the communion that is between them, whereof the person of Christ, in the discharge of his office, is the bond and centre.

5. There is herein a full manifestation made of the wisdom of God, in all the holy institutions of the tabernacle and temple of old. Herein the veil is fully taken off from them, and that obscure representation of heavenly things is brought forth unto light and glory. It is true, this is done unto a great degree in the dispensation of the Gospel. By the coming of Christ in the flesh, and the discharge of his mediatory office in this world, the substance of what they did prefigure is accomplished; and in the revelations of the Gospel the nature and end of them is declared. Howbeit, they extended their signification also unto things within the veil, or the discharge of the priestly office of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, Heb. ix. 24. Wherefore, as we have not yet a perfection of light to understand the depth of the mysteries contained in them; so themselves also were not absolutely fulfilled until the Lord Christ discharged his office in the holy place. This is the glory of the pattern which God showed unto Moses in the mount, made conspicuous and evident unto all. Therein especially do the saints of the Old Testament, who were exercised all their days in those typical institutions whose end and design they could not comprehend, see the manifold wisdom and goodness of God in them all, rejoicing in them for evermore.

6. All that the Lord Christ receives of the Father on the account of this holy interposition and mediation for the church, he is endowed with sovereign authority and almighty power in himself to execute and accomplish. Therefore is he said, as a priest, is be "made higher than the heavens;" and as a "priest to sit down at the right hand of the majesty on high," Heb. viii. 1. This glorious power doth not immediately belong unto Him on the account of his sacerdotal office, but it is that qualification of his person which is necessary unto the effectual discharge of it. Hence it is said of him, that he should "bear the glory," and "sit and rule upon his throne," and should be "a priest upon his throne," Zech. vi. 13. A throne is insigne regium, and properly belongs unto Christ with respect unto his kingly office, Heb. i. 8, 9. Howbeit the power accompanying and belonging unto his throne being necessary unto the effectual discharge of his priestly office, as he sits and rules on his throne, so it is said that he is a "priest on his throne" also.

This is one instance of the present state of Christ in heaven, and of the work which he doth there perform, and the only instance I shall insist upon. He was made a priest "after the power of an endless life," -- the life which he now leads in heaven; -- and "lives for ever to make intercession for us." He was dead, but is alive, and lives for evermore, and hath the keys of hell and death, -- all power over the enemies of his church. God on a throne of grace; -- Christ, the high priest, so on his right hand in glory and power as yet to be "before the throne" in the virtue of his sacerdotal office, with the whole concernment of the church on his hand, transacting all things with God for them; -- all the holy angels and the "spirits of just men made perfect" encompassing the throne with continual praises unto God, even the Father, and him, on the account of the work of infinite wisdom, goodness, and grace, in his incarnation, mediation, and salvation of the church thereby; -- himself continuing to manage the cause of the whole church before God, presenting all their prayers and services unto him perfumed with his own intercession, -- is that resemblance of heaven and its present glory which the Scripture offers unto us. But, alas! how weak, how dark, how low,

are our conceptions and apprehensions of these heavenly things! We see yet as through a glass darkly, and know but in part. The time is approaching when we shall see these things "with open face," and know even as we are known. The best improvement we can make of this prospect, whilst faith supplies the place of future sight, is to be stirred up thereby unto holy longings after a participation in this glory, and constant diligence in that holy obedience whereby we may arrive thereunto.

What remaineth yet to be spoken on this subject hath respect unto these two ensuing propositions:--

1. All the effects of the offices of Christ, internal, spiritual, and eternal, in grace and glory, -- all external fruits of their dispensation in providence towards the church or its enemies, -- are wrought by divine power; or are the effects of an emanation of power from God. They are all wrought "by the exceeding greatness of his power," even as he wrought in Christ himself when he raised him from the dead, Eph. i. 19. For all the outward works of God, such as all these are, which are wrought in and for the church, are necessarily immediate effects of divine power, -- nor can be of another nature.

2. Upon supposition of the obedience of Christ in this life, and the atonement made by his blood for sin, with his exaltation thereon, there is nothing in any essential property of the nature of God, -- nothing in the eternal, unchangeable law of obedience, -- to hinder but that God might work all these things in us unto his own honour and glory, in the eternal salvation of the church and the destruction of all its enemies, without a continuance of the administration of the offices of Christ in heaven, and all that sacred solemnity of worship wherewith it is accompanied.

These things being certain and evident, we may inquire thereon, whence it is that God hath ordered the continuation of all these things in heaven above, seeing these ends might have been accomplished without them, by immediate acts of divine power.

The great "works of the Lord are sought out of them that have pleasure in them," Ps. cxi. 2. This, therefore, being a great work of God, which he hath wrought and revealed unto us, especially in the effect and fruit of it, and that for the manifestation of his wisdom and grace, it is our duty to inquire into it with all humble diligence; "for those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children," that we may do the will of God for our good. Wherefore, --

(1.) God would have it so, for the manifestation of his own glory. This is the first great end of all the works of God. That it is so is a fundamental principle of our religion. And how his works do glorify him is our duty to inquire. The essential glory of God is always the same, -- eternal and immutable. It is the being of God, with that respect which all creatures have unto it. For glory adds a supposition of relation unto being. But the manifestations of his glory are various, according to the pleasure of his will. Wherefore, that which he chooseth to manifest his glory in and by at one time, he may cease from using it unto that end at another; for its being a means of the manifestation of his glory may depend on such circumstances, such a state of things, which being removed, it ceaseth to be. So of old he manifested and represented his glory in the tabernacle and temple, and the holy pledges of his presence in them, and was glorified in all the worship of the Law. But now he ceaseth so to do, nor is any more honoured by the services and ceremonies of religion therein prescribed. If the whole structure of the temple and all its beautiful services were now in being on the earth, no glory would redound unto God thereby, -- he would receive none from it. To expect the glory of God in them would be a high dishonour unto him. And God may at any time begin to manifest his glory by such ways and means as he did not formerly make use of unto that purpose. So is it with all Gospel ordinances: which state will be continued unto the consummation of all things here below, and no

longer; for then shall they all cease, -- God will be no more glorified in them or by them. So hath God chosen to glorify himself in heaven by this administration of all things in and by Jesus Christ; whereunto also there is an end determined.

And in the continuance of this holy worship in the sanctuary above, God doth manifest his glory on many accounts, and resteth thereto. First, he doth it in and unto the saints who departed this life under the Old Testament. They came short in glory of what they now enter into who die in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. For -- not to dispute about nor determine positively, what was their state and condition before the ascension of Christ into heaven, or what was the nature of the blessed receptacle of their souls -- it is manifest that they did not, they could not, behold the glory of God, and the accomplishment of the mystery of his wisdom and will, in Jesus Christ; nor was it perfectly made known unto them. Whatever were their rest, refreshment, and blessedness, -- whatever were their enjoyments of the presence of God; yet was there no throne of grace erected in heaven, -- no High Priest appearing before it, -- no Lamb as it had been slain, -- no joint ascription of glory unto him that sits on the throne, and the Lamb, for ever; God "having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." See Eph. iii. 9, 10.

This was that, and this was that alone, so far as in the Scripture it is revealed, wherein they came short of that glory which is now enjoyed in heaven. And herein consists the advantage of the saints above them, who now die in faith. Their state in heaven was suited unto their faith and worship on the earth. They had no clear, distinct knowledge of the incarnation and mediatory office of Christ by their revelations and services; only they believed that the promise of deliverance, of grace and mercy, should be in and by him accomplished. Their reception into heaven -- that which they were made meet and prepared for by their faith and worship -- was suited thereunto. They had a blessed rest and happiness, above what we can comprehend; for who knows what it is to be in the glorious presence of God, though at the greatest distance? They were not immediately surprised with an appearance of that glory which they had no distinct apprehensions of in this world. Neither they nor the angels knew clearly either the sufferings of Christ or the glory that should ensue. But they saw and knew that there was yet something farther to be done in heaven and earth, as yet hid in God and the counsels of his will, for the exaltation of his glory in the complete salvation of the church. This they continued waiting for in the holy place of their refreshment above. Faith gave them, and it gives us, an entrance into the presence of God, and makes us meet for it. But what they immediately enjoyed did not in its whole kind exceed what their faith directed unto. No more doth ours. Wherefore they were not prepared for a view of the present glory of heaven; nor did enjoy it. But the saints under the New Testament, who are clearly instructed by the Gospel in the mysteries of the incarnation and mediation of Christ, are, by their faith and worship, made meet for an immediate entrance into this glory. This they long for, this they expect and are secured of, from the prayer of our Saviour, -- that they be, when they leave this world, where he is, to behold his glory.

But now, upon the entrance of Christ into the heavenly sanctuary, all those holy ones were admitted into the same glory with what the saints under the New Testament do enjoy. Hereon with open face they behold the use and end of those typical services and ordinances wherein these things were shadowed out unto them. No heart can conceive that ineffable addition of glory which they received hereby. The mystery of the wisdom and grace of God in their redemption and salvation by Christ was now fully represented unto them; what they had prayed for, longed for, and desired to see in the days of their flesh on the earth, and waited for so long in heaven, was now gloriously made manifest unto them. Hereon did glorious light and blessed satisfaction come into and upon all those blessed souls, who died in the faith, but had not

received the promise, -- only beheld it afar off. And hereby did God greatly manifest his own glory in them and unto them; which is the first end of the continuation of this state of things in heaven. This makes me judge that the season of Christ's entrance into heaven, as the holy sanctuary of God, was the greatest instance of created glory that ever was or ever shall be, unto the consummation of all things. And this as for other reasons, so because all the holy souls who had departed in the faith from the foundation of the world, were then received into the glorious light of the counsels of God, and knowledge of the effects of his grace by Jesus Christ.

Want of a due apprehension of the truth herein hath caused many, especially those of the Church of Rome, to follow after vain imaginations about the state of the souls of the faithful, departed under the Old Testament. Generally, they shut them up in a subterranean limbus, whence they were delivered by the descent of Christ. But it is contrary unto all notions and revelations of the respect of God unto his people -- contrary to the life and nature of faith -- that those who have passed through their course of obedience in this world, and finished the work given unto them, should not enter, upon their departure, into blessed rest in the presence of God. Take away the persuasion hereof, and the whole nature of faith is destroyed. But into the fulness of present glory they could not be admitted; as hath been declared.

Moreover, God hereby manifests his glory unto the holy angels themselves. Those things wherein it doth consist were hid in himself even from them, from the foundation of the world, -- hidden in the holy counsels of his will, Eph. iii. 9. Wherefore unto these "principalities and powers in heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God was made known by the church," verse 10. The church being redeemed by the blood of Christ, and himself thereon exalted in this glory, they came to know the "manifold wisdom of God" by the effects of it; which before they earnestly desired to look into, 1 Peter i. 12. Hereby is all the glory of the counsels of God in Christ made conspicuous unto them; and they receive themselves no small advancement in glory thereby. For in the present comprehension of the mind of God, and doing of his will, doth their blessedness consist.

265 Heaven itself was not what it is, before the entrance of Christ into the sanctuary for the administration of his office. Neither the saints departed nor the angels themselves were participant of that glory which now they are. Neither yet doth this argue any defect in heaven, or the state thereof in its primitive constitution; for the perfection of any state hath respect unto that order of things which it is originally suited unto. Take all things in the order of the first creation, and with respect thereunto heaven was perfect in glory from the beginning. Howbeit there was still a relation and regard in it unto the church of mankind on the earth, which was to be translated thither. But by the entrance of sin all this order was disturbed, and all this relation was broken. And there followed thereon an imperfection in the state of heaven itself; for it had no longer a relation unto, or communion with, them on earth, nor was a receptacle meet for men who were sinners to be received into. Wherefore, by the "blood of the cross," God "reconciled all things unto himself, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven," Col. i. 20, -- or gathered all things into one in him, "both which are in heaven, and which are on earth," Eph. i. 10. Even the things in heaven so far stood in need of a reconciliation, as that they might be gathered together in one with the things on earth; the glory whereof is manifested in this heavenly ministration. And the apostle affirms that the "heavenly things themselves" were purified by the sacrifice of Christ, Heb. ix. 23. Not that they were actually defiled in themselves, but without this purification they were not meet for the fellowship of this mystery in the joint worship of the whole society in heaven and earth, by Jesus Christ. Hence, therefore, there is a continual manifestation of the glory of God unto the angels themselves. They behold his manifold wisdom and grace in the blessed effects of it, which were treasured up in the holy counsels of his will from eternity. Hereby is

their own light and blessedness advanced, and they are filled with admiration of God, ascribing praise, honour, and glory unto him for evermore; for the beholding of the mystery of the wisdom of God in Christ, which is here so despised in the dispensation of the Gospel, is the principal part of the blessedness of the angels in heaven, which fills them with eternal delight, and is the ground of their ascribing praise and glory unto him for evermore.

This is that manifestative glory wherewith God satisfieth himself, until the end determined shall be. On the account hereof he doth and will bear with things in this world, unto the appointed season. For whilst the creation is in its present posture, a revenue of glory must be taken out of it for God; and longer than that is done it cannot be continued. But the world is so full of darkness and confusion, of sin and wickedness, of enmity against God, -- is so given up to villany, 266unto all the ways whereby God may be dishonoured, -- that there is little or no appearance of any revenue of glory unto him from it. Were it not on the secret account of divine wisdom, it would quickly receive the end of Sodom and Gomorrah. The small remnant of the inheritance of Christ is shut up in such obscurity, that, as unto visible appearance and manifestation, it is no way to be laid in the balance against the dishonour that is done unto him by the whole world. But whilst things are in this posture here below, God hath a solemn honour, glory, and worship above, in the presence of all his holy ones; wherein he resteth and takes pleasure. In his satisfaction herein he will continue things in this world unto all the ends of his wisdom, goodness, righteousness, and patience, let it rage in villany and wickedness as it pleaseth. And so, when any of the saints who are wearied, and even worn out, with the state of things in this world, and, it may be, understand not the grounds of the patience of God, do enter into this state, they shall, unto their full satisfaction, behold that glory which abundantly compensates the present dishonour done to God here below.

(2.) This state of things is continued for the glory of Christ himself. The office of Mediator was committed by God the Father unto his only-begotten Son, -- no other being able to bear or discharge it. See Isa. ix. 6; Rev. v. 1-5. But in the discharge of this office it was necessary he should condescend unto a mean and low condition, and to undergo things difficult, hard, and terrible, Phil. ii. 6-8. Such were the things which our Lord Jesus Christ underwent in this world; -- his undergoing of them being necessary unto the discharge of his office; yea, it consisted therein. Herein was he exposed unto reproach, contempt, and shame, with all the evils that Satan or the world could bring upon him. And besides, he was, for us and in our stead, to undergo the "curse of the law," with the greatest of terror and sorrows in his soul, until he gave up the ghost. These things were necessary unto the discharge of his office, nor could the salvation of the church be wrought out without them. But do we think that God would commit so glorious an office unto his only Son to be discharged in this manner only? Let it be granted that after he had so accomplished the will of God in this world, he had himself entered into glory; yet if he should so cease the administration of his office, that must be looked on as the most afflictive and dolorous that ever was undergone. But it was the design of God to glorify the office itself; as an effect of his wisdom, and himself therein; yea, so as that the very office itself should be an everlasting honour to his Son as incarnate. Unto this end the administration of it is continued in glory in his hand, and he is exalted in the discharge of it. For this is that glory which he prays that all his disciples may be brought 267unto him to behold. The time between his ascension and the end of all things is allotted unto the glory of Christ in the administration of his office in the heavenly sanctuary. And from hence doth the apostle prove him, "as a high priest," to be far more glorious than those who were called unto that office under the law, Heb. viii. 1-3. Herein it is manifest unto angels and men, how glorious a thing it is to be the only king, priest, and prophet of the church. Wherefore, as it behoved Christ, in the discharge of his office, to suffer; so, after his sufferings in the discharge of the same office, he was to enter into his glory, Rev. i. 18.

(3.) God hath respect herein unto those who depart in the faith, in their respective generations, especially those who died betimes, as the apostles and primitive Christians. And sundry things may be herein considered.

[1.] There are two things which believers put a great price and value on in this world, and which sweeten every condition unto them. Without them the world would be a noisome dungeon unto them, nor could they be satisfied with a continuance therein. The one is the service of Christ. Without an opportunity of being exercised herein, they could not abide here with any satisfaction. They who know it not so to be, are under the power of worldly-mindedness. The meanest service of Christ hath refreshment in it. And as to those who have opportunities and abilities for great instances of service, they do not know on just grounds, nor are able to determine themselves, whether it be best for them to continue in their service here below, or to enter into the immediate service of Christ above; -- so glorious, so excellent is it to be usefully serviceable unto the Lord Jesus. So was it with the apostle, Phil. i. 21-26; -- so may it be with others, if they serve him in the same spirit, with the same sincerity, though their ability in service be not like unto his. For neither had he anything but what he received. Again, they have the enjoyment of Christ in the ordinances of Gospel worship. By these means do they live, -- in these things is the life of their souls.

In this state of things God will not call them hence unto their loss; he will not put an end unto these privileges, without an abundant recompense and advantage. Whatever we enjoy here, yet still to depart hence and to be with Christ shall be far better, Phil. i. 23. For, --

1st, although service here below shall cease, and be given over unto other hands who are to have their share herein; yet, on the continuance of this state of things in heaven, there is also a continuation of service unto Christ, in a way inexpressibly more glorious than what we are in this life capable of. Upon their admittance into this state of things above, they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them, Rev. vii. 15. The whole state of the glorious worship of God before described is here respected; and herein is a continual service performed unto him that sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb. Wherefore it is so far from being loss, in being called off from service here below, as that, in point of service itself, it is an inconceivable advancement.

2dly, The enjoyment of Christ in and by the ordinances of his worship, is the immediate fountain and spring of all our refreshments and consolations in this world, Ps. lxxxvii. 7; but what is it unto the blessed immediate enjoyment of him in heaven! Hence the blessedness of the state above is described, by being with Christ, being with Christ for ever, -- in the presence and immediate enjoyment of him. The light of the stars is useful and relieving in a dark night as we are on our way; but what are they when the sun ariseth! Will any man think it a loss that, upon the rising of the sun, they shall not enjoy their light any more, though in the night they knew not what to have done without it? It may be we cannot conceive how it will be best for us to forego the use of sacraments, ministry, and the Scripture itself. But all the virtue of the streams is in the fountain; and the immediate enjoyment of Christ unspeakably exceeds whatever by any means we can be made partakers of here below.

In this blessed state have the holy apostles, all the primitive martyrs and believers, from the time of their dissolution, enjoyed full satisfaction and solace, in the glorious assembly above, Rev. vii. 15-17, &c.

[2.] Hereby there is a continuation of communion between the church triumphant above and that yet militant here below. That there is such a communion between glorified saints and believers in this world, is

an article of faith. Both societies are but one church, one mystical body, have one Head, and a mutual concernment in each other. Yea, the spring and means of this communion is no small part of the glory of the Gospel. For, -- before the saints under the Old Testament had the mystery of the glory of God in Christ, with our redemption thereby, revealed unto them, in the way before declared, -- the communion was very obscure; but we are now taken into the light and glory of it, as the apostle declares, Heb. xii. 22-24.

I know some have perverted the notions of the communion unto idolatrous superstition; and so have all other truths of the Gospel been abused and wrested, unto the destruction of the souls of men; -- all the Scriptures have been so dealt withal, 2 Pet. iii. 16. But they deceived themselves in this matter, -- the truth deceiveth none. Upon a supposition of communion, they gathered that there must of necessity be an immediate communication between them above and us below. And if so, they knew no way for it, no means of it, but by their praying unto them, and their praying for us. But they were under the power of their own deceivings. Communion doth not require immediate mutual communication, unless it be among persons in the same state, and that in such acts as wherein they are mutually assisting and helpful unto one another. But our different states will admit of no such intercourse; nor do we stand in need of any relief from them, or can be helped by any acts of their love, as we may aid and help one another here below. Wherefore the centre of this communion is in Christ alone and our exercise of it is upon him only, with respect unto them.

Yet hereon some deny that there is any such communion between the members of the church or the mystical body of Christ in these diverse states. And they suppose it is so declared in that of the prophet, Isa. lxiii. 16, "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not." But there is nothing of any such importance in these words. The church, under a deep sense of its present state, in its unworthy walking and multiplied provocations, profess themselves to be such, as that their forefathers in covenant could not own them as their children and posterity in the faith. Hereupon they appeal unto the infinite mercy and faithfulness of God, which extend themselves even unto that condition of unworthiness which was enough to render them utterly disowned by the best of men, however otherwise concerned in them. But to suppose the church above, which hath passed through its course of faith and obedience in afflictions, tribulations, and persecutions, to be ignorant of the state of the church here below in general, and unconcerned in it, -- to be without desires of its success, deliverance, and prosperity, unto the glory of Christ, -- is to lay them asleep in a senseless state, without the exercise of any grace, or any interest in the glory of God. And if they cry for vengeance on the obdurate persecuting world, Rev. vi. 10, shall we suppose they have no consideration nor knowledge of the state of the church suffering the same things which they did themselves? And, to put it out of question, they are minded of it in the next verse by Christ himself, verse 11.

But that which at present I alone intend, is the joint communion of the whole church in the worship of God in Christ. Were all that die in the Lord immediately received into that state wherein God "shall be all in all," -- without any use of the mediation of Christ, or the worship of praise and honour given unto God by him, -- without being exercised in the ascription of honour, glory, power, and dominion unto him, on the account of the past and present discharge of his office, -- there could be no communion between them and us. But whilst they are in the sanctuary, in the temple of God, in the holy worship of Christ and of God in him, and we are not only employed in the same work, in sacred ordinances suited unto our state and condition, but, in the performance of our duties, do by faith "enter in within the veil," and approach unto the same throne of grace in the most holy place, there is a spiritual communion between them and us. So the

apostle expresseth it, Heb. xii. 22-24.

[3.] It is the way that God hath appointed to prepare the holy souls above for the enjoyment of that eternal state which shall ensue at the end of all things. As we are here, in and by the Word and other ordinances, prepared and made meet for the present state of things in glory; so are they, by the temple-worship of heaven, fitted for that state of things when Christ shall give up the kingdom unto the Father, that God may be all in all.

(4.) Respect is had herein unto the faith of the church yet militant on the earth, and that, among others, in two things.

1st, For the encouragement of their faith. God could, as we have observed, upon the supposition of the atonement and reconciliation made by the blood of Christ, have saved the church by mere sovereign act of power. But whereas it was unto his glory that we should be saved in the way of faith and obedience, this way was necessary unto our encouragement therein. For it is in the nature of faith, it is a grace suited unto that end, to seek for and receive aid, help, and relief, from God continually, to enable us unto obedience.

For this end the Lord Christ continueth in the discharge of his office, whereby he is able to save us unto the uttermost, that we may receive such supplies by and from him. The continual use that faith makes of Christ unto this purpose, as he gloriously exerciseth his mediatory office and power in heaven, cannot fully be declared. Neither can any believer, who is acted by present Gospel light and grace, conceive how the life of faith can be led or preserved without it. No duties are we called unto, -- no temptation are we exercised withal, -- no sufferings do we undergo, -- no difficulties, dangers, fears, have we to conflict withal, -- nothing is there in life or death, wherein the glory of God or our own spiritual welfare is concerned, -- but faith finds and takes relief and encouragement in the present mediatory life and power of Christ in heaven, with the exercise of his love, care, and compassion therein. So he proposeth himself unto our faith, Rev. i. 17, 18.

2dly, That our faith may be guided and directed in all our accesses unto God in his holy worship. Were nothing proposed unto us but the immensity of the divine essence, we should not know how to make our approaches unto it. And thence it is that those who are unacquainted with the glory of this dispensation, who know not how to make use of Christ in his present state for an access unto God, are always inventing ways of their own (as by saints, angels, images) for that end; for an immediate access unto the divine essence they cannot fancy. Wherefore, to end this discourse in one word, -- all the present faith and worship of God in the church here on earth, all access unto him for grace, and all acceptable ascriptions of glory unto his divine majesty, do all of them, in their being and exercise, wholly depend on, and are resolved into, the continuation of the mediatory actings of Christ in heaven and glory.

I shall close this discourse with a little review of somewhat that passed before. From the consideration of that place of the apostle wherein he affirms, that at the end Christ shall give up the kingdom unto the Father, I declared that all the state of things which we have described shall then cease, and all things issue in the immediate enjoyments of God himself. I would extend this no farther than as unto what concerneth the exercise of Christ's mediatory office with respect unto the church here below, and the enemies of it. But there are some things which belong unto the essence of this state which shall continue unto all eternity; as, --

1st, I do believe that the person of Christ, in and by his human nature, shall be for ever the immediate head of the whole glorified creation. God having gathered all things unto a head in him, the knot or centre

of that collection shall never be dissolved. We shall never lose our relation unto him, nor he his unto us.

2dly, I do therefore also believe, that he shall be the means and way of communication between God and his glorified saints for ever. What are, what will be, the glorious communications of God unto his saints for ever, in life, light, power, joy, rest, and ineffable satisfaction, (as all must be from him unto eternity,) I shall not now inquire. But this I say, they shall be all made in and through the person of the Son, and the human nature therein. That tabernacle shall never be folded up, never be laid aside as useless. And if it be said, that I cannot declare the way and manner of the eternal communications of God himself unto his saints in glory by Christ; I shall only say, that I cannot declare the way and manner of his communications of himself in grace by Christ unto the souls of men in this world, and yet I do believe it. How much more must we satisfy ourselves with the evidence of faith alone in those things which, as yet, are more incomprehensible. And our adherence unto God, by love and delight, shall always be through Christ. For God will be conceived of unto eternity according to the manifestation that he hath made of himself in him, and no otherwise. This shall not be by acting faith with respect unto the actual exercise of the mediation of Christ, as now we cleave unto God; but it shall be by the all-satisfying acting of love unto God, as he hath manifested himself, and will manifest himself in Christ.

2723dly, The person of Christ, and therein his human nature, shall be the eternal object of divine glory, praise, and worship. The life of glory is not a mere state of contemplation. Vision is the principle of it, as faith is of the life of grace. Love is the great vital acting of that principle, in adherence unto God with eternal delight. But this is active in it also. It shall be exercised in the continual ascription and assignation of glory, praise, and honour unto God, and the glorious exercise of all sorts of grace therein; -- hereof the Lamb, the person of Christ, is the eternal object with that of the Father and the Spirit; the human nature in the Son, admitted into the communion of the same eternal glory.

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