

“Reformed Basics”: 4. Christ

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January 2025 (v 1.0)

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But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4)

1. Review

The one, true, and living God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He has chosen to reveal himself in Creation and Scripture. The one God exists in three Persons. God created humanity for fellowship with him; humanity bears his image. Adam’s disobedience and the consequent Fall left humanity under God’s displeasure and unable to help themselves.

First we consider Christ as the center the history of redemption. Then we describe his Person and Nature.

2. Christ in History

2.1 Covenant of Works

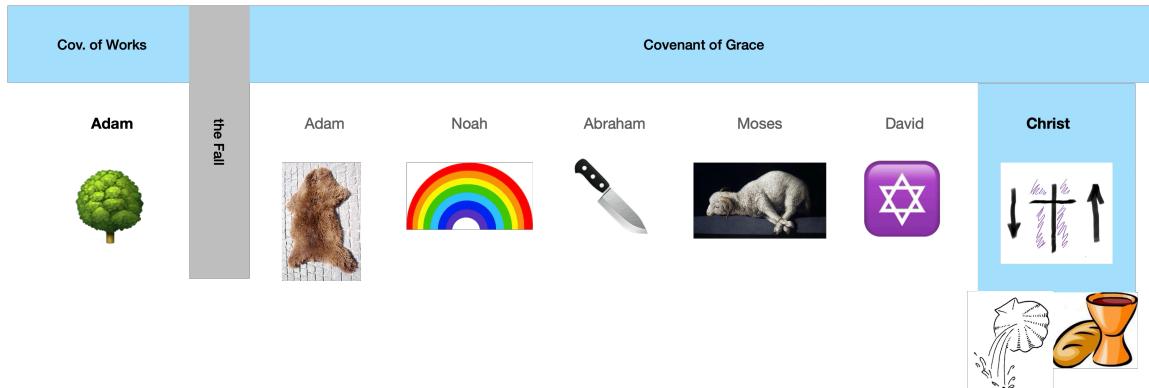
Adam and Eve were made in God’s image. They were placed in the Garden with a blessing and a general command to “be fruitful and multiply” and to “fill the earth and subdue it.” They were given a specific command, not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This arrangement is called the Covenant of Works. In it God required them to be obedient, and he promised blessing to them.

After some time they broke the Covenant of Works by disobedience. In that day they died spiritually. Their relation to God, to each other, to their own bodies, and their relation to the earth became cursed.

2.2 Covenant of Grace

The Creator did not abandon them in that cursed state. He immediately instituted another covenant, the Covenant of Grace. In it he promised (Gen 3:15) a Savior who would undo the Fall. That Savior is Jesus Christ. In broadest terms, the history of redemption has two parts: the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace. The central actor in the Covenant of Grace, who makes grace possible, is Jesus Christ.

After the Fall God acted to protect our first parents. This enabled them to fulfill his intent that they spread his image throughout the earth. Despite the rising wickedness of fallen humanity, God maintained a godly remnant. He acted to preserve his people through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. Although God made specific covenants with each of these, those covenants are all aspects of the one Covenant of Grace, as in this diagram:



“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

All the history of redemption (and thus the whole Bible) is about Christ!

- Gen 1:1 – Gen 3:15: Covenant of Works
- Gen 3:15 – Rev 22:21: Covenant of Grace

2.3 Christ's Ministry

Jesus Christ was conceived by the direct action of the Holy Spirit on his mother Mary. He was raised in a poor but faithful family in northern Palestine. In his first 30 years he was an ordinary worker and son to his mother. (Mark 6:3) But he was aware from his earliest days of his identity and mission. (Luke 2:41–52)

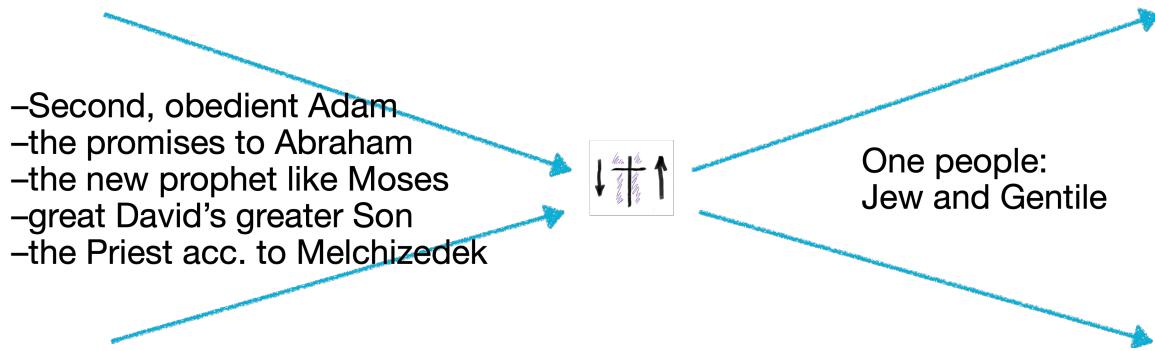
“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea... the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” (Luke 3:1–2) With the arrival of John the Baptist, Jesus began his public ministry: “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14–15) Jesus’ three years of public ministry consisted of announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God, performing “wonders and signs,” and in gathering a group of disciples.

At the end of those years, Jesus allowed himself to be arrested, humiliated, and judicially murdered by the Jewish authorities, with the connivance of the Roman governor. He died the death of a condemned criminal. He had repeatedly foretold this event, and was in control of the timing and manner of his death.

On the third day after his death Jesus’ body was not to be found in his tomb. He began to appear at various times to groups of his disciples as having come back from the dead with a new and glorified body. These appearances continued for forty days, during which he instructed his disciples. Jesus then returned to the Father where he was “crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death” (Heb 2:9). “...so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” (Heb 9:28)

Thus Christ is the climax of all redemptive history. All the Old Testament pointed to him. He is “the heir of all things.” (Heb 1) The Kingdom of God arrived with him. The Kingdom will come fully with his return in glory.

As the second Adam (Rom 5, 1 Cor 15) Christ fulfills the Covenant of Works and earns the blessing that would have been Adam’s. He receives and fulfills the promises to Abraham: descendants, land, law, kings. He is the Prophet like Moses (Deut 18). He is the true David, the Good Shepherd. He is the Priest who offers the true sacrifice in the true, heavenly Temple (Heb 8:1ff)

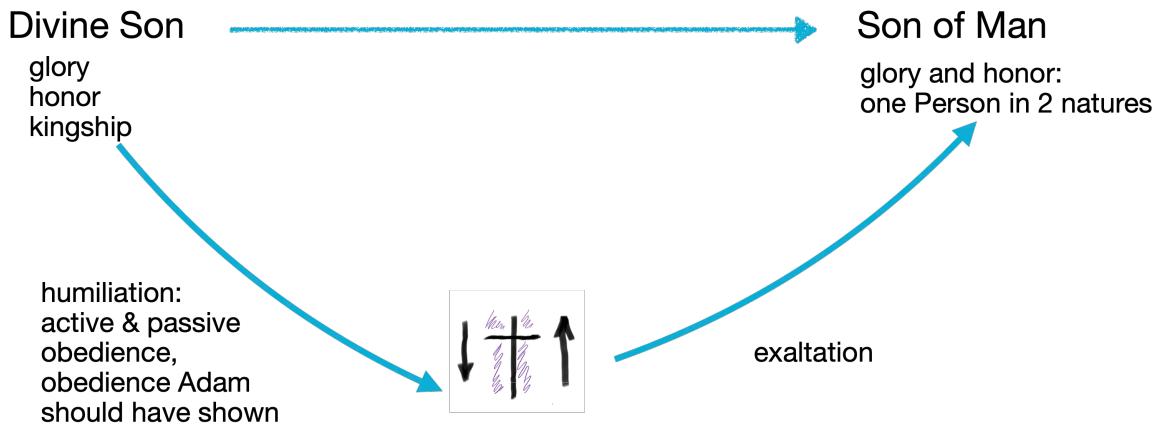


3. *Christ as Mediator*

Jesus Christ comes to accomplish the “covenant of redemption”: Father and Son agree that the Son should die for a people that the Father will give him. The Holy Spirit applies Christ’s work.

How does he do this? The Divine Son, second Person of the Trinity, takes to himself a true and complete human nature. In that nature he: (1) obeys God fully (as Adam should have done), and (2) he suffers God’s righteous wrath against the sin of his people, as a substitute for them.

The Divine Son, 2nd Person of Trinity, agrees with the Father to assume human nature and suffer for the people the Father will give him. He becomes the Son of Man, with his previous glory, now with divine and human natures combined in His single Person. How? He undergoes humiliation: he takes a real, complete human nature to himself; he obeys the Law fully; he dies, undergoing the Father’s wrath against sin, in the place of his people. He achieves exaltation: He is raised to new human life. He ascends to Father’s right hand, where he reigns for his people’s good.



“What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is he?” It was not easy for the Early Church to come to an understanding of Christ’s Person. The Church made a number of false starts, but eventually came to an acceptable understanding. Here we will draw on the “Chalcedonian definition” of Christ’s Person and Natures, as agreed at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 381. This agreement is expressed in the Nicene Creed; the language of the Creed is repeated in WCF 8.2. This is depicted in the “Chalcedon box” of Donald Macleod and Fred Sanders:

- Christ is fully God: “of one substance with the Father.” “God alone can save us”—only a Divine Person could bear God’s wrath for all his people. He is not merely a good human example.
- Christ is fully human: “that which is not assumed is not healed.” He did not merely “seem” human. Our human nature in all its parts has been redeemed.
- Christ is one Person: Christ was not “adopted” by God. From the moment of his conception He was both God and man. He sits at God’s right hand now fully human and fully divine.
- Christ has two natures: “inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.” (WCF 8.2) He is not some “third thing.” The two Natures remain separate, so He is fully divine (the human does not become divine), and fully human (the divine does not absorb or substitute for the human)

4. Summary

When our first Parents fell God stepped in to promise a Mediator.

All the Old Testament and New Testament are about that Mediator: Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came (1) to fulfill the Law on our behalf; (2) to die in our place, so that we could be accounted righteous.

Christ was from all eternity the Divine Son, the second Person of the Trinity. From his conception he took to himself a full human nature, complete in all respects, but without sin.

Is Christ’s sacrifice good enough to atone for your sins? He is fully God. Is he powerful enough to save you and defeat your enemies? He reigns as the divine Son. Does he sympathize with your weaknesses and difficulties? He was and remains fully human. Can my humanity be perfected? He is the “firstfruits” that guarantees my eventual perfection.

5. For Further Reading

Our church's subordinate standard, the Westminster Confession of Faith, describes the Mediator's Person and work in chapter 8. The Confession is available here:
<https://opc.org/wcf.html>

5.1 Videos

On the relation of the Old Testament to the Cross:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00VpZJRyoJ0>

On the Incarnation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6XMn-yH71E>

5.2 Books

A brief but deeper discussion of the Person of Christ: Stephen Wellum, *The Person of Christ: an Introduction*, Crossway, 2021.