

MESSIAH THE PRINCE,
Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.
By William Symington.
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 32.

CHAPTER 10.
THE PERPETUITY OF THE
MEDIATORIAL DOMINION.

THE reign of Messiah the Prince is progressive, both as respects the hearts of men and the world at large. Neither his visible nor his invisible kingdom is complete at once. By the use of those special, and also of those common, means which he employs, he carries forward, with irresistible energy, his work of grace and his work of judgment, at once gradually subjugating his enemies and gathering in those given him by the Father. This work embraces a period of several thousands of years, during which his kingdom is making steady advancement. There is to be, even in this present world, a season of unspeakable grandeur, when light, love, liberty, peace, and holiness, shall prevail to an unprecedented extent. But it is in the state of glory that the kingdom of Christ is to receive its grand consummation.

By Christ's mediatorial reign in glory, we do not understand that government merely which he exercises in heaven, extending from the period of his exaltation to the end of the world. Much of his administration, during this period, has respect to his church upon earth, and to other things in subordination to her interests, as well as to the redeemed above. But what we mean by the mediatorial reign in glory, is the dominion which the exalted Mediator exercises, and will continue to exercise, over the redeemed above as such; a dominion which, we conceive, is not to be confined to the period that shall elapse at the final judgment, but shall stretch out into endless ages.

This, it will be readily perceived, is a theme of very great sublimity, and we may reasonably expect to find it involved in considerable mystery. It would argue great presumption, for a weak-sighted mortal to pretend to a complete understanding of such a subject. It is to be approached only with sentiments of profound veneration and humility, and with a fixed resolution to be guided by the light of divine revelation alone, avoiding all vain speculation, and humbly determining not to be wise above what is written.

It is a topic on which, it appears, some diversity of sentiment has existed. From an expression in the writings of the apostle Paul,¹ many have been led to form the idea, that, at the end of all things, the mediatorial reign is to terminate altogether, and the government of the

1 1 Cor. 15.24. 'Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father,' &c.

kingdom to devolve, through eternity, on God essentially considered.² But there seems to be some confusion of ideas in the minds of those who have expressed themselves to this effect, inasmuch as, in speaking of it, they use language which is inconsistent with the notion itself. The venerable Dr. Owen says, in one place, ‘at the end of this dispensation, he shall give up the kingdom to God, even the Father, or *cease from the administration of his mediatorial office and power.*’ And again, ‘when this work is perfectly fulfilled and ended, then shall *all the mediatory actings of Christ cease for ever.*’ ► Yet he says, elsewhere, in explanation of his meaning on this subject, ‘I would extend this no further than as to what concerneth the exercise of Christ’s mediatorial office with respect unto the church here below, and the enemies of it;’ while he admits, ‘that the person of Christ, in and by his human nature, shall be for ever the immediate Head of the whole glorified creation—the means and way of communication between God and his glorified saints for ever—the eternal object of Divine glory, praise, and worship.’³ From these expressions, it is plain that this distinguished divine was not of opinion that the reign of the Mediator was not to be perpetual, or that it was to be abrogated, properly speaking, at the conclusion of the present state, but, on the contrary, that it was to continue, in some sense or another, for ever. Such being his sentiment, it is to be regretted that he should have allowed himself to speak on the subject without sufficient precision, and to use language which seems to give countenance to the opposite opinion.

Another writer of merited celebrity, in our own day, speaking of what Christ will do at the period in question, says, ‘As a faithful ambassador, whose commission is finished, he will honourably *give it back* to Him who appointed him, and will *return to his own personal station, as the divine and eternal Son*; and then will a new order of the moral universe commence, and the unspeakably vast assemblage of holy creatures, delivered and secured from sin and misery, shall possess the IMMEDIATE fruition of the Father.’⁴ This language seems to convey the idea, that it was the opinion of this writer, that the reign of Christ as Mediator, even over the church, should come to an end; for he speaks, in the context, of ‘the *termination* of the mediatorial reign;’⁵ and, elsewhere, ‘of the great *parenthesis* of the mediatorial administration.’⁶ It is but fair, however, to take notice of certain qualifying clauses which are thrown in, and which illustrate the confusion of ideas of which we have complained. ► ‘When all its designs,’ says Dr. Smith, ‘are accomplished, the mediatorial system, *as to all these modes of its exercise*, shall cease,’ referring to what he had said before, of ‘the giving and enforcing of religious laws, the diffusion and success of the Gospel, the heavenly intercession, the operations of divine grace, the vanquishing of all antichristian and other inimical powers, and the adjudication of eternal rewards and punishments.’ He also adds, ‘Imperfect and obscure as must be our conceptions of the termination of the mediatorial reign, it is self-evident that it can, in no respect, diminish the

2 The author here has made a reference to *Christ’s Second Coming: will it be pre-millennial?* By Principal Brown. 2nd ed. 1849, pp. 160-166.

3 Owen’s Works, vol. 1. pp. 236, 237, 271, Goold’s edition.

4 Dr. P. Smith on the Messiah, iii. 257. [Congregationalist Min. & Fellow of Geological Soc. Lon.]

5 P. 258.

6 Smith on Sacrifice, p. 92.

honours of the Redeemer, or abate the regards of the redeemed. . . . The connexion of Christ and his saints is indissoluble; neither things present nor things to come shall separate them from his love: and the final state of true Christians is expressly called an entering into the ETERNAL kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’ But, after attaching all due weight to this language, as tending to modify what was quoted above, we find it impossible to look upon the expressions in question as otherwise than unguarded and erroneous.

To talk of Christ’s *returning* to his own personal station as the Divine and Eternal Son, certainly implies that he must have left his personal station: but is it so? He stooped, indeed, from his personal dignity, but he never laid it aside. The rank of divine and eternal Son was never lost. At the moment of his deepest humiliation, he possessed the personal dignity of the Son of God, and indeed, but for this, his humiliation would have been in vain. This Dr. Smith certainly knows and believes. To speak, as this writer does, of the redeemed in glory possessing the IMMEDIATE fruition of the Father, in the sense of excluding the intervention of the Mediator, is plainly at variance with his own admission, that the connexion of Christ and his saints is *indissoluble*, and that the final state is the *eternal* kingdom of our Lord and Saviour.

The same view of the temporary duration of the mediatorial dominion, is supported in the theological lectures of a late eminent Professor of Divinity, in one of our dissenting churches. This learned author in question speaks of the text at present under consideration as ‘confessedly obscure,’ and subjoins to his explanation the following modest statement:—‘What has now been said, is proposed solely as a probable opinion: it would be presumptuous to speak confidently on a subject so obscure.’⁷ The views of this writer will fall to be examined in the sequel.

With all due deference to the distinguished individuals alluded to above, we would venture to submit, whether the saying of the apostle may not, after all, be satisfactorily explained, in full consistency with the proper perpetuity of Christ’s dominion as Mediator. The passage, in its connexion, stands thus:—‘Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.’ [1 Cor. 15.24-28.]

It is necessary to take the whole passage into consideration. The meaning of any one phrase in it, must be consistent with that of others. The apostle cannot contradict himself. It is, of course, requisite that our explanation of one clause agree with that of another. And, if this reasonable principle is closely adhered to in the interpretation of the apostle’s language, we apprehend it will be found impossible to explain the delivering up of the kingdom, so as to imply that the mediatorial reign shall ever altogether cease. We remark, then, that such a view appears to be utterly at variance with the expression—‘Then shall the Son also be subject unto

7 See Dr. Dick’s Lectures, vol. iii. pp, 239-245. [Minister, United Assoc. Congreg. Greyfriars.]

Him.’ In what sense, we ask, but that of Mediator, can any Trinitarian understand the Son to be subject to the Father through eternity? As God, personally considered, the Son is in every respect equal to the Father. Subjection or subordination necessarily implies inferiority of some kind or another; but it is only in an *official* capacity that inferiority, in any sense, can be ascribed to the Son of God. Personally, he ‘counts it no robbery to be *equal* with God;’ he is ‘Jehovah’s *fellow*.’ ► One of the writers above spoken of, has been led, by the theory of interpretation which he adopts, to use language on this subject, in our opinion, most unguarded and indefensible. ‘The eternal Son of God,’ says Dr. Pye Smith, ‘is, notwithstanding his Divine nature, subordinate in the order of Deity, and even perfectly obedient to the Father. To have been thus subject to the Father, from all eternity and by the necessity of the Divine personality, is no more incongruous with the proper and essential Divinity of the Son, than it will be, after the consummation of the present system of things, when the great parenthesis of the mediatorial administration shall be completed, and God shall be all in all.’⁸ What the writer of these words means by *a necessary and eternal subordination or subjection of the Son to the Father, apart from all respect to the mediatorial economy*, we know not. But, we frankly confess for ourselves, that we can form no idea of any such thing, without adopting the Socinian or the Arian heresy. The slightest degree of such subordination appears to us to be perfectly ‘incongruous with the proper and essential Divinity of the Son;’ and to speak of such a thing is to us altogether revolting. ► It is obvious that this respected author has been betrayed into the use of such language, solely by his finding it necessary to reconcile the everlasting subjection of the Son with the preconceived notion that his mediatorial character and reign are to cease at the end of the world. And to us it appears no slight presumption against the correctness of this latter notion altogether, that so able and clear and accurate a supporter of the doctrine of our Lord’s divinity, should have found it necessary, in speaking of it, to express himself in language so obscure, contradictory, and repulsive. Believing as we do, on the authority of this passage itself, that the Son is to be eternally subject to the Father, we find it impossible to separate this idea from that of the strict perpetuity of his mediatory office. But what, it will be asked, are we, in this case, to make of the *delivering up* of the kingdom?

The term kingdom, does not, in the instance before us, necessarily signify *kingship*, reign, or the possession and exercise of kingly power; but dominion in the sense of territory, or realm,—that, in short, over which the king reigns. The kingdom of Christ, in this sense, is, as we have shewn, most extensive. Besides his church, or spiritual kingdom, it includes all things in the world, in subordination to her interests. And it is the opinion of some excellent and sound theologians, that the kingdom to be delivered up at the end of time is the latter of these—his government over things without the church, and more especially her enemies. It is of his reign over ‘enemies,’ that the apostle is speaking at the time. This, as we before remarked, is the opinion of Dr. Owen, who expressly says, that the delivering up of the kingdom he would ‘extend no farther than as unto what concerneth the exercise of Christ’s mediatorial office with respect unto the church *here below*, and the *enemies* of it.’ Such also is the view of Dr.

8 Smith on Sacrifice, pp. 91,92. See also Treffrey on the Sonship, p. 387.

Doddridge, who, in a note to his exposition of the passage in question, says, ‘To me it appears that the *kingdom* to be given up is the rule of this *lower world*, which is then to be consumed.’⁹ This view of the subject is certainly free from the objection to which that we are combating is exposed. It is also quite agreeable to the context, and perfectly consistent with the perpetuity of the mediatorial reign.

Without, however, taking the word *kingdom* in so restricted a sense; viewing it even as inclusive of the church, the proper realm of the mediatorial King, may not the phrase under review be satisfactorily explained on another principle? It is all along taken for granted, that the words ‘deliver up’ signify *abandon, surrender, give over*; and so they are understood to import that the divine Mediator shall return into the hands of the Father the *official* commission received from him, and henceforward exercise only a *personal* dominion. But may not the original term, παραδῶ, be understood to signify, only bringing the work he was commissioned to perform to a state of completion, and presenting it in that finished state to him from whom the commission was derived, by way of giving account of the trust committed to him? Certain it is that the Greek verb here employed, is used in the New Testament in this very sense. ‘But when the fruit is brought forth (marg. *ripe*, Gr. παραδῶ) immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.’ [Mark 4.29.] Here the verb bears the idea of completion or perfection, ripeness or maturity. ► Now, at the end of the world, the kingdom of the Messiah shall have been brought to perfection; the work given him to do shall have been finished. Those given him by the Father shall have been found out, redeemed, sanctified, saved, and gathered all together into one; their enemies, even death itself, shall have been subdued; and the whole scheme of providence shall have been developed and wound up. The Mediator shall, then, appear and give in to the Father a full account of his mediatorial undertaking; presenting to him the kingdom in that state of consummation to which he shall then have brought it; and receiving from him a clear testimony of his approbation. This is perfectly consonant with the idea that the Son shall retain and exercise his mediatorial authority over his own proper kingdom for ever. ‘This kingdom,’ says Theophylact, ‘he delivers to his Father, by achieving and *accomplishing the purposes* of it. Thus, for instance, if a king commits to his son the management of a war against nations that have rebelled, when the war is finished, and the nations again reduced to subjection, then he is said to deliver up the war to his Father, i.e., *shew that he has accomplished the work committed to him.*’¹⁰

It is admitted, on all hands, that there must be, at the period alluded to, an entire change in the mode of administering the kingdom. The mediatorial dominion is conducted at present by means of ordinances and providences. The preaching of the Gospel, the dispensation of sacraments, the services of ministers, and the overruling of the events that fall out in both the natural and the moral worlds, are all made subservient to the interests of the church. At the period alluded to, these shall cease. Christ has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, ‘for the *perfecting* of the saints, TILL they come to a *perfect* man, to the measure

9 See also Urwick on *The Second Advent*, p. 62; and on *The Worship of Christ*, p. 261.

10 Bloomfield’s *Recensio Synoptica*, vol. vi. p. 681.

of the *stature* of the *fulness* of Christ.’ By eating bread and drinking wine, believers ‘shew forth the Lord’s death TILL he come;’ but then they are to be introduced to the marriage supper of the Lamb. ► We have already adverted to the language of Dr. Smith, which accords with this view, when he says that the ‘mediatorial system, *as to all these modes of its exercise*, shall cease.’ We may add the language of Calvin, who, after quoting the words of the apostle respecting the delivering up of the kingdom unto the Father, says, ‘he only intends, that in that perfect glory *the administration of the kingdom will not be the same as it is at present.*’¹¹ There is thus suggested another principle on which this difficult but interesting text may be interpreted, without supposing a cessation of the mediatorial dominion and character. At present the administration of the kingdom is conducted through the intervention of outward instruments: afterwards it shall be immediate, direct, personal. According to this interpretation, the phrase, ‘that God may be all in all,’ means that a new mode of intercourse with the Deity shall then be introduced, to the exclusion, not of the Mediator, but only of those institutions and ordinances which were deemed necessary for the saints in their present state of existence. In the triumphant state, they shall no longer see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; which is, however, perfectly consistent with their receiving the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

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Discussion Questions:

1. What state of things is the focus of the questions of the present chapter?
 - A. The state of glory.
2. In reading which passage of Scripture have many been led to form differing ideas about the future, notwithstanding agreement in many other things?
 - A. That verse in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, asserting that ‘Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father,’ 1 Cor. 15.24.
3. Who is the first author quoted who in one place speaks as if the administration of mediatorial power will terminate, and elsewhere qualifies the statement, and explains how the office continues?
 - A. John Owen.
4. Why does Dr. Symington find the language of Dr. Pye Smith to be “unguarded and indefensible”?
 - A. Because one cannot form an idea of the things he expresses without adopting the Socinian or Arian heresy.
5. What should we notice as two distinct ideas intended by the word “kingdom”?
 - A. It may refer to one’s authority and power to rule; or it may refer to that system which is ruled by the King.
6. Does the Greek term παραδῶ (παραδίδωμι) or deliver-up, ever signify something different?
 - A. In Mark 4.29 it is taken for the act of bringing forth with ripeness or maturity: yielding complete.
7. Does Calvin conclude from the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 15 that Christ’s mediatorial kingdom will cease?
 - A. No. Like others, he qualifies the assertion, explaining that “the administration of the kingdom will not be the same as it is at present.”

11 Calvin. Institutes, Book II. chap. 15. sec. 5.