

A Study on God's Oaths

Jim Beale

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I. Positive Oaths

a. Christ Affirmed as Mediator: God swore an oath to Abraham

"(15) And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, (16) And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: (17) That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which [is] upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; (18) And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:15-18 KJV)

- i. This rich gospel picture of Abraham offering up Isaac to be sacrificed with God's gracious provision of a substitute – Jehovah Jireh – here speaks relatively clearly of Christ in His vicarious substitutionary atonement and resurrection. That is, all the elements are here, if we can see them aright. Isaac, as a type of Christ, is viewed by Abraham as having been received back from the dead, his life in exchange for the life of the substitute. He is viewed as having been raised "even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Heb 11:19).
- ii. This passage identifies the angel of the LORD with the LORD. In v.15 it is the angel of the Lord speaking, then in v.16, it is the LORD who is speaking. And in Hebrews 6, we read, "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself" – so the angel of the LORD is LORD and distinct from the LORD. Given that Jesus said, no man has either heard the Father's voice at any time, or seen his shape (John 5:37) we surmise that the angel of the LORD is none other than the Son, the eternal Logos, in one of His many pre-incarnate manifestations in the OT.
- iii. In this glorious manifestation, He swears an oath by Himself – as only the infinite, eternal God could – and so manifests Himself as Prophet, revealing the future to Abraham. God manifested His sovereignty here as well. He declares the end from the beginning, stating quite simply what He would do. The entire context is one of substitutionary atonement, and it would be hard to deny the significance of the context in the swearing of the oath, that all nations would be blessed in the Seed, who is Christ.
- iv. Hebrews 6:13-20 expounds upon this passage and opens a two-fold assurance. The first ground of the oath is in the immutable nature of God. The second is in the entire truthfulness of God. An oath is only as good as the ground upon which it stands – so, since there is none greater than God, none more truthful than God, He swears by Himself. He is greater than all, immutably perfect, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, infallible and absolutely sovereign over the creation. There is no Rock like this Rock! He is the Creator of all things, and the sustainer of it too, yet He does not swear by the creation which He made and upholds. All of creation is as nothing in comparison to Him. "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted by him less than nothing, and vanity" (Is 40:17). He stands outside of time, eternal and unchangeable. He is the first, and the last; and beside Him there is no God. He swears by Himself because He

is the ground of all things – it is He who declares the end from the beginning. He is the One who works all things according to the counsel of His own will. Shall God swear an oath and not bring it to pass? God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? (Numbers 23:19 KJV). As the Lord told Ezekiel, “I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass” (Ezek 12:25). He speaks but not all of God’s utterances are of such momentous form. When God does speak in such a dignified and solemn form, we must consider the added weight of significance.

v. What is sworn is the promise that “in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (v.18). In Galatians 3, Paul makes the argument from the singular number of the word ‘seed’, to affirm that the seed is Christ – “He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal 3:16). And so, the promise that “in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” is a statement of what He Himself would be and do – He Himself would be the seed of Abraham, and in Him there would be blessing. As Paul wrote, “if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29)

1. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. (Acts 2:33)
 - a. This implies that Christ, in His work as Mediator, perfectly satisfied the demands of the covenant and gloriously merited the blessing of the covenant – first, the Holy Spirit, then Himself in final and blessed eternal union, glorious beyond measure in Christ.
 - b. He shed forth that blessing upon His church, in grace and mercy, because He also bore the sins of His people in His body on the tree and thus cleared away the legal obstacles which stood in the way, having nailed them to the cross; he removed the enmity in Himself and opened the way for reconciliation through Himself and in union with Himself unto union with the Father, the Holy Spirit is poured out to prepare Him a Bride, the Church, as Abraham sent his servant to fetch a bride for Isaac.
2. We are blessed IN CHRIST, and only in Christ, because only in Him are all the promises of God yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God. (2 Cor 1:20). God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. (1 John 5:11-12 KJV). In Him is peace with God, having borne the wrath of God to the uttermost, to the last drop, such that in Him is righteousness and redemption, and never any more condemnation. In Him is adoption and sanctification, chastisement and correction. In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In Him is joy unspeakable at the riches of His glory.

3. Outside of Christ there is grief and misery, darkness and ignorance, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and the worm of a guilty conscience that does not die, and bondage to sin and Satan and death.
- vi. Hear then the promise of the Mediator, sworn by an oath, of His own coming, to be the Seed of Abraham and to be the source of blessing to all nations. The sworn promise is presented in clear reference to the atoning work of the Mediator, as reflected the typical picture of atonement by the shedding of blood, with resurrection unto life in terms of substitution. The promise is sworn by the Mediator Himself who pledged Himself to the Father. For Christ is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises – namely of the Spirit and union with Himself and so reconciliation with the Father, by grace alone through faith alone, in which is all our hope and comfort and joy. And therefore, for our more specific security, the Lord established the threefold office of Mediator with an oath.
 - vii. The Office of Mediator is threefold: prophetic, priestly and kingly each in relation to the two parties – God the Father and fallen human creatures. Job lamented that there was no daysman betwixt us and God, who is able to lay his hand upon us both (Job 9:33). And He must not only be able to lay His hand upon both God and Man, in terms of their essential nature, He must also provide the threefold mediation which is suited both to our needs and God’s covenantal requirements. Thus, our threefold misery of ignorance, guilt and bondage finds the perfect match in the threefold office of Mediator: as all-wise Prophet He instructs us in the nature and will of God; as merciful High Priest He removes our guilt and bring us into peace with God; and as righteous King, He sweetly conquers our wills and delivers us from our bondage to sin and Satan.
 1. With respect to God, in God’s essential nature
 - a. He is of the same nature as God. He was “in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phil 2:6). In the beginning was Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God. He is one with the Father and the Spirit. These three are One God, equal in power and glory -- He dwells in the bosom of the Father; and eternally proceeds forth from the Father. The Son is the exact representation of the Father.
 2. With respect to the covenant requirements, from God’s perspective --
 - a. WRT the prophetic aspect, Christ is Himself the message, the eternal Word of God which goes forth from the Father. The Son is the revelation of the Father, the exact representation of His Being. He is the substance of every message of the gospel, which must focus on the revelation of the Mediator in the threefold nature of that office.
 - b. WRT the priestly aspect, Christ is the sacrifice to bear the whole curse of the law. Christ is our propitiation to God. He is the mercy seat, the covering over the ark of the covenant.

- i. The mercy-seat was the covering of the ark, made of solid gold, exactly fitting the ark in which were the Ten Commandments. The mercy seat was a propitiatory covering, representing Christ, in the perfection of His vicarious atonement. God said, "I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat" and from there the mercy seat is the great covering for sin.
 - ii. The word for "mercy seat" in the Greek version of the OT is used in Romans 3:25 as propitiation and Hebrews 9:3 as "mercy seat". 1 John 2:2 and 1 John 4:10 say that "he is the propitiation for our sins" using a closely related word. The root idea of propitiation is the means of making propitious, or that which turns away wrath.
 - iii. It is interesting to note that mercy seat was made of solid gold to represent the perfect purity of the Mediator. In dimensions, it was about 44" x 26" and if it was an inch thick, it would have weighed about 800 lb. And so, by reflection upon the weightiness of the mercy seat, let us feel the weightiness of the need for a pure gold mercy seat.
 - c. WRT the kingly, here God views Christ as the humble, perfectly obedient Servant, who obeyed the Father in every detail, willingly, joyfully, with His whole heart. Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34) and "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).
 - d. Then, from God's perspective, Christ is everything needed to be the perfect Mediator – He is the exact representation of the Father, and willingly, gladly, joyfully takes upon Himself to reveal the Father, to satisfy His wrath and to obey Him in everything.
- 3. With respect to man, in Man's essential nature --
 - a. He became of the same nature as mankind. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law (Gal 4:4). He "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:7). As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same (Heb 2:14). In all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren (Heb 2:17).
- 4. With respect to the covenant,

- a. Christ is our Prophet sent from God, His very own dear Son who alone knows the Father. God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.
 - b. With respect to the priestly, Christ is our High Priest, who makes atonement for our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. He needeth not daily, as the former high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.
 - c. Finally, with respect to the kingly office, Christ is King to us, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, the Head of the body, who rules by the very authority of God the Father given to Him. Every knee will bow to Him. 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 Corinthians 15:28 KJV)
- viii. This is the theology of the threefold Mediatorial Office. The fundamental importance of this idea to God is not only made apparent throughout Scripture but is nowhere more emphatically set forth than by the three remaining oaths of God, in which the Mediator is sworn to each of the threefold aspects of the office.

b. Christ Affirmed as King: God swore to David

I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, ... Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah. (Psalm 89:3, 35-37 KJV)

- i. Here is the solemn oath of the kingship of the Mediator. Here God swears by His holiness. Matthew Henry says, "holiness, that darling attribute. In swearing by his holiness, he swore by himself" as holiness is no simple attribute but altogether the collective and consummate glory of His nature.
- ii. Hosea wrote, 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 (Hos 3:5). And Ezekiel wrote that there is to be 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).
- iii. Thus, the role of King overlaps with Shepherd, as one whose rule is tender towards His people. Jesus said that, other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. (John 10:16 KJV). He rules with a rod of iron, but a bruised reed He does not break, nor does he quench the smoking flax and He gently leads those with young.

- iv. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness (Psalm 110:3) – because God has once sworn by His holiness that Christ would be our King to call His elect out of the world and to bestow upon them saving grace, correcting them for their sins, preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings, restraining and overcoming all their enemies, and powerfully ordering all things for his own glory, and their good. (Q45, WCF-LC)

c. Christ Affirmed as Priest: A Priest Forever

The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. (Psalm 110:4 KJV)

- i. Here is the solemn pledge that the Mediator would be High Priest for His people. Melchizedek was not a mere priest but was High Priest to the Most High God. Melchizedek was a kingly High Priest, of which there is no such thing in the Mosaic covenant. It is a new order of Priest which stands apart from the order of Aaron. Hebrews 7:2 says that the name Melchizedek means “King of righteousness” and points out that Melchizedek was also “the King of Salem, which is, King of peace.” Thus we have a completed different order of priesthood, in which the priest is also the king.
- ii. Zechariah wrote that “Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zech 6:13). This is the Branch, and that He shall be a priest upon His throne. This can only be a priest of the order of Melchizedek, a kingly priest. The counsel of peace is between the Father and the Son, between God and the man the Branch; the counsels concerning the peace to be made between God and man, by the mediation of Christ.
- iii. Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb 8:1). This one is declared a Priest forever by an oath. There is no end to His Priestly office. By the power of an endless life, and upon the infinite virtue of His own blood, He ever lives to make intercession for His people. His is always and forever our mercy seat – and He worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

d. Christ Affirmed as Prophet: Every knee shall bow

I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. (Isaiah 45:23 KJV)

- i. Here is a solemn pledge, which might seem to teach that every knee will bow to Him. This is referenced by Paul in both Romans 14:11 and Philippians 2:10 with respect to the kingship of Christ – and truly every knee will bow to Him.
- ii. A closer look at the verse though that the oath is fundamentally about the word that is gone forth out of the mouth of God in righteousness, how that word will stand. God said in another place, “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of

my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11 KJV).

- iii. Ultimately, the Word that goes forth from Himself is the Word of God, the revelation of God. The prophetic office is found in Christ being the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person. God hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, the Word who was with Him in the beginning, by whom also he made the worlds.

e. Summary of Positive Doctrine

- i. Scripture says that there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5) and this is a necessary conclusion from the nature of the situation. The Mediator must have two natures joined in One Person. The Mediator must be fully God and fully man. He must be able to lay His hand upon both God and man.
- ii. The Mediator must fulfill the threefold office of Mediator.
 - 1. He must be Prophet for we must know God and His will in order to come into union with Him through the work of a Mediator. None can reveal the infinite, eternal God but one who is infinite and eternal. No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him (Matt 11:27).
 - 2. Even given knowledge, none can approach God unto reconciliation without the Priestly work of Christ. As we know "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb 9:22) and so without the priestly ministry of Christ, there could never be reconciliation with God.
 - 3. And the kingship of Christ is the guarantee of the application of His priestly work. He rules and reigns until all enemies will be under His feet – He rules in the midst of His enemies. As we read earlier, "he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory".
- iii. This threefold office of Mediator is exactly suitable to our needs because we are ignorant, guilty and in bondage to sin and to Satan. But if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed (John 8:36). By His word and by His omnipotent hand, by His the sacrifice of Himself and by His knowledge, He shall justify many, bringing them into right relation with God, and securing for them an everlasting redemption and graciously giving them all things in Himself.
- iv. God saw fit to affirm with an oath, not only the overall and general office of Mediator given in Genesis 22, but to affirm each of the three aspect of one office of Mediator with an oath. Not only does this teach us the nature of the threefold office, but establishes the absolutely essential nature of the threefold nature of the Mediator in two natures.
- v. The oaths have two characters --
 - 1. The Son is the angel of the LORD who speaks directly to Abraham in Gen 22. He relates to Abraham as a friend, promising by Himself in response to the faith in the glorious picture of the gospel, to be that true Mediator through whom blessing would come to all who have the faith of Abraham. Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the

end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all. For, as James says, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. (James 2:23)

2. The Father is the speaker in each of the three particular oaths – He establishes by decree in three particular oaths: by His holiness for the kingly aspect, seemingly by His mere decree regarding the priestly aspect (He lets His yes be yes), and by eternal generation for the prophetic aspect.
 3. Marvelous!!! Good theology must always lead to doxology! Stop and praise the incomprehensible God who is revealed through the Mediator and His glorious work. Praise His Name for His glorious grace!
- vi. And so, God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by these four oaths. These oaths were given that we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the Mediator, whom we have as our hope and the anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, within the veil – our Prophet, our Priest and our King.

II. Negative Oaths – given as warnings for us

a. The Prototype Rejection – the People in the Wilderness

(21) But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. (22) Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; ... (28) Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: (29) Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, (30) Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. (Numbers 14:21-22, 28-30 KJV)

- i. This is terrifying!
 1. We have seen the Lord swear to establish the threefold ground of our redemption, for our assurance and comfort and consolation, to those who have fled to Christ for refuge.
 2. Here we read of God’s swearing, on His own self-existent nature, that none of those men would enter His rest. God had told Noah, “My spirit shall not always strive with man” and truly the people were hard-hearted and rebellious. They saw His marvelous works in deliverance from Egypt, passed through the Red Sea, and yet tested Him ten times in the wilderness, and finally refused to enter the Promised Land to which He so graciously brought them.
 3. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? (Heb 2:3)

b. The Perils of Unbelief

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. ... While it is said, Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. ... And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So, we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:12, 15, 18-19 KJV)

- a. Christ is set forth in Scripture as Mediator for us, the only Mediator between God and Man. He is fully God and fully Man, Son of God and Son of Man, able to lay His hand upon both sides.
- b. He embodies the threefold office in the unity of His Person. He is the perfect Prophet, Priest and King – to bring us to God.
- c. He said “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 KJV)

Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. (Hebrews 4:1-2 KJV)

Today, if you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts against Him. Because God, willing to abundantly demonstrate heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed [it] by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which [it was] impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which [hope] we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, [even] Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. (Hebrews 6:17-20 KJV) .

Now He sits as a Priest upon His throne – His throne is forever and ever, and He is a Priest forever and ever. And God, who by His world spoke light into Being, gives the knowledge of Himself in the face of Jesus Christ, when He shines forth in the heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. (2 Cor 4:6) This is what we need to begin the work and to carry it forward, the prophetic work of the Lord, in the heart, to implant within us the true knowledge of God. Let us not harden our hearts against this knowledge but rather receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls (James 1:21).

Abraham is the model of faith, given to us, not just in Hebrews 11, but in Romans 4, James 2:21 all of which present the full picture of saving faith not as a dead orthodoxy but a living commitment to trust and obey because that is the nature of the new life in Christ. Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.