Chapter 20 – The Gospel and the Extent of Its Grace

1. Because the covenant of works was broken by sin and was unable to confer life, God was pleased to proclaim the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect and producing in them faith and repentance.\(^1\) In this promise the gospel in its substance was revealed and made effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Genesis 3:15
And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

In this promise the gospel in its substance was revealed and made effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.\(^2\)

\(^2\) Revelation 13:8.
All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

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2. This promise of Christ and of salvation through him is revealed in the Word of God alone.\(^3\) The works of creation and providence, when assisted only by the light of nature, do not reveal Christ or grace through him, even in a general or obscure way.\(^4\) Much less are those without the revelation of him in the promise or gospel enabled to attain saving faith or repentance by seeing these works of God.\(^5\)

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2. This promise of Christ and of salvation through him is revealed in the Word of God alone.\(^3\)

\(^3\) Romans 1:17
For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”
The works of creation and providence, when assisted only by the light of nature, do not reveal Christ or grace through him, even in a general or obscure way.4

4 Romans 10:14-17
14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? 15 How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!” 16 However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?” 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Much less are those without the revelation of him in the promise or gospel enabled to attain saving faith or repentance by seeing these works of God.5

5 Proverbs 29:18
Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained,
But happy is he who keeps the law.

5 Isaiah 25:7
And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples,
Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.

5 Isaiah 60:2-3
2 “For behold, darkness will cover the earth
And deep darkness the peoples;
But the LORD will rise upon you
And His glory will appear upon you.
3 “Nations will come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising.

3. The gospel has been revealed to sinners in various times and in different places, along with the promises and precepts describing the obedience it requires. The particular nations and individuals who are granted this revelation are chosen solely according to the sovereign will and good pleasure of God.6 This choice does not depend on any promise to those who demonstrate good stewardship of their natural abilities based on common light received apart from the gospel. No one has ever done this nor can anyone do so.7 Therefore, in every age the preaching of the gospel to individuals and nations has been granted in widely varying degrees of expansion and contraction, according to the counsel of the will of God.

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6 Psalm 147:20
He has not dealt thus with any nation;
And as for His ordinances, they have not known them.
Praise the LORD!

6 Acts 16:7
and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;

This choice does not depend on any promise to those who demonstrate good stewardship of their natural abilities based on common light received apart from the gospel. No one has ever done this nor can anyone do so.7

7 Romans 1:18–32
18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Therefore, in every age the preaching of the gospel to individuals and nations has been granted in widely varying degrees of expansion and contraction, according to the counsel of the will of God.

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4. The gospel is the only outward means of revealing Christ and saving grace, and it is abundantly sufficient for that purpose. Yet to be born again, brought to life or regenerated, those who are dead in trespasses also must have an effectual, irresistible work of the Holy Spirit in every part of their souls to produce in them a new spiritual life.8 Without this no other means will bring about their conversion to God.9

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those who are dead in trespasses also must have an effectual, irresistible work of the Holy Spirit in every part of their souls to produce in them a new spiritual life.⁸

⁸ Psalm 110:3
  Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power;
  In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,
  Your youth are to You as the dew.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:14
  But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

⁸ Ephesians 1:19-20
  and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

Without this no other means will bring about their conversion to God.⁹

⁹ John 6:44
  No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:4-6
  4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.