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John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787): Minister of the New Covenant

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EDINBURGH
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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Abstract

A fundamental characteristic of Scottish Reformed theology is its emphasis on God's covenants. This development reached its high point in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and also in the *Marrow* tradition. One of the most prominent evangelical theologians of the eighteenth century nurtured within this milieu was John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787). Yet, despite his significance and influence there has been a surprising lack of research into his theology. The objective of this thesis is to fill part of this gap.

Brown wrote in the context of a society which was moulded by a combination of Enlightenment rationalism and ecclesiastical Moderatism, which together led to an emphasis on behaviour patterns and morals and not on evangelical doctrine and sanctification. In preaching, covenant theology was displaced by sermons centered on man, culture and society. John Brown stands in contrast to this emerging 'polite' Presbyterianism. This research therefore seeks to focus on how the Christological and covenantal aspects of Brown's theology helped to strengthen and consolidate the evangelical orthodoxy of the Reformed churches during the eighteenth century. In spite of having some differences with his Reformed predecessors with respect to the covenantal scheme, Brown maintained the essential elements that conform the classical Reformed federalism. In addition, this thesis explores how Brown's commitment to Scripture and to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* led him to develop a Christ-centered covenantal theology entailing strong practical implications for the Christian life. It also traces the way in which his experiential Calvinism was reflected not only in his theological works, but also in the training of divinity students who were candidates for the ministry. As both the pastor of his congregation in Haddington, and his

denomination's professor of theology his goal was to encourage sanctification and a distinctive covenantal piety not only in Christians in general, but also in the lives and ministries of his students.

This dissertation seeks briefly to place Brown's theology within the context of recent critical discussions of the Federal tradition in Scottish theology and to underline the way in which he saw his own work as standing in the tradition of the *theoretica-practica* theology. In conclusion, Brown's Covenantal Christology shows a theological unity and continuity between Calvin's theology and the Scottish Reformed theology expressed in Westminster federalism, both of which highlight the glory of the Triune God in the salvation and fellowship with his covenantal people.

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bonnie Emma Paz. Praise to God for our Scottish-Chilean covenant daughter!

Above all, I wish to thank to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Only through union with him am I able to have a sure and sweet fellowship with the Triune God.

PS: This thesis is dedicated to the global church, especially to the Latino-American church. To the new generation of Reformed evangelical people: Christological covenant theology surely will help us to have healthy, humble and strong pulpits and churches.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Introduction

Let my familiarity chiefly be with the Father, Son, and
Holy Ghost, as leagued with me, by the covenant of
grace.¹

The Dutch theologian, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) suggested that the concept of covenant constitutes the root of Scottish Reformed Theology: ‘The history of the church and theology in Scotland after the Reformation is wholly dominated by the idea of the covenant’.² A similar view was expressed by the Scottish theologian James Walker (1821-1891): ‘The old theology of Scotland might be emphatically described as a *covenant theology*’.³

The sixteenth century Scottish Reformation planted the seed of what would later become not only the trunk of Reformed theology in the Second Reformation that followed, but also bear the theological fruits that would be harvested by the *Marrow Men* and the Secession Church. This seed, trunk and fruits all emerged within a covenant theology that was rooted in the Bible and came to expression in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* to which the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly contributed so significantly.

From the mid-eighteenth century, the flavour of Scottish Presbyterianism in the Established Church was transformed from this biblical worldview

¹ John Brown [of Haddington], ‘Devout and Practical Meditation’ *The Christian Repository*, (November 1816; Edinburgh), 669.

² Henk Van den Belt, ‘Herman Bavinck on Scottish Covenant Theology and Reformed Piety’, *The Bavinck Review* 3 (2012), 164-77

³ James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland Chiefly of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Edinburgh: Knox Press (Edinburgh), 1982), 73.

to one shaped by the culture of the Scottish Enlightenment. Theological Moderatism became dominant. It was through an ecclesiastical policy (Patronage) promoted by this group that, in 1733, the first division took place in the Church of Scotland, when a group of those who opposed that policy formed the Secession Church. The leaders of this new church were among the *Marrow Brethren* who saw in covenant theology an exposition of the heart of the gospel and a protection from legalism, neonomianism and antinomianism.

John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787) was heir to this covenant theology of the Secession. He became widely known for developing a Reformed theology that influenced evangelical circles in Scotland, England, Wales, Ulster and America. In particular, his *Self-Interpreting Bible* was widely and favourably received.¹ The evangelical Anglican leader, Charles Simeon (1759-1836), was one who expressed a deep appreciation for it:

Dear Sir, Your Self Interpreting Bible seems to stand in lieu of all other comments; and I am daily receiving so much edification and instruction from it, that I would wish it in the hands of all serious ministers.²

Brown's Bible also occupied an important place in evangelical family libraries alongside Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* and Boston's *Fourfold State*. As Robert Burns bore witness:

¹ Robert Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington* (London, New York, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 184.

² *Ibid*, 188.

I pray and ponder butt the house;
 My shins, my lane, I there sit roastin',
 Perusing Bunyan, Brown, an' Boston'.¹

Some of his important works have been republished in the twenty-first century. These include his *Systematic Theology* (2002), a short edition of the *Memoir and Select Remains of the Rev. John Brown* (2004), one of his three *Catechisms* (2007), a part of his *Dictionary* (2009), *A Refutation of Religious Pluralism* (2010) and finally, his *Letters on Gospel Preaching and On the Exemplary Behaviour of Ministers* (2017).

Despite Brown's influence on his own and subsequent generations, the lack of research on and secondary resources discussing his theology is surprising. Only one PhD thesis exists and this addresses his annotations on the Psalms.² A chapter of his life and writings appears in Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*³ and Jack Whytock focused on his theological training.⁴ In spite of the influence that he exerted in his time, Brown has been little studied.

What makes Brown particularly worthy of investigation is his commitment to two things: 1) covenant theology and 2) The formation and training of new pastors. This latter took place in a context in which a significant number of ministers in the Scottish Kirk were obscuring the

¹ Epistle to James Tennant of Glenconner, a Poem.

² Shelley P. Sanders Zuckerman, *Spiritual Formation Through Psalm-Singing Worship: A Study of the Piety Nurtured by the Annotations in John Brown of Haddington's The Psalms of David in Metre* (Madison; Drew University, 2005).

³ Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004).

⁴ Jack C. Whytock, "An Educated Clergy" *Scottish Theological Education and Training in the Kirk and Secession, 1560-1850* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

importance of covenant theology in their preaching. What lends significance to an analysis of Brown's theology in relation to both the Christian life and the formation of new ministers of the gospel is the extent to which, in the eighteenth century, ministers and their preaching were so influential on patterns of social behaviour.

With this in view, this thesis focuses on describing and analysing Brown's theology and its practical implications. To achieve this goal, his covenant theology will be examined in conjunction with his Christology and his teaching on sanctification, along with the main implications of these doctrines for both Christian life in general and the training of ministers of the gospel in particular.

Chapter one is a succinct biography of John Brown, highlighting the practical-theological aspect of his life and books.

Chapter two relates mainly to his covenantal theology, comparing it to that of other divines who influenced his thinking. In particular we will see that Brown did not necessarily follow the common divisions or distinctions between a *pactum salutis* and a covenant of grace, but expounded his own distinctive view of the much-discussed issue of conditions related to the covenant of grace.

There cannot be a right understanding of covenant theology without a right understanding of Christ. Hence chapter three focuses on his person and work. Descriptions of the general and particular offices of Christ are analysed, as well his states of humiliation and exaltation. According to Brown, a biblical and Reformed conception of Christ is the foundation of the free offer of the gospel and of sanctification. Thus there is a direct relation between covenant theology and both Christology and sanctification.

Sanctification, the privilege and duty of those who are united to Christ, is described in chapter four. For Brown, the sovereign work of the Triune God, as well the responsibilities of believers are rooted in the covenant.

Several practical implications are described in chapters five and six.

Chapter five describes the meaning of a covenantal piety and shows how Brown's writings apply doctrine to different aspects of the Christian life. Important here is Brown's experiential Calvinism reflected in the communion that believers have with the Triune God.

Chapter six explores Brown's teaching on the character of a minister's life, as well the elaboration of his sermons, focusing on how the doctrines described throughout this research find their converging point in the life of the Reformed pastor.

The conclusion then assess Brown's theology in relation to both his predecessors and successors in the Scottish Reformed tradition and discusses how, for John Brown, set in the midst of a society affected by cultural rationalism, a Christological covenantal theology was seen as essential to maintaining the biblical theology of the Reformed faith and therefore of paramount importance in both the Christian life and in the preparation of new pastors to enable them to preach with fidelity the message of the gospel of the Triune God.

2

John Brown of Haddington**The Young Christian**

John Brown was born in 1722 in the village of Carpow, near Abernethy, Perthshire, Scotland.¹ Despite scarce economic resources, his parents endeavoured to raise him in an atmosphere of piety and Christian devotion. In his early years he experienced the family worship and catechetical instruction that he later highlighted as an important duty in the Christian life. He wrote, 'It was the mercy that I was born in a family which took care of my Christian instruction, and in which I had the example of God's worship, both evening and morning; which was the case of few families in that corner at that time'.²

When Brown was eleven years old, both his parents, John Brown and Catherine Millie, died. In the same year, 1733, the Associate Presbytery was constituted. This was the Church in which Brown would later exercise his ministry and in which he would become heir to the *Marrow Theology*.³

Because of his family circumstances, Brown's education was very limited. Nevertheless he was an avid reader. Thomas Vincent's and John Flavel's *Catechisms* were among the works he read in his childhood along with Samuel Rutherford's *Letters*. In addition he carefully studied the

¹ William Brown, *The Life of John Brown with Select Writings* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 7. This is the edition of 1856 of *Memoir and Select Remains of the Rev. John Brown*.

² Ibid.

³ William Vandoodewaard, *The Marrow Controversy and Seceder Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 117-118. For the reasons for the Secession see John Brown [of Haddington], *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Secession* (Edition Sixth; Edinburgh: Printed by Hugh Inglis, 1791), 24-25.

Westminster Confession of Faith and its respective *Catechisms*.¹ These documents helped shape his Reformed theology.

In addition, Brown's difficult circumstances paved the way for his later ministry which was marked by an experimental Calvinism. His grandson comments, 'Mr. Brown speaks of his spiritual experience during this period of sweet and edifying communion, as having been peculiarly lively and affecting'.² As Brown wrote:

The reading of Alleine's 'Alarm to the Unconverted' contributed not a little to awaken my conscience and move my affections ... I made much the same use of Guthrie's 'Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ'. Indeed, such was the bias of my heart under these convictions, that I was willing to do any thing, but flee to Christ and his free grace alone for salvation.³

As Brown indicates, the kind of theology that would mark his life was not a cold doctrine, but rather a warm orthodox theology that instructed the mind, touched the affections, and moved the will to rest in and work for Christ. This experimental piety stood in marked contrast to the social and ecclesial trends of the times, dominated as they were by the Scottish Enlightenment⁴ on the one hand and the influences of the Moderate party on the other.¹

¹ John Brown Patterson, *Memoir of the Rev. John Brown*, v. This memoir is included in John Brown [of Haddington], *The Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (Edinburgh and London: A. Fullarton & Co., no year of publication). Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 8.

² Brown, *Memoir of the Rev. John Brown*, vi.

³ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 9.

⁴ This was an era that 'witnessed the perceptible though gradual triumph of reason, reason applied to knowledge, to religion, to political and social arrangements. Tradition, faith and divine right could no longer expect to prevail as unquestioned authorities in the affairs of men'. Anand C. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1976), 4. John Macleod describes the situation: 'These were days when the mordant acid

Brown's early life was characterized by a strong commitment to the means of grace, such as prayer and Bible study. In addition he would walk several miles to hear sermons by evangelical preachers, such as the Rev. Adam Gib.² Gib impacted Brown's life at an early stage but would later engage in open opposition to him.

Brown suffered sometimes from poor health. This together with the emphases in the preaching he heard, made him seriously reflect on his past religious experience (which he sometimes despised) and on his own standing before God.³ The eternal state of souls later became a constant theme in his sermons and treatises, as was language that emphasized the importance of the affections in the Christian life. However, he also stressed that his own experiences should never be seen as the benchmark for others' salvation: 'I saw that it was improper for a preacher to make his own experiences, either of one kind or another, any thing like the

of deistic critical unbelief or eighteenth century illumination was eating into the substance of religious thought and life in wide circles of the nation. The thinking of the unevangelical school fell under this blight'. John Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 194. For Brown definitions of a deist see, *An Historical Account*, 74-75. Brown referred to David Hume as 'the great modern pillar of infidelity, who perhaps neither believed a God, a heaven, a hell'. John Brown [of Haddington], *A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 33. We will refer to this book as *Systematic Theology*.

The moralism of the Moderate party harmonised with the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment. D.W. Bebbington. 'Enlightenment' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology* (Edited by David F. Wright, David C. Lachman and Donald E. Meek. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1993), 294.

¹ Moderates were a group within the Church of Scotland who differed from the Evangelical party, mainly in that while the latter 'were men who held and preached the mysteries of the faith; the tendency among the Moderates was to give a minimum of the characteristic truths of the gospel'. Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 210. Moderate preaching was characterized by moralism and legalism. See for example, Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 210-215. Some of their representatives were quite critical of the Christian Creeds and Confessions. H.R. Sefton, 'Moderates', *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology* (Edited by David F. Wright, David C. Lachman and Donald E. Meek. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1993), 596.

² Brown, *Memoir of the Rev. John Brown*, v.

³ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 11-12.

discriminating standard of his conceptions or declarations on these delicate subjects'.¹

The Diligent Student

John Brown's theological development can be divided into two stages: self-training and formal education in the Theological Hall of the Associate Synod.

Despite having studied for only a few months in the elementary school of Abernethy with only one month of Latin², the young Brown had a thirst for acquiring knowledge of various languages. While working as a shepherd on the farm of John Ogilvie, an elder in the church of Abernethy, Brown took every free moment to learn. His minister, Alexander Moncrieff, who for a time was a friendly counsellor, lent him books from his own study. Brown readily acquired knowledge of Latin and Greek. So great was his desire to learn the language of the New Testament that on one occasion he began at midnight a twenty-four-mile journey to St. Andrews to buy a Greek New Testament. A professor of the university rewarded both his effort and the unexpected facility in Greek he demonstrated by buying a copy for him.³

This formidable ability in teaching himself Latin, Greek, Hebrew and other languages⁴ led to unforeseen consequences however. It precipitated not only envy but also slander from some within his own church.⁵

¹ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 12.

² D. F. Wright, 'Brown, John (1722–1787)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3622>, accessed 31 Aug 2017]

³ Brown, *Memoir of the Rev. John Brown*, vi-vii.

⁴ Brown, *Select Remains*, 22.

⁵ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 13.

Sadly Brown was accused of acquiring his linguistic skills from Satan,¹ a serious charge since the last execution for witchcraft had recently taken place in Scotland.²

Despite knowing his unfortunate family circumstances and personal hardships, Adam Gib and Alexander Moncrieff were among his accusers. Moncrieff's accusation was so vehement that he allowed 'the charge to hang around his neck'.³ In an effort to defend himself against slander and obtain a certificate of church membership, Brown wrote a letter to Moncrieff, but he was intransigent. Finally, in June 1746, by unanimous vote of the elders and deacons of the church, the certificate was granted to Brown, although Moncrieff dissented and refused to sign it.⁴

Undoubtedly both the knowledge of biblical languages he acquired and the adversities he experienced during these years of defamation helped to shape the character of the future student, minister and professor of theology.

In the middle of this conflict, Brown left his occupation as a shepherd and began to work as a peddler or travelling salesman.⁵ But his real interest lay in books. They fed his desire to learn more and to become a minister. But for this, he had to formalize his theological studies.

In 1747, Moncrieff and Gib separated from the other ministers with whom they had begun the Secession Church. This separation ('The Breach') resulted in two denominations, the General Associate Synod, led

¹ Brown, *Memoir of the Rev. John Brown*, vii.

² Janet Horne was executed in 1727. According to Robert Mackenzie, this execution was in 1722.

³ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 32.

⁴ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 33-44.

⁵ Wright, *Brown, John (1722-1787)*, ODNB.

by Moncrieff and Gib, and the Associate Synod with James Fisher and Ebenezer Erskine. Brown followed the latter group.

Faced with this new situation, the Associate Synod began its own program for training ministers. The professor appointed was Ebenezer Erskine and his first enrolled student was the twenty-six year old John Brown. While a previous university education was usually required for the study of theology, Brown was accepted into the Theological Hall because of his knowledge of languages and theological works. In addition, he was received as a candidate for the ministry because of his godly character. As Ralph Erskine indicated, 'I think the lad has a sweet savour of Christ about him'.¹

Brown studied two sessions under Ebenezer Erskine in Stirling between 1747 and 1748. The main theological textbook was the *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* of François Turretin (1623-1687). Two years later Brown became a student of the Rev. James Fisher, another of the main leaders and initiators of the Secession Church.² Fisher's theological knowledge greatly influenced the young student. He placed considerable emphasis on biblical exegesis and on its subsequent application in preaching. The study of hermeneutics was intended to bear fruit in the pulpit.³

After completing his theological studies, Brown was licensed to preach by the Associate Presbytery of Edinburgh in 1750.⁴ It was an important moment in his life, not only because of the difficulties he had experienced, but especially because he understood what it would mean to be a minister. He understood *Question 1* of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*

¹ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 68.

² Ibid, 69-70.

³ Ibid, 70.

⁴ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 17.

he had learned as a child. Everything had to be for God's glory. In his own words:

I know not how often I have had an anxious desire to be removed by death from being a plague for my poor congregation. But I have oft taken myself, and considered this as my folly, and begged of Him, that if it was not for his glory to remove me by death.¹

Brown received simultaneous calls from the congregations of Stow (Edinburgh) and Haddington. He chose the latter for two reasons: his modest estimate of his own qualifications and because the Haddington congregation had experienced some difficulties with regard to the establishment of a minister. He was ordained on July 4th, 1751 and remained in Haddington until his death in 1787.²

The Reformed Pastor

Brown's pastoral work focused primarily on three things: preaching the Bible, prayer meetings, and catechesis.

In the winter months, two worship services were conducted every Sunday, while in the remaining months there were three.³

For Brown, preaching was a serious task. He emphasized the connection between preaching and the preacher. There must be no dissociation between what the mouth expresses and what is in the heart. In his *Reflections of One Entered on the Pastoral Office*, he comments:

¹ Ibid, 17-18.

² Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 68.

³ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 17. Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 79.

How many eyes of God, angels, and men, are upon me!
 Why then, conscience, do I speak of heaven or hell - of
 Jesus and his love – his blood – of the new covenant and
 its blessings – in so careless and sleepy manner, when
 before and on every side of my pulpit, there are so many
 scores or hundreds of immortal souls suspended over
 hell by the frail thread of life...!¹

In the pulpit Brown did not display the technical knowledge he had acquired, but instead brought biblical truths in a simple way.² As he said: 'I was led generally to preach as if I had never read a book but the Bible'.³ His sermons pointed directly to the hearts and consciences of his congregation.⁴ An English divine, the Rev. Robert Simpson, described in 1770 his preaching as 'close, and his address to the conscience pungent. Like his Lord and Master, he spake [sic] with authority and hallowed pathos, having tasted the sweetness, and felt the power of what he delivered'.⁵ David Hume, the Scottish philosopher, said Brown preached as 'if he were conscious that the Son of God stood at his elbow'.⁶ Brown's sermons were built not through study and exegesis alone, but were accompanied by a strong prayer life. For him this was an important responsibility of every minister. It was his practice to pray before and after the worship service for both his sermon and his congregation. In addition, every first Monday of the month (except September) the Kirk

¹ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 190.

² *Ibid*, 72.

³ *Ibid*, 20.

⁴ John Brown [of Whitburn], *Select Remains of the Rev. John Brown* (Fourth Edition, with Large Additions; Berwick: Printed for J. Reid, 1807), 26. We will refer to this book as *Select Remains*.

⁵ *Ibid*, 26-27.

⁶ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 100.

Session had a meeting for prayer.¹ He also saw prayer societies during the week as important for Christian life. Not only did he recommend them from the pulpit, but he also participated actively in the meetings. In this, as in other aspects of his work, he was conscious of his shortcomings: 'I lament that I have been so deficient in effectual fervent prayer for my flock, and for the Church of God'.² On another occasion he wrote, 'I lament that though I pretty often attended the Society meetings for prayer and spiritual conference, yet I did not do it more, especially after my settlement in the congregation'.³

The third aspect of his pastoral work focused on catechizing. For this, the congregation was visited once a year and examined twice a year.

Brown visited with an elder all the families of the members in a certain area.

First, he taught the heads of households both doctrine and duties. Then he proceeded to catechize the children of the family.⁴ Interestingly, his first and third publications were related to teaching his people through catechism. His first work was *Questions and Answers* derived from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. In his third publication entitled *Two Short Catechisms, Mutually Connected* (1764), there is a clear interest in the teaching of parents and children. These pastoral visits ended with an exhortation and prayer.

Then, secondly, Brown engaged in examination of a more public nature. The objective was to consolidate the members of the church explicitly in biblical and Reformed doctrine.⁵

After Brown had served for sixteen years in the Haddington congregation, the professor of divinity of the Associate Synod died.¹ The denomination

¹ Ibid, 79-80.

² Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 24.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 34.

⁵ Ibid, 35.

needed someone with theological acumen, pastoral wisdom and ecclesiastical commitment. On August 27th, 1767, John Brown was elected the new divinity professor of the Associate Synod.²

The Godly Divinity Professor

The training of future ministers involved two elements. For ten months of the year they were under the supervision of their local presbytery.

During August and September however they studied full-time under the tutelage of a single professor. For twenty years, until his death in 1787, students therefore went to Haddington to be trained under Brown. On average, there were approximately thirty students per year. Classes began at ten in the morning and ended between twelve and one in the afternoon. On Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday they met together in the afternoon to hear lectures and sermons from the students from the first to the fifth year.³ On Wednesday afternoon they met for discussion and debate and every Saturday they met with Brown for prayer.⁴

To help his students with their exegesis of the Old Testament, Brown prepared a short Hebrew vocabulary and grammar. His knowledge of biblical languages together with his passion for biblical learning, teaching and preaching led him to write his own commentaries and publish *The Self-Interpreting Bible*.⁵ His broad learning was also reflected in his writing on Church History.⁶

¹ Rev. John Swanston.

² Jack C. Whytock, "An Educated Clergy" *Scottish Theological Education and Training in the Kirk and Secession, 1560-1850* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 210.

³ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 132.

⁴ *Ibid*, 133.

⁵ First edition in 1778.

⁶ *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Secession* (1766), *A General History of the Christian Church, from the Birth of our Saviour to the Present Time*. Two vols. (1771) and *A Compendious History of the British Churches in England, Scotland, Ireland, and America, with an Introductory Sketch of the History of the Waldenses*. Two Vols.

Brown had extensive knowledge of the works of Reformed divines such as Calvin, Owen, Goodwin, Mastricht, Perkins, Charnock and others. But rather than use Turretin's *Institutes*, he instead produced his own material for the students. In time this became *A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion*. Prior to its first publication in 1782, all students had to transcribe the entire manuscript by hand. In addition to this, they were interrogated orally and had to memorize different doctrinal definitions along with supporting biblical verses. Brown emphasised that the knowledge acquired should be manifested in a practical way in each student's life. This concern was reflected in his publishing of biographies,¹ as well as in his *Address to Students of Divinity*, his *Christian Journal* and in the memorization by his students of some passages from his *Cases of Conscience*.

The care of his students was not limited to five years of theological education, but extended to their later ministries. For example, in a letter to a minister who had been his student, Brown wrote:

I know the vanity of your heart and that you will feel mortified that your congregation is very small in comparison with those brethren around you; but assure yourself, on the account of them to the Lord Christ, at His judgment-seat, you will think you had enough.²

(1784). See Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 166-171 and John Croumbie Brown, *Centenary Memorial of the Rev. John Brown, Haddington. A Family Record* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 17 Princes' Street, 1887), 128

¹ *The Christian, the Student, and Pastor, exemplified in the Lives of Nine Eminent Ministers of Scotland, England, and America* (1781). *The Young Christian; or, the Pleasantness of Early Piety* (1782). *Practical Piety exemplified in the Lives of Thirteen Eminent Christians, and illustrated in Cases of Conscience* (1783).

² Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 147.

This characteristic is reflected in the advice given to ministers on their behaviour and preaching in *Six Letters on Gospel Preaching* and *Ten Letters on the Exemplary behaviour of Ministers* (1785).

Brown died in 1787 having wonderfully fulfilled his duties as a minister of a local church and as professor of theology.

The Model Minister

The qualities of an exceptional minister were recognized early in Brown when he was elected Moderator of the Synod. He had been a pastor for just over two years.¹ His influence spread. He corresponded with the Countess of Huntingdon, influencing the theological thinking of the students of Wales at that time.² In 1784 he was invited to be a professor in the theological Hall of the Dutch Reformed Church in America, but he declined the invitation.³

Brown developed his theology with strong biblical and Reformed emphases. His subscription to the *Westminster Standards*, as well as his knowledge of puritan divines bore fruit in his own *Systematic Theology*. Five characteristics stand out in this work:

- 1) His ability to be precise and concise when developing the main doctrines. In a single volume, Brown expounds material generally developed in several volumes in other authors.
- 2) Every chapter has many biblical references to support each doctrinal point. As Richard Muller notes, Brown's intention is 'to point his readers

¹ Ibid, 87-88.

² Whytock, *An Educated Clergy*, 210.

³ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 243-244. He never mentions why he declined it.

away from his own definitions and back to the text of the Bible and to demand that theology be grounded in Scripture'.¹

3) A covenantal backbone. From the sixteenth century, the Reformed developed their theological systems in terms of Covenant Theology. Some Scottish divines played an important role in the consolidation and development of this.² It is in this line that Brown developed his own theological system. His *Systematic Theology* is divided into seven books. Five of them refer explicitly to the doctrine of the Covenant:

Book III: Of the Covenant Bonds of Religious Connection between God and Men.

Book IV: Of Christ, the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace

Book V: Of the Principal Blessings of the Covenant of Grace.

Book VI: Of the External Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace, by the Law, the Gospel &c.

Book VII: Of the Church or Society, for, and to which, the Covenant of Grace is dispensed. ³

This covenantal aspect leads to:

4) A practical and devotional emphasis. Almost every chapter ends with a reflection that leads the reader to examine his own heart with respect to the doctrine studied. This was the fruit of what Brown was forging in his

¹ This is a review of Brown's *Systematic Theology* by Muller. Richard A. Muller, 'The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington' *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 no 2 (Nov 2003),362-364.

² For example Robert Rollock and his contribution to the differences between an explicit *Covenant of Works* and *Covenant of Grace*. Robert Rollock, *Some Questions and Answers about God's Covenant and the Sacrament That Is a Seal of God's Covenant* (Translated and Edited by Aaron Clay Denlinger; Eugene: Pickwick Publications). David Dickson and Samuel Rutherford were the first divines to differentiate between a *Covenant of Redemption* and *Covenant of Grace*. See David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy 1718-1723* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988), 37.

³ Book I: Of the Regulating Standard of Religion. Book II: Of GOD, the Author, Object, and End of all Religion. Brown, *Systematic Theology*, xix-xxii.

own life and in the lives of his students. He wanted to ‘impress their consciences and hearts with a sense of their own individual interest in it, with the necessity of personal piety, and with the solemn responsibilities of the Christian ministry’.¹

5) Brown’s work reflects the foundation and purpose of his theology: Jesus Christ. He exhorts his students to ‘*begin all things from Christ, carry on all things with and through Christ; and let all things aim at and end in Christ*’.² Likewise, their theological preparation for pastoral ministry should lead them to an experiential love for Christ: ‘if you do not *ardently* love Christ, how can you *faithfully* and *diligently* feed his lambs – his sheep?’.³ In the same line, this practical and Christological focus can also be seen in his *Self-Interpreting Bible*,⁴ treatises and letters.

For Brown, words like ‘there is no learning nor knowledge like the knowledge of Christ; no life like Christ living in the heart by faith’⁵ and ‘believing that God hath made with me, and my seed after me, his “everlasting covenant, to be a God to me and to my seed”’⁶ reflect a deep interest in living according to Christ and his Covenant of Grace. The memorization by his students of sections of his *Systematic Theology* and *Cases of Conscience*, were intended to reflect this theological and practical emphasis.

What elements helped shape Brown’s teaching, preaching and writings? We turn now to answer this question by first considering his covenant theology.

¹ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 58.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, xviii.

³ Ibid, xi.

⁴ Each chapter ends with a devotional and Christological reflection.

⁵ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 157.

⁶ Ibid, 197.

3

John Brown's Covenant Theology**The Concept of Covenant**

Following the order of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, John Brown links the Covenant directly with God's Providence. For him, the special work of Providence toward man in his primitive or pre-fall state was that '[God] entered into a covenant with him'.¹ He did this in order 'to render men more happy, and their obedience more cheerful'.²

At the outset, it is important to define Brown's understanding of the nature of a Covenant.

He notes that the Hebrew word *berith* denotes an establishment in general³ but also a *choosing, or friendly parting*.⁴ Covenants, he wrote:

...were made with great solemnity; beasts were slain with awful imprecations that God might deal so with the breaker. The Scripture alludes to the solemnity of killing a calf, and rending it asunder, and passing between the parts, in token of a solemn wish, that so God might rend in twain the breaker of the covenant.⁵

¹ John Brown [of Haddington], *Questions & Answers on the Shorter Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 62. See John Brown [of Haddington] *Two Short Catechisms Mutually connected* (Edinburgh: Printed by John Gray and Gavin Alston, 1764), 24.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 192.

³ Ibid.

⁴ John Brown [of Haddington], *The Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (Edinburgh and London: A. Fullarton & Co., no year of publication), 186.

⁵ Ibid.

This is why the making of covenants is often called a *cutting*.¹

Commenting on Genesis 15:17, Brown indicates that the division of the animals ratified the covenant with Abraham (and his descendants) in 'God's passing between the pieces, in the symbol of the burning lamp'.²

The Greek word *diathēkē* (covenant) signifies an '*establishment, particularly one by agreement or testament*'.³ 'Testament' means 'the will of a dying man, whereby he determines how his property shall be disposed of after his death'.⁴

Brown defines covenant in general terms as '*an agreement made between different persons on certain terms*'.⁵ This definition points to the elements required to establish a covenant i.e. *parties, a condition, a promise* and finally a *penalty*.⁶ According to Brown, the Bible mentions only two divine covenants for the eternal happiness of men, the first one is the Covenant of Works and the second is the Covenant of Grace, where all mankind are in one of these two covenants.⁷

¹ Ibid.

² John Brown [of Haddington], *The Self-Interpreting Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments According to The Authorised Version* (Edinburgh, Dublin and London: A. Fullarton & Co., 1860), 20. We will refer to this book as *Bible*.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 192.

⁴ Brown, *Dictionary*, 186.

⁵ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 192; *Questions & Answers*, 62; *Two Short Catechism Mutually connected*, 24.

⁶ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 192; *Questions & Answers*, 62.

⁷ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 62.

The Covenant of Works

Brown believed that the relationship in which Adam stood with God was a covenantal one. The *parties* to this first covenant, were on one side God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and on the other, Adam. The Triune God manifests himself as the Creator and Sovereign Lord of the entire human race who with *supreme and unbounded authority*, reveals his will in a law.¹

Here, however, Brown holds to an important distinction between Adam *as created* and Adam *in covenant* with God. He considers that, at the moment of his creation, he was only under the law and not under a covenant; he was a servant of God who must perfectly obey the law of God without any promised reward.² But superimposed on this relationship, God declares also his *unbounded authority* in establishing with Adam a proper method for him and all his sons, to lead them to an eternal and happier state on the easiest terms.³ God reveals himself as a God of infinite condescension in establishing a covenant with the first man.⁴ Therefore, even when it is called a *covenant of works*, this is a *gracious covenant*⁵ which made Adam a friend and ally with God, promising a great reward for his obedience.⁶

The second party in this covenant is Adam. He was created *perfectly holy and righteous*, with all the capacities to fulfil what God required of him.

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 195.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 62.

³ For Brown, this means 'one man's perfect obedience to God's law for a time, perhaps a very short time, would have secured this happiness to all mankind'. *Systematic Theology*, 196.

⁴ Brown holds that a better translation of Hosea 6.7 would be 'They, like *Adam*', instead of 'They, like *men*'. See Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 194.

⁵ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 63. His catechism asks 'Was very much grace manifested in the covenant of works? Yes, very much free favour and bounty.' If someone asks 'Why then is it not called a covenant of grace?' He replies, 'because there was far less grace manifested in it than is in the second covenant'.

⁶ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 62.

Besides this, he is the common head of all his natural posterity born by ordinary generation.¹

Being a covenant made by the Creator, Adam could not but accept its terms. Not to desire this would have implied 'contempt of God's goodness and bounty', a hatred of the holiness of God and a rebellion against his authority.² So Adam must consider God as

His chief *good*, and seek happiness in him above all things else; that he should cheerfully accept of the everlasting enjoyment of him, and infinite good, when offered upon the easiest terms; that he should cheerfully receive the law, which was the will of his Creator and transcript of his moral perfections to be the rule of his dispositions and conduct.³

Thus Brown insists that God is not a tyrannical Creator who imposes his law capriciously. Rather the opposite; the Sovereign God is a gracious law-giver who condescendingly establishes the *Condition, Promise and Penalty* of this Covenant.

The condition was, and must be, obedience to God. In *Systematic Theology*, Brown develops this point in three aspects: the *Rule*, the *Matter* and the *Manner*.⁴

The *Rule* is a law founded on the immutability of God,⁵ it regulates man's actions and moral qualities. This law was manifested to Adam *before* the

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 195.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 196-197.

³ Ibid, 197.

⁴ Ibid. See *Questions & Answers*, 63.

⁵ Interestingly, Brown highlights the relationship between the unchangeable nature of God and his law so that 'all men, at all times, might have their dispositions and behaviour adjusted by the same standard'. *Systematic Theology*, 198.

covenant was established and required him to love God with all the faculties of his being and his neighbour as himself.¹ But then, in addition to the law of nature, God required the 'not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge'². This is a precept that promotes the exact fulfilment of the law. It manifests the Sovereignty of God over man; renders Adam's obedience or disobedience more obvious; shows that all that Adam held belonged to God; it also shows that Adam was fallible, and that his complete joy was not in paradise, but was to be found only in the Triune God. All of this simply summarises the law of nature imprinted in his heart.³

The *Matter* was an observance of the *whole law* of God and *acting* exactly according to it.⁴

Finally, and following the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, the *Manner* indicates the nature of Adam's obedience. It was to be personal, perpetual and perfect.⁵ It must be a personal obedience to the law *as a covenant* in his own person; perpetual till God 'should release him from under that law, in its covenant form'; and it must be perfect in its principle and motive⁶. In his own Catechism,⁷ Brown develops this last point, saying that this obedience must be perfect in its extent⁸, degrees⁹ and duration.¹⁰

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 198.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 63.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 198.

⁴ *Ibid*, 199.

⁵ Question 20.

⁶ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 199.

⁷ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 64.

⁸ *Loc. cit.*, 'His whole man, soul and body, was to obey the whole of God's law'.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*, 'He was to love and obey the Lord with *all his heart and strength*'.

¹⁰ *Loc. cit.*, 'It was to be constantly continued in till his time of trial was over'. After this, Adam 'would have been free from obedience to the law as a covenant, but never from obedience to the law as an eternal rule of righteousness'.

The *promise* for Adam, if he fulfilled the condition of the covenant, was life: *temporal, spiritual* and *eternal* life.¹ By temporal life, he means ‘the happy communion of soul and body in this world’.² Spiritual life means the continuity of the image of God in its perfection on his soul and a perfect intimacy and fellowship with God in this world.³ Eternal life consists in a full enjoyment of the Triune God, in body and soul, not on earth but now in heaven and for all eternity.⁴

The seal of this covenant-promise was the tree of life, which Brown holds pointed, although in an obscure way, to a more perfect life promised upon the fulfilment of the condition.⁵

God was not in any sense Adam’s debtor, but by means of this covenant—which he sustained in his sovereign grace—he became a debtor to himself, ‘... to his own kindness, and his faithfulness pledged in his promise’.⁶

Brown also supports the idea that there was an inherent promise of eternal life in the covenant of works from the fact that eternal death was included in the threatening if Adam broke it.⁷ Here he distinguishes between two types of death: a *Legal Death* and a *Real Death*. The first points to the curse, or the *sentence* of condemnation of the broken law at the moment of the fall.

¹ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 65. See *Questions & Answers*, 63.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 65.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 200.

⁴ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 65.

⁵ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 201.

⁶ *Ibid*, 202.

⁷ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 65.

When he describes the Real Death as the actual *execution* of that sentence, he develops it in terms of *Spiritual Death*, *Natural Death* and *Eternal Death*.¹

The loss of God's favour and separation from fellowship with him are the main consequences of the *Spiritual Death*. The degeneration of man's understanding, conscience and affection are the results of the loss of God's image in Adam's soul. In the progress of this spiritual death, the sinful lusts are strengthened and the inflictions of God's just vengeance can be felt through the sorrows, anxieties and terrors of the soul. On the other hand, these inflictions are unfelt because of a blindness of mind, and hardness of heart.² In this state, man is not a friend of God; he has lost his friendship and fellowship, becoming an enemy of his Creator.

Natural or Temporal Death refers to the mortal constitution of man after sinning, and is completed in the terrible separation of the soul from the body. This *natural* death not only affects man in the course of his life through the sorrows and troubles he experiences in both soul and body; it also affects all of nature: animals, air, and wind; indeed Brown sees the entire earth becoming progressively worse.³

Finally, *Eternal Death* involves the 'complete loss of every thing good or agreeable, earthly, or divine' and 'the enduring most tremendous torments in soul and body'⁴ or 'the accursed separation of the whole man from God, and lying under his wrath in hell forever'.⁵

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 202. *Questions & Answers*, 65.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 203.

³ Ibid, 203-204.

⁴ Ibid, 204.

⁵ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 65.

Despite having these promises and threats before him, Adam broke this covenant. Brown has only one way to describe this: sin against God. This horrific act was committed by eating the forbidden fruit. Adam doubted the threats of God. According to Brown, the first sin included unbelief, pride, ambition, bold and presumptuous curiosity, shocking ingratitude and discontentment, contemptuous apostasy in renouncing the covenant of friendship, and breaking the whole law of God in just one act and thus trampling down the authority and love of God.¹

This sin was so terrible because it was committed against the Holy God by someone created in his image and by eating a fruit which God had forbidden, and doing so almost immediately after the establishment of the covenant.² In that moment, Adam abused the freedom of his will.

Adam's sin was imputed to all his natural posterity. The result of this is that he can no longer be the federal head of a covenant that would lead his posterity into eternal life.³ Having lost the favour of God, none of them can now obtain the covenant blessings. They are henceforth under the curse of the broken covenant and are incapable of fulfilling perfectly the law of God.

Despite this, the covenant of works was *not utterly abolished*. The law⁴ of it remains without any changes. Now only an infinite satisfaction for the sin committed against an infinite God, and a perfect obedience from man can fulfil the conditions that will bring eternal life.⁵ Therefore, all mankind

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 206-207.

² Cf. Robert Rollock: 'Q: When did he [Adam] fail with respect to the covenant of works? A: Immediately after creation and the establishment of that covenant.' Rollock, *Some Questions and Answers*, 27.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 208-210.

⁴ 'It were most absurd to imagine, this act of disobedience could annul the obligation of the divine law, or render men independent of God, and not obligated to obey him. Man therefore now became at once obligated to perfect obedience, and to endure the whole penalty of the violated agreement'. Brown, *Dictionary*, 187.

⁵ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 210-211.

mankind is naturally under the covenant of works in both its matter and its form.¹ The law still has the power to command every man to fulfil it perfectly under pain of infinite punishment for even the smallest offence. Thus for Brown, the law of the covenant of works now represents a rigid master:

How extensive and hard its requirements of us! Without affording or allowing us any spiritual strength or nourishment, it demands; we should perfectly fulfil its precepts, holy, just, and good, spiritual, and exceeding broad ; and satisfy its unbounded penalty for our past offence... Ah, Jesus, how long I foolishly preferred this hard bondage, to thy easy yoke and light burden!²

This principle is so strong that even believers sometimes '*desire to be under the covenant of works*, and obtain happiness by their own righteousness, or the condition of it'.³ Nevertheless, no man can fulfil its demands by reason of the execution of the curse of the broken law. For Brown, this takes place in two stages: in this life and in the after life.

The execution of the curse in *this life* operates on the *soul of man* because it is separated from God, therefore 1) the *understanding* is marked by ignorance, doubt and unbelief. 2) The *conscience* becomes stupid, dumb, and error-prone, calling good evil, and evil good; it becomes angry, rigid and desperate. 3) The *will*, because of its weakness, is incapable of any good, and is wholly against God's will

¹ Ibid, 211.

² John Brown [of Haddington], *Sacred Tropology; or, a Brief View of the Figures, and Explication of the Metaphors, Contained in Scripture* (A New Edition; London: Printed by J. Haddon, Tabernacle Walk, 1813), 308.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 212.

and every gracious act concerning the salvation of men¹ and 4) his affections and 5) memory are unable to appreciate things related to God.²

The situation of those who are in this covenant is so awful because everything related to the gospel is *a savour of death unto death* for them.³ Their prayers and works are an abomination to the Lord; their corruptions increase more and more, and their lusts are members of the *old man* or body of sin. Because of this, they are called '*ungodly, devilish, worldly, insatiable, deceitful, hurtful*' and so on.⁴ The choices of sinners, and the curse of the law upon them increase the power and reign of lust in their lives to the point that sinful attitudes become 'more and more powerful, till they be altogether uncontrollable [sic]' and become 'their *predominant* lust'.⁵

Brown further develops this by noting that the execution of the curse also affects the *physical body*, resulting in diseases such as deafness, blindness, lameness, etc. This body is called a *vile body, sinful flesh* and *vessel of dishonour* because with all its lusts, gluttony, drunkenness, etc. it corrupts not only the soul and body but also every human relationship:⁶

Magistrates are oppressors ... Ministers are unfaithful,
unwatchful, unactive, unsuccessful, or deceiving.

Neighbours are unjust, selfish, and mischievous. ...

Husbands are such sons of Belial, that one cannot speak to
them; and wives such brawlers, continual dropping and
rottenness that one cannot live with them. Children are a

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 217.

² Ibid, 216-217.

³ Ibid, 217. 2 Corinthians 2:16.

⁴ Ibid, 218.

⁵ Ibid, 218.

⁶ Ibid, 220-221.

reproach and grief to parents, arrows to pierce their hearts.¹

Brown uses increasingly vivid language to describe the consequences of rebellion against God's covenant if the covenant breaker dies in that state. There is, first, an unhappy separation between soul and body. In the death of the sinner, the curse of the covenant secures the eternal and infinite separation from all God's blessings and fellowship and proclaims God's eternal war against him.

In the moment of death, the soul is dragged before the judgment-seat of God. All its sins are manifested in the presence of the Holy Judge, sins that bring a particular curse with them, causing Brown to exclaim 'Alas, what unnumbered cords of damnation'.² The sentence of eternal damnation begins when the soul is put in hell as a prison, securing it for the last judgment. In that moment two things are revealed to, and experienced by, the conscious sinner: on the one hand, how the wrath of God is poured out on him; and then, on the other, his lost happiness appears in its full value, and thus becomes an aggravation of his torment.³

At the last judgment, the soul will be reunited with the body, ready to appear at the tribunal of Christ. His appearance will be terrible to the condemned for he will then give the final sentence of the curse of the broken Covenant of Works: hell in its full strength forever.⁴

The terrible words used by Brown to describe the penalty of the broken covenant have a practical purpose. He wants his readers to consider and feel the state of their souls by asking themselves if they are under the

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 221.

² Ibid, 223.

³ Ibid, 223.

⁴ Ibid, 224.

covenant of works or if they have escaped from the curse of the broken law.¹ This he sees not merely as point of dogmatic theology, but as a deep pastoral concern. He expands on this with great pathos in a letter:

Alas! I fear many of you will go down to hell with a lie in your right hand, go down to hell with all the gospel sermons and exhortations you ever heard in your conscience, to assist it to upbraid, gnaw, and torment you! My dearly beloved hearers, shall I see you next, at the last day, standing at the left hand of your Judge? Shall I see those faces in flames, and those eyes which often looked at me, looking lively bright horror [sic] at the judgment-seat of Christ?²

With this in mind, Brown's goal is to awaken the conscience of his hearers. He warns them of their desperate condition, of the impossibility of self-salvation, and of the penalty of trusting in one's own obedience and works. He wants to lead the sinner to stop relying on himself for salvation and to look to the only one who has fulfilled, in a perfect, personal and perpetual way, the whole law of God and who also suffered the terrible curse of the broken covenant of works—the new and better federal head, and the new and better covenant in Jesus Christ.

¹ Ibid, 225.

² Brown, *The Life of John Brown*. 88

No Covenant of Works, no Covenant of Grace

The development of the concept of *covenant* and *covenant of works* in Brown's theology finds its starting point in the Bible, and in the Reformed tradition expressed in the *Westminster Standards*. Robert Mackenzie holds that in this area Brown's theology is '*less congenial and credible*'¹ than his exposition of the covenant of grace. Nevertheless, Brown's view is that without this background in the covenant of works there would in fact be no theological basis for the covenant of grace. In his view it is impossible to develop a post-lapsarian covenant of grace theology without first recognising the nature of the covenant of works between God and Adam.

Brown compares both covenants and analyses their agreements and differences and the relationship between them.² In sum, he argues that for a right understanding of Covenant Theology both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace must be held together.

Three things should be noted from Brown's exposition of the covenant of works as a gracious covenant.

First, man was not created immediately in a covenantal relationship with God. It was, therefore to manifest his grace and condescension in a special act of providence that God established the covenant of works with Adam. Secondly, this idea is not new. While not explicitly found in Fisher's catechism, it is clearly developed by Boston: the covenant of works 'was

¹ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 211. The chapter 'The Theologian' is not included in *The Banner of Truth* edition of 1964.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 97-98.

certainly an act of grace and admirable condescension in God'¹ and also 'man was under the law of nature before he was under the covenant'.² Thirdly, the fact that the covenant of works is based on the grace of God allows us to distinguish the law of God in three ways: 1) as a *law of nature*, it required perfect obedience from Adam, but there was no reward for this because man was not under a covenant. 2) As a *law of works*, it functioned as a covenant of works under which man was placed and, 3) as the *law of Christ*, it brings believers under the covenant of grace.³

In this way, in a cultural and social context where man was increasingly occupying central place, and in which his moral ability was stressed, Brown's doctrine of the covenant of works maintained the classical evangelical and Reformed doctrine of *total depravity* and *eternal punishment*, over against the philosophical ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment represented, for example, by David Hume.⁴

¹ Thomas Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion, with Respect to Faith and Practice, Upon the Plan of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* in *The Whole Works of Thomas Boston*; Aberdeen: George and Robert King, St. Nicholas Street, 236.

² Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines*, 237.

³ Brown, *Dictionary*, 405. Interestingly, discussing the question whether the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works or a covenant of grace, Brown comments: 'When we consider the ten commandments as ushered in with such terrible thunders and lightnings, and as attended with a curse to the breaker, they appear plainly a republication of the *covenant of works*, in order to alarm the Hebrews to flee from it to Jesus, the deliverer ... When we consider the ten commandments as founded on the preface, and laid up in the ark, and attended with the sacrifices and other ceremonies considered in their gospel signification, there appears a declaration of the *covenant of grace*, and of the law, as a rule of life embosomed therein. When we consider these laws as required to be observed, in order to secure a happy entrance into Canaan, and a peaceful residence therein, we justly take them up as the matter of a *national covenant* between God and Israel'. Brown, *Dictionary*, 405. (Italics mine).

⁴ Brown, *Systematic theology*, 33.

Brown's theology has a pastoral burden: its intention is to cause people to turn from the covenant of works to the new covenant, to flee from Adam to Christ who alone is the fountain and end of the covenant of grace.¹

The Covenant of Grace

The preacher ought clearly to understand the difference and the connection between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.²

With these words, John Brown underlines the importance of understanding the

infinitely more amazing, more costly, and curious engine of the new covenant [...] by means of which, all the inestimable benefits flowing from JEHOVAH'S deep purposes, bottomless wisdom, and unfathomable love, are brought near to us. Stupendous engine, of whose wheels the rings are dreadful: in which the unsearchable riches of God are in a manner exhausted.³

Brown introduces this doctrine by emphasising the intensification of man's ruined condition under the covenant of works. After the fall, a perfect obedience to the whole law is impossible for sinners since they

¹ For the importance of the doctrine of the Covenant of Works see Rowland S. Ward, *God and Adam: Reformed Theology and the Creation Covenant* (Melbourne: New Melbourne Press, 2003).

² John Brown [of Haddington], *Counsel to Gospel Ministers: Letters on Preaching, Exemplary Behavior, and the Pastoral Call* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 13.

³ John Brown [of Haddington], *The Christian Journal; or, Common Incidents, Spiritual Instructors* (A New Edition; London: Printed by R. Edwards, Crane Court, Fleet Street, 1810), 38.

cannot give a full satisfaction for their criminal violation of the law.¹ Their consciences are affected by the curse of the law, and the strength of sin, and the corruption of their hearts simply confirms their misery.² Against this background, Brown develops his theology in terms of the necessity, the occasion, the cause and the end of a new covenantal relationship with elected sinners.

To redeem man from the obligation and curse of the broken law, it was *necessary* that 'any covenant for the redemption of fallen men should be made with a divine person, who could infallibly secure' and in the same nature which had sinned 'would fully pay the debt, as stated from the broken covenant of works'.³ The *occasion* of God's making this covenant was man's new state of misery; but its *cause* and fountain was the love and sovereign grace of God. However, the *end* of the covenant of grace is not primarily soteriological. Rather it is to manifest the glory and attributes of the Triune God.⁴ Only when the glory of God is exalted as the ground and end of the covenant of grace is the salvation of the sinner firmly secured. For it does not rest in man, but in God's faithfulness to himself as the covenant maker.

Seeing God actively involved in the salvation of man was an emphasis that ran counter to the tendencies inherent in both the Scottish Enlightenment and religious Moderatism. Over against a stress on natural reason and moral ability, Brown comments that it is vain to pretend that 'rationality will render men sufficiently religious'⁵ and 'it is equally absurd to pretend that philosophy will, or can, correct the errors of mankind'.⁶ Saving faith is not founded on mere rational proofs, but in the application of the truth of

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 226.

² *Ibid*, 227.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ *Ibid*, 283.

⁵ *Ibid*, 40.

⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

the gospel by the Holy Spirit in our hearts.¹ A deistic and moralistic religion is inimical to the Reformed faith.

To sum up, Brown underlines that the salvation of sinners does not and cannot come from any of our own efforts or works. Only the undeserved grace and sovereign work of God secure salvation. As a result, the new covenant is called the covenant *of grace* because 'free grace moved God to make it; and all the blessings thereof are freely bestowed upon unworthy sinners'.²

For Brown, from all eternity, the three divine persons of the Godhead were involved in the making of this new covenant, although in a particular manner it was made between God the Father and God the Son as its Mediator.³

The party on heaven's side is God considered specifically in the person of the Father, both as the offended party because of man's sin, and as the one who manifests the fullness of his grace in the redemption of the elect; but also as 'infinitely just and holy, who cannot save sinners, but in a way of magnifying his law, satisfying his justice, and vindicating his holiness'.⁴

On the other hand, God the Son is the *party contractor* on man's side. The Son is considered as a *Representative* of his spiritual seed because he is compared with Adam who was our representative in the covenant of works.

In Brown's view, the promises of the covenant of grace made for men were all made first to Christ.⁵ This is a point he highlights. Christ is our Representative because he is the *surety* of this covenant. He is the only

¹ Ibid, 43.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 88.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 228.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 230. See *Questions & Answers*, 89.

⁵ Ibid, 231.

one who can fulfill the requirements of the law and at the same time make an infinite satisfaction for sin in the place of another.¹

In the same way, as the surety of the covenant, Christ magnifies the riches of God's grace because all promises are secured in him.² Against all neonomian tendencies, while Christ is the surety of his people's faith and repentance, this is not because these are conditions of the covenant but rather because they are the promises of it.³ He is the surety because of the dignity of his person and work and not because of anything residing in his people.

Only after having explained that the main parties of the covenant are the Father and the Son, can we refer to the *elected people* as the *party contracted for* in this covenant.⁴ Because Christ is their federal head, they are his body. Although the elect are considered as sinners unable to help themselves, in the sovereign and wise purpose of God, they are distinguished from the rest of the world, and are objects of the redeeming love of the triune God.⁵ Their election to salvation is not grounded in themselves, but in the love of God manifested in their new federal head. They are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

How is it, then, that the doctrine of a particular election does not dishonour Christ since he represents a lesser number than Adam did? Brown's answer is that 'Christ had infinitely more to do for the salvation

¹ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 90.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 231. Commenting on Hebrews 8:6: 'for taking away all differences between God and his people, and purchasing all its spiritual and eternal blessings for them, by his sacrifice of himself, and ratifying and securing for to them all its promises and blessings'. Brown, *Bible*, 1293.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 90.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 232.

⁵ *Ibid*, 232.

of one sinner, than Adam had to do for the happiness of innocent mankind'.¹

In this way, then, Brown emphasizes the role of Christ in the covenant of grace. The Son of God does not only bear, generally speaking, the character of Mediator. In particular he is the *Kinsman-Redeemer*, and the *Sacrificing Priest* who offered himself to God for the atonement of the guilt of his people.²

Brown notes three aspects to the *making* of this gracious covenant. 1) The Second Person of the Godhead was constituted *the second Adam*, and agreed to take our nature in order to be a *substantial*³ Mediator between God and men. 2) The Father gives a people to Christ, which implies a particular number of people chosen for eternal life. 3) The terms of, and every detail related to the salvation of Christ's people were fully settled in eternity e.g. 'what ransom should be paid, and in what form and time; what furniture for, assistance in, and reward of his surety-service, Christ should have from God the Father'.⁴

In connection with this last point, the work of the Holy Spirit is vital to the Trinitarian character of the covenant of grace. According to Brown, the Third Person of the Godhead is the one who acts as the

Publisher of the covenant-declaration, the furnisher, assistant, and rewarder of Christ, the witness of Christ's and his Father's fulfilment of this covenant, and as an effectual applier of the blessings of it to elect men.⁵

¹ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 90.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 232-233.

³ Truly God and truly man.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 234.

⁵ *Ibid*, 234.

By having one will with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is sent not only to publish, but also to execute the plan of this covenant of grace.

Consequently, he works in everything related to the incarnation of the Son, that is, in *forming, anointing and supporting* the manhood of Christ. On the other hand, he not only effectively applies the covenant blessing, but from his concern in the making of this covenant, 'he hath a right to be Intercessor in the hearts of believers for the blessings of it'.¹

Having thus considered the parties of this covenant, Brown proceeds to discuss the conditions of the covenant of grace within the scheme of Reformed covenant theology.

It will be helpful at this point to locate Brown's work in the context of the divines who influenced him. Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), and John Flavel (1630-1683) were two theologians whose theology left a deep mark in Brown's life. Flavel's *Catechism* was one of his favourite books as a child, while on his deathbed he recommended Samuel Rutherford's *Letters* to his children. In addition, the theology of the *Marrow Brethren* like Thomas Boston and James Fisher played an important role especially in his theological thought.

These four men represented two different strands of federal theology. Rutherford and Flavel developed a *three-covenant* scheme: *Covenant of Redemption, Covenant of Works* and *Covenant of Grace*, and highlighted that *faith* is the condition of the covenant of grace.

In his catechism, Flavel says that the difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is that 'the former requires exact Obedience, the latter Faith and sincere Obedience'.² So too, there is a

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 232.

² John Flavel, *An exposition of the Assemblies Catechism* (The Works of John Flavel; London: Printed for W. Baynes and Son, 1820), VI, 176.

covenant made from all eternity between the *Father and the Son* for our salvation that '*is not the covenant of grace, but of redemption*'.¹ Similarly, Rutherford distinguished between a Covenant of Redemption and a Covenant of Grace. The latter is the application of the eternal covenant, so although 'the covenants of Suretyship and Reconciliation differ, *yet must they not be separated*'.² The condition of the *pactum salutis*, Rutherford holds, is Christ's obedience to the law and his satisfaction of the broken covenant of works in the place of the elect.³ In *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* he indicates that 'the condition of the covenant [of grace] is faith; holiness and sanctification is the condition of covenanters ... *This do*, was the condition of the covenant of works. *This believe*, is the condition of this covenant [of grace]'.⁴ 'Condition' here is not used in an Arminian sense. As Rutherford notes, faith as condition of the covenant is itself a gracious gift, promised by God because 'for without his giving of a new heart, and his efficacious moving us to walk in his way, to which God is tied by covenant, we cannot choose but sin'.⁵

Boston and Fisher however held to a *two-covenant* scheme: a covenant of works and a covenant of grace, arguing that *faith is not the condition* of the latter.

¹ John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life Opened Up* (vol. I of Works; London: Printed for W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 53. Emphasis mine. For Flavel, the covenant of grace was made between *God and man*. See Flavel, *An exposition of the Assemblies Catechism*, 176.

² Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened: Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh: Printed by A.A. for Robert Brown, 1655), 309.

³ *Ibid*, 225.

⁴ Samuel Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 87.

⁵ *Ibid*, 88, 91. See also John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions. The mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 130-138 and D. Patrick Ramsey, "Samuel Rutherford's Contribution to Covenant Theology in Scotland" in Matthew Vogan, ed., *Samuel Rutherford: an introduction to his theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Reformation Society, 2012), 139-166.

Boston is emphatic in referring to the unconditionality of the covenant of grace: 'The covenant of grace is absolute, and not conditional to us'.¹ So too, faith cannot in a proper sense be called a condition of it, because Christ's fulfilling all righteousness is the condition of the covenant of grace.² Hence, faith is the gracious means through which a sinner is personally and savingly instated in the covenant of grace.³

In a similar way, James Fisher indicated that faith cannot be the condition of the covenant because it is promised in the covenant itself. It is rather the *instrument* and *gift* of it.⁴

For Boston, 'the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace are not distinct covenants, but one and the same covenant'.⁵ Similarly, for Fisher there is no warrant from scripture and the Westminster Standards to suppose two different soteriological covenants.⁶

Considering this background, Brown sought to develop his covenantal theology and by building on but also nuancing and enriching the theology of his predecessors.⁷ In particular his Trinitarian concept of the covenant of grace, with its strong Christological focus, led him to his views on the issue of its conditions and scheme.

¹ Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace* (The Whole Works of Thomas Boston; Edited by the Rev. Samuel M'Millan; Aberdeen: George and Robert King, St. Nicholas Street, 1850), VIII, 398. For an analysis of Boston's theology see A.T.B. McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1997), and Phillip Graham Ryken, *Thomas Boston as Preacher of the Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1999).

² Boston, *A Brief Explication of the Shorter Catechism* (The Whole Works of Thomas Boston; Edited by the Rev. Samuel M'Millan; Aberdeen: George and Robert King, St. Nicholas Street, 1850), VII, 40.

³ *Ibid.* 42.

⁴ James Fisher, *The Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained* (New Edition; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, Tweeddale Court, no year of publication), 98.

⁵ Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of The Christian Religion*, 333.

⁶ Fisher, *The Shorter Catechism Explained*, 95.

⁷ For example, concerning the place of the administration of covenant of grace (earth or heaven).

First he explains what does *not* constitute a true condition or when 'condition' is not defined very precisely.¹ While many Reformed divines called *faith* the *condition* of the covenant of grace. Brown prefers to express the relationship differently:

faith is particularly required in the public dispensation of this covenant by the gospel, and is the appointed instrument by which God communicates, and we receive the blessings of it ... and indeed might be called a condition of connection IN it'.²

Thus, expressing empathy with Rutherford, Flavel and others, Brown recognizes that in some sense faith might be called a condition with respect to the covenant of grace. Nonetheless, when *condition* is properly defined, giving the performer the right to claim the promised reward,³ or when it is strictly taken as the full right of the covenanter to claim the promised reward when it is fulfilled, faith cannot be considered a true condition of the covenant of grace.

In this way, Brown is seeking to emphasise the role of *the righteousness of Jesus Christ*, the God-man, by which all the demands of the broken law are fully satisfied. This is, properly speaking, the only condition of the covenant of grace.⁴ No man can fulfill the condition of the broken covenant of works, pay the infinite debt, and make satisfaction for his own sins as required by the holy nature of God. The covenant of grace does not annul the covenant of works; it honours and establishes it.⁵ In other

¹ i.e when condition signifies no more than 'what particular duties as performed must, in order of nature, precede the enjoyment of particular promised benefits, many things may be called *conditions*'. Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 234.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 234.

³ Brown, *Dictionary*, 178.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 234.

⁵ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 88.

words, the fulfilment of the conditions of the covenant of works becomes the condition of the covenant of grace.¹ This is precisely what has been accomplished by Jesus Christ.

To summarize, then, nothing but the righteousness of Christ can fulfill and satisfy the high demands and conditions of the covenant of grace in the place of the elect.

It is precisely at this point that Brown introduces the importance of a covenantal Christology.² It was necessary for the perfect holiness of Christ's human nature to answer for the righteousness demanded by the holy law of God.³ Besides, the dignity of his person gives an infinite value to his sufferings, satisfying in this way the infinite wrath of an eternal God⁴.

By presenting Christ as one of the parties of this covenant, and at the same time his righteousness as fulfilling its condition, Brown concludes two things: faith is not a condition of the covenant of grace, and the covenant of redemption is in fact the covenant of grace.

Faith is not the condition of this covenant because it cannot answer the demands of the broken law.⁵ Only the righteousness of Christ can do that. Therefore instead of being called a condition of the covenant, faith is an *inestimable benefit* promised in it.

In spite of maintaining a view distinguishing him from theologians he revered, Brown maintains a spirit of Reformed catholicity. His position is that previous *godly divines* (Rutherford and Flavel) were not strictly

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 234.

² See chapter 3.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 91.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 237.

⁵ By implication also repentance and new obedience.

speaking in error when they called faith the condition of this covenant, because they only meant that 'it was the instrument by which we are personally interested in that covenant, and receive the blessings of it'.¹ They did not see faith as a *contributing factor* to justification, and in that sense a 'condition'.

Nevertheless, Brown argues that it is precisely because of the *unconditionality* of this covenant for the elect, that we cannot sub-divide the covenant of grace, as if one covenant (*of redemption*) had been made with Christ and another (*of grace*) with the elect in their own persons.

Brown adds two further arguments to indicate that the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption are one and the same.

The first is that when Scripture speaks about the eternal happiness of mankind it mentions only two covenants, specifically the covenant of works that leads to bondage and another covenant (*of grace*) that leads to deliverance. In addition, the Scripture talks about the blood of *the covenant*, but never about the blood of *the covenants*.² Consequently, the Scripture sees Christ as the centre of one unique redemptive covenant of grace. Since Christ is the head and the party contractor of this covenant, there is no reason to distinguish between two gracious covenants, because 'our salvation depends upon none but one covenant; and that Christ and his people obtain their eternal glory by the same covenant'.³

In sum, Brown's goal is to keep the eyes of the covenanters fixed on Jesus to enjoy the blessings of the covenant.

¹ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 92.

² Ibid, 88. This is the same argument used by Fisher in his *Catechism* (page 96).

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 242.

These blessings are the promises of the covenant of grace, which explains why it is also called *the covenant of promise*. The absolutely full-of-grace nature of this *pactum* requires ‘not one duty of us in the whole of its dispensation’, but, at the same time, ‘God in it promiseth to work it in us, accept it from us, and reward us for it’¹. This constellation of promises, as Brown calls it, is confirmed by the oath of God. His glory, the *honour of Christ* and the *happiness of all the elect*, depend upon his fulfilling it.² Specifically, two kinds of promises are contained in this covenant of grace: some respect *Christ* and others respect the *elect*. But such is the unity between the head of the covenant and his body that every promise fulfilled in Christ terminates in the advantage of his church and therefore also in the joy and glory of Christ³.

With regard to the promises related to Christ’s person, Brown distinguished into *absolute* and *conditional*. The first concern the nature of and assistance in his work, in his possessing a holy manhood and in the abundant supply of the Holy Spirit given to him. Again we notice that there is a Trinitarian dimension to every aspect of this covenant.⁴ On the other hand, the conditional promises made to Christ are of the *acceptance* of and the *reward* for his work. *God’s acceptance of his service promises includes* his resurrection from the dead and his justification in the Spirit. In other words, these promises point out that God declares himself well pleased for his righteousness’ sake, and with him as Mediator, and believers in him because of it.⁵ Finally, God’s rewarding of his service includes the highest exaltation of Christ’s person as the

¹ Ibid, 237.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 92.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 237.

⁴ Ibid, 237-238. *Questions & Answers*, 92.

⁵ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 92.

Theanthropos.¹ Moreover, Christ is the manager of the welfare of his church, being the Head and Defender of a numerous spiritual seed, which ultimately results in a complete victory against all his and his people's enemies.²

Referring to promises related to *his people*, Brown holds that because these were primarily made to Christ himself, they have an immediate fulfilment for the elect. Since Christ is the heir of all things this includes every kind of promise. Furthermore, these promises were made before the foundation of the world and prior to the existence of any elect people. But only *spiritual union with Christ* gives them interest in and possession of all the covenantal promises. As a result, the main and the most comprehensive promise for sinners is *I will be your God, and ye shall be my people*.³

The result of this union with Christ is the sure promise of *eternal life* to the elect. This involves 'all true happiness in time and through all eternity, and all the means of it', and includes 'death to the broken law, to sin, and to the world and an endless life'.⁴ This promise is considered in three different periods: *before* union with Christ, *between* the moment of union with Christ and death, and in the *eternal state*. In the first stage, the elect *do not have title to, or possession* of eternal life in their own persons. At the second, they have *full title* but an *imperfect possession* of eternal life. Finally, in heaven, the elect have *full possession* and *full title* to eternal life.⁵

¹ As God-man. Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 92.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 238. See *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 26.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 93.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 239.

⁵ *Ibid*, 239.

Brown expands this analysis of the periods mentioned above through eleven chronological steps:¹

- 1) The promise of the *security of it*, being their natural life preserved till the appointed moment when they are united with Christ.
- 2) The promise of *spiritual union to Christ*, with special emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit to convince, allure, apprehend, conquer and quicken souls by showing Christ and working saving faith to receive him.
- 3) The promise of free and everlasting *justification*, that is the imputation to the sinner of Christ's fulfilment of the condition of the covenant, and the complete forgiveness of past, present and future sins.
- 4) The promise of a *new covenantal relation*; in which there is no more enmity between them and God, who is now their reconciled and reconciling friend, portion, father and God.
- 5) The promise of *sanctification* as proceeding from their union with Christ, from their new covenantal relationship, and from the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts.
- 6) The promise of their *perseverance and the forgiveness* of their daily sins, upon their renewed actions of faith and repentance.
- 7) The promises of *spiritual comfort*, consisting in the sensible (i.e. felt) assurance of God's love, peace of conscience and joy in the Spirit of God.
- 8) The promise of *temporal benefits*, including a covenantal protection from evil and the provision of all good things.
- 9) The promise of happy, sanctified and sweet *death*.
- 10) The promise of an *honourable judgment* at the last day.
- 11) The promise of *eternal happiness*, beginning in the moment of their death and completed with their resurrected bodies at the last day.²

¹ Such detailed analysis, which is characteristic of Brown, gives us an indication that he was capable of developing a *theoretico-practica* theology. That is, an analysis and synthesis that were features of Protestant scholasticism, but with a pastoral end in view.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 239-242.

Brown emphasizes that each of these promises is *grafted into* a specific work or promise made at first to Christ. Therefore, every single promise for the believer is linked to his union with Christ: 'Rejoice, my soul, the everlasting covenant, made with me in union with Christ, will procure me an abundant entrance into the metropolis of glory above'.¹

Furthermore these promises are: 1) exceeding *great*, because they come from a great God, 2) *precious*, because they were purchased by the blood of the Son of God, 3) *well-ordered* because they are beautifully interconnected between them, 4) *free*, flowing from grace² and 5) *sure*, because they are confirmed by God's oath and Christ's blood.³

An important point in Brown's theology here is the *administration* of the covenant. This is directly linked with the free offer of the gospel. Christ, the appointed Administrator of the covenant, administers it both on earth and in heaven.

'In heaven Christ administers it personally, without ordinances, and to the elect only; but on earth he administers it in ordinances, and partly by instruments, and partly to reprobates'.⁴ Thus the fact that in Christ the covenant is made only for the elect, does not contradict its indiscriminate administration to men in general. In fact, this covenantal administration is *without any consideration* of them as either reprobates or elect.⁵

¹ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 79.

² Interestingly, this point brings back the question of conditions: 'How can they be absolutely free, when many of them require some condition to be performed by us? Nothing is required as a condition in one promised, but what is absolutely promised in another'. But when the question is raised 'Why then hath God made many of his promises to run in a conditional form?', Brown replies 'To excite us to holiness, and to teach us to apply sundry promises at once'. See Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 93.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 93-94.

⁴ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 94.

⁵ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 243.

Again, Brown's Christological focus is important. Christ's commission from his Father for the administration of this covenant is general and unlimited. In other words, 'Though Christ effectually save none but his elect, he is by divine appointment, grant, and office, the Saviour of the world, fit for all sinful men and to whom they are all warranted by God to apply for salvation'.¹

Thus Christ's salvation is a *common salvation* to sinful men in general, because the fulfilling of the covenant condition by Christ was made in a *human nature* common to all men. Likewise, it is a common salvation as well because all humanity share the same sinful character as those for whom Christ specifically died. If this were not the case, Brown argues, nobody could be condemned for unbelief.² Therefore, for Brown, the doctrine of the covenant of grace ensures the eternal life of the elect and on the other hand, the administration and free offer of the gospel to all.³

Since Brown was a commentator on the whole Bible, it should not surprise us that his covenant theology is grounded in a view of God's saving work as unfolding in an organic way towards a single goal. . He holds that on the very day of Adam's fall, the development of the covenant of grace began. It was then that Christ, the Trustee and Testator of it, commenced publishing his covenant, which from then on was gradually enlarged with a clearer revelation of his benefits.⁴ Thus, commenting on Genesis 17:2, Brown indicates that in the covenant with Abraham, God *enlarges, renews, establishes* or *confirms* the same covenant of grace.⁵ In this way, he develops a redemptive-historically shaped doctrine of the

¹ Ibid, 244.

² Ibid, 244.

³ This point was developed widely in his Christology.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 246.

⁵ Brown, *Bible*, 21.

covenants, beginning with Adam after the fall, then with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Christ.¹

Thus Brown traces organically one covenant of grace throughout the Bible. In this sense, the Old Testament is the declaration of a *dying Saviour*. This was confirmed through many sacrifices and oblations typical of his death, and sealed with the respective sacraments of Passover and Circumcision. On the other hand, the New Testament is the *dying declaration of Christ himself*, confirmed by his own death and sealed by the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Here, Brown maintains a similar position to Calvin with respect to the substance, unity and continuity/discontinuity of the covenant of grace in the Old and New Testaments:²

These Testaments are circumstantially different in their time, clearness, fullness ... But they are the same in substance, exhibiting the same new covenant, making over the same Saviour and salvation, conferring the same right to, assurance of interest in, and actual enjoyment of eternal salvation, and requiring the same duties of faith, repentance, love, and new obedience in the legatees.³

Finally, the *ends* for which Christ administers this covenant are bringing sinners into it, the right management of the covenanters in their

¹ Brown, *Bible*, 1-li, 632.

² See John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* (Edited by John T. MacNeill. Translated by F.L. Battles. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), Book IV, Chapters XIV – XVII. See also Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 142-161; Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 66-67; Andrew A. Woolsey, Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 254-343.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 246.

justification and sanctification, and their complete eternal happiness in heaven.¹

But how is the sinner instated in this covenant of grace? The answer is, again, only through spiritual union with Christ, by which Christ brings sinners to himself, uniting with them as their husband and new covenant head. Having this as a secure ground, the sinner *responds* dutifully with *faith*.

As a result, the free grace of this covenant is preserved² and indeed exalted. For the fundamental point of this covenant is not faith, but the object of faith: Christ, the Messenger, Interpreter, Witness, Trustee, Testator and Executor of the Covenant of Grace.

The way in which Brown develops his theology of the Covenant of Grace reveals that his sources were the Bible, the Westminster Standards and the school of the *Marrow Brethren*. He employs terminology characteristic of the *Marrow* (e.g. 'grant').

His whole approach is opposed to the tendency of the Moderate school. While it avoided discussing the mysteries of the covenant of grace,³ Brown explores it in biblical, theological and pastoral terms. In his *Systematic Theology* alone, he uses 1,792 scriptural references to expound the covenant of grace.⁴ On the other hand, he was faithful to the Reformed doctrine expressed in the *Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms*. His writings also display continuity with Calvin's theology. Therefore, his subscription to a Reformed confession, elaborated by Puritan theologians

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 244-245.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 252.

³ MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 213.

⁴ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 221.

did not lead him to a position contrary to Calvin; His understanding of how the *external signs and seals* change between the Old and New Testament, while the *internal substance* of the covenant of grace remains the same, is typical of the Genevan reformer.¹

The federal theological tradition in which Brown stood has not lacked criticism. This we will consider in our concluding chapter. But at this juncture it is adequate, as well as important to stress that the *telos* of Brown's exposition of federal theology is that we keep our eyes fixed on Christ. For Christ himself is the covenant.²

Thus Brown's theology could be described as a Christological Covenant Theology. It is to this theme that we now turn.

¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.10.2.

² In the list of 'The names and Titles given to Jesus Christ' Brown mentions Christ as the Covenant. Brown, *Bible*, 1358.

4

Covenantal Christology

John Brown's last words were 'My Christ!'.¹ The Son of God was the focus of his life. Even when he realized that his health was failing, Christ remained his priority:

I am determined to hold Christ's work so long as I can. How can a dying man spend his last breath better than preaching Christ?.²

This same focus is evident in his theological treatises:

If my soul not love this Lord Jesus, let me be ANATHEMA,
MARANATHA, *accursed at his coming*.³

Why did Brown dedicate his life, writings, sermons and practical counsels to magnify the God-man? The substantive answer is that he believed that when he opened his Bible, Christ filled every page. Christ was the *telos* of every genealogy, history, prophecy, law and doctrine.⁴ This was so important for him that in the midst of the scientific-humanist awakening of his time, he could exclaim without fear that

I would not exchange the learning of one hour of fellowship with Christ for all the liberal learning in ten thousand universities, during ten thousand ages, even though angels were to be my teachers ... There is none

¹ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 137. *The Christian Journal*, 229.

² Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 91.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 576.

⁴ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 161.

like Christ ... There is no learning nor knowledge like the knowledge of Christ.¹

Such dedication rested on Brown's conviction that Christ is the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace. Any exposition of his covenantal thought therefore must focus on the Person and Work of the Administrator of this redemptive covenant.

For the making, fulfilment and administration of the covenant of grace it was necessary that its Federal Head manifest himself as its *Mediator*. Three things are necessary for this; he must have the nature of both God and man; he must build a bridge from God to men, and from men to God; and he must fulfil the conditions for, and do everything to purchase and preserve, reconciliation between God and sinners.²

The *end* of the incarnation of the Mediator is the glory of God and its *cause* is the love of God to men.³ When asking children 'What moved God to provide this glorious Surety and Redeemer for us?', Brown taught them to answer: 'Nothing but his own free love'.⁴

For Brown, the love of God is an essential element in understanding the work of Christ. In his sermon *The Love of God inseparable from His People*, he mentions four of its characteristics. First God is love, and therefore his love was from everlasting. Secondly, his love is sovereign and free.⁵ Thirdly, it is inconceivably great like its author; and finally it is an

¹ Ibid, 157-158.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 256.

³ Brown, Ibid, 256.

⁴ Brown, *Two Short Catechism Mutually connected*, 10.

⁵ Brown notes: 'God loves his people because he loves them'. John Brown [of Haddington] *The Love of God inseparable from His People. A Sermon Preached at the Interment of Mr. William Wallis*. London: Printed for the Author and sold by George Keith, 1758.

⁵ Brown, *The Love of God*, 9-11.

immutable love because the covenantal engagement between the Father and the Son secures it.¹

The Son of God was appointed from eternity to be the Mediator for the elect. Indeed, for Brown, this led Christ to experience delight in having fellowship with sinners and also in his anticipation of assuming a human nature.² This is manifested in every appearance of Christ to the saints of the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Daniel. So too, the frequent anthropopathisms and anthropomorphisms in the Old Testament were intended to point the covenant people to the future incarnation of God.³

The incarnation itself was an historical fact, in which the Second Person of the Trinity took our human nature. If this were not so the Christian faith would be a superstition and a deception.⁴ At a particular point in the 4,000 years of world history,⁵ the incarnation of the Son of God occurred.

The Mediatorial Person of Christ

Following the Reformed tradition, Brown highlights that Christ assumed a true human nature, that is, a reasonable soul and a human body formed of the Virgin Mary's substance. In this, the Spirit's role is significant. Without imparting substance of his own, he formed Christ's human nature in Mary's womb. He also formed his soul in an intimate union with his

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 257.

³ Ibid, 258.

⁴ Ibid, 261-262.

⁵ Brown, *Bible*, lviii.

human body and then sanctified¹ this manhood from its beginning; and then, in addition, he filled it with a fullness of gifts and grace.²

The doctrine of the Hypostatic Union, Brown defines as the Son of God assuming a human nature into³ his own divine person. Christ is 'God in my nature, obeying, suffering, bleeding, dying, rising, and ascending for me. Is JEHOVAH bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh!'.⁴

In Christ's incarnation Brown observes two divine acts. The first is a *forming-uniting* act, in which, by God the Trinity, Christ's manhood is united to his person as the Son of God. The second is an *assuming* act, where the Son alone assumes a human nature into his divine person.⁵ To avoid any confusion or doctrinal error, it is essential to emphasize that both natures, divine and human, are united in his divine person. Christ assumed not a human person, but a human nature. A human person subsists by himself, while a human nature subsists in a person. Consequently, his human nature never subsisted by itself, but in the very moment of formation, was assumed by the divine person of the Son.⁶ Both in his systematics and in his catechism, Brown explains three main properties of this hypostatic union. It is a *personal* union. Two different natures are united and subsist in one person. Christ's human nature is united immediately to his person, and is related to his divine nature only as it subsists in the person of the Son of God. His manhood

¹ i.e. prepared and set apart to a holy use. Brown, *Dictionary*, 582.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 262.

³ *Into* means the same as *united to*. 'And, in order to effect these grand designs of our redemption the eternal Son of God assumed our nature, in its debased appearances, into a personal union with himself'. Brown, *Bible*, 1085.

⁴ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 47.

⁵ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 263.

⁶ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 101.

is not immediately united to his divine nature, considered absolutely in itself, but as it is characterized, and subsists in the person of the Son: and hence is not personally united with it, as it subsists in the Father and Holy Ghost.¹

It is an *uncompounding* union. Brown maintains a Reformed catholicity, expressed in the *Chalcedonian Creed* and *Westminster Confession of Faith*,² by teaching that both natures retain their essential properties. By extension, Christ has two different understandings and wills. He knows absolutely everything in every detail; at the same time, he does not know the exact time of the last judgment. He is the Almighty God and yet crucified through weakness.³

Thirdly, the hypostatic union is an *everlasting* and *indissoluble* union. These two natures will never, indeed cannot be separated.⁴ This feature is essential to his mediatorial work in maintaining a never-ending fellowship of love with his people.

Brown is insistent that there is *no communication of properties* from one nature to the other.⁵ Nevertheless, there are *true effects* of the personal union of natures. For example, there is a communion of mutual interest, a

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 264-265.

² Chapter 8, II-III. For an analysis of the Reformed Christological Catholicity in the Westminster tradition see Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 335-345; David F. Wright, "Westminster: Reformed and Ecumenical?" in Lynn Quigley ed., *Reformed Theology in Contemporary Perspective. Westminster: Yesterday, Today and – Tomorrow?* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006). 174-175.

³ Ibid, 265.

⁴ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 102.

⁵ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 266.

shared anointing of Christ's natures,¹ and also a communion in all qualities, acts, and offices related to his mediatorial work. Therefore, the properties of each nature are ascribed to his person, the God-man. This is why the Scriptures can refer to the 'blood of God' or say that the 'Lord of Glory was crucified'.² Brown also makes clear that this union is *incomprehensible*, because 'no man or angel can understand the mysteries of it'.³

But the fact that it is a mystery does not prevent it from being glorious. Indeed, the glory of God is revealed in Christ, the God-man. On the one hand, this glory finds its foundation in the diversified connection with the nature of God and his revealed truths and covenants. And on the other hand, it is also revealed in the fellowship of Christians with God.

With respect to God's nature, Brown indicates that God is *one* with Christ. The Father is the same as the Son in attributes, honour and glory. But also, God is *with* Christ and *in* Christ. This reveals the *perichoresis* or mutual delight, satisfaction, love and fellowship between the Father and the Son. Consequently, God is manifested *in* and *through* Christ. As the Son of God, he is the brightness of the glory of his Father, and the express image of his person (Hebrews 1:2). So too, as God-man, Christ is the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).⁴

The person of Christ is also the fountain, foundation, matter, centre, the great teacher, interpreter, witness, the glory, power and application of every revealed truth of God.⁵ Therefore, to have a true interest in and

¹ This conjunct anointing means, with respect to his divine nature, 'the sending him and the preparing an human nature for the personal residence of his godhead'. With respect to his human nature, this 'denotes the actual bestowal of all necessary gifts and graces upon it'. For Brown, this is a work of the Holy Spirit. Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 266.

² Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 2:8.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 102.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 270.

⁵ *Ibid*, 272-273.

knowledge of gospel doctrines, the sinner must fix his eyes on the person of Christ, the author and perfecter of faith. Brown is enthusiastically Christocentric in his thinking:

No truth can be rightly perceived, till he be spiritually discerned. No truth can be received in the love of it, till he be embraced. We can have no comfortable interest in divine truths, till we be interested in him. No saving virtue of truth can be felt, till we experience his self-uniting touch.¹

Concerning the glory revealed in the covenant of grace, every particular covenant established in the Old Testament represents the covenantal relationship between God and his people in Christ. In fact, he was the real end of the covenant of works.² Such is the connection that Brown makes between his covenant theology and Christology that he gives Christ more than twenty titles related to the covenant of grace. For example, he is the Contractor, Administrator, Testator, Sacrificing Priest, Prophet, King, Founder and Foundation of this new covenant.³ Together with this, all saving blessings of the covenant of grace are founded in Christ and enjoyed in union with him. To highlight his covenantal Christology, Brown emphasizes that Christ is the cause, substance and end of all these benefits.

These blessings lead the believer to exalt the glory of the person of Christ through his communion with God. Just as there is between the Father and

¹ Ibid, 273.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 273. 'Christ in his person and work was the real, though at first unseen end of God's making the covenant of works with Adam, and the full vindication of his making it with a representative'.

³ Ibid, 273-274.

Son, so there is a mutual delight, esteem and affection between Christ and his Church, in which communion with the Holy Spirit is also involved. Without union with Christ, and an enjoyment and beholding of his glorious person as God-man, there is no right to eternal life. The good works, acceptable worship and new obedience of believers all have their foundation and purpose in the person of Christ. As a result the covenant of grace has its goal in the beatific vision of the Son of God:

All the heaven I wish below is but to taste his love: and all,
 the heaven I wish above is to see his face. Oh! For that
 ETERNITY... when Christ God-man shall by my Teacher
 ...Christ shall be my Bible! Christ shall be my ALL IN
 ALL!¹

The General and Particular Offices of Christ

Before beginning to describe the offices of Christ, Brown re-emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of the God-man. It is precisely in the title 'Christ' (i.e. anointed one) that we see a deep relationship between the Holy Spirit and the incarnate God; every anointing of a king, prophet or priest in the Old Testament pointed to the anointing of the true Priest, Prophet and King. He receives the anointing from the Holy Spirit. It includes (1) a solemn setting apart, from God, to be Mediator. (2) A commission and authority given by God to execute his mediatorial work. (3) Equipment from God to complete his work. This includes a holy humanity but also the gifts and graces given to him 'without measure'.²

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 279.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 280.

This anointing leads Christ to execute both his general and particular offices. The general offices are executed in all Christ does for the salvation of sinners, whereas particular offices are executed only in part of his work.¹

When referring to the anointing of general offices, Brown mentions the work of the Mediator, as Saviour and Redeemer. In each of these, Christ is the Mediator of *theostygeis*, these both hated by and haters of God.² So, only the God-man can remove the *legal* and *real* enmity between God and sinners. For such Christ becomes Redeemer. He alone can recover what was lost and free the enslaved from bondage (i.e. law and justice, and on the other hand, sin and Satan).³

Christ's general role as Mediator includes three particular offices: Prophet, Priest and King. In the Old Testament, no one person owned these three offices simultaneously. David was a prophet and king, but not a priest; Melchizedek was a priest and king but not a prophet.⁴ But for our salvation the Mediator must serve in each office: as a prophet to cure our ignorance and instruct us in the law of God; as a Priest to pardon our guilt and bring peace between us as offenders and the offended God, and as a King to deliver us from bondage to sin and Satan:⁵ 'The nature of our salvation requires this threefold office, that he might purchase it, as a priest; reveal and offer it, as a prophet; and confer and apply it, as a king'.⁶ Brown suggests two approaches to the logical order of these offices. The first designates the *execution* of the offices on the hearts of sinners where the prophetic occupies the first place, then the priestly, and finally the

¹ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 106.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 281. See Romans 1:30.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 106.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 284.

⁵ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 107. *Systematic Theology*, 284.

⁶ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 284.

kingly.¹ Christ must first enlighten the minds of sinners and convince them of the saving message of the gospel before applying his priestly righteousness and before their subjection to him as king.² On the other hand, the *natural* or chronological order is first the priestly, then the prophetic and the kingly. The priesthood of Christ precedes because salvation must be purchased and sins atoned for before these are proclaimed and applied.

For Brown, a further reason for this order is related to the covenant: Christ's priestly work belongs to the fulfilment of the new covenant's *conditions*, while his prophetic and kingly works are related to its *administration*. However, a correct understanding of the covenant of grace will make clear that these offices are not 'the proper fountain of the promises of the gospel, but only the means of their fulfilment'.³

Following *Westminster Shorter Catechism* 24, Brown begins by describing the prophetic office. Christ is called a prophet because he reveals and teaches God's will to men. Scripture also refers to this office when describing Christ as Apostle, Interpreter, Witness, and Messenger of the Covenant.⁴ The light of the lamps in the tabernacle and temple, the trumpet blowing, and the prophets themselves, all typified this office which is essential because of our ignorance. By it Christ reveals the mysteries of the gospel in order to remove this ignorance.

Brown mentions that Christ is the best and true Prophet for sinners because (1) he possesses an exhaustive and perfect knowledge of all things; (2) he is full of infinite patience, and compassion in teaching us

¹ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 109.

² *Ibid*, 109.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 285.

⁴ *Ibid*, 285.

everything necessary for salvation; (3) he is also the truth itself; the Word of God. Through him, the mind of God is made known.¹

This prophetic work began immediately after the fall, with the first promise of the covenant of grace in Genesis 3:15. In his public ministry, Christ exercised this office *immediately* by himself explaining and enforcing the commands of the moral law, but also by declaring the gospel in relation to the covenant² through his parables, by his example, and by miracles. But he also does so in a *mediate* manner through angels, prophets, apostles, gospel ministers and parents,³ all with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Here again, we see the necessity of the Spirit's work for Brown. Christ reveals the will of the Father through his word and Spirit. The word alone cannot give sight to blind sinners. Only the Spirit can make the teaching of the word effective for salvation.⁴ However, the Spirit does not teach without the word. Rather Christ teaches men by his Spirit when 'He opens our understanding by the word, and makes us see the beauty of divine things, and fall in love with them.'⁵

Brown indicates that Christ develops his prophetic teaching in three schools:⁶ The school of law, where men learn about the sinfulness of sin and its danger; the school of the gospel, where Christ teaches about complete salvation in himself and the free offer of it to all; and the school of affliction, where he teaches 'the bitterness of sin, the vanity of the world, and the exercise of justifying God, resignation to his will, and desire to be with him'.⁷

¹ Ibid, 285. Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 111.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 286.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 287.

⁴ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 111.

⁵ Ibid, 112.

⁶ Here, Brown follows Fisher's Catechism.

⁷ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 112.

Thus, by this office, Christ not only produces cognitive understanding of divine truths but also experimental knowledge: a 'saving, heart-conquering, and sanctifying knowledge of them', which is the result of 'the especial and effectual influence and application of them by the Holy Ghost'.¹

The priestly office, Brown emphasizes, is the foundation of Christ's other offices. It differs from them because in it, he deals immediately with God, while in the other two offices, he deals with creatures.²

Christ is the true Priest because he offers a holy life as a sacrifice, upon an altar (himself), in the place of guilty sinners.

The sacrifice includes both his sufferings and his whole obedience to the broken law. It began at his conception, and was completed on the cross and in the grave. In other words, through his active and passive obedience, Christ fulfilled the conditions of both the broken covenant of works and the covenant of grace in the place of the elect.³

In Christ's sacrifice, his person God-man was the *priest*: his human nature as subsisting in his divine person, was the *matter offered*: and his divine nature or person was the *altar which sanctified his gift*. Hence he is represented as *giving himself* in sacrifice; for, though his manhood only obeyed and suffered, it did so as personally united to his divine nature.⁴

In this context, Brown can even refer to the 'death of God'.⁵ It is Christ, the the God-man, not his natures by themselves, who paid an infinite debt through the infinite dignity of his person.

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 288.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 113.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 289-290.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 291.

⁵ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 226. 'God built over the floods of death and hell, by loving loving me, and giving his Son for me! Strange bridge! founded in the death of God! Ibid, 253.

Christ's offering himself was absolutely necessary in order to satisfy God's justice and bring about definitive reconciliation between God and men. To honour God's holiness, majesty, covenants, grace and love to sinners, Christ suffered the curse of the broken law because an infinite God was offended by the sin of finite creatures. But Christ, as *Theanthropos* was able to make infinite satisfaction because of the infinite dignity of his person.

Christ's sacrificial work was typified through the Old Testament in every ceremonial law and its respective sacrifices. But in the fullness of time, he himself made a definitive satisfaction to the law and justice of God being crucified and made a curse for sinners.¹

Such is the dignity of Christ in his propitiatory and expiatory work that God accepted the sacrifice of his Son. The Father manifested his complete satisfaction by Christ's resurrection and exaltation to his right hand, appointing him king and head of his church.²

Brown also gives attention to the much debated question of the extent of the atonement. Did Christ die to make salvation possible for all, or to secure infallibly the salvation of the elect? Brown's position is the latter: Christ died in the place of the elect only. Since, in his view, Scripture declares that 'their sin was laid upon him, and he bare it, and laid down his life for them'³ both his substitutionary atonement and his intercessory prayers are for the elect only.

What then of evangelism? Brown believes his view is consistent with a free and universal offer of the gospel, since with respect to its *intrinsic*

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 294-295.

² *Ibid*, 297.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 114.

worth, Christ's sacrifice being made by an infinite divine person, it is sufficient for all mankind.

Negatively, Brown argues that the doctrine of particular atonement does not hinder evangelistic preaching. His chief reasons include: (1) this sacrifice was fulfilled in man's common nature; (2) men are not obligated to believe in Christ on the basis of God's secret counsel or intention, but on the basis of his general offer of salvation; (3) gospel hearers will be condemned for not believing what the gospel plainly offers to them; (4) Christ died not for a few people, but perhaps for thousands of millions of men.¹ Brown therefore sees no conflict between particular redemption and the free offer of the gospel.

Finally, Christ's Intercession for his elect is the other part of his work as a High Priest.

His heavenly intercession is directed to procure covenant blessings for his people. Because founded on the merit of his shed blood, it is continual, distinct, careful and successful.² These prayers are directed to the life of the elect in different stages. He intercedes for the unconverted elect: for their regeneration, justification and sanctification. Similarly, he makes intercession for believers, specifically for their growth and perseverance, by removing any new differences between them and God caused by their ongoing sinfulness, and also for accepting their good works performed in faith. And in their death, he intercedes for believers to procure their abundant entry to the heavenly glory and prays also for their future resurrection.³

¹ Ibid, 299-308.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 117. Brown distinguishes between the Holy Spirit's and Christ's Intercession. See Brown *Questions & Answers*, 117 and Boston *Brief Explication of the first part of the assembly's Shorter Catechism*. 59-60

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 117 and *Systematic Theology*, 309.

Lastly, Brown describes the kingly office. Christ the King rules over two kingdoms. This first is the *essential* kingdom, where the Son, as God,¹ has dominion over all things. This kingdom belongs to him by nature. But the second or the *mediatorial* dominion is given by the Father to the Son, as God-man, as a reward for his sacrifice.² In this kingdom, Christ has dominion over the Church and all things related to it.

Especially in his catechism, Brown details some of the honours of Christ as King.³ Consequently, he distinguishes Christ's mediatorial kingdom as one of power, grace and glory.⁴

In the *kingdom of power*, Christ disposes all things on heaven and earth for the edification of his Church. To do this, he appoints angels, men and creatures to work for her good. He judges and punishes his and their enemies.⁵

Referring to the *kingdom of grace*, Brown distinguishes between its external and internal form.⁶ The former involves the individual's religious profession, worship and service to Christ or the visible church. To manage this Christ appoints ordinances of worship, institutes offices and gives his Spirit.⁷ The latter, the internal form of the kingdom refers to the life submitted to Christ by true believers.⁸ To manage this Christ effectually calls his elect and gives them a new nature and state. He writes his law in

¹ Together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 309.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 121.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 313-316.

⁵ *Ibid*, 313-314.

⁶ In his *Catechism*, Brown called it the visible and invisible kingdom.

⁷ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 314.

⁸ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 122.

their hearts, but he also protects them from the law as a covenant of works.¹

Finally, Christ's *kingdom of glory* is also called the kingdom of the Father because 'he gives it to redeemed men, and reigns in it in a more immediate manner',² i.e. without church officers, ministers and teachers. Here Christ gives a full and irrevocable title of glory to his people. Furthermore, he prepares heaven for the moment of their death, and in the future will raise them from the grave to govern them in a heavenly enjoyment of God.³

Each aspect of Christ's three-fold office has application to the life of the believer:

If he is a Prophet, it is to teach to profit; to teach to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. If he is a sacrifice, it is to purge our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God; it is to finish transgressions, and make an end of sin, and sanctify the people. If he is a King, it is to command deliverance for Jacob; slay our enmity, and subdue our iniquity; and make his grace sufficient for us, and his strength perfect in our weakness.⁴

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 315. This means to protect them from the re-enslaving influence of the broken covenant of works.

² Ibid, 313.

³ Ibid, 315.

⁴ Brown, *Select Remains*, 119.

The Two States of Christ: Humiliation and Exaltation

The person and offices of Christ are manifested and executed in two states respectively: Humiliation and Exaltation. The first state refers to his service while the second makes mention of his reward.¹

For Brown, Christ's humiliation generally consists in the veiling of his divine glory for a time, and in his life and suffering on the earth as a man of sorrows.²

Although this state of humiliation was engaged from eternity, it was only actually experienced in his birth, life, death, and after his death.³ From the moment of his incarnation, Christ as our surety was made under the law. This included the judicial and ceremonial law but more properly the moral law *as a broken covenant of works*.

In both his treatises, Brown seeks to impress the hearts of his readers and students to bring them to meditate on this doctrine. Thus for example, referring to Christ's humiliation:

Rather think, my soul, JEHOVAH became a worm and no man, that he might purchase and offer an everlasting salvation to me, his enemy: yet, through wretched carelessness have I, times without number, trampled him under my feet, trodden on the bowels of his infinite compassion.⁴

And referring to Christ under the law:

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 316.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 125.

³ Ibid. 'After his death' means in Christ buried and continuing in the power of death for a time. Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 129.

⁴ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 8.

The Most High God, the great Lawgiver, and Lord of all, was made under the command of this broken law, requiring him to perform perfect, personal and perpetual obedience under the infinite weight of its curse. The infinitely happy God, blessed for ever, was made under the curse of this broken law.¹

For Brown, the curse of the broken covenant of works was executed in Christ's soul, his body, his reputation, his outward lot and his person. So to, the curse was executed in his soul partly through Satan's temptations and the grief and sorrow Christ experienced from the world, but mainly in the hiding of his Father's face and his experiencing infinite wrath: 'Think, my soul, how JEHOVAH'S Son was dried, roasted, and burnt amidst his Father's indignation'.² In terms of Christ's body, he was circumcised, experienced thirst and hunger, and bled and died on the cross. In his reputation, he was loaded with calumny, reproach and false accusations. In his outward lot, he was born of a poor woman in a stable, lived for a while in Egypt, and in his adulthood lived in Nazareth, a 'wicked and infamous city'.³

With respect to the curse in his person, though his Godhead was not affected with his sufferings, Christ's person was under the curse and his divine glory was hidden under his flesh.⁴ Christ being made sin for his people came under God's curse. Although he did not suffer an eternally prolonged wrath, the dignity and the divinity of his person gave infinite value to his sufferings.

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 317.

² Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 30.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 318.

⁴ Ibid.

Before beginning his exposition of the exaltation of Christ, Brown lists as many as twenty-four honourable circumstances that accompanied the humiliation of Christ. For example, an angel foretold his birth, a star directed wise men to the stable in Bethlehem, the Father audibly attested his divine Sonship, the visible descending of the Holy Spirit, and so on.¹

Between the death and resurrection of Christ, his humiliation and exaltation were conjoined. While his humiliation continued with his body in the grave, the fact that his soul departed to paradise and into the hands of his Father declared his exaltation.²

In this exaltation God was honoured, Christ rewarded and by it the elect are saved, because in it the Saviour was raised from the dead, ascended to heaven and now sits at God's right hand and waiting the day of his coming to judge the world.

For Brown, there are three main reason of Christ's exaltation: That God might be honoured, Christ rewarded and his elect saved.³

The exaltation itself involved his: rising from the dead, ascending to heaven, sitting at God's right hand and coming to judge the world.

For Brown, it is the person, the God-man who is exalted; the addition of glory is related only to his manhood. Consequently, the eclipsed glory of his Godhead in his humiliation now shines all the more through the graces of his manhood in his exaltation.⁴

Christ's resurrection is a Trinitarian work. The Father, as a satisfied judge and as rewarder, released Christ from the death-prison. The Son reunited his soul to his body, and the Holy Spirit re-established their natural union.⁵

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 321-322.

² Ibid, 323.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 131.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 324.

⁵ Ibid, 326.

Concerning the ascension to heaven, only Christ's manhood ascended since his divine nature cannot ascend nor descend. Thus, in Brown's view, Paul's reference to the divine nature descending to the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9) must denote his assuming a human nature.¹

The ascension is also related to his three offices. It was a prophetic act because he ascended in order to send the Holy Spirit for the instruction of his church; a priestly act because he entered into the holy place with his own blood; and a kingly act because he triumphed over all his enemies.² In this ascension he receives a kingdom, he goes to prepare a mansion for his elect and sends to them his Spirit.³ Now he is seated at the right hand of the Father, the most honourable place of all where he enjoys close and intimate fellowship with his Father.⁴

Brown describes the fourth step of Christ's exaltation in greater detail since it involves his works as Judge. He develops this in terms of its *preparation*, the *judgment itself* and the *execution* of it.

Christ will appear personally in the most glorious manner, that is, with his own glory and the glory of the Father;⁵ and he will raise the dead from from their graves. Here

Brown presupposes the preservation of all the essential particles of our natural bodies, and a new formation of them in order to be united with our preserved souls. In this context, the sacraments of the covenant of grace serve as pledges that our bodies will share the eternal happiness therein sealed.⁶ By contrast, wicked men will be excluded from this happy happy resurrection, and instead will be resurrected to condemnation and

¹ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 134.

² Ibid.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 135.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 328.

⁵ Ibid, 329.

⁶ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 330.

misery. At the end, the righteous and wicked, each in their particular and personal bodies will be separated one from another. Believers will be at the right hand of Christ in the air and the wicked, 'perhaps classed according to their most remarkable crimes, shall be left assembled on the earth'.¹

Following this, the three persons of the Trinity will head up the *judgment itself*, in which Christ as God-man, will act immediately.² Judging all devils and men. While believers will not go to the judgment of condemnation, their thoughts, words and deeds will be assessed.³ All this will take place in accordance with the omniscience of Christ and the opening of the books of conscience, of Scripture and of life.

Christ's sentences will be just. Wicked men will be condemned for their nature and practice and believers will experience everlasting life because of Christ's fulfilment of the law in their place.

Brown did not think it was clear whether believer's sins would be publicly exposed in the last judgment. But if this is to be the case, they will not be put to shame because they are justified by the One who is their Judge: Jesus Christ.⁴

The *execution* of these sentences will lead to eternal punishment for the wicked in hell and eternal life in heaven for the justified elect.

To sum up, Christ's exaltation is necessary to reward him according to the promises of the covenant of grace made in eternity by the Father and to manifest the love and fellowship between them. And it is also necessary

¹ Ibid, 331.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 332.

⁴ Ibid, 333.

for Christ's people in order to secure their resurrection and to crown his children with glory and honour.¹

John Brown's Christology was intimately related to his covenant theology. It is impossible to understand these doctrines apart from each other. In this he stood firmly in the tradition of the Secession theology and behind it the Reformed theology expressed in the Westminster Standards. Indeed in some points he follows practically the same development as Fisher's and Boston's theology. Here he provides a synthesis rather than an original contribution to the development of Reformed orthodoxy.²

To see Christ in the Old Testament was important for Brown. However Robert Mackenzie sees Brown's references to analogies and typologies as 'doubtful and precarious weapons' employed 'pretty freely'³ to explain and expound doctrines and express his own subjective opinion. But in fact Brown's works share a use of analogies and typology that is characteristic of older Reformed authors.⁴ For Brown, the influence of the Holy Spirit was vital to a sound exegesis, which presupposes the right use of hermeneutical tools i.e. the analogy of faith, knowledge of historical and geographical context, chronological knowledge and a plain scope and a tendency of a specific passage or chapter under study.⁵ Therefore, when

¹ Ibid, 334-335.

² Here we can observe Brown's small but distinctive contributions when he refers to the school of Christ (prophetic office) and the various steps of Christ's development of final judgment.

³ Ibid, 212.

⁴ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 35.

⁵ Brown, *Bible*, xvi-xxi. Regarding Brown's eschatological interpretation of the last times, it seems that he did not applied in a right way his own exegetical method by setting specific dates for certain periods. He wrote: 'at the end of this blessed period [an amazing and successful spreading of the gospel who should began on 1866 or 2016], perhaps

Christ is the ‘great subject and end of scripture revelation’, typologies are not an old fashioned tool for exegesis, but a way to understand the ‘surprising eloquence of Heaven, and discern almost every form in nature, a guide to, an illustrator of inspired truth’ and to ‘perceive the whole substance of the gospel of Christ truly exhibited in ancient shadows, persons, and things’.¹

In Brown’s works, there is an experimental and practical element in each doctrine taught. Every aspect of orthodox Christology led him to say, ‘With pleasure may I ever apply thy person, thy offices, thy relations, and works, that my soul may be strengthened and excited to every good work and deed’.²

Why does this covenantal Christology not produce a dry and cold religion? Brown’s answer is that when Christ transfers a sinner from the Covenant of Works to the Covenant of Grace, the believer, is both justified and brought into the privileges of new life in Christ. To this—Brown’s teaching on sanctification—we now turn.

about A.D. 2860 or 3000, Satan will be again loosed from his long restrain...’. However, he was faithful to the Bible in not putting a specific date for Christ’s second coming: ‘Then cometh the end of the world, at what distance we know not, when Jesus ...shall appear with power and great glory’. See Brown, *Bible*, L-lxii.

¹ Brown, *Sacred Tropology*, iii.

² *Ibid*, 75.

5

**Living according to the New Covenant Status:
Sanctification.**

I advise you to read Mr Brown's tract on
'Sanctification', and especially to commit to memory
all the passages of Scripture quoted therein.¹ –
George Lawson.

The reason for Lawson's endorsement was the deep connection that
Brown makes between Christology and sanctification:

This sanctification is of unspeakable importance in itself,
and as it is the end of all the offices of Christ ... the end of
his humiliation and exaltation ... the end of the Holy
Ghost, in all his work on Christ, and his church ... and the
end of our election, redemption, effectual calling,
justification, adoption and spiritual comfort.²

Thus, any study of sanctification is adequate only if it is well grounded in
the person and work of Christ and the believer's union with Christ and
justification through faith alone.

¹ John Macfarlane, *The life and Times of George Lawson* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Co., 1862), 237.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 398.

Christology and Sanctification

For Brown, justification is an *act* of God's free grace, in which he imputes Christ's righteousness to the elect sinner.¹ Sanctification on the other hand is the *work* of God's free grace in which the justified sinner is renewed in his whole man, enabling him to die to sin and live to righteousness.² It is both an inestimable *privilege* and a comprehensive *duty*. On the one hand, it involves the privilege of the secure imputation of Christ's righteousness and the work of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, it involves the duty of living according to God's law as a rule of life.³ While sanctification is not necessary in order to have access to Christ as a Saviour or to be justified, it is an essential aspect of initiated salvation. The believer must grow in conformity to the holy nature of God and in the blessings of the *ordo salutis*. But sanctification is also necessary as obedience to the will of God; as gratitude to God for his gracious redemption; to adorn the Christian profession; to gain others to Christ; and as a preparation for heaven. Sanctification is an essential evidence of union with Christ, faith in him and justification.⁴

Although justification and sanctification are inseparably linked together,⁵ Brown distinguishes them⁶ in order to avoid the two errors of antinomianism and legalism.⁷ For example, they differ in the following ways: (1) Nature: where justification changes our legal state, sanctification changes our heart and life. (2) Order: sanctification follows justification as its fruit and evidence. (3) Form: justification is an act

¹ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 156.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 398.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 399.

⁵ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 165.

⁶ Thirteen points in his *Systematic Theology*.

⁷ 'Q. Is it very dangerous to confound justification with sanctification? A. Yes; for it either tempts to turn the grace of God into sloth and licentiousness; and it leads believers into the practical error of judging their state by their frame'. *Questions & Answers*, 167.

perfected at once, being equal for all believers, while sanctification is a work that will not be perfected till death and is different in each believer, and in degree even in the same person. (4) Matter: while in justification Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, in sanctification it is implanted in us. (5) Extent: justification affects the conscience, and sanctification affects the whole man. (6) Evidence: while justification is a secret act, sanctification is an open evidence of justification. (7) Their relation to the law: justification delivers the sinner from the law as a broken covenant, while sanctification conforms the believer to the law as a rule of life. (8) In relation to Christ's offices: justification is founded on Christ's priesthood, while sanctification is related to Christ's prophetic and kingly offices.¹

The Privilege and the Duty

Sanctification is a privilege given to believers by the grace of the Trinity, and is particularly a work of the Holy Spirit. God sanctifies sinners on the basis of Christ's surety righteousness. But sanctification is also a duty: the sanctified believer works together with God.² Brown's exposition of sanctification therefore emphasizes both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the believer.

God's word, promises, gospel invitations, and the law in the hands of Christ are all important elements in effecting sanctification. However, 'it is not of themselves that God's word and ordinances promote our sanctification, but the Holy Ghost, with his saving influences attending them, renders them effectual'.³

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 399 - 401. *Questions & Answers*, 166 -167.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 401- 402.

³ *Ibid*, 402.

The law, not as a covenant, but as a rule of life, is the regulating standard here. While the justified believer cannot keep the law perfectly, 'The more perfection in holiness we attain, the more is God glorified'.¹

The example of other Christians can help us here, but the only perfect pattern and example is Christ himself.² Thus only union with Christ can effect the imitation of Christ in keeping God's law.

Brown distinguishes between the sanctification of *nature* and the sanctification of *life*. The first is related to the renewing of the whole man after God's image,³ while its fruit is sanctification of life, in which the believer is enabled to die to sin and live to righteousness.⁴ This includes the implanting of 'gracious habits', the acquiring of Christian 'tempers' and the performing of 'holy exercises'.⁵

It is on the basis of these three elements that Brown develops his teaching.

First, a vital principle of grace is implanted by the Holy Spirit in regeneration in opposition to indwelling sin. This principle increases in all the work of sanctification and is antecedent to any act of faith or obedience.⁶ Therefore, believing and working out salvation are the fruits of this implanted habit, and this in turn evidences our union with Christ, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ and our adoption into the family of God. In sum, without these habits or principles of grace, we will never engage in spiritual warfare, or have any real experience of sanctification,⁷ for, 'All the duties of religion must flow from an implanted

¹ Ibid, 403.

² Ibid.

³ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 167.

⁴ Ibid, 168.

⁵ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 405

⁶ Ibid, 405-406.

⁷ Ibid, 408-410.

principle of real grace'.¹ This alone inclines man's heart to a holy lifestyle. Although it is one single habit of grace in itself, it is diversified according to the various faculties of the soul in which it acts, namely the mind, conscience, will, affections, memory and body.² Its activity towards different objects is also diversified. Hence there are graces of *knowledge, faith, hope, love, and repentance*.

Brown carefully differentiates between legal and evangelical repentance. Legal repentance goes before faith in Christ, while repentance unto life follows it.³ The cause of legal repentance is God's judgment and wrath, but the cause of evangelical repentance is God's holiness and love manifested in the death of Christ for the complete pardon of our sins. The object of legal repentance is the guilt of our sins, but the object of true repentance is the filth of our sin and the dishonour we have done to God. Legal repentance turns only from gross sins, but repentance unto life turns men from the love of every sin. Finally, legal repentance 'hath no proper connection with divine pardon',⁴ while evangelical repentance is the fruit of the pardon of God in justification.⁵ Significantly, evangelical repentance is Christ-centered:

all promises confirmed in Christ's person and righteousness, mightily encourage to it ... Christ's execution of all his offices, and all saving discoveries of him, powerfully promote it.⁶

¹ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 149.

² *Ibid*, 411-412.

³ Using the language of Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 87.

⁴ 'though God often makes it an introduction to it'. Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 414.

⁵ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 414-415. See also *Questions & Answers*, 295-296.

⁶ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 415.

The results of a proper exercise of these implanted graces are *Christian tempers*, or *acquired* gracious habits. Brown lists as many as sixteen.¹ Emphasizing God's sovereign grace and his lordship in every work that the Christian does, he reminds his readers that these tempers must be produced in

hearts united to Christ, by gracious virtue derived from Christ and his Spirit, through his word dwelling in us richly, in conformity to Christ, and exercised in obedience to the authority of Christ, and aiming at his honour and the honour of God in him.²

They are *exercised* in two ways: dying to sin and living to righteousness.³ Such gradual dying to sin is essential since although believers are free from the slavery and dominion of sin, they will never be purged from the indwelling corruption of sin while they live.⁴

Brown highlights several reasons why God allows sin to remain in believers. It teaches them the power, sinfulness and deceitfulness of their secret sins. It awakens their sense of need and dependence on Christ and leads the manifestation of the riches of God's grace, because 'the more numerous and aggravated sins he forgives, the more of his grace, and of the virtue of Jesus' blood, appears in the pardon'.⁵

¹ 1) christian wisdom and prudence, 2) spirituality of mind, 3) purity of heart, 5) sincerity, 6) humility, 7) meekness, 8) patience, 9) peaceableness, 10) tenderness of heart, 11) bravery, fortitude of virtue, 12) zeal, 13) temperance, 14) equity or justice, 15) mercifulness, and 16) truth, candour, and faithfulness. See Brown, *Systematic Theology* 416-418.

² Ibid, 418-419.

³ Ibid, 419.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, 420-421.

According to Brown, our sinful corruption is also called the old man, the law in the members, and the law of sin, flesh and lust. It is because of this that the mortification of sin is so necessary. This does not consist in improving our natural powers in opposition to sin, or in occasional victories over it, but in diligently seeking to destroy the root of sin through an application of Jesus' blood to the conscience, and by a hatred for sin produced by the love of God.¹

This mortification also has a direct connection to Christology, because it leads to an increased knowledge of Christ in his person, offices, righteousness and grace; it also manifests the interest that believers have towards Christ, as well as leading to conformity to his image.²

The Holy Spirit and believers cooperate in mortification and for this reason the latter must avoid grieving, resisting or quenching his presence.³

The Holy Spirit begins his mortifying influence by exposing indwelling corruptions by two means: God's law and the sufferings of Christ as their Saviour.⁴ It is in this way that there Christ's blood applied to the conscience is important for mortification, because:

Therein is discovered the true and aggravated nature of sin, as against an infinitely high and holy law and nature of God, our creator, preserver and redeemer; and as against the redeeming love and life of the great God our

¹ Ibid, 421-422.

² John Brown [of Haddington], *Practical Piety Exemplified, In the Lives of Thirteen eminent Christians, and illustrated in Casuistical Hints or Cases of Conscience. Concerning Satan's Temptations,-Indwelling Sin,- Spiritual Experiences,-Godly Conversation,-and Scandalous Offences* (Glasgow: Printed by John Bryce, 1783), 234. We will refer to the second part of this book as *Casuistical Hints*.

³ Ibid, 236.

⁴ Ibid, 237.

Saviour, Jesus Christ. Being implicated to our conscience as exhibited and given in the gospel by faith, it renders it pure and tender, inflames our heart with hatred of sin, and conveys a sin mortifying influence.¹

The mortification of sin therefore involves an internal spiritual warfare in the believer for which vigorous self-denial is necessary.² In this work, the Christian renounces himself, and seeks to place his chief happiness in God, and submit himself to the lordship of Christ.³

While dying to sin, believers also experience living unto righteousness. This process leads them 'more and more to love and abound in inward holiness, and in the practice of good works'.⁴ These works, required by God's law must be done on a gospel foundation, influenced by gospel motives, performed in a gospel manner to an evangelical end.⁵ Thus Brown emphasizes faith in Christ as the instrument of sanctification, the holy law of God as its rule and the example of God and Christ as its pattern.⁶ Since the good works of believers are a product of God's grace, they must always abound and grow in them more and more.

Brown develops thirteen rules that must be considered when studying this doctrine, and thus, seeks to promote correct conceptions about it. These include: (1) The real nature of sanctification must be learned with care and attention, and derived from the word of God, which is the regulating standard of it, from the covenant of grace, and from the believer's condition in this world. (2) Believers are called to a diligent and careful study of it. (3) This requires an inward inclination to it and a real

¹ Ibid, 239.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 422.

³ Ibid, 422-423.

⁴ Ibid, 423.

⁵ Therefore, no-regenerate people cannot have good works.

⁶ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 170.

persuasion of God's reconciliation through the imputation of Christ's righteousness. (4) All requirements for it are received by spiritual union and fellowship with Christ, considering his person and work as the treasure of holiness. (5) As justification precedes sanctification, Christ must be received in all his offices, as offered in the gospel.¹ In sum,

Gospel-holiness must be earnestly sought after by faith,
as a necessary and principal part of our salvation,
enjoyed in consequence of our union with Christ,
justification by his blood, and reception of his Spirit.²

The duty of sanctification: improving the fullness of the covenant

Reformed theology has always emphasized both the grace of God and the responsibility of man in the work of sanctification.³ Within the *Marrow* tradition, John Brown was probably one of the first to articulate sanctification in terms of it being simultaneously both a *privilege* and a *duty*. While the idea is not expressed in these terms in Fisher's catechism,⁴ in the previous century, John Owen had spoken of the *grace* of God and our *duty* in our sanctification.⁵ Interestingly, Boston and Fisher refer to sanctification as *habitual* and *actual*. For this point, Brown prefers the language of the sanctification of *nature* and the sanctification

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 426-436.

² *Ibid*, 432.

³ See for example Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed theology's unwelcome guest?* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2013).

⁴ Fisher and Boston do not use explicitly the words *privilege* and *duty* to describe the work of God and the work of believer on sanctification.

⁵ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit (The Works of John Owen; ed. William H. Goold; Edinburgh, Reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009)*, III, 384.

of *life* or *practice* - language that may well have been clearer to ordinary people.

For Brown, holiness is closely connected to Christology. The *telos* of all the offices and states of Christ is the sanctification of believers,¹ and at the same time, sanctification has its foundation and *telos* in Christ. There is no sanctification without union with Christ, nor any evidence of sanctification if the believer is not increasingly conformed to the image of Christ.

Precisely here the work of the Holy Spirit is vital because it is he who unites the sinner with Christ and applies all the benefits of the covenant of grace, including conforming of the believer to the image of the Saviour.

Reformed theology stressed the intimate relationship between Scripture and the Holy Spirit.² The written word of God is the only standard for sanctification; the work of the Holy Spirit makes it effective in the heart of believer.³ Not the mere exercise of reading the Bible sanctifies, but the Holy Spirit who honours the Holy Scripture, sanctifies believers through it.

Brown was faithful to his roots in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Marrow* school in emphasising that the duties involved in sanctification must never be viewed as the conditions of justification. As Vandoodewaard indicates, the Marrow's theology 'described the covenant of grace as absolute, arguing against those who held to a neonomian conditionality of the covenant of grace, tying it to repentance or obedience'.⁴ Thus, for Brown,

Christ never requires holiness to warrant our receiving
him in the gospel, but invites men, the very worst not

¹ Brown, *Dictionary*, 582.

² See *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q.155.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 402.

⁴ Vandoodewaard, *The Marrow Controversy and Seceder Tradition*, 10.

excepted, but rather particularly called, to come *directly* to him, *as they are* ... No true repentance is ever required as our qualification warranting us to receive Christ as our Saviour ... Nor humiliation for sin; for that is the fruit of God's application of Christ to us ... If we could attain any true holiness or virtue before our union to Christ, it would infallibly exclude us from all warrant and access to believe in him, and demonstrate that we were none of those LOST SINNERS whom he came to seek and save, or calls to himself.¹

Yet this emphasis on the unconditionality of the covenant of grace and the free and sovereign work of God in uniting the sinner with Christ and justifying and adopting him, do not constitute an argument for passivity or neglect in the Christian life, but rather the opposite. Christ in his person and work is the basis for good works in believers. Sanctification must be sought and exercised as a necessary and principal part of salvation in union with Christ. This is a reflection of Brown's practical theology and his covenantal Christology:

Q. What is our duty, if we find ourselves in this covenant [of grace]?

A. To admire and adore God's free grace which brought us in; and to improve the fullness of the covenant, in living like the children of God.²

The above question appears in Brown's first published work, which was written to help new believers deepen their Christian convictions through

¹ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 431-432.

² Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 98.

an exposition of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. From the outset his writings had in view not a mere intellectual theology, but reaching the heart of the people to encourage them to live a practical-confessional Christianity. As his son wrote:

the great object which he ever had in view was the improvement of his readers in religious knowledge, and especially in personal piety'.¹

The way in which Brown directs covenant theology to such 'personal piety' is therefore the theme of our next chapter.

¹ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 53.

6

Covenantal Piety.

It is only lively practical religion that entails present or future blessings on men by the promise of God. And the more we labour for the spiritual edification of others, the more shall we be edified and fitted for our work.¹

The religious context of eighteenth century Scotland was very different from that of the previous century. Then there had been a strong interest in theology, now a century later, Scotland had experienced its own Enlightenment. Priorities had changed. Delight in the development of the mysteries of Reformed theology had been marginalized.²

The emphasis was no longer on doctrine but on patterns of social behaviour in a changing society. The focus was on virtue, faith in reason and science, the enjoyment of worldly pleasures and a distrust of religious enthusiasm.³

This development is linked to men born in the same period as John Brown who also claimed to subscribe to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. These men influenced Scotland's two most important social centres: the University and Church. They were the Ministers of the Moderate Party.⁴ While the tendency of Moderatism was to divorce behaviour from the old Reformed doctrines,⁵ Brown did the opposite: he integrated them. While the Moderates left behind the old theology, Brown impregnated the hearts

¹ Brown, *Bible*, 1270.

² MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 221.

³ Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 8.

⁴ *Ibid*, 14.

⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

of his congregation with it. If Moderates shaped their Sunday sermons with contemporary philosophical ideas, Brown shaped his sermons with the *norma normans* of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. It was in this context that Brown expounded what we may call ‘covenantal piety’.

The Only Rule of Faith and Practice: The Bible

For John Brown, the Bible alone is the rule for doctrine and life. Therefore, the basis for a Christian life involves a proper approach to Scripture. He prescribes rules for a correct interpretation of the Bible. The first involves the author of Scripture: The Holy Spirit. The Christian must seek through prayer his guidance: ‘*Let us labour, in much prayer and supplication, for the powerful influence and inhabitation of the Holy Ghost, that he may effectually interpret and apply them to our heart*’.¹ Secondly, to know ‘the secrets of his covenants’ we must search the Scriptures under a deep sense of the presence of God. In this way, we will avoid employing a ‘*philosophical manner, regarding merely or chiefly the rational sense of the passage*’.² Then: ‘*We must earnestly study to reduce all scriptural knowledge to practice*’.³ In this way, the intellect, the affections and will are all involved. This leads to an experiential knowledge: ‘*But is one thing to know these matters in our head, and another thing to feel them in our heart*’.⁴ In sum, the foundation for a life of godliness begins in our dependence on God’s written word. Such godliness proceeds from, and is pleasing to God, therefore a godly man

¹ Brown, *Bible*, xvi.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 142.

is one, who, having obtained grace from God, makes it his business to glorify him by receiving, worshipping, and imitating him... Godliness is the worshipping and serving of God, from the faith of his love and relation to us, and in love to him.¹

While Brown developed a whole chapter in his *Systematic Theology* on the doctrine of sanctification, his interest in its application led him to write a separate treatise on sanctification in the daily life of the Christian. In fact *Casuistical Hints* was originally written for his own use, as an appendix to the doctrine of sanctification.² In it 'Practical Christianity' is illustrated in five main topics: Satan's Temptations, Indwelling Sin, Spiritual Experiences, Gospel Conversations and Scandalous Practices.

Practical Christianity

Satan's temptations are especially directed to those who enjoy communion with God. He entices to sin by making it seem less sinful. He leads men to trust in their own abilities, strength and wisdom in opposing temptation.³ He blinds their minds, and thus hinders their exercising of reason.⁴ Given Brown's social context this is a significant observation. In his view, reason is indeed a gift of God. But men have exalted it and Satan has deformed it. He tempts learned men to

¹ Brown, *Dictionary*, 309.

² 'The Casuistical Hints were originally formed for my own use ... in which the principal experiences or exercises of a Christian are briefly pointed out.' Brown, *Casuistical Hints*, iii.

³ Brown, *Casuistical Hints*, 176.

⁴ *Ibid*, 176, 177.

Disbelieve and condemn the scriptures, or judge of their contents by carnal corrupted reason, -to employ their time, opportunities or abilities in curious, carnal and trifling enquires, rather than in studying to know Christ and him crucified,- to study divine truths in a philosophical manner; to invent and propagate errors and superstitions, to hunt after novelties of opinion, and to kindle or perpetuate and spread empty, angry, and wicked debates.¹

But not only are learned men in general tempted by Satan; ministers of the gospel are in particular when their personal honour takes priority over the edification of the Church, and when the knowledge of Christian doctrine is seen as an external business without application to the heart.²

Satan also tempts the unconverted by making them ignorant of two essential things: Jesus Christ and the Covenant of Grace.³ He may deceive them into thinking they are converted by a mere external profession of faith when they in fact esteem 'profane persons, or carnal professors of religion and make them their favourite companions'.⁴ This Brown viewed as typical of some Moderate Ministers, for whom friendship with philosophers such as David Hume was commonplace. Beside this, clergymen began to 'attend the playhouse openly and to follow Alexander Carlyle's example of "playing cards at home with unlocked doors"'.⁵ This was the cultural Christianity of a changing society, and with it Brown was all too familiar.

¹ Ibid, 180.

² Ibid, 181.

³ Ibid, 182.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish*, 154.

Satan's temptation of converted people is related to their religious duties in two ways; the first by hindering the performance of them through a practical antinomianism;¹ the second by vitiating the performance of these duties by mere external, indeed carnal, performance.² Satan also tempts those who boast of supposedly having greater communion with God than others. For Brown, these men are under the influence of Satan's seduction when they

make high pretences to spiritual illumination or liberty, intimate fellowship with God, and zeal for his cause, without eminent holiness of practice, when they are extremely keen in imposing their disputable sentiments or practices on others; or, when they indulge themselves in lies to promote their own cause; or in reproach and contempt of such as differ from them.³

In sum, Satan tempts Christians by leading them into either practical legalism or antinomianism.

According to Brown, the best remedies for all Satan's temptation are found in a practical Christology. The man who is united to Christ must know about his person, and his offices and promises and the relation between them. This requires making use of the means of grace, such as the study of the Scriptures, prayer and fasting.⁴

¹ Brown, *Casuistical Hints*, 176.

² Brown, *Casuistical Hints*, 189-190.

³ *Ibid*, 192.

⁴ *Ibid*, 200-207.

In addition to resisting Satan's temptation, those who are united to Christ must fight against indwelling sin which is a rebellion against the implanted habits of grace and the duties of faith. ¹ It is manifested in every thought, word and deed. Indwelling sin is both deceitful and powerful. It weakens the graces implanted in believers, especially when they lack fellowship with God and grow only in a rational knowledge 'without an answerable growth in holy and heavenly conversation'.²

This issue of growing in an external religious knowledge without a true and living communion with Christ, is a recurring theme in Brown. He writes: 'So grows the hypocrite, by carnal motives and encouragements; his appearance of grace is often tall and flourishing; but his heart is unsubstantial and naughty, only meet for eternal flames'.³ Hypocrisy and Atheism are close allies because atheists delight in 'doing that in secret of which they would be ashamed before men'.⁴ For Brown, a hypocrite is a devil's servant dressed with an external holiness, that God abhors because he sees man's inner hypocrisy.⁵ This is why Brown emphasizes that all religious duties have their foundation, and flow from, an implanted principle of real grace.⁶ That begins in regeneration and union with Christ.⁷ Christ.⁷ Even if a person talks about Christ or matters related to Christianity, he is a hypocrite if the principle of grace is not implanted in his heart and his life is not marked by a genuine piety: 'It is not talking of, or for Christ, but conformity to him, and walking in and with him, that will mark us real Christians'.⁸

¹ Ibid, 208.

² Ibid, 211-212.

³ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 27.

⁴ Brown, *Casuistical Hints*, 213.

⁵ John Brown [of Haddington], *Devout Breathings of a Pious Soul* (Sixteenth Edition; Glasgow: Printed by John Bryce, 1784), 115.

⁶ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 149.

⁷ See the chapter on *Sanctification*.

⁸ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 149.

In order to avoid the internal spiritual plagues developed by indwelling sin, such as legalism, idolatry, the rationalistic assent of hypocrites¹ and ignorance of Christ and the administration of the covenant of grace,² Christians must (as we have seen) mortify their sins by the power of the Holy Spirit.³ This, however, is not merely a matter of behaviour but of growth in the knowledge of Christ:

The ADVANTAGE of an earnest and evangelical study of mortification is very great. It increaseth our knowledge of Jesus Christ, in his person, offices, righteousness, and grace ... it increaseth our hatred of sin, and promotes our victory over temptations, it manifest our interest in Jesus Christ, and conforms us to his image.⁴

The third chapter of *Casuistical Hints* deals with spiritual self-examination. In order to avoid false conversions, people must know the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. While Moderate preachers might encourage moral living without an explicit gospel foundation, Brown maintains the old Reformed position: the cure for superficial, cultural Christianity begins with a deep doctrinal and practical knowledge, especially of the Triune God, the covenant of works and the eternal covenant of grace with its blessings.⁵ Thus Brown exhorts his readers to examine their spiritual state, in order to avoid false conversions. At the same time he understands that while the work of the Holy Spirit is the

¹ Brown, *Casuistical Hints*, 220.

² Ibid, 213.

³ Ibid, 229-243.

⁴ Ibid, 234.

⁵ Ibid, 244.

same in substance in drawing people to Christ, the circumstances vary from individual to individual:

Some are sanctified from the womb, or, at least, when we cannot discern how there can be any instrumentality of the word in the regenerating work. Others are suddenly converted in their dying moment ... Others are so quickly captivated, by discoveries of Christ and his love, that their conviction and regeneration are almost contemporary ... Others are very gradually brought to Christ, through manifold convictions and spiritual allurements, God's preparatory work in their soul continuing for months, or years...¹

Each Christian's experience is best understood when we distinguish between the *state* and the spiritual *condition* of believers. The spiritual state of believers is 'equally perfect and fixed' in their union with Christ, but 'their spiritual frame or condition is extremely changeable'.² It is in the context of their spiritual condition that God often '*lifteth them up and casteth them down again*'.³ For example, when he

gives them clear and delightful views of himself and his truths ... he sheds abroad his love in their heart, and so inflames and arrests it by his influences... Anon, their

¹ Ibid, 253-255.

² Ibid, 255.

³ Ibid, 256. The reason for this is 'to try and exercise their graces, to make a remarkable difference between heaven and earth; to glorify his own wisdom, power and love, in making contrary conditions promote the same end; to train up his children for heaven, to oblige them to look above frames and cases to himself, who made all things work for their good; to make them duly prize and cautiously improve his favours'.

hearts being deprived of the constraining influence of his love, becomes so loose and unstable, that they cannot keep it a moment fixed to any spiritual object ... Sometimes God inflames their desire after himself, and conformity to him, to an inexpressible degree... Anon, they can neither pray, cry, nor breathe after fellowship with him.¹

While a variety of experiences may occur in the life of the Christian, it is the Holy Spirit in his written word, the Bible, who remains the Supreme Judge of our state and spiritual condition.²

Brown proceeds to speak of the meaning of the Christian walk. For Calvin, two things were fundamental: a knowledge of God and of ourselves.³ Brown develops this into three: 1) a knowledge of ourselves, 2) a knowledge of the person and work of Christ and 3) a knowledge of the covenant of grace.⁴ Christians walk by a faith that grows in knowledge and in a fellowship with God. This includes a mutual communication in which God declares his covenant to them and they exercise all the graces implanted in their union with Christ in obedience to God's law. For Brown, each Christian has a distinct, though not separate, communion or fellowship with each person of the Trinity: with the Father in his love, with the Son in his grace and with the Holy Spirit in his inhabitation and influence.⁵

¹ Ibid, 256-260.

² Ibid, 269.

³ See Calvin *Institutes*, Book I, 1.1.

⁴ Brown, *Casuistical Hints*, 279.

⁵ Ibid, 283. This analysis is similar to, and probably dependent on, that of John Owen. See John Owen, *Communion with God* (The Works of John Owen; ed. William H. Goold; Edinburgh, Reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), II, 1-274.

God the Father holds fellowship with believers in the declarations of his immutable love, and Christians respond to this in believing and receiving it with a cordial and grateful responsive love to him:

Thus, while his love to them is a love of rest and complacency in them, theirs is a love of satisfaction with rest in him.¹

Regarding communion with the Son, Christ is represented as coming to believers, walking among them, and delighting in them through his new-covenant relationship. Believers are like the bride of Song of Songs, lying in Christ's bosom, sitting under his shadow and eating his fruit. There cannot be a true Christian walk without a serious consideration of the person of Christ. For communion with him involves an ongoing commitment to him as God, as man, and as God-man. So too, a Christian's delight in communion with Christ must be in his person, offices, relations and works.² Thus a deep Christian walk requires a deep knowledge of Christ.

When considering the communion of believers with the Holy Spirit, Brown notes that 'in respect of his personal presence, he constantly abides with, and dwells in them'.³ The Holy Spirit voluntarily and powerfully teaches them the holy law of God, their sins, the person and work of Christ, and also persuades them about God's everlasting love to them. He witnesses with their spirit that they are children of God and 'animates and enables them to pray over, and apply the promises of the new covenant'.⁴

To enjoy fellowship with the Holy Spirit, believers must learn to distinguish between his influences and Satan's influences. The Holy Spirit's

¹ Ibid, 284.

² Ibid, 284-286.

³ Ibid, 290.

⁴ Ibid, 291.

influences lead Christians to exalt Christ and his word and also to study holiness in all areas of life. But Satan's influence blinds men to the sinfulness of sin and encourages legalism. He stimulates pride and self-esteem.¹ In sum, the Holy Spirit brings us closer to Christ while Satan distances us from him.

The previous point is important for a right understanding of the concept of the presence of God within the context of communion with God. Brown maintains a healthy orthodox and Reformed experiential theology.

In a chapter on Spiritual Consolations, in his *Systematic Theology*, Brown refers to the 'sensible assurance of God's love'² as a persuasion that we are in a state of favour with God, that according to the promises of the new-covenant, he 'certainly will exert all his perfections for advancing our real and everlasting felicity in Christ'. This assurance of sense differs from the assurance included in the very nature of faith.³ It implies the certainty of the marks of grace contained in the Bible; but it also 'depends on our sensible perception of the almighty influences of God's Spirit in changing and actuating our heart'.⁴ Within this context Brown speaks of a sensible manifestation of the presence of God. For example, in communion with the Father, believers render love to God under the influence of *true faith* and a

¹ Ibid, 291-292.

² Referring to the use of the term 'sense' in this case, Brown defines it as 'Our various means of perception, by seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling, are our *bodily senses*; in allusion to which, the powers of the soul, whereby we discern good and evil, are called *senses*'. Brown, *Dictionary*, 596.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 442. 'The foundation of *that* assurance of faith is wholly without us in the faithfulness of God pledged in his word. The foundation of *this* assurance of sense is partly within us, in the gracious effects of God's word and Spirit upon our heart. By *that* we are persuaded of the truth of God's revealed declarations, particularly in his offering Christ to us in the gospel. By *this* we are certified that the work of God begun upon our soul is truly gracious and saving. By *that* we believe upon God's own testimony, his candour in giving Christ and his salvation to us. By *this* we certainly know that God hath formed in us the begun possession of salvation.'

⁴ Ibid.

spiritual sensation of the Father's love to them.¹ According to Brown, this familiar fellowship with God is sometimes more constant and imperceptible, or more occasional and 'sensible'.

Such 'sensible' fellowship with God has sanctifying results, but sometimes fellowship is unfelt. In a more sensible manifestation of his presence, God holds fellowship with believers in applying his word to their hearts, in intimating and revealing the mysteries of his love and the heavenly glory prepared for them. Believers respond to this with a delight and a burning desire for God.²

But some may erroneously believe that they have communion with God. The real proof is that true communion with God humbles man, exalts Christ and is a sanctifying influence.³ But if a person takes pride in his communion with God, he clearly is under satanic influence.⁴

God sometimes withdraws his sensible comforting influences when people begin to apostatize from him. If believers begin to create idols, or to fall into gross sins, God may also withdraw his sensible influence from them leading to a decrease of joy and inner peace. God may leave them sensible of his absence until leaving them insensible to his absence.⁵

To resolve this, believers must again apply Jesus Christ offered in the gospel and remember that God hides his face from them 'in order to make them more earnestly seek him'.⁶

Living by faith and holding habitual communion with the Triune God will thus lead to spiritual mindedness. For Brown, this does not consist in having mere thoughts on spiritual subjects, but rather presupposes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It consists in the believer's understanding

¹ Brown, *Casuistical Hints*, 284.

² Ibid, 294.

³ Ibid, 295.

⁴ Ibid, 192.

⁵ Ibid, 297.

⁶ Ibid, 298.

being enlightened and furnished with a saving knowledge of divine things, resulting in a contemplation of spiritual things in a truly spiritual manner. If we ask what these spiritual objects are, Brown again mentions a knowledge of 'his covenant of works and grace; and concerning Christ the Mediator, in his person, offices, states, and work' and also the blessings of the *ordo salutis*.¹ Here too the work of the Holy Spirit is important, otherwise 'the knowledge of them will, like dead and lifeless lumber, fill the mind, or puff it up'.²

Finally, communion with God does not develop in isolation but in the context of the Church. The visible church on earth is a 'society of believing and holy persons, whom God, by the gospel, has called from among mankind, to fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ'.³ It is not just any society, but the 'Covenant Society'.⁴ This covenantal fellowship consists in an agreement in faith and practice, where believers walk together in the ordinances of God for their mutual 'comfort and welfare in every thing pertaining to vital, powerful, and sincere religion'.⁵ This requires maintaining the principles and ordinances of gospel-worship in purity and simplicity. So too, it is related to the exercise of church-government and discipline and the maintaining of holiness of life.⁶

For Brown, Christian fellowship develops in three ways that relate to and complement each other: The first is personal holiness and devotion. The second is related to families. There must be a diligence in family religion, especially in family worship. This point depends very much on the first, in

¹ Ibid, 302.

² Ibid.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 551.

⁴ Ibid, 550.

⁵ Ibid, 553.

⁶ Ibid, 552.

which the head of the family must live in holiness and not in hypocrisy - as for example is reflected in *The Christian Journal*:

“Now the worship of our family hath been essayed” But
 how can they prosper, how can their prayers be heard,
 while such an Adam, a Beelzebub, is among them? Alas!
 I am an offence to God, a curse, a plague to all around
 me!¹

For Brown, this issue is vital. The neglect of family nurture leads to serious consequences on the Judgment Day. This responsibility here begins at home but also extends to the church.²

The third way to maintain Christian fellowship is by joining private societies for prayer and spiritual conferences.³ Brown describes such meetings not only in his *Systematic Theology*, but also in a small but important treatise entitled *Divine Warrants, Ends, Advantages, and Rules, of Fellowship meetings, for Prayer and Spiritual Conference*. Here, he defines fellowship meetings as ‘regular societies of Christians, who have voluntarily agreed to assemble, at stated times and places, for promoting of holy friendship, by joint prayer and spiritual conference’.⁴ Although reason itself reveals that men are social beings, the Bible specifically commands believers to have such meetings. God is pleased when believers exercise mutual assistance, but also when they teach, admonish, exhort and provoke one another to love and to good works.⁵

¹ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 6-7.

² Brown, *Letters on the Christian Church*. 17-18. See also his sermon ‘*The Fearful Shame and Contempt of Those Professed Christians, who Neglect to Raise Up Spiritual Children to Jesus Christ*’.

³ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 553-554.

⁴ Brown, *Select Remains*, 232.

⁵ *Ibid*, 233.

In a time when social gatherings focused on the moral behaviour and virtue of man in society, these meetings had in view 1) promoting and increasing the knowledge of the truths of God, 2) expressing mutual sympathy between members, 3) encouraging holiness and virtue, 4) sharing gifts and graces for mutual edification, 5) helping Christians to be faithful and friendly counsellors, warners, and reprovers of one another and, 6) sharing in prayer and other spiritual exercises.¹

Prayer was an essential activity for covenant societies, and Brown wrote a series of rules (twelve in all) to guide them. But one particular burden for prayer exercised him, namely (as indicated by the title of one of his few printed sermons), *The Necessity and Advantage of Earnest Prayer for the Lord's Special Direction in the Choice of Pastors*.

Here Brown stresses the obligation of the members of the covenant community to pray for those who preach the covenant of grace. The characteristics of such ministers and their preaching will be examined in the next chapter.

Experiential covenantal piety

We have seen that for John Brown the foundation of piety lies in a Covenantal Christology: 'Let my first care be to be in Christ and in his covenant'.² This stands in sharp contrast to Moderatism. While it is true that Moderates did not deny the mysteries of the faith, their interest was in a moral and rational religion.³ Brown, however, believed that only

¹ Ibid, 234.

² Brown, *Devout Breathings*, 95.

³ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 35. MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 213.

doctrinal knowledge leads to true Christian behaviour. By this he did not mean speculative knowledge, a merely rational perception of things natural or divine, without faith or love to God.¹ Indeed, for Brown, to study general history without the presupposition of God's providence, is tantamount to atheism or deism: 'To read of events without observing the hand of God in them, is to read as Atheists: to read and not observe how all events conduce to carry on the work of redemption, is to read as Deists'.² Thus he could write in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment:

But what avails knowledge without the true fear of God, unless to make me liker to the devil? ... Better be an humble peasant, with the grace of God in my heart, than a proud philosopher, that attempts to comprehend both heaven and earth'.³

The theological knowledge that Brown refers to is a spiritual taking up of divine things, where through the word and Spirit we not only perceive in a rational way, but are also powerfully and kindly disposed to believe in and love God in Christ.⁴

This is an experiential knowledge, involving reason, affections and will. Brown was not interested in a speculative theology that ignores or goes beyond the limits of Scripture, but rather in a biblical theology that leads to a real and experiential knowledge of the gospel. In his own words: 'Instead of curious prying into the unsearchable depths of Godhead, let me chiefly labour to experience the quickening and sanctifying power of gospel truth'.⁵ This experiential Calvinism was rooted in the Scottish Reformed

¹ Brown, *Dictionary*, 398.

² Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 94.

³ Brown, *Devout and Practical Meditations*, 667-668.

⁴ Brown, *Dictionary*, 398.

⁵ Brown, *Devout and Practical Meditations*, 667.

tradition. Here we can detect the influence of Samuel Rutherford's theology. Brown's language and vocabulary are similar to Rutherford's. Both describe the communion that believers have with God in theological and experiential terms.¹ For example Rutherford wrote to Rev. John Nevay in 1638, in the midst of his difficulties in Aberdeen, 'I never write to any of Him [Christ] so much as I have felt. Oh, if I could write a book of Christ, and of His love!'.² Then in 1647, in *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself*: 'The soul which never felt the love of *Christ*, can never be troubled, nor jealously displeased for the want of love'.³ Similarly, Brown wrote: 'How many live in the church, who never feel the eminent strivings of the divine Spirit!'.⁴

Here, there is a noticeable difference between the Moderate Hugh Blair and John Brown. In his sermon *On the Sense of the Divine Presence*, Blair states,

There are principally two effects, which the sense of the Divine presence is fitted to produce upon men. One is, to restrain them from vice; the other, to encourage their virtue'.⁵

But as we saw, for Brown, the ends of God's sensible presence in believers' heart are not social moralism, but glorifying God for his saving works. For Brown, 'without his powerful presence I sink into nothing; without his

¹ For Rutherford see Maurice Roberts 'Samuel Rutherford: The Comings and Goings of the Heavenly Bridegroom.' *The Westminster Conference* (1993).

² Rutherford, *Letters*, 409.

³ Rutherford, *Christ Dying*, 49.

⁴ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 152.

⁵ Hugh Blair, *Sermons* (Complete In One Volume; London: Printed for T. Tegg & Son, Cheapside, 1834), 391.

gracious presence, I fall into sin; without his merciful presence, I plunge into hell'.¹

The main ends of such experiential knowledge are to know Christ and to live in holiness. There must be a connection between knowledge and life:

Much knowledge, without much holiness of heart and life, will but render my future judgment the more shameful and dangerous ... Learning is good in itself; but a good conscience and an holy life, are much better. Nay, by labouring to know much rather than to live well, many deprive themselves of the benefit of their knowledge.²

Thus the main foundation of the Christian life lies not in the Christian himself, but in the person of Christ. For Brown, a practical religion that is not founded on Jesus' imputed righteousness and the indwelling Spirit of grace is equivalent to seeking to 'erect a castle in the air'.³ But if Christ, and union with him, form the basis of the Christian life, there is no other purpose in it than Christ himself. In Brown's words:

If I follow Jesus Christ ...Let me therefore be *one* with Christ ...*put on* Christ ...*receive* Christ, as my life, strength, food, and all-filling treasure, *follow* Christ, as my pattern, and always regard Christ, as my royal Master and chief end'.⁴

¹ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 180.

² Brown, *Devout and Practical Meditations*, 668.

³ *Ibid*, 667.

⁴ *Ibid*.

The Christian life therefore is a journey of faith, structured by the covenant of grace and in communion with the Triune God:

Let me ... by the hand of faith, take hold of the new covenant, that I may dwell for ever in the palace of King Jesus; and even now thrust myself into the most intimate fellowship with him.¹

So far we have seen that for John Brown understanding Covenant Theology, and the person and work of Christ, undergird a practical application of the doctrine of sanctification, and lead to a life of covenantal piety lived out in experiential communion with God on the basis of union with Christ. So too, it is within the Covenant Society, the Church, that Christians develop a covenantal godliness.

All of this in turn indicates why it is so important that believers should gather to pray for and to choose wisely those who will preach Christ and his Covenant. To the character of such ministers of the gospel we now turn our attention.

¹ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 61.

7

Ministers of the Covenant of Grace

The preacher ought clearly to understand the difference and the connection between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.¹

Presbyterian ministers held prominent places in Scottish society in the eighteenth century, and many of them belonged to the Moderate party. They played an important role in introducing the ideas of the Enlightenment both in the universities and the Kirk.² John Witherspoon (1723-1794) famously satirized them in his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* commenting that professors of theology or ministers suspected of heresy, are to be esteemed men '*of great genius, vast learning, and uncommon worth; and are, by all means, to be supported and protected*'.³ It was a feature of a moderate '*never to speak of the [Westminster] Confession of Faith but with a sneer; to give sly hints, that he does not thoroughly believe it; and to make the word orthodoxy a term of contempt and reproach*'.⁴ So too, the four marks of a good moderate preacher were: his subjects must be confined to social duties; he must recommend them only from rational considerations; his authorities must be drawn from heathen authors and few from the Bible; and he must be very unacceptable to the common people.⁵ Satire apart, there was some truth in that description. As Richard Sher indicates: "The Moderates did tend to be clannish; they did favour lay

¹ Brown, *Counsel to Gospel Ministers*. 13

² Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 151.

³ John Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics: or, The Arcana of Church Policy. Being an Humble Attempt to Open Up the Mystery of Moderation* (The Fifth Edition; Edinburgh, 1763), 19.

⁴ *Ibid*, 24.

⁵ *Ibid*, 27.

patronage as the best means of filling parish vacancies; they did emphasize morality over doctrine in their sermons'.¹

John Brown sought to train new ministers in sharp contrast, emphasising a biblical, Reformed theology that was both Trinitarian and covenantal.

Theological Students and Candidates for the Ministry

Prefixed to Brown's *Systematic Theology* is an *Address to Students of Divinity*. He focuses attention on students examining themselves to discern if they are real Christians or not. Are their reading, prayers and preaching carried out under the influence of the Holy Spirit? For if theological students are not believers, their condition is terrible if they become ministers:

If you be, or become either *graceless* preachers or ministers of the gospel, how terrible is your condition! If you open your Bible, the sentence of your redoubled damnation flashes into your conscience from every page. When you compose your sermon, you but draw up a tremendous indictment against yourselves. If you argue against, or reprove other men's sins, you but aggravate your own.²

Unbelieving students desecrate the covenant and the gospel and at the same time trample Christ and his work under their feet. Without a saving and experiential knowledge of Christ, all knowledge is vain, and only serves to increase pride and finally to kill the soul of the student.

¹ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 59.

² Brown, *Address to Students of Divinity*, iv. Contained in John Brown, *A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015)

Candidates for Ministry must therefore ask themselves ‘Am I a real Christian? Or am I a devil, a dissembler with God and men, an entertainer of sin and Satan in my heart?’¹

While the training of some Presbyterian students of theology was linked only to a rationalist knowledge, Brown emphasized the importance of a theological knowledge nourished by intimate communion with God that emphasizes the core of the covenant of grace: God must be *his* God. As he wrote to the Countess of Huntingdon:

I would not exchange the learning of one hour’s fellowship with Christ for all the liberal learning in ten thousand universities...Nor would I exchange the pleasure my soul hath found in a word or two about Christ, as, *thy* God, *my* God’.²

Students must also have a clear call to ministry. For this, a heart filled with compassion for souls and a sense of unfitness for such work is necessary, but also, a fervent desire for holiness. A true call to the ministry begins with the call of Christ and a love for him.

Theological students and candidates must also understand the goal of the ministerial office: the glory and the honour of Christ, and not the glory of men. For this, they must labour with ‘much fear and trembling, determined to know, to glory in, and make known, nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified’.³ Here we see how elements of both Christology and sanctification, are important in the lives of students. However, the knowledge of those doctrines must be experiential:

¹ Brown, *the Life of John Brown*, 177.

² Ibid, 158. See the comment in William G. Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland. From the Sixth to the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 38 George Street, 1888),211.

³ Brown, *Address to Students of Divinity*, ix.

If you do not *ardently* love Christ, how can you *faithfully* and *diligently* feed his lambs-his sheep? Alas! How many precious sermons, exhortations, and instructions are quite marred and poisoned by coming through the cold, carnal, and careless heart of the preacher, and being attended with his imprudent, untender, and lukewarm life? If you have not a deep-felt experience of the terrors of the Lord ... and of the conscience-quieting and heart-captivating virtue of Jesus's bleeding love, how can you be duly serious and hearty in preaching the gospel?¹

Theology, sanctification, personal piety and a sense of the solemn responsibility of the ministerial office were the main focus of preparation. The development of these topics in the classroom was a safeguard against any spirit of moderatism in ministry. While the Moderates supported the Act of Patronage as a method to fill vacancies, Brown called for fervent prayer in the election of faithful ministers: 'Blindfold election of ministers is as dangerous as to make ignorance the mother of devotion'.² Although a man may have excellent qualities for this office, if God has not sent him to a specific place, and is not with him, he will only damage the congregation. On the other hand, if Christ sends him to a specific church, the people will be blessed, and there will be joy and honour for them on the Day of Judgment.³

¹ Ibid, xi-xii.

² John Brown [of Haddington], *The Necessity and Advantage of Earnest Prayer for the Lord's Special Direction in the Choice of Pastors* (Edinburgh: Printed by David Paterson, 1783), 13.

³ Ibid.

The Life of Ministers

Ponder my soul, with solemn awe! Am I without that
 God, that Christ, a stranger to that covenant of promise,
 which I preach to others? While I commend Jesus
 Christ from the pulpit, am I a despiser of him in my
 heart.¹

These words stress the necessary congruence between the life of the preacher and his preaching. The preacher's heart and mouth must be linked together by an experiential covenantal knowledge of Christ. Through his letters, Brown describes the behaviour and character of ministers. A minister must not be a novice, lifted up with pride. He must be called by Christ. If someone possesses piety and theological knowledge, but has not been called by Christ, he exposes himself to the displeasure of God. But an inward call of the Spirit will manifest itself in a compassion for souls and in a humble desire to serve Christ with the gifts he has bestowed. This, in turn, must be confirmed by an outward call, in an invitation by the majority of a congregation to be their pastor.² Personal character is also important. While the Moderates socialised with and defended people such as Hume,³ Brown offered different counsel: 'Shun all unnecessary intimacies with obstinately atheistical and scornful men'.⁴ Again, while some Kirk ministers were noted for their ecclesiastical, academic or political reputation, Brown issues a cautionary word:

¹ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 183.

² Brown, *Counsel to Gospel Ministers*, 39-40.

³ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 61, 154.

⁴ Brown, *Counsel to Gospel Ministers*, 40.

Beware...in eagerly seeking after outward fame,
honour, and advancement...in seeking them to gratify
your own pride, not for the glory of God or edification
of His church...Never hunt after vainglory and applause
from men.¹

Ministers must also avoid envying the prosperity of others. Envy hinders men from being edified by the gifts of others. It also leads ministers to blaspheme God as if he had no right to sovereignly distribute his gifts to others.

After listing various things that ministers should avoid, Brown proceeds to describe the positive characteristics of a pastor. These include the exercise and growth of the elements of sanctification described earlier.² Saving graces and a Christian spirit are essential for the worship of God, and for receiving, observing and keeping pure God's instituted ordinances of private and public worship.

As for his own character, a minister must cultivate a heart burning with love and holy zeal, constrained by the love of Christ and by the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. His Christian life must be reflected in his own family. He should choose a 'pious, prudent, active, frugal, kind and affable wife' and he must manifest an affectionate delight in her and sympathy with her in any trouble. He must provide in all senses for his family.³ Regarding his general behaviour, the minister must be blameless and humble. He must help the poor, forgive injuries and pray for his enemies.

Why must a minister live this way? Brown answers:

¹ Ibid, 42-43.

² Sanctification includes, 1) *gracious habits implanted*, 2) *Christian tempers acquired*, and 3) *holy exercises performed*. See page 77.

³ Brown, *Counsel to Gospel Ministers*, 52.

By the earnest study of the above duties toward God, yourself, and your neighbour, you will promote your own delightful fellowship with God; you will cherish and maintain the abundant influences of the Holy Ghost, who dwells in you. ¹

Not only should gifts and graces be improved but learning must be ongoing. If there is no desire for study, there is no real evidence of a call to ministry. Such theological study must be accompanied by fervent prayer under the influences of the Holy Spirit. This will lead the minister to study as a Christian and not as an atheist. In this way he will show that he is endowed with the Holy Spirit, as he manifests a prudent zeal for God's glory, tender compassion, reverence and simplicity.²

The ministerial character Brown thus describes contrasts with the Moderate ideal. Moderates tended to walk arm in arm with the Enlightenment culture. Worldly behaviour began to penetrate their social life. As William Blaikie indicated: 'Neither did morality improve among clergy or laity. Drunkenness became common among the clergy'.³ This is why Brown wrote to his fellow ministers: 'carefully avoid all approaches to drunkenness, whether in private houses or places of public concourse'.⁴

There was a difference of opinion between Moderates and Evangelicals not only over how to fill congregational vacancies, but also over the Reformed confessional standards. Theologically the Moderate party had a more liberal spirit. As the Rev. Daniel Brodie of Cawdor wrote in 1771:

¹ Ibid, 57.

² Ibid, 61-64.

³ Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland*, 242.

⁴ Brown, *Counsel to Gospel Ministers*, 47.

Happily a more liberal spirit has gained ground among the Clergy of Scotland. They think more freely than they did of old, and consequently a spirit of inquiry and moderation seems to be on the growing hand.¹

This led to a controversy over subscription to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* between 1770 and 1780. Moderate clergy argued that all creeds and confessions are partial and incomplete.² As they claimed, 'This age is superior to the age of the Reformation, our sentiments may be presumed juster, and more correct than theirs'.³

It was in this context that Brown called ministers to be faithful to their ordination vows. Being a Reformed confessional minister is a solemn issue, because it is directly related to God's glory and the salvation of men:

The declarative glory of God in his church and in the world around it, and the everlasting salvation of multitudes, in the present and following ages, depending so much upon the orthodoxy, faithfulness, and diligence of church-officers, particularly ministers, it is exceeding proper and necessary that, at their entrance on their office, they should solemnly declare their real principles and their sincere resolutions with respect to these, and their faithful execution of their office. It is, therefore, necessary, that every expectant of such office ought, timely and seriously, and with much fervent prayer to God for direction, to examine

¹ Quoted in Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 151.

² Ian D.L. Clark, 'From Protest to Reaction: The Moderate Regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752-1805'. in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement, Essays in Scottish History in the Eighteenth Century*. (Edited by N.T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 205.

³ *Ibid.*

his own heart, qualifications, aims, and intentions, and also the contents of the solemn vow to which he is to enter.¹

In summary: only a minister who has been called by God, who lives in holiness, who maintains an intimate communion with God, whose fruits are reflected in his life, family, church and society, should preach. Only a candidate faithful to the Reformed Confessions and chosen by a local congregation is qualified to preach the Gospel of Christ.

The Sermons of the Reformed Pastor

Hugh Blair, one of the greatest Moderate preachers wrote:

An essential requisite, in order to preach well, is to have a just, and, at the same time, a fixed and habitual view of the end of preaching...*The end of all preaching is, to persuade men to become good*.²

On the other hand, Brown wrote: '*The end in every sermon ought to be the glory of God in the salvation, sanctification and comfort of his hearers*'.³

The difference is obvious.

¹ John Brown [of Haddington], *The Posthumous Works of the Late Rev. Mr. John Brown* (London: Printed for David Ogilvy & Son, 1798), 93.

² Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rethoric and Belles Lettres* (Thirteenth Edition; Vol. II; London: Printed for Cadell and Davies, 1819), 60. Emphasis mine.

³ John Brown [of Haddington], "On the Composition of Pulpit Discourses" *The Christian Repository*, (November 1817), 669. Emphasis added.

For Brown, every preacher should be able to distinguish between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Without this covenantal worldview, there cannot be proper preaching of the gospel. As we have seen throughout this study, this covenantal view is linked to an orthodox Christology. Therefore, it should not surprise us that Brown applies it to the core of the ministry of the gospel:

[The] evangelical preacher should have a deep insight into the mystery of Christ, that he may clearly perceive how His person, God-man, is connected with and influences all His offices, states, and works; how it is connected with every part of the covenant of grace and the privileges and duties of believers.¹

This statement contains the elements that define Brown's understanding of the gospel: Covenant Theology, Christology and Sanctification as both privilege and duty should be the fundamental elements present in preaching. Nothing is more agreeable to sinful nature than to preach the truths of the gospel in a broken and disjointed manner because at the end, there will not be a preaching of the gospel of Christ.² For if Christ is not explicitly preached according to his person and work, according to his righteousness and mercy, there is no preaching of the gospel. Without Christ, preaching becomes a pagan and at best a moralistic message announcing vices and virtues. In fact, even when there is a verbal mention of Christ, a sermon without the gospel may still be preached. In order for Christ and the gospel of grace to be truly announced, the sermon should contain the following elements:

¹ Brown, *Counsel to Gospel Ministers*, 13. Note the use of the words *privilege* and *duty* related to the practical doctrine of sanctification.

² Brown, *Counsel to Gospel Ministers*, 5.

- A declaration of the nature of Christ as surety-undertaking for us. Christ is the substitute in our room as the second Adam.
- A declaration of Christ's relation to the new covenant as mediator, surety, and administrator of it. A preacher must declare on the one hand, Christ's relation to sinners as their appointed Saviour and on the other hand, Christ's relation to his people as their head and husband and as the source of their sanctification.
- A representation of God's sovereign grace through the free offer of the gospel to sinners. Christ and salvation are free without regard to our good resolutions, sincerity, repentance, or good works.
- A representation of sinners' justification before God through the imputed righteousness of Christ offered in the gospel and received by faith, uniting them to Christ.
- A description of the elements and nature of saving faith and how the sinner can receive and rest upon Christ for salvation alone, freely offered in the gospel.
- An urgent and daily receiving of Christ by the exercise of faith according to the new-covenant, as the means of producing good works and living in holiness.
- A declaration that union and communion with Christ is the only foundation of our sanctification as a privilege and duty.¹

Here again we see the application of Brown's Christological and covenantal theology and, his experiential-Calvinist emphasis. The preacher not only has a duty to know these doctrines intellectually, but also experientially. As Brown notes,

¹ Ibid, 10-12.

The more abundant grace and experimental fellowship with God the preacher has, the better he will understand his subject, the more deeply he will be affected with it...and able to speak to them [hearers] in the most plain and affecting manner.¹

Why should the preacher know these truths both intellectually and experientially, and never divorce them? Because this will enable him to avoid the moralism, corruption and pride that were present in contemporary preaching.

For Christ and the gospel of free grace to be expounded, the preacher should begin by preaching about the law as a broken covenant, which requires a right understanding of the covenant of works. The motive of this is to convince his hearers of their guilt and inability to save themselves, and to drive them to Christ. So too, the preacher must show the horrors of having broken the covenant of works. But he cannot stop there. After preaching about the curse of the broken covenant he must then proceed to preach Christ and the free offer of the covenant of grace:

The covenant of grace - in its source, its making, its condition, its promise, its administration, and the manner of attaining an actual interest in it, must be clearly and distinctly unfolded...The preacher must, by the direction and authority of God's Word, explain how...when the law could not justify and save us, being weak through the flesh, He [God] sent Him [Christ] forth, that by His offering of Himself sin might be condemned and the righteousness of the law fulfilled in

¹ Brown, *On the Composition of Pulpit Discourses*, 661.

us...how...[He] with His whole heart engaged to be our surety, was made man... [and] fulfilled the condition of the new covenant.¹

Preachers should delight in preaching about the making and administration of the covenant of grace because in this there is a display of the riches of God's grace in the redemption of men in the person and work of Christ.

As an exponent of particular election and redemption Brown believed that Christ died only for the elect; but he also believed in the free offer of the gospel because Christ is able to save all who come to him. Thus the preacher should not scrutinize the secret counsel of God, but invite all to Christ not as elect or sensible sinners but as sinful men and sons of Adam.² Again, the minister must show that union with Christ is the foundation of the whole Christian life³ bringing the sinner from the covenant of works into his new state in the covenant of grace in sanctification and communion with the Triune God.

As we have seen throughout these chapters, prayer was important for Brown in the Christian life and in the election of a new minister. But it is also vital in preaching. A right proclamation of the gospel message begins with fervent prayer and meditation. The preacher needs to have his message applied to his own heart.⁴ Both his praying and his preaching must be warm and evangelical. The minister is not dealing with a 'philosophical problem' but with people standing on the very brink of

¹ Brown, *Counsel to Gospel Ministers*, 20-21.

² Ibid, 24-25.

³ Ibid, 31.

⁴ Brown, *On the Composition of Pulpit Discourses*, 669.

eternity, 'when his and their eternal salvation do so much depend on every sentence of divine truth which he utters'.¹

Finally, 'The preacher's life must be an illustration and enforcement of his sermons'.² Otherwise, in spite of all his orthodoxy, eloquence and warmth, the only thing that he manifests is symptoms of hypocrisy and both his preaching and his life will do more harm than good to his hearers.

Ministerial Legacy

The influence of Brown's *Address to Students of Divinity* was felt not only by his own students, like George Lawson, but also by a whole generation of candidates even after the death of his grandson John Brown of Edinburgh (1784-1858). In the edition of 1859, he states that the *Address* of his grandfather contained the whole substance of what he himself wanted to communicate to his students before he died. Indeed, he wrote, 'I prefer it for this purpose [his final farewell] to any thing of my own composition'.³ It was

Well fitted to guard against a style of theological instruction ... and which is the plague that threatens to overwhelm our time as well as his—"a rational" [a mere rational] "sort of religion – ordinances without power, doctrine without influence – a religion which is not Christianity at all properly so called, but mere deism,

¹ Ibid, 670

² Ibid, 670.

³ John Brown [of Haddington], *Address to Students of Divinity... To Which is Prefixed A Letter to the Students of Exegesis in the United Presbyterian Divinity Hall, Session 1858, by their Professor, John Brown, D.D.* (Edinburgh, 1859), 12.

having no relation to Christ Jesus and the Spirit of God”
of which assuredly “Christ is not all in all”¹

We see in Brown’s tract an answer to the rationalism that was destroying Reformed and experiential theology in the divinity halls. His grandson in turn realized the danger of divorcing theological study from the Christian life. It is precisely the marriage between theology and piety so fully expounded by his grandfather that Brown believed would help his own students to counteract the influence of the scepticism of nineteenth century German theology.

John Brown’s own piety was reflected in his catholic character. Despite the division in his own denomination, he maintained a spirit of unity with people in the General Associate Synod, and in addition with members of the Established Church. In Haddington, he helped the Antiburgher minister financially and when he died offered to take one of his orphans into his own family.² He also maintained a prayer group with people from both the Church of Scotland and the Secession Church.

While he opposed to the deism of the Enlightenment, Brown was not apposed to the study of philosophy and the sciences. He was no obscurantist. For him a minister should be ‘well instructed in the history of nature, nations, and churches, that he may be able readily to observe how the oracles of God and his works illustrate each other’.³ But neither philosophy nor science should be the basis for developing a pastoral ministry. The Holy Spirit, through the Bible, must shape the worldview of every preacher. When this happens, the contrast between the character

¹ Ibid,19-20.

² Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 49.

³ Brown, *On the Composition of Pulpit Discourses*, 664.

and preaching of a Moderate minister and a true gospel minister becomes clear.

Brown sustained this vision for ministry to the end. His son, the Rev. Ebenezer Brown, wrote to Charles Simeon to let him know that his father had died, and added:

P.S.- Perhaps it will delight you to hear that my revd. Father died testifying his faith in the Doctrines which he preached and expressing earnest desires to be with Christ'.¹

This same faithfulness came to expression in his *Dying advice to his younger children*. This spiritual *testamentum* affirms his conviction that God not only made an everlasting covenant with him, but also with his father, with the father of his wife and with his children (to whom he directs his advice). While the Moderates chafed under the *Westminster Confession of Faith*,² Brown urged his children to be biblical and confessional, 'I charge you, to learn diligently the principles of our Christian and Protestant religion, from your Catechisms and Confession of Faith, but especially from your Bible'.³

The hallmarks of John Brown's ministry were his commitment to biblical truths, and to Reformed theology. Although only four of his sermons were printed,⁴ they give ample evidence of the congruence between them and

¹ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 189.

² Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, 24.

³ Brown, *The Life of John Brown*, 197.

⁴ 1) *The Fearful Shame and Contempt of Those Professed Christians, Who Neglect to Raise up Spiritual Children to Jesus Christ (Being the Substance of Two Sermons)*. 2) *Religious Steadfastness*. 3) *The Necessity and Advantage of Earnest Prayer for the Lord's Special Direction in the Choice of Pastors*. 4) *The Love of God Inseparable from His People*.

the advice he gave to pastors: an experiential expository emphasis in which the elements of the covenant of works and covenant of grace are expounded to highlight both the person and work of Christ, and the privileges and duties of believers.

At a time when in some important pulpits covenant theology was lacking,¹ and the focus was on virtue and the morality of man in society, John Brown centred his preaching and his writing on Christ's Glory, Crown and Covenant of Grace.

¹ G.D. Henderson. "The Idea of the Covenant in Scotland". *The Evangelical Quarterly* 27 (January 1955): 14.

8

Conclusion**Theological and Practical Covenantal Christology**

Survey Jesus' Fœdera, his everlasting covenant, behold the law in his heart, fulfilled and magnified by him; and written in our heart, by a perfect conformity to him.¹

We have seen that John Brown occupies an important place in the theology of Scotland. His ministry not only influenced his own denomination, but also Evangelicals in the Established Church who shared his desire to teach an orthodox theology. For example, in his work *On The Covenant of Grace*, John Colquhoun (1748 - 1827), recognizes Brown's influence alongside other important Covenant theologians such as Witsius, Turretin, and Boston.² Writing in the late nineteenth century William Blaikie noted the ongoing influence of Brown's *Self-interpreting Bible*.³ At the beginning of the twentieth century, Robert Mackenzie did much to recover interest in Brown's life and ministry. Later in the century, John Macleod noted the importance of Brown's Shorter Catechism on the Scots-Irish Presbyterians. When the Ulster children were still too young to learn the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, their parents used Brown's Catechism. According to Macleod, in the wake of the emigration of so many Scots-Irish to North America, this early training 'helped so much to build up and recruit the ranks of American Presbyterianism'.⁴ Towards

¹ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 141.

² John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh: Printed for Ogle, Allardice and Thomson, 1818), v.

³ Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland*, 211.

⁴ Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 193.

the end of the of the century, M. Charles Bell¹ paid particular attention to Brown's theology, and T.F. Torrance, while saying little about Brown's work, noted his important role in shaping theology in Scotland by giving it a 'more evangelical and biblical slant to its understanding of the Westminster Tradition'.² More recently the significance of Brown's work has been discussed by William Vandoodeward, Jack Whytock, and also by Richard Muller and Joel Beeke.

Expository Theology

How is the structure of Brown's theology best described? It is Reformed theology whose backbone is classical Covenant or Federal theology in which the blood of the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace circulates from the largest artery to the smallest vein and blood capillary, from the beginning to the end of Scripture. It is a Christocentric covenantal theology whose beating heart is the glory of the Triune God.

At the same time, Brown's distinctive method in expounding his system of theology was driven by a desire to connect every element in it to biblical material and the biblical message from Genesis to Revelation.

Brown was also known for his profound knowledge of Scripture, evidenced in *his Self Interpreting Bible*. He sought to base all his theological construction on the Scriptures. In this way, his theological thought was born out of his biblical exegesis and theology. Thus his theological method always pointed to Christ and his covenant, and to the

¹ M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: the doctrine of assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press Ltd, 1985), 168-172.

² Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 244.

transformation of the individual, the family, and the church. This was the programme he pursued in both the pulpit and the Divinity Hall.

Brown's theology was not developed in the academy, as such, but in a pastoral seminary. His familiarity with Reformed scholastic thought did not drive him in the direction of mere intellectual knowledge. His chief concern was the practical piety of the minister of the gospel. As Whytock has argued, Brown's approach stands in marked contrast to that of the moderate Professor of Divinity, George Campbell.¹

How, then, are we to assess Brown's theology within the broader context of the Scottish theological tradition?

Critical Issues

Brown's covenant theology provides an interesting case study in Scottish Reformed theology, both in terms of how he himself assessed his theology within this tradition and also how he has been assessed by his successors.

Brown and his Predecessors: Two or Three Covenants?

How is Brown's covenantal scheme to be assessed in the light of his predecessors in the Reformed tradition – like Samuel Rutherford – who (i) held to a three covenant paradigm, distinguishing between the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace, and (ii) spoke of faith as the condition of the Covenant of Grace?

With respect to these issues, two points are worth noting:

¹ Whytock, *An Educated Clergy*, 132-138.

First, despite their differences with respect to the covenantal scheme, and the question of whether faith is the condition of the covenant of grace, Brown believed there was no substantial difference or contradiction between himself and his Reformed predecessors. His own non-distinction and non-separation between the *pactum salutis* and covenant of grace did not mean for Brown that he denied the substantial issues of the Trinitarian covenant. Rather the opposite. As we saw, the eternal counsel of peace was essential in Brown's theology. For him there was no scriptural necessity to distinguish within the gracious covenant or to divide it into two distinct covenants.

Secondly, this difference between Brown and some of his predecessors may in part be explained by the different historical-theological contexts in which they wrote.¹ By making a distinction between the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace, Rutherford emphasized both the sovereignty of God and man's responsibility over against *antinomianism*. But by encapsulating the elements of the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace in a single covenant, Brown responded to the moralism and legalism of *Moderatism* by stressing that the righteousness of Christ is the only condition of the Covenant of Grace. Nevertheless, this emphasis did not nullify human responsibility expressed in the response of faith. Therefore, for Brown, Rutherford and others were not expressing any substantial error when they called faith the condition of this covenant, since, in his own words, they only meant that 'it was the instrument by

¹ Rutherford wrote against antinomianism and Boston wrote considering the danger of Baxterianism. Donald MacLeod. 'Covenant Theology' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*. Edited by David F. Wright, David C. Lachman and Donald E. Meek. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1993.

which we are personally interested in that covenant, and receive the blessings of it'.¹

Thus Brown saw himself standing in continuity with the federal tradition he inherited. What, then of later assessments of Brown himself?

Brown and his Successors: Federal Calvinism

While there has been a general recognition Brown's contribution and his place in the Scottish Reformed theological tradition, there are basically two school of analysis of that tradition and therefore of Brown's place in it.

On one hand Vandoodeward, Whytock, Beeke and Muller tend to approach Brown's theology in a descriptive and fundamentally appreciative way. On the other hand, M. Charles Bell, and behind him T.F. and J.B. Torrance, represent a critical school of thought in relation to the Scottish federal tradition to which Brown belonged. Because of this, his covenantal Christology provides an interesting 'test-case' of the 'Torrance school' thesis that postulates a discontinuity between Calvin and the Westminster/Scottish federalist theologians which gave rise to several theological and spiritual distortions.

How - in this context - is Brown to be assessed as a leading representative in the Secession tradition of the theology of the *Westminster Confession* Theology?

¹ Brown, *Questions & Answers*, 92.

(a) Covenant or Contract?

According to the ‘Torrance school’, in the Westminster theology, ‘covenant’ has become a ‘contract’. In this negative evaluation of the federal scheme, J.B. Torrance argued that ‘we can see an impoverishment and restriction of the concept of grace.’¹

As we have seen, however, for Brown the concept of the covenant is not an arid contract, but an agreement of *friendship*, where the elements that make up a covenant, often noted by Reformed divines, are present, i.e. *parties, a condition, a promise and finally a penalty*.² This covenantal friendship between God and man is only by God’s free grace. There is not an impoverishment and restriction of the concept of grace. In fact, for Brown, there is a kind of grace in the covenant of works in that it manifests the condescension and goodness of God in his making it with Adam.³ The critique that covenant theology obligates a priority of law over grace –tending to legalism and contractualism – thus lacks of foundation. Indeed, as we have seen, for Brown, even the covenant of works ultimately points to Christ. Every covenant dispensation is, ultimately, related to his person and work. In the case of the covenant of works, God always had in view the fact that he alone would fulfil it. And while the covenant of grace is first published in Genesis 3:15 following the fall, it has its roots in the eternal Trinitarian relations. In this way we can

¹ James Torrance, ‘Covenant or Contract?: A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland’ *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 70.

² Torrance recognized that a covenant ‘brings its promises, its obligation and indeed its warnings’. *Ibid*, 66.

³ Boston held the same notion of a gracious covenant of works. In the same position, Gib referred to an *undeserving grace* in the covenant of works; ‘though it was not till afterwards, that he became an object of it [grace] as *ill-deserving*, which last is the view of *grace*, as ordinarily mentioned in scripture.’ Adam Gib, *Kaina kai palaia. Sacred Contemplations: in Three Parts* (Edinburgh: Printed by Neill and Company, 1786), 31. For the Puritan view of grace in the covenant of works see also Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 229-232.

see the manifestation of God's grace in Brown's federalism because the focus is the gracious work of God and not man's work.

Again, and to highlight God's grace in the midst of the moralism of the established church, we can understand why Brown did not separate or distinguish between a covenant of grace and a covenant of redemption, but saw only a single unified covenant of grace with Christ as its guarantor. As a result, the condition of the covenant of grace does not reside in men, but only in the God-man, Jesus Christ. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is the condition of the covenant of grace. Faith is, therefore not properly the condition of it but the means of its reception.

What then of J.B.Torrance's further critique that in the Federal theology there is a distortion of grace at the very root? Thus,

if the Son fulfils the conditions of the Covenant (contract) of Works for the elect, God will be gracious to the elect ...when applied to the doctrine of atonement, it implies that the Father has to be conditioned into being gracious.¹

The result, according to Torrance, is that in this construction grace has been turned into a conditionalism which implies that the Father himself does not love sinners.

Brown would have viewed his analysis as misrepresenting the covenantal relationship between the Father and sinners. Rather, it is because God (the Father) loves sinners and is gracious towards them that he sent his Son to fulfil the condition of the covenant in their place. This immutable love is secured in the engagement between the Father and the Son made

¹ Ibid, 63.

by them within the mutual and intrinsic love of the Trinity and their corresponding extrinsic love for sinners. At least in Brown's theology the criticism that the Father has to be conditioned into being gracious has no foundation in fact. Rather, in his covenantal theology, it is because God is full of grace that he himself fulfilled the condition of the covenant in Christ.

To conclude this point it is important to acknowledge that Brown and the Westminster divines did employ the words 'contract' and 'agreement' to describe the covenant. It is this very word 'contract' however that draws out the critical rejection of federalism as a distortion of the biblical way to define covenant.

Although defining covenant is not a simple task,¹ the term itself does not exclude an element of agreement.² An analysis of the Hebrew word *berith*, allows for the ideas of contract or agreement.³ The real issue is how this agreement is constituted and what the nature of the contract is. In fact Brown's definition of covenant is more biblical than Bell has claimed:

Of the covenant of works, Brown simply reiterates the standard Federalist definition, and in typical Federalist fashion, he uses the language of social contract rather than biblical covenant.⁴

¹ Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with and Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (Nottingham: APOLLOS, an imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 35-36.

² David L. Baker. "Covenant: An Old Testament Study" in *The God of Covenant: Biblical, theological and contemporary perspectives* (Edited by Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson; Leicester: APOLLOS and imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 21-22.

³ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Translated and Edited by M-E-J- Richardson, Vol. I; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 157-159.

⁴ Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, 170. However, Bell is less sharply critical of Brown than he is of Rutherford, Boston and Ebenezer Erskine.

For Brown, however, the ‘agreement’ in view is not a contract *per se*, in the sense of a settlement reached by two parties. Rather it is a sovereign gracious agreement of union and communion between God and sinners justified by Christ. Within the context of Brown’s experiential Calvinism, his federal theology cannot be viewed as reflecting a mere cold social contract.¹

The critics’ reading of Scottish federalism is that the use of the word ‘contract’ turns covenant into a legal relationship between God and man. According to this view, the focus of religion is in what the man can do and not in what God did.² Brown’s covenantal Christology shows the opposite: God’s covenant is not conditional in this sense; rather the focus of the *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis* begins and ends with the person and work of Christ, applied to man only by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Father. Thus Brown’s federal theology should not be seen as a ‘mercantile arrangement between God and the sinner’ (to use Mackenzie’s language).³

In summary, then, the covenant of grace is not a rigid contract void of elements of the wonder and mystery of grace, but the opposite: ‘Now, O my soul, think what astonishing displays of Jehovah’s perfections appear in this covenant! ... How all infinite perfections work for the redemption of sinful men, of sinful ME!’.⁴

¹ ‘Am I prepared by God, with the saving views of and heart-captivating influences of his covenant, to declare to others, what I have seen, and heard, and handled, of the Word of life?’ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 255.

² Torrance, ‘Covenant or Contract?’, 69.

³ Mackenzie, *John Brown of Haddington*, 260. Mackenzie seems to contradict this view himself by saying that a covenantal scheme is a warm fellowship between the Saviour and the sinner.

⁴ Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 252.

(b) Westminster Legalism?

In addition, and growing out of this first element of criticism, it is claimed that the *Marrow Men* (and therefore, by implication, Brown also), ‘were themselves federalists and did not adequately see that the legalism against which they were protesting grew in no small measure out of federalism itself’.¹

It would seem, however, that in Brown’s case, this critique also falls wide of the mark. It recognises the deep concerns over legalism that he shared with his predecessors (notably Thomas Boston). But this legalism did not proceed from federal theology or from the *pactum salutis*.² So too, this legalism could not come from theologians who spoke of faith as a condition of the covenant.

Brown, like Boston before him, recommended *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. In it Edward Fisher had written that faith was the condition of the covenant of grace. But Boston and Brown believed that when Fisher – and others - referred to faith as condition it was ‘Not in a strict and proper sense’.³ ‘Condition’ in this context for them was the equivalent of ‘means’, ‘instrument of reception’ not ‘way of contribution’. The legalism that Brown was attacking did not come from Westminster federalism. In fact the legalism and conditionalism rightly under attack here is also found in theological traditions throughout the world which can hardly be traced to the supposed contractualism of the Westminster tradition. Therefore, the thesis that legalism sprouted from Westminster federalism takes little or

¹ Torrance, *Covenant or Contract?*, 63.

² As Bell postulated when he considered Thomas Boston rejection of a third covenant. Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, 155.

³ See Boston notes in Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, reprint 2015), 90.

no account of the way in which it has been an endemic problem from biblical times.¹

In fact, Brown himself provides three important clues to help analyse the origins of legalism in the established church: the rejection of evangelical federalist literature,² a rejection of the free offer of the gospel, and as a result of this, asserting ‘men’s holiness to be a federal head or conditional mean of their obtaining eternal happiness’.³ For Brown it was a rejection or distortion of covenant theology that led to legalism in those who were claiming to preach the doctrines of grace.⁴

A third area of criticism is:

c) Limited atonement

It is a characteristic critique of Federal theology that its view of the extent of the atonement (i.e. that Christ died to save the elect only) means that ‘you cannot say to all men unequivocally, “Christ died for you”’.⁵

It appears to be implicit in this statement that *not* to say these words somehow involves a failure to preach or communicate the gospel. Thus to

¹ For a reformed discussion about *legalism*, see Ferguson, Sinclair B.. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance – Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 75-96.

² Brown mentions that in 1710, the Assembly ‘prohibited all ministers or members of this church to print or disperse in writ any catechism, without the allowance of the Presbytery of the bounds, or the Commission’. One of these was Hamilton’s Catechism, which deals with covenant theology in a ‘more evangelical strain than some wished’. See *The Occasion of the Marrow Controversy* by John Brown of Haddington in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 345. Interestingly, Hamilton of Airth held a three-covenant scheme, and Christ as the only proper condition of the covenant of grace and faith as condition but not in a proper sense. Alexander Hamilton [of Airth] *A Short Catechism, Concerning the Three Special Divine Covenants, and to Gospel Sacraments, with the Scripture Proofs*. (Edinburgh: Printed by John Moncur, 1714),16-17.

³ Brown, *The Occasion of the Marrow Controversy* in Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 345.

⁴ William Philip, “The Marrow and the Dry Bones Ossified Orthodoxy and the Battle for the Gospel in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Calvinism.” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* (Vol 15, no 1, Spring 1997) ,35.

⁵ Torrance, *Covenant or Contract?*, 69.

be able to say to someone: 'Christ died for you' seems here to be taken as a *sine qua non* of evangelistic communication. Yet in the New Testament's record of the apostolic communication of the gospel to non-Christians the appeal to believe in Christ is never expressed in these terms. 'Christ died for you' was not seen by the Federal theologians as the warrant for faith, since they did not believe it was presented as such in the apostolic preaching.

Furthermore, it is clear that the free offer of the gospel was a major motif in the thinking of the most significant figures in that Scottish tradition.¹ In addition, and related to this research, it is worth noting here that Brown sets his doctrine of limited atonement within the twofold context of the covenant of grace *and its administration*. Christ administers it both on earth and in heaven. While it is true that Christ died only for the elect, he *administers* this covenant on earth indiscriminately to all men in general. It is precisely this distinction between Christ's *administration* in heaven and on earth that harmonises limited atonement with the free offer of the gospel since this administration is *without any consideration* of people either reprobates or elect.² In Brown's words: 'Though there is no universal atonement, yet in the word there is a warrant to offer Christ to all mankind whether elect or reprobate, and a warrant to all, freely to receive him however great sinners they are or have been'.³ So too, a Reformed Christian must maintain that:

God entered into a covenant with Adam...that through
his breach of that covenant ...all man are conceived and

¹ See Donald John MacLean, *James Durham (1622-1658) and the Gospel Offer in its Seventeenth Century Context* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015). For Knox and Rollock see pages 57-61. For Rutherford see pages 235-255.

² Brown, *Systematic Theology*, 243.

³ Brown, *Select Remains*, 337.

born in sin...that in order to redeem men from an everlasting state of sin and misery, and bring them to everlasting salvation, Christ...assumed our nature, ...That he, as our surety, in the covenant of grace, from all eternity, undertook for all the elect, and them only, and in the fullness of time performed the broken law, and offended justice of God, whatever obedience and satisfaction could be required of us ... that though Jesus Christ laid down his life for the elect only, yet in the gospel, he, and his complete righteousness, and everlasting salvation, are freely offered to all sinful men who hear it, so as each may warrantably [sic] receive him, his righteousness and salvation, to himself in particular.¹

For Brown, only a gospel that proclaims an effective and particular atonement that assures the salvation of the sinner – and not an atonement that gives a possibility of salvation – is worthy of being preached to every man. In this way, the connection between Westminster covenant theology, Christology and the free offer of the gospel² grounded Brown's understanding of evangelism.³

How, then, is Brown's theology to be assessed?

¹ Brown, *An Historical Account*, 66-67.

² For the importance of the free offer of the gospel in the Westminster Assembly see MacLean, *James Durham (1622-1658)*, 45-56.

³ For a response to the 'Torrance school' in general, see Donald Macleod, 'Dr. T.F. Torrance and Scottish Theology: a Review Article' in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 72:1 (2000), 57-72.

A Theoretico-Practica theology

As we have seen, Brown's theology is characterized by its practical aspect. The link between dogma and practice emerges especially in his doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification seen as a fruit of union with Christ and justification is defined as the believer's *privilege* and *duty*. These concepts highlight both the sovereign work of God and the believer's responsibility to mortify sin and to be conformed to the image of Christ. Again, the Christological focus is important here because it helps to avoid legalism, neonomianism and antinomianism. The person and work of Christ always serve as the foundation and end of sanctification, which has its fruit in covenantal piety.

We have stressed the importance of this practical aspect in Brown's teaching in view of the ecclesiastical and social context in eighteenth century Scotland, especially the post-Enlightenment stress on moral behaviour rather than on salvation through faith in Christ. This emphasis was largely mediated by Moderate ministers. For the Moderates, morality was constructed from principles drawn from Scripture, but then shaped by the rationalist culture of the time that had implicitly departed from the Westminster Confession of Faith. For Brown, by contrast, behaviour is to be regulated neither by reason nor by a changing culture, but by the unchanging word of God and in terms of a system of faith that clearly expressed the doctrines of the Bible (i.e. the *Westminster Confession of Faith*). The truths of the gospel must illuminate and renew human reason, engage and affect the emotions and lead the will to love and submit to the will of God. All this should be reflected in both the life and the preaching of a minister of the gospel. In Brown's view this stood in sharp contrast to the lifestyle of many Moderate ministers:

Lord, let us have nothing to do with clergy who know better how to manage farms, than to wrestle with God, and deal with hardened and wounded consciences; that give us fine language, and airy flights, rather than rousing lectures of the corruption of our nature, and of a crucified Christ; or who value the company of the graceless great, more than of the debased saint.¹

In addition, Brown showed contempt for sermons that did not have Christ as the centre of the message, or that used the gospel and justification by faith alone as an excuse for ungodly living:

Ah! how many sermons are a mere chaos of confusion, nay, an antichristian overturning of the gospel of God; not so much because they are larded with error, as that divine truths are not therein exhibited in their true connection with JEHOVAH'S redeeming grace, and with Jesus' person, and imputed righteousness...
 Detested too be the preacher, who warmly descants concerning Jesus' imputed righteousness, and his Father's free GIFT of him for men, as their surety and ransom, and to them, as their husband and portion; but neglects to point him forth as a Saviour from the power and pollution of "sin – manifested to destroy the works of the devil" in my heart and life, and fill their place with implanted habits of grace in my heart, and exercises of true holiness in my life...

¹ Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 167.

Detested be the preacher, who represents not sin as the greatest misery, as well as the only crime of rational creatures; and HOLINESS as the very quintessence of true endless felicity: who presents not my HOLINESS in nature and life, as the glorious end of all gracious purposes, precious promises, holy laws, kind providences, free and inestimable gifts of God.¹

These critical descriptions indicate the type of moderate preaching Brown believed was characteristic in many Scottish pulpits in his own time. But he not only warned against a preaching marked by bad theology, but also against hypocrisy in pastors. For him, nothing is harder to cure than an ungodly minister; his sins expose him to the most terrible judgments of God.²

What then can solve this problem in the church except a powerful outpouring of the one who is the messenger of the Covenant of Grace, that is, the Holy Spirit?

Nothing but a remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God can prevent our superlative miseries, answerable to our heaven-daring national iniquities...The sins of Britain at present are so great, many, universal...so

¹ Ibid, 290, 292-293. Brown's criticisms are directed not only against Moderatism, but also against secession ministers who had an orthodox theology, but whose lives were ungodly. For example, in *The Christian Journal*, he wrote: 'Here comes **** the seceder, staggering through drink. - He vomits it up, while his companions make sport of him.' Alas! contrary to his vows, and resolutions; - contrary to the admonitions of his minister and friends, - contrary to the rebukes of providence; - contrary to the repeated challenges of his own conscience...often, by this means, he hath neglected to attend a praying society, and even the regular performances of evening-worship in his family; and now God is exposing him to public ignominy by his graceless companions.' Brown, *The Christian Journal*, 235-236.

² Brown, *Counsel to Gospel Ministers*, 59

aggravated, that the nation can neither be duly convinced of them...that there can no national reformation of them, without a remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God...So many thousands of unsent, careless, indolent, unholy, and erroneous preachers in Britain, by their legal, Arminian, or blasphemous doctrine, and by their impious and unedifying example, lay a fearful bar in the way of all the extraordinary work of the Holy Ghost.

But, notwithstanding all these things, an abundant effusion of the Holy Ghost would prevent our superlative ruin.¹

Thus for John Brown only through the power of the Holy Spirit will ministers be able to live according to the theology we have described in these pages: a Christological Covenantal Theology that leads men and women to live for God's glory through a godly life. Thus the theological and practical implications of this thesis are, perhaps, best summarized in Brown's own words in a letter he wrote to a number of Irish ministers who had been his students:

Labour to have always a cordial belief and powerful experience of the truths of the gospel concerning God's free grace; concerning Christ in his person, office, relations, labours, states, and fullness; concerning the Holy Ghost in his nature, mission, and work; concerning the covenant of works and grace, and their connection with you and with another; concerning the

¹ Brown, *Select Remains*, 183-184.

law and the gospel, as connected with these covenants, and with your persons and hearts; concerning the connection of the Church, and all her doctrines, laws, and ordinances, and members with Christ.¹

¹ John Brown [of Haddington], "Letter from the late Rev. John Brown of Haddington, to those Ministers and Probationers in Ireland, who had been his Pupils" in *The Christian Repository*, (January 1818), 18-19.

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