

A Complete Body of Doctrinal Divinity (1769)

by John Gill

Book 2 Chapter 10

*Lightly modernized with verses annotated
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OF CHRIST, AS THE COVENANT HEAD OF THE ELECT

There are various characters, relations, and offices which Christ sustains in the Covenant of Grace; among these is being a federal Head: Christ is often said to be the “Head of the Church”; not of any particular congregation of saints, in this or that part of the world; but of the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven: all the elect of God that have ever been, that are, or that will be in the world (Eph 1:22-23;¹ 5:23;² Col 1:18³). And he is a Head to them in different senses. He is a Head to them like a NATURAL head to a natural body and its members — the natural head has the same nature as the body, but it is superior to it; it communicates life, sense, and motion to it; and it oversees and protects it. Christ is that kind of Head of influence to the church; he is the source of life to it, the one from whom its nourishment is derived, and he is all its supplies of grace (Eph 4:15-16;⁴ Col 2:19⁵). He is a Head in a POLITICAL sense, as a general is the head of his army, and a king is the head of his subjects (Jdg 10:18;⁶ 11:11;⁷ Hos 1:11⁸). And Christ is a Head in an ECONOMIC sense, as the husband is the head of the wife, and a father is the head of his children, and a master is the head of his servants and of his whole family (Num 1:4;⁹ Eph 5:23-24;¹⁰ Isa 9:6;¹¹ Mat 23:10¹²).

The headship of Christ in these several senses, chiefly belongs to his KINGLY office. But besides these, he is the representative head of his church, or of all the elect of God. They were all considered in him, and represented by him, when he made a covenant with his Father for them. All that he engaged to do and to suffer for them, was not only *on their account*, but *in their name* and in their stead. And all that he received, all the promises and blessings, were not only *for*

¹ **Eph 1:22-23** And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

² **Eph 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

³ **Col. 1:18** And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

⁴ **Eph 4:15-16** Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

⁵ **Col 2:19** and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

⁶ **Jdg 10:18** And the people, the princes of Gilead, said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

⁷ **Jdg 11:11** Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them: and Jephthah spake all his words before Jehovah in Mizpah.

⁸ **Hos 1:11** And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

⁹ **Num 1:4** And there shall be with you a man from each tribe, each man being the head of the house of his fathers.

¹⁰ **Eph 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

¹¹ **Isa 9:6** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon {*Or is upon*} his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

¹² **Mat 23:10** Neither be called master, for you have one Master, the Christ.

them,¹ but he received them as *representing them*. As Christ was given to be the Covenant of the people,² so he was given to be their Head in that Covenant (Eph 1:22³). And thus,

1. It was Christ that was considered in Election: he was chosen as the Head, and his people were chosen as members in him, and so they were in union with him, and had a representative in him, even before the world began; they did not personally exist then, but Christ did, who represented them, and therefore they were capable of being chosen in him, as indeed they were (Eph 1:4⁴).

2. Christ stood in such a relation to them in the covenant, that it was not made with him alone, but with all the elect of God, for they were considered in him, as their head and representative. Hence we read of “the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ” — which was made sure and firm by God with his covenant people, in Christ, as their Head, before the foundation of the world — when they did not yet actually exist, but only had a representative existence in Christ (Gal 3:17⁵). And hence, the covenant was made sure to them *in him*, before the manifestation and application of it to Abraham and his spiritual seed that are spoken of in the preceding verse. So that “the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after” that revelation and manifestation of the covenant to Abraham, “cannot disannul it, such that it should make the promise of no effect”; for what commences at a point in time, can never make void what has been confirmed in eternity.

3. The promises of grace and glory, made to the elect of God in covenant, were made to them as they are considered in Christ, their head and representative; for whereas these promises were made before the world began (Tit 1:2⁶) they could not be made to them in their own persons, but only as represented by Christ. And therefore they were made to him as their Head, and they were made to them in him; hence the promise of life is said to be “in” him (2Tim 1:1⁷). And indeed, all the promises are *Yes* and *Amen* “in him” (2Cor 1:20⁸). The apostle, having said that “the promises were made to Abraham and his seed”, observes “he did not say ‘and to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, and to your seed, which is Christ.” Christ is the head and representative of all his spiritual offspring, and they are all collected and considered in him; all the promises made, manifested, and applied to Abraham and his spiritual seed, were originally made to Christ. He is the everlasting Father of his spiritual offspring, and their common Head and Parent (Gal 3:16⁹).

4. All the blessings of grace, and all the grants of those blessings in the covenant of grace that are given and made to the elect in it, were given and made to Christ first, in their name, as representing them. They were given and made to them *in him*, as considered *in him*, their head and representative. For when these grants were made, and these blessings were bestowed, the elect did not actually exist; they only had a representative existence in Christ their head. Hence

¹ It wasn't like a husband earning money at his workplace that he gives to his wife, but working his wife's job in her place and in her name, earning her money which indeed belongs to her, as if she earned it herself.

² The New Covenant was signed in his blood, and we are the beneficiaries of his Last Will and Testament (Luk 22:20; Heb 9:15).

³ Eph 1:22 and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church,

⁴ Eph 1:4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

⁵ Gal 3:17 And this I say, *that* the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, the law — which was four hundred and thirty years after — cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of no effect.

⁶ Tit 1:2 in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal;

⁷ 2Ti 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus,

⁸ 2Cor 1:20 For however many be the promises of God, in him is the yea: wherefore also in him is the Amen, to the glory of God through us.

⁹ Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

grace is said to be given to them “in Christ Jesus” before the world began; and the elect are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places “in Christ”, as they were *chosen in him* before the formation of the world (2Tim 1:9;¹ Eph 1:3,4²).

5. Christ, in the everlasting covenant, engaged himself in the name of his people, to obey and suffer in their stead; and accordingly he did both, in time, as their Head and Representative. He obeyed the law, and fulfilled all righteousness, not as a single individual of human nature, and for himself, but as the federal Head of his people, as representing them; “So that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us”, says the apostle (Rom 8:4³). That is, it was fulfilled in the elect of God as they are considered in Christ their Head, when he became the fulfilling End of the law for righteousness to them. And so they were made, or accounted, the righteousness of God “in him,” their Head (Rom 10:4;⁴ 2Cor 5:21⁵). In the same way, he engaged himself to suffer for them in their name; and in time, he suffered in their place and stead, as their head and representative — this is such, that they may be truly said to suffer with him. They were all gathered together, collected in one Head, “in Christ”, and were sustained and represented by him when he hung on the cross, and are said to be “crucified with” him (Eph 1:10⁶; Col 2:12⁷).

6. In consequence of Christ’s covenant engagements and performances, when he rose from the dead, he did not rise as a private Person, but as a public Person, as the head and representative of all those for whom he obeyed and suffered. And therefore they are said to be quickened and raised together with him; they were then also justified in him, when he himself was justified as their Head and Surety (Eph 2:5-6;⁸ Col 3:1;⁹ 1Tim 3:16¹⁰). Indeed, Christ has also gone to heaven, not only as the Forerunner of his people, but as their Head and Representative. He has taken possession of heaven in their name. He appears in the presence of God for them. And he represents them, just as the high priest represented the children of Israel in the holy of holies. Hence they are said to be made to sit together in heavenly places “in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6¹¹).

7. The federal headship of Christ may be argued and concluded from Adam being a federal head and representative of all his natural offspring, in which he was “the figure of him that was to come” — that is, Christ. For it was chiefly in that, if not solely, that he was a figure of Christ; at

¹ **2Tim 1:9** who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal,

² **Eph 1:3** Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ: 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love:

³ **Rom 8:4** that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

⁴ **Rom 10:4** For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believeth.

⁵ **2Cor 5:21** Him who knew no sin he made *to be* sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

⁶ **Eph 1:10** unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in him,

⁷ **Col 2:12** having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

⁸ **Eph 2:5-6** even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), 6 and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly *places*, in Christ Jesus:

⁹ **Col 3:1** If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God.

¹⁰ **1Tim 3:16** And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; He who was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the spirit, Seen of angels, Preached among the nations, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

¹¹ **Eph 2:6** and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly *places*, in Christ Jesus:

least, this is the chief thing, if not the only thing, that the apostle has in view in Rom 5:14.¹ This appears by setting a parallel between them, as heads and representatives of their respective offspring: Adam, through his fall, conveyed sin and death to all his natural descendants; and Christ, through the free gift of himself, communicated grace, righteousness, and life to all his spiritual seed, the elect — the children his Father gave him. Hence these two are spoken of as the first and last Adam, and the first and second man, as if they were the only two men in the world. They are each the representatives of their seeds, which are included in them (1Co 15:45, 47²).

Now, because Christ is related to the elect as their Head, all things are delivered into his hands. In honour to him, and in love both to him and the elect, and for their good, God has given Christ to be “Head over all things” to the church (Mat 11:27³; Joh 3:35⁴; Eph 1:22⁵). All persons and things are under his command, and are at his disposal, to subserve his interest as Head of the church, including angels and men, good and bad, and all things in heaven and in earth. All power in heaven and earth is given to him, to protect and defend his people, and to provide for them. All fulness of grace, and the blessings of it are given to him, to supply them. The government of the church and of the world is on his shoulders,⁶ to represent them. And therefore their persons, grace, and glory of necessity are safe in him; the covenant with all its blessings and promises are sure in him — for he is the Head and Representative of his people in it.

¹ **Rom 5:14** Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come.

² **1Co 15:45-47** And so it is written, The first man Adam was made into a living soul; the last Adam into a life-giving spirit. **46** So then, that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. **47** The first man is from the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

³ **Mat 11:27** All things have been delivered to me of my Father: and no one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does any know the Father, except the Son, and those *to whom* the Son intends to reveal *him*.

⁴ **Joh 3:35** The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand.

⁵ **Eph 1:22** and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church,

⁶ **Isa 9:6** For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder.