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*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without  
wavering. — Hebrews 10:4*

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# THE BENEDICTION IN CORPORATE WORSHIP<sup>1</sup>

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Most people know what it is like to read a book or watch a movie in which the ending seems anticlimactic. The reader or viewer has been absorbed in the story and sitting on the edge of his seat wondering how all of the character's problems would be resolved and how the story would culminate in a dramatic ending. Yet when the ending comes, he walks away confused and disappointed because what ought to have been the culmination of an exciting story fails to serve its purpose. God has designed the pronouncement of a Scriptural blessing or benediction to be the conclusion or culmination of the corporate worship of his people. By it the people who have gathered together in God's name and with his presence among them depart with the assurance that God has indeed been in their midst and that he intends to bless his people. Yet in modern worship services, the benediction is often lost by confusing it with a doxology, treating it as a prayer, or omitting it altogether. However, the regulative principle of worship demonstrates that ministers of the Word ought to close corporate worship by pronouncing a benediction upon the congregation from Scripture. This is shown by the origins and purpose of benedictions in the Old Testament, the capacity and manner in which the priests administered benedictions, the example of the apostles of Jesus Christ, and the meaning and significance of benedictions. After demonstrating these things, I shall close with some observations regarding the content and proper use of benedictions in corporate worship.

## **The Origins and Purpose of Benedictions in the Old Testament**

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<sup>1</sup> This article has been adapted from chapter 5 of my ThM project completed at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary entitled, *The Consequences of Reformed Worship*. This work has been submitted for publication. To my knowledge, there is very little material available providing the biblical warrant for the use of benediction in corporate worship.

If a man finds a tool lying on the floor of his garage, he will not know if he should use it for a project until he knows what the tool is and what it is intended to do. For the same reason, before arguing that benedictions should be used in corporate worship today, it is necessary to examine where benedictions originated and for what purpose they were intended. This shall be done by examining the nature of benedictions, the early usage of them in Scripture, and the meaning and importance of the Aaronic Blessing in Numbers 6:22-27. These things shall lay the groundwork for the need and necessity of closing corporate worship by pronouncing a Scriptural benediction.

### *The Origins and General Character of Benedictions in Scripture*

John Owen described the nature of benedictions in this manner: “As to the nature of it, blessings in general are the means of communicating good things, according unto the power and interest in them of them that bless, Gen. xxxiii. 11.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, a benediction is an effective means of communicating “good things” from God, (who is the source of all true blessings<sup>3</sup>), through human instruments. The character and efficacy of a true benediction depends upon two things: the authority bestowed upon the person pronouncing it, and his relationship to those who are being blessed. William Plumer, however, provided a more narrow definition of benedictions than Owen. He wrote, “A benediction is the ministerial and authoritative pronouncement of a blessing upon the people in the name of the Lord.”<sup>4</sup> This definition limits the consideration of benedictions to those that are pronounced by ordained ministers in the church. It will be demonstrated that this definition of a benediction is most directly relevant to the question of the use of benedictions in corporate worship. However, beginning with Owen’s definition makes it easier to trace the origins and use of benedictions in Scripture, and then to narrow the study to benedictions pronounced by duly appointed ministers.

Owen observed there are two general categories of benedictions in Scripture. These are what he referred to as “Paternal” benedictions and “Sacerdotal” benedictions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews with Preliminary Exercitations*, Volume V, in *The Works of John Owen*, Volume XVIII, ed. William Gould (N.p: Johnstone & Hunter, 1854; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), vol. V, 316.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>4</sup> William S. Plumer, *The Law of God* (n. p: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864, reprint, Harrisonburg: Sprinkle Publications, 1996), 258.

<sup>5</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, V, 316. Owen notes that commentators in his time generally recognized four types of benedictions: 1. “*benedictio potestativa*,” or those which are absolute and communicated directly by God and from God. 2. “*benedictio autoritativa*,” which are pronounced in God’s name and by direct warrant or command from him. 3. “*benedictio charitativa*,” by which a blessing comes to others by means of prayer on their behalf for things that are according to the will of God. 4. “*benedictio reverentialis*,” which is a blessing directed to God by his people. See Owen, *Hebrews*, V, 370-371. However, Owen ruled out the first of these as irrelevant, since all blessings ultimately proceed from God and this category is too broad to be meaningful. The third category is also to be ruled out because prayer is not a benediction in the proper sense of the term, but the asking of God to bestow one. The fourth category should also be excluded because blessings directed towards God are, properly speaking, *doxologies* rather than *benedictions*. Hebrews 7:7 states that in the benediction bestowed upon Abram, “the lesser is blessed by the greater.” In a doxology, the greater is blessed by the lesser. According to Owen, both paternal and sacerdotal blessings are included under heading number 2. This is the only category that I have chosen to take up in this chapter.

“Paternal” benedictions are those in which blessings are communicated from parents to their children. “Sacerdotal” benedictions are not necessarily (as the term might initially suggest) blessings communicated by a priest, but by those who have been entrusted with ministerial office respecting the service of divine worship. In other words, a “Sacerdotal” benediction is a blessing pronounced by those who have been charged to administer sacred things in corporate worship, whether they are the priests and Levites who led in corporate worship under the old covenant or the elders who lead it under the new. In the Old Testament, these blessings were sometimes pronounced in the form of divinely inspired prophecy. At other times benedictions were pronounced by those holding ordinary, but divinely instituted offices. The distinctions between “Paternal” and “Sacerdotal” benedictions and between extraordinary and ordinary benedictions will become clear by examining several of the early benedictions found in Scripture.

The first recorded benediction in Scripture is the “Paternal” benediction which Noah pronounced upon his sons after the flood in Genesis 9:25-27. This proclamation was clearly prophetic in its nature and announced the respective destinies of the nations that would descend from Noah’s three sons. This blessing begins, ironically, with a *curse* upon the descendants of Ham (v. 25) and concludes by pronouncing a *blessing* upon Shem, and Japheth through Shem.<sup>6</sup> The second instance of a benediction being pronounced in Scripture is that of Abram by Melchizedek, “priest of the Most High God,” in Genesis 14:18-20. Owen argued that the use of “Sacerdotal” benedictions, or those that are communicated by virtue of bearing office in the church, originated in this instance.<sup>7</sup> This benediction is short and to the effect that Abram is and shall be blessed by the Most High God (v. 19). It was designed to be an encouragement and confirmation to Abram of the truth of the promises that he had already received from God in chapter 12. The blessing that Melchizedek pronounced upon Abram was his right simply by virtue of his office, “For,” Owen wrote, “as he was appointed to act for men with God, so it is reasonable to assume that he should pronounce blessings unto them in the name of God; that as he ministerially carried their gifts, offerings, and services unto God, so in like manner he should return his acceptance and blessing unto them.”<sup>8</sup> By blessing Abram, Melchizedek demonstrated that he was greater even than Abram, to whom the promises belonged (Heb. 7:1, 6-7). This “greatness” was by virtue of his office, and it was his office that gave him warrant to pronounce a blessing from God upon the patriarch.

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Apart from the extraordinary examples cited from Genesis, I will also not discuss the ways in which God has designed parents ordinarily to bless their children, although Owen’s discussion is thought provoking and practical. See pg. 372-373.

<sup>6</sup> For an insightful exposition of the character and scope of this blessing, see Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1948, reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 58. This blessing also includes a partial doxology, but still bears the overall characteristics of a benediction.

<sup>7</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, V, 320.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

An important example of a “Paternal” benediction was when Isaac mistakenly bestowed his blessing upon Jacob instead of Esau in Genesis 27:27-29. This blessing is prophetic in its nature, yet it sheds much light on the nature and use of benedictions in general. This blessing bestowed the right of the firstborn upon Jacob instead of Esau, and thus made him heir of the blessings given to Abram. The blessing emphasizes prosperity, the relation of Abraham’s seed to the nations, and the blessing and curse of God resting upon others, depending upon their relation to Jacob, since he was the child of promise and had inherited the blessing of Abraham (Rom. 9:8; Gal. 3:14). Notice that the blessing was *efficacious* and actually communicated what it promised. Verse 33 states, “I have blessed him – and *he shall be blessed.*” The substance of this blessing is reiterated and practically applied in 28:3-4 to encourage Jacob to have faith in the promises of God as he departed to an unknown land and an unknown future in search of a bride. That the benediction was an effective means of communicating the grace of God’s promises to Jacob is shown by the dramatic way in which it served as the pivotal moment that changed the course of his destiny. Although God had predestined these events from all eternity, until this point, as far as Jacob was concerned, the blessing would be passed to Esau. The fact that Jacob would attempt to steal the benediction of his father by means of deceit demonstrates the importance that he attached to it.<sup>9</sup> The fact that this benediction is prophetic does not take away from the fact that it demonstrates that benedictions in general communicate the blessings of God to men authoritatively. Whether benedictions are prophetic or not, the common thread that ties them together is that the content of all benedictions must be based upon the authoritative Word and promises of God and must be pronounced by those whom God has placed in authority. In either case, a blessing is communicated through the Word of God being proclaimed and received.

The last benediction in the book of Genesis is the detailed account of the blessing of the sons of Jacob by their father in chapter 49. This blessing is predominantly prophetic in character. By it the blessings promised to Abraham were passed on, and were particularized to each of Jacob’s sons and to his two grandsons. It is similar to the blessing Moses pronounced upon the children of Israel just prior to his death in Deuteronomy 33, the primary difference being that the blessing of Jacob was “Paternal” and that of Moses was “Sacerdotal.” Jacob blessed his sons because he was their father; Moses blessed the descendants of Jacob because he was their prophet and pastor. In summarizing the use of these early benedictions in the book of Genesis, most of them were “Paternal” as well as prophetic. These prophetic benedictions also appeared at key

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<sup>9</sup> The fact that the blessing was bestowed upon a different person than Jacob intended does not mean that benedictions somehow possess magical power or are automatically effective to those that receive them. Isaac thought he was blessing Esau, but God had predestined that the blessing should belong to Jacob (see Gen. 25:23; Mal. 1:2-5; Rom. 9:6ff.). At the time, Jacob foolishly believed that it was by his own doing that he had received the blessing and he apparently had not yet learned to live by faith in the promises and grace of God. He demonstrated a similar way of thinking when he believed that he could cause the flocks to give birth only to speckled and spotted lambs by placing colored rods before their faces (Gen. 30:34-33). He does not seem to have truly learned to live by faith in the promises until he was faced with the fear of reunion with his brother and plead the promises of God in his prayer (Gen. 32:9-12). What he eventually learned, and what all who hear benedictions every week in local churches must also learn, is that although the promises of God will never fail, “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established” (Is. 7:9).

moments in the administration of the Covenant of Grace. It was by means of benedictions that the promise was narrowed to one family among the descendants of Noah, to one of the descendants of Abraham in the person of Jacob, and then passed on to the descendants of Jacob who would constitute the tribes of Israel. These benedictions actually conveyed the blessings that they proclaimed to those who received them by faith. In light of these other benedictions, Melchizedek's stands out because it was not a father pronouncing a blessing upon his sons, but a minister of the Lord upon a fellow servant of the Lord. It was prophetic in the sense that it confirmed the promise of the Covenant of Grace to Abram, but it was "Sacerdotal" in that it came by virtue of office rather than bloodline. The blessing of Melchizedek paved the way for a different sort of blessing that became a standard institution in Israel. This came in the form of the Aaronic Blessing under the ministry of the Levitical Priesthood.

### *The Aaronic Blessing*

The Aaronic Blessing or benediction is perhaps the best-known and most commonly used benediction in the history of the church. It reads: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" (Num. 6:24-27). This is one of the most important benedictions in Scripture because of the nature of the blessings that are promised in it and the frequency to which it is alluded. This benediction is important in establishing the warrant for the use of benedictions in corporate worship, since it was the first occasion on which ordained officers in the church were instructed to pronounce a blessing on the congregation of God's people on a regular basis.

God instituted the Aaronic Blessing at a pivotal point in the history of the nation of Israel. After the inauguration of the priesthood in the book of Leviticus with its ordinances and a reiteration of the blessings and curses of the covenant, the book of Numbers begins by numbering all the males in Israel who were able to go to war (Num. 1:3). Once the number of men from the tribes had been calculated, leaders were appointed and instructions were given to the priests as to how they were to transport the tabernacle (chs. 2-4). In Numbers 5 and 6, the people among whom the Lord himself was to dwell were warned against varying forms of moral and ceremonial uncleanness. After addressing the uncleanness of the people and clearing all obstacles out of the way, the priests were given the command to bless the gathered congregation in the name of the Lord prior to setting out to war against the inhabitants of the land. Following the final preparations of the leaders, of the Levites, and the observance of the first anniversary of the Passover feast, the glory of the Lord rose above the tabernacle, the trumpets sounded, and the children of Israel marched to war (chs. 7-10). "So it was that whenever the ark set out, that Moses said: 'Rise up, O Lord! Let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you.' And when it rested he said: 'Return, O Lord, to the many thousands of Israel'" (Num. 10:35-36).

It is significant that the proclamation of the Aaronic Blessing is the one duty of the sons of Aaron that was not prescribed with the rest of their responsibilities given at their ordination. In this respect, the command to pronounce the blessing upon the congregation almost appears to be out of place in the context of Numbers. However, the

occasion upon which God chose to issue this command makes the Aaronic Blessing all the more important. As the congregation journeyed through the wilderness, God dwelt among the people in the camp, he went before them to lead them into battle, and he pronounced his blessing upon them through his priests in order to assure the people that he was the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel (1 Sam. 17:45). It was because of the promises contained in this blessing that David could say, “Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident” (Ps. 27:3). Just as it was with the “Paternal” blessings of the patriarchs, this blessing was intended to instill confidence in the people that they should be blessed just as God had promised. That this was the purpose of the Aaronic Blessing is made clear by examining some of the details of the passage.

First, God said, “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel’” (v. 23). The proclamation of the benediction was a ministerial act committed to the newly formed priesthood. It was their role as ministering priests that entitled the sons of Aaron to pronounce the blessing upon the congregation. Second, although it is beyond the purpose of this chapter to examine the full significance of the contents of the Aaronic Blessing, yet because the language of this benediction recurs so frequently in Scripture, it is worthwhile briefly to summarize them.<sup>10</sup> The “face” and the “countenance” of God signify the presence of God. By his presence among his people, the Lord promised to bless and to keep them. The result of the presence and blessing of God upon his people was grace and peace. Notice the similarity to the customary greeting of the apostle Paul to the churches of the New Testament, which reads, “Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The blessing contained a promise of the grace and comforts that result from the presence of God among his people.

Third, the most significant part of the Aaronic Blessing for this discussion is the promise attached to it. What does it mean when God promises, “I will set my name upon them, and I will bless them?” (Num. 6:27). The “name” of God in Scripture is synonymous with his divine glory. When God places his name upon anyone or anything, he ties their lives and destinies to the proclamation of his own glory. The people who are called by his name are created for his glory (Is. 43:7). God’s promise to set his name upon the temple meant that his glory would be proclaimed there and his presence manifested there (1 Kings 8:29). The Lord performed awesome signs and wonders in bringing Israel out of the land of Egypt so that, as he says, “my name might be declared in all the earth” (Ex. 9:16). The fate of those people then became intimately connected to whether or not the glory of God’s name would be recognized among the nations (Ex. 33-34; Ezek. 20:14). The quintessential way of breaking the third commandment (“you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain”) is to *bear* his name vainly. In other words, when those who ought to set the glory of the Lord on display before the nations by a living faith in his promises and by honoring him with their lives fail to do so, they tread his glory underfoot by their sin and apostasy. Centuries later, the apostle Paul sought to vindicate the name or honor of God when most of the Jewish people rejected Jesus as the Christ by demonstrating that it was not as though the word and promises of God were

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<sup>10</sup> For a useful exposition of the content of the Aaronic Blessing, see Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, vol. II, 40-42.

without effect (Rom. 9:6). It was the strongest indictment against Israel that God should say, “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rom. 2:24; Is. 52:5).

Bearing the name of God brings special privileges and responsibilities as well as consequences for dishonoring his name (Ex. 15:26). Those who have the name of God set upon them are made God’s “special treasure” and “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” with access to God and all of his blessings (Ex. 19:5-6). Bearing the name of God is the basis upon which God’s people plead his promises. The psalmist pleaded: “For your name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great” (Ps. 25:11; also see 1 Jn. 2:12). He also said, “He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Ps. 23:3). On the other hand, God insists, “I am the Lord, that is my name; and my glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to carved images” (Is. 42:8). When the people called by his name turned aside to idolatry, God told them: “Go, serve every one of you his idols – and hereafter – if you will not obey me; but profane my holy name no more with your gifts and your idols” (Ezek. 20:39). In short, when God places his name upon a people, he makes them his own. For the sake of those who are called by his name, he will just as soon deny his own glory as fail to fulfill the promises that he has made to them. And since they bear his name, they must trust in him and obey him so that they will reflect his glory to the nations. If they fail or refuse, God will ensure that his name will be made great, “For,” he says, “from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts” (Mal. 1:11).

This illuminates what it meant that God set his name upon his people when the Aaronic Blessing was pronounced. There was a very real sense in which the name of God was already resting upon the people of Israel before the Aaronic Blessing was instituted. By the blessing, God placed his name upon a people who already had his name upon them. In this sense the use of the benediction is similar to that of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>11</sup> Those who are to partake of the Lord’s Supper are those who have already received Jesus Christ by faith and live in a saving union and communion with him. They already possess the benefits that are signified in the sacrament and enjoy the status of being declared righteous before God in their justification. However, the Lord’s Supper serves as a confirmation of the promises given to them in Christ as well. By it their faith in God’s promises is strengthened and they are better equipped and encouraged to run the race set

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<sup>11</sup> Similar, but not identical. There seems to be a special blessing in the Lord’s Supper that is not received anywhere else. In his characteristically profound yet carefully guarded manner, John Owen said, “The Communication of Christ herein, and our participation in him, are expressed in such a manner as to demonstrate them to be peculiar – such as are not to be obtained in any other way or divine ordinance whatever; not in praying, not in preaching, not in any other exercise of faith on the word or promises. There is in it an eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ, with a spiritual *incorporation* thence ensuing, which are peculiar unto this ordinance. But this especial and peculiar communion with Christ, and participation of him, is *spiritual* and *mystical*, by faith – not carnal or fleshly. To imagine any other participation of Christ in this life, but by faith, is to overthrow the gospel.” John Owen, *The Chamber of Imagery in the Church of Rome Laid Open*, in *The Works of John Owen*, Volume VIII, ed. William Gould (n.p: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-1853; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), vol. VIII, 560.



before them. Additionally, as the Lord's Supper, the benediction is more than simply a *reminder* of the name and blessing of God upon the people; to those who receive it by faith it is a *means of grace*. God demonstrates that the benediction communicates his blessing to his people when he says, "So they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, *and I will bless them.*" By means of the benediction, the people not only received assurance of the blessing of God, but the blessing itself. In this respect, the Aaronic Blessing shares the nature of the other benedictions mentioned above. It is part of the design of a benediction to communicate the grace that is promised in it.

The Aaronic Blessing does not share the strictly "prophetic" character of some of the earlier patriarchal blessings. It is an example of a "Sacerdotal" benediction with an important addition: the priests were not only to pronounce the blessing by the right of their office as Melchizedek had done, but God ensured that the blessing would be pronounced regularly by a positive institution or command. Just as the church would have been required to remember the sacrificial death of the Lord and have fellowship with him continually without the Lord's Supper, by adding the positive institution of this sacrament, the Lord ensured that this would be done regularly and frequently. Without being prophetic in its nature, the Aaronic Blessing still bears the prophetic authority of being a word from God to his people. Just as Isaac had said concerning Jacob, "I have blessed him – and he shall be blessed" (Gen. 27:33), so when the Aaronic Blessing is proclaimed, the Lord says to his servants, "I will bless them." This blessing was pronounced by virtue of ministerial office and the commandment of God and is the model for all those who hold the office of ministering the Word.

### *The Importance of the Aaronic Blessing in Scripture*

Before leaving the Aaronic Blessing, it should be noted that this particular benediction took on an extraordinarily significant role throughout the Scriptures. The citations of, or allusions to it, are almost too numerous to cite. Allusions to the Aaronic Blessing occur with particular frequency in the Psalms and are used to enforce the petitions and prayers of God's people. In response to many mocking God's people and wondering if any good would come to them, the Psalmist prayed, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us" (Ps. 4:6). Since the presence of God went with his people in their journeys as the Aaronic Blessing promised, David could write, "When my enemies turn back, they fall and perish at your presence" (Ps. 9:3).<sup>12</sup> In Psalm 31, David prayed, "Make your face shine upon your servant; save me for your mercies' sake" (Ps. 31:16). The Lord hides his people from the plots of men in the secret place of his presence (v. 20) and David remembered his hasty words and lack of faith when he said, "I am cut off from before your eyes" (v. 22). Psalm 67 is based entirely upon turning the Aaronic Blessing into a prayer to the effect that God's name would be known in the earth by the blessing of his people and that all nations would then come to praise him. When

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<sup>12</sup> The presence of God that is a blessing to his people is the terror and doom of his enemies. Because the Lord blesses and keeps his people, causes his face to shine upon them to be gracious to them, and lifts up his countenance upon them to give them peace, it is his presence among them that guards them from those who seek to harm them. Is this what Paul had in mind when he wrote, "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:9)?

God's people cried out in distress, they pleaded repeatedly that God's face should shine upon them as the means of their restoration and salvation (Ps. 80:3, 7, 19). These examples not only demonstrate the importance of the Aaronic Blessing in Scripture, but they show how God's people are to respond in faith to the pronouncement of this benediction. By making the Aaronic Blessing the solid ground upon which petitions and prayers to God are based, these Psalms show that God's people through the ages expected God to set his name upon them and that they should be blessed through these words of promise. The blessing itself is not a prayer, but forms the basis upon which prayer is framed.

The importance of the Aaronic Blessing is not relegated to the Old Testament, but reaches up to the heights of the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells. There are remarkable allusions to the Aaronic Blessing coming to its culmination and fulfillment in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. As "the Lamb's wife" (21:9), the glorified church in the form of the New Jerusalem descends from heaven, it is proclaimed, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them" (v. 3). The results of God's dwelling with his people are, "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it" (v. 23-24). In the Aaronic Blessing the face of God signified the presence of God and the shining of his face meant grace and peace to his people. By this blessing God put his name upon his people. In like manner, John's picture of the glorious bliss of pure unadulterated worship and communion with God in heaven closes by saying, "They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the glory of the Lord gives them light. And they shall reign forever" (22:4-5). The Aaronic Blessing has been received as a means of grace by the people of God for many centuries. In it is a promise of the presence of God with his people along with the grace and peace that come from his presence. In light of the teaching of the last book of the Bible, every time the people of God hear the Aaronic Blessing, they receive assurance that they shall be perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity. What could more fully emphasize the importance of this blessing?

In light of the above examples, all types of Scriptural benedictions share some common characteristics: they are blessings from God, they are pronounced by those placed in authority to administer sacred things, they are a confirmation of the promises of God, and they are a means of communicating the grace they promise to those who receive them by faith. The Aaronic blessing is particularly important due to the special institution of God, the fact that it was to be pronounced regularly by the priests as church officers, and by the importance of its place in both the Old and New Testaments. This blessing was pronounced upon the people of God as a whole when they were gathered together. The Aaronic Blessing in particular helps provide warrant for the use of benedictions in corporate worship in the New Testament.

## **The Continuation of Benedictions in the New Testament**

Pronouncing benedictions upon God's people did not simply belong to the patriarchs or to the Aaronic priesthood. "Prophetic" blessings have ceased and the Levitical priesthood has passed away by its fulfillment in the work of Christ on the cross. However, the responsibility of pronouncing "Sacerdotal" benedictions continues and now falls upon those entrusted with the ministry of the Word in the New Testament. That the ministers of the Word in the New Testament must continue to pronounce benedictions upon the congregation of God's people is demonstrated by examining the capacity in which the sons of Aaron pronounced the blessing, the relation of the blessing to types and shadows of Christ, the nature of ministerial authority, and the example of the apostles of Jesus Christ.

### *The Capacity in which the Priests Pronounced the Benediction*

The first reason that benedictions are to continue under the New Testament is that the priests pronounced the blessing as ministers of the Word. In other words, the benediction was not a distinctly "priestly" act, but an act that is common to all who are appointed to proclaim the Word of God. In chapter 2, it was shown that apart from their distinctively priestly duties, the sons of Aaron, along with the Levites as a whole, were the ordinary ministers of the Word of God in the Old Testament. Although there are some aspects of the ministry of the priests and Levites that were rendered obsolete after they were fulfilled by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest who passed through the heavens (Heb. 4:14), yet their duties as ministers of the Word now pertain to the eldership of the New Testament. When God ordered the sons of Aaron to pronounce the benediction upon the congregation, they did so as ministers of the Word rather than as priests. 2 Chronicles 30:27 states that the Levites as a whole as well as the priests "arose and blessed the people." This was done at the close of corporate worship when Hezekiah restored the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The very proclamation of the benediction was a proclamation of God's promise and was thus an act of the ministry of the Word. This ministry has passed to the teaching elders of the New Testament Church.

### *Relation to New Testament Fulfillment*

Second, pronouncing the benediction should remain an aspect of the ministry of the Word in corporate worship, since it did not pass away by being fulfilled in Christ. This is implied by the fact that the benediction is an aspect of the ministry of the Word. The only parts of Old Testament worship that passed away with the coming of Christ were those that were types and shadows of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1). Paul set forth the nature of such things in Colossians 2:16-17 when he described the Jewish festival days as shadows of things to come, "but," he wrote, "the *body* belongs to Christ" (see Greek text). The picture that Paul intended to communicate in this passage was that, just as a shadow is always cast by a solid body, so Christ was the "body" that was casting his shadow throughout the ordinances of Old Testament worship. If the two passages from Hebrews and Colossians are placed side by side (and it is clear that they are parallel passages), it is clear that none of the Jewish festivals, special days, temple services, or animal sacrifices were permissible any longer because their purpose was exhausted once

the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross had been accomplished. In fact, the observance of the various days listed passed away, in part, because their primary significance was intimately bound up with the sacrifices.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of the temple as well as that of the festival days that were to be observed was to offer blood sacrifices as types and shadows of what Christ would accomplish once and for all in the sacrifice of himself.<sup>14</sup>

When the body is present, the shadows that it casts are no longer relevant. What is there in the benediction that would make it a type and shadow of the Christ who was to come? There were no sacrifices attached to it. It was instituted in a context entirely separated from the role of the priests in offering sacrifices as mediators between God and men. Since the priests declared the words that God had committed to them, does not the benediction fit into the category of the ministry of the Word of God? To continue the sacrifices and the Old Testament feasts and regulations would be to proclaim that the sacrifice of Christ was incomplete or imperfect (see Hebrews 9 and 10). Although it is true that the blessings pronounced in the benediction come to believers only through Christ, yet if the benediction is a proclamation of God's Word, then it is just as lawful to continue to proclaim it as every other portion of God's Word and should still be pronounced upon the congregation by the ministers of the New Testament. In a real sense, the benediction did not come to its fruition at the first coming of Christ, but shall at his second coming. The only time that a benediction will no longer need to be pronounced shall be when Christ himself pronounces it upon the saints in glory.

### *The Nature of Ministerial Authority*

Third, the use of benedictions carries over from the Old Testament to the New because blessing the congregation on God's behalf is an inherent part of ministerial authority. Owen's comments on the benediction that Melchizedek gave to Abraham are both powerful and instructive to this effect:

And we may take notice in our passage, that whatever be the interest, duty, and office of any, to act in the name of others towards God, in any sacred administrations, the same proportionably is their interest, power, and duty to act

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<sup>13</sup> Although Paul mentioned "sabbath days" in Colossians 2:16, I do not believe that he intended to include the principle of the fourth commandment. For the reasons why this is the case see Pipa, *Lord's Day*, (Geanies House, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 1997), chapter 7.

<sup>14</sup> The temple had the added significance of being the dwelling place of the special presence of God. While it stood, it was evident that the entrance into the most holy place was not yet made manifest (Heb. 9). Christ entered into the heavenly sanctuary and offered himself as a sacrifice for sins so that in our worship today we come "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:22-24). As Van Dooren has pointed out, under the new covenant, the temple has been turned on its side and we have direct access to the heavenly sanctuary in our worship through Jesus Christ. Van Dooren, *Beauty of Reformed Liturgy*, (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Premier Publishing, 1980), ch. 1.

towards them in the name of God in the blessing of them. And therefore ministers may authoritatively bless their congregations. It is true, they can only do it *declaratively*, but withal they do it *authoritatively*, because they do it by virtue of the authority committed to them for that purpose. Wherefore the ministerial blessing is somewhat more than the eutical, or a mere prayer. Neither is it merely doctrinal and declaratory, but that which is built on a particular especial warranty, proceeding from the nature of the ministerial office. But whereas it hath respect in all things unto other ministerial administrations, it is not to be used but with reference unto them, and that by them by whom at that season they are administered.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, ministers have the right to proclaim a benediction *by virtue of their office*. When they do so, it is more than a prayer and even more than a simple declaration of what God has revealed in his Word. It is an act of ministerial authority by which the congregation is to receive the blessing by faith as from the mouth of God himself.<sup>16</sup> This blessing, according to Owen, must not be detached from the official functions of the minister, since his only warrant for pronouncing it is as a minister of the Word “in sacred administrations.” He cannot pronounce it at his own will and prompting, but in connection with his role in leading in corporate worship. Even within that setting, it should be pronounced only by those who took part in the ministry upon that occasion. A minister is not called to pronounce benedictions, but to administer the Word and sacraments in corporate worship. He pronounces the benediction because he is a minister of the Word, and he is not to pronounce the benediction apart from the context of ministering the Word. The positive corollary is that whenever an ordained minister of the Word exercises his ministry to the assembled people of God, he has warrant by virtue of his office authoritatively to pronounce God’s blessing upon them from Scripture.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> John Owen, *Hebrews*, vol. V, 319.

<sup>16</sup> The efficacy of Scriptural benedictions has already been considered in part under the treatment of the Aaronic Blessing. Matthew 10:11-13 also sheds light up this subject. When the apostles entered into a house in the name of Christ, they were to give their greeting. If the household was worthy of the greeting, peace was imparted to them through the apostolic greeting. In the same way, benedictions are a means of imparting grace to those who receive them by faith.

<sup>17</sup> If a minister is not available, then it is not proper that a ruling elder should proclaim the benediction upon the congregation. Even though ruling elders share the same office as teaching elders/ministers and have teaching responsibilities themselves, pronouncing the benediction appropriately falls into the same category as the public reading and preaching of the Scriptures. The one who proclaims it must be the one who is the herald of God, sent to proclaim the word of God publicly as an ambassador entrusted with authority. If there is no minister present at a worship service, I recommend that a ruling elder be appointed to pray for a blessing at the close of the service. In this way, the blessing is still sought from God with confidence, though it loses the effect of being pronounced and received as from his own lips. This is similar to the difference between a child being assured of the love of his parents and finding security and comfort in that fact even though the parents never say a word, and the reassurance of the parents telling their child that they love him. In both cases the child is blessed and secure as a matter of fact, but who can deny the added comfort that a child has in being told and reminded of the love of their parents?

Yet someone will argue that to assert these things is to treat New Testament elders as priests acting as representatives of God in order to speak to men. Is this not to act as mediating priests rather than as ministers of the Word? On the surface, this objection bears some weight. The sons of Aaron stood before the people on behalf of God and in this sense the blessing of God was “mediated” to the people through them in the benediction. Yet it is important to remember that, although there is only one Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5), this does not negate the fact that God may still appoint men to stand on his behalf and authoritatively proclaim his Word. Indeed, the proclamation of the Word by ordained ministers is always authoritative. Paul was an apostle of Christ and did not occupy the role of a priest, yet he could say, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, *as though God were pleading through us*; we implore you *on Christ’s behalf*, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Although the apostles had an authority that was distinct from all others, Jesus did not limit the act of speaking in his name with authority to the apostles. When he sent out the seventy, he said, “He who hears you hears me, he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). Paul went so far as to state that, if people do not hear Christ himself, they cannot believe in him and be saved (See Greek text of Rom. 10:14). Yet how are people to *hear him* and be saved? Paul answered that it is through a preacher who is sent or commissioned to preach (v. 14b-15). As the minister preaches the Word, “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

All believers are part of a royal priesthood and have direct access to God through his Son Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). Yet it must not be denied in light of the teaching of Scripture that, with the exception of the regeneration of the soul, God does not act immediately, but mediately. In other words, he uses outward and ordinary means to communicate the benefits of his redemption. These benefits are *mediated* to men through what are commonly called the “means of grace.” By the very use of the means of grace, the church confesses that they are the ordinary channels in which she expects the blessings of God to flow. The preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments are means of grace dispensed by officers appointed by God and recognized and called by the church for this service. It is one thing to set up ministers as *mediators* between God and man, which would overthrow the gospel. It is another thing to say that God works through these men *as a medium* to communicate blessings to his people. The blessing does not lie in the men, but in the ordinances of God and the promises that God has attached to them. God has ordained that these ordinances, such as the benediction, should be administered to his people by certain designated men. It should be stated emphatically, however, that the salvation of souls is never dependent upon the intercession or labors of men, but upon the grace of God in Christ alone. The role of a priest is to present men holy in the sight of God; the role of a minister of the Word is to present Christ to men, who then makes men holy in the sight of God. As types of Christ, the priests of the Old Testament occupied both of these roles at once, whereas the eldership of the New Testament occupies only the latter.

### *The Example of the Apostles of Christ*

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If a ministerial student is exhorting and a minister is present, then the minister should pronounce the benediction.

The final reason for pronouncing benedictions under the New Testament is the example set by the apostles of Jesus Christ. Plumer noted, “Of the twenty-one epistles, five do not close with a benediction. These are the epistles of James, of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> epistles of John and the epistle of Jude.”<sup>18</sup> The forms of these benedictions are diverse, but they all share the character of being blessings from God to his people through his apostles. This fact lies on the surface of these epistles. One popular example of an apostolic benediction is the “Trinitarian” blessing in 2 Cor. 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”<sup>19</sup> Paul’s benediction in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 demonstrates that these apostolic benedictions shared the same character as those of the Old Testament. He wrote: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, *who also will do it.*” What is not explicitly noted in the other apostolic blessings is made clear in this case: God will bless his people according to the words set forth in the blessing; he “will do it.” The example of the apostles demonstrates that benedictions may take on more forms than simply that of the Aaronic Blessing. Yet it demonstrates that the long-standing practice of pronouncing benedictions upon the congregation of the church continued under the new covenant. In pronouncing benedictions the apostles exercised a right that has always been possessed by those appointed to minister the Word of God.

The apostolic benedictions were also a part of the corporate worship in the church, since their epistles were to be read publicly when the congregation of believers gathered together. For example, Paul said in Colossians 4:16, “Now when this epistle is *read publicly* among you, see that it is *read publicly* also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise *read publicly* the letter from Laodicea.” The word Paul used for the reading of the epistles in the churches is a word used to indicate the public reading of Scripture in the synagogues. It is the same word that Paul employed in instructing Timothy in his duties in ministering to the church (1 Tim 4:13. See 3:15) and it was used to describe the public reading of Scripture in the synagogues in Acts 13:15 and 2 Cor. 3:14.<sup>20</sup> If the epistles were to be read publicly when the congregation was gathered together, then it is clear the apostles intended their benedictions to be pronounced upon and applied to all the congregations in which they were read. The example of the apostles clearly demonstrates that pronouncing a blessing from God upon the worshiping assembly of his people continues to be a part of the ministry of the Word under the new covenant.

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<sup>18</sup> Plumer, 258.

<sup>19</sup> With respect to this blessing, Donald Macleod cited George S. Stuart as saying, “When the minister comes to this last act in awe and wonder that God has commissioned him for this giving, the words will quiver and burn with the glory of their meaning – the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ – the love of God – the communion of the Holy Ghost – actually given as the supreme blessing to his worshiping people.” Donald Macleod, *Presbyterian Worship: Its Meaning and Method* (Richmond: John Knox Press), 1965.

<sup>20</sup> For the biblical use and meaning of *anaginosko* see George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 207.

In summary, the ministers of the Word under the New Testament have the right and duty to pronounce the Lord's blessing from his Word upon the congregation of his people. The Levitical priests performed this duty as ministers of the Word, and this duty passed to New Testament teaching elders, who have assumed this function. This right belongs to the ministerial office, in which ministers express the desires of the people to God by corporate prayer and declare his Word to them with authority. This duty should not be detached from leading in corporate worship, and it is only upon the congregation gathered together in the name of and in the special presence of God that the blessing should be proclaimed. The example of the apostles confirms these conclusions and demonstrates that benedictions in corporate worship should not be restricted to the form of the Aaronic Blessing.

### **The Use and Significance of Scriptural Benedictions**

That God intended Scriptural benedictions to be used in corporate worship is clear. However, some things still remain to be considered in order to understand what benedictions truly are and how they are to be used in corporate worship. Since benedictions cannot be properly understood apart from their proper use and application, I shall close with some remarks about the proper content of the benediction and the place of the benediction in the order of service.

#### *The Purpose of Benedictions in Worship*

Benedictions serve as a confirmation that the people have met in the special presence of God in corporate worship and that they shall continue to receive its blessings. The benediction is not a prayer; it is a pronouncement. The congregation should not have bowed heads and closed eyes, but should look up to the heavens from which the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth sends our help. They should be filled with joy and receive the blessing with faith as from the mouth of God himself.<sup>21</sup> Plumer reminded his readers that the benediction, "is not merely or chiefly the expression of the private wishes of the minister."<sup>22</sup> For this reason the minister is not to proclaim his own words. To do so would be to lose the force of the divine authority behind the pronouncement of the benediction. As with the call to worship, to omit Scripture would be an abuse of the use of the keys of the kingdom.<sup>23</sup> Not only should he use Scripture, he must use Scripture

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<sup>21</sup> The first time I began to think through the nature of the benediction was the first time I attended a worship service in a Presbyterian church (OPC). To my surprise, at the close of the service the minister said, "Beloved congregation of the Lord, *look up* and *receive* the Lord's blessing."

<sup>22</sup> Plumer, 258.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Rayburn asserts that since "there are many excellent benedictions in Scripture" the minister should not make up his own when the Holy Spirit has put so many at his disposal. Rayburn, *O Come Let us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 217. However, this slightly misses the point. He should not substitute his own words in place of Scripture because the nature of his office does not permit him to do so. Just as with the Call to Worship, to use a benediction not found in Scripture, however true its sentiments, would be an abuse of ministerial authority. For this reason, the recent book by Robert Vasholz on Benedictions goes beyond the proper use of benedictions in corporate worship by adding a host of man-made, though "Scripturally enriched" benedictions. This book reflects the fact that in most cases, churches have retained the use of benedictions



that is suited to the purpose at hand. It must be a text that pronounces a blessing from God to his people. It does not even seem appropriate to take Scriptural sentiments that are otherwise true and paraphrase them in order to turn them into a benediction. For example, “May he who knew no sin and was made sin for us, be both just and the justifier of you who have faith in Christ.” This blessing is based upon two passages of Scripture and its sentiments are true and vital to our faith and salvation. Yet for a benediction truly to be an authoritative proclamation from God, should not God speak for himself through his own blessings recorded in Scripture? To embellish our own benedictions is to act as though God does not know how to bless his people and that our contrivances are better than his words. In this sense, the benediction is not like corporate prayer or the sermon. Though true prayer should be filled with petitions and praises based upon Scripture and using the language of Scripture, its purpose is to adapt the truth of Scripture to express the desires of particular individuals and congregations. Likewise, sermons must expound Scripture and be filled with Scripture, but additionally they must wisely apply the Scriptures to the audience, “warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ” (Col. 1:28). A benediction, however, is a direct word from God. The minister cannot add to or take away from it without distorting its meaning, purpose, and efficacy.

Which Scriptural benedictions, however, should the minister use? Robert Rayburn argued that, in order to avoid repetition, the minister should use as many of the Scriptural benedictions as possible.<sup>24</sup> This is a point in which some freedom and discretion should be allowed, and the variety of Scriptural blessings certainly should not be neglected. However, in light of the importance of the Aaronic Blessing throughout the Scriptures, it does not seem inappropriate to give preference to it, so long as a word or two of reminder is given regularly to explain its significance. People often claim that the repetition of anything makes it mundane and devoid of meaning. Some churches argue in this manner with respect to how often the church should observe the Lord’s Supper, but if repetition of necessity makes something mundane or devoid of meaning, then the apostle Paul was the worst offender of all. Every one of his letters begins with the words, “Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” with the exception of the Pastoral Epistles, in which he adds “mercy.” It is not repetition but redundancy that makes a practice irrelevant. The Aaronic Blessing may be repeated often and yet never be redundant. Some things in Scripture are repeated often because of their importance. Paul’s customary greeting as well as the Aaronic Blessing fits this category. The more fully the church understands the significance of the Aaronic Blessing and the more she sees Christ as the ultimate source of the blessings contained in it, the more God’s people will rejoice to hear it pronounced and the more they will long for its fulfillment in the presence of Christ in heaven.

Another important point to note is that a failure to understand the purpose of the benediction often results in omitting it from worship entirely. This is particularly true in

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in corporate worship, while they have lost the theological moorings upon which benedictions are founded. See Robert Vasholz, *Benedictions: A Pocket Resource*, Geanies House, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Rayburn, *Come Let us Worship*, 217.

light of the frequency with which benedictions are replaced by doxologies. Doxologies are blessings directed *towards God* from his people; benedictions are blessings directed *towards the people* from God. Hebrews 7:7 describes the distinctive nature of a benediction by setting forth the following principle: “beyond all contradiction, the *lesser* is blessed by the *greater*.” In a doxology, the Greater is blessed by the lesser. So, for example, a common mistake is to exchange the doxology in Jude 24-25 for a benediction. It reads, “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.” However glorious the sentiments of this passage are, the fact that it is not a benediction is indicated by whom the word “to” is directed; it is to *him* rather than to *us*. Some benedictions, however, may have doxologies embedded in them (such as Hebrews 13:14) and yet still retain the essential elements of a benediction. The burden falls upon the discretion of the minister in selecting a passage of Scripture that is suited to the purpose at hand. Doxologies have an important place in corporate worship, but if a doxology is substituted for a Scriptural benediction, then the benediction will be unintentionally removed from corporate worship and the people denied the blessings that God intends by means of it.<sup>25</sup> The fact that benedictions are so readily replaced by doxologies is itself a testimony to how little benedictions are understood. The result is that the people in the church are already being denied part of the blessings of the benediction, since they are not being taught what it means and how they are to respond to it in faith.

### *The Place of the Benediction in the Order of Worship*

It has already been implicitly asserted that the benediction should be used to conclude the worship service. The benediction is a necessary element of corporate worship, but why should it conclude the service? Why should it not be used at other points in the worship service? In a certain sense, the greetings contained in the New Testament epistles take the form of blessings from God to his people. If these epistles were read in corporate worship, then worship would actually open with a benediction from God. Yet in light of chapter 2, the call to worship already serves this purpose by implication. However, as demonstrated above, most of the epistles close with benedictions as well. Closing the worship service with a benediction is most in line with the apostolic example. It leaves God with the first and last word in the worship service. As Van Dooren has expressed well, “The service started with a blessing or salutation which ‘covers’ the whole service. The closing benediction ‘covers’ our whole life till the next Lord’s Day and is no less than the divine assertion or promise that his blessing and peace and grace and fellowship will accompany us through all our days. It is more than a pious wish or a bang with the gavel: the meeting is finished. All the elements of the liturgy now come to a head and are summarized in the solemn words of Numbers 6:24-26 and 2 Corinthians 13:14.”<sup>26</sup> It seems entirely inappropriate to place the benediction

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<sup>25</sup> For the proper use of doxologies in corporate worship, see Plumer, 254-258.

<sup>26</sup> Van Dooren, *Beauty of Reformed Liturgy*, 48. In the Dutch Reformed context in which Van Dooren ministered, the liturgy is more restricted and the minister is allowed the use of these two passages only in pronouncing the benediction. In light of what I have said above, however, it does not seem that the form of the benediction should be restricted so heavily so long as appropriate passages of Scripture are

anywhere other than at the close of worship. The placement of the benediction in the order of worship comes close to being part of the essence of the benediction.

### Conclusions

When the call to worship goes forth, ushering God's people into corporate worship, a benediction or blessing from God is already being implied. If the Votum and salutation are used, this is explicit. By summoning his people into corporate worship through ordained ministers, God is implicitly declaring that he is ready to accept and bless the corporate worship of his church. By closing the service with a benediction pronounced from God's own words in Scripture, the fact that this blessing has occurred is made explicit and set before the faith of God's people. The proclamation of this blessing directs us back to the importance of the regulative principle of worship in general, since God sets his blessing only upon that worship which he has appointed in his Word and he sets his name only upon the people who receive his promises by faith in Jesus Christ. As the church strives to worship the true and living God according to his Word, his people should respond to the call to worship with joyful anticipation of the special presence and blessing of God upon his ordinances; such a blessing that they do not receive in any other setting. When they hear the benediction at the close of the service, they should leave the special presence of God with their faith stirred toward his promises, knowing that they have been blessed and shall be blessed. Just as the priests proclaimed the blessing of God upon the congregation before marching out to war, so corporate worship closes with the proclamation of the blessing of God upon his people as they go forth to fight the good fight of faith with courage and boldness, knowing that their God shall never leave nor forsake them. And as Plumer pointed out, "The last thing said in the Bible is a benediction. 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.'"<sup>27</sup> So the last thing in corporate worship should be a benediction as God's people anticipate the face of God shining upon them in the new heavens and new earth.

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used. I also do not see why the Trinitarian blessing from 2 Cor. 13:14 should be given priority over the numerous other forms of apostolic blessings.

<sup>27</sup> Plumer, 261.