

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 6: THE THREEFOLD OFFICE OF CHRIST — PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING

Lesson 16

The Munus Triplex

Christ's Threefold Office Introduced

The Prophet Who Reveals, the Priest Who Reconciles, the King Who Reigns

Key Texts: Deuteronomy 18:15–18; Psalm 110:1–4; Hebrews 1:1–3; Acts 3:22–26

“The Anointed One — Prophet, Priest, and King”

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*
2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

With Unit 6, we cross the most significant architectural threshold in this entire Christology series: the transition from the Person of Christ (Units 1–5) to the Work of Christ (Units 6–11). Units 1 through 5 have been devoted to the question of who Jesus Christ is, His pre-existence and eternal Sonship, His incarnation, the hypostatic union, His impeccability, His knowledge and will, and His sinless active obedience. These are the christological foundations: the doctrine of the Person that undergirds and grounds everything that follows. Units 6 through 11 now turn to the question of what Jesus Christ does, the comprehensive work of redemption that He accomplishes in and through the human nature He has assumed, in the offices He holds, and in the historical acts by which He accomplishes what sinners need.

The organizing framework for Units 6 through 9 is the *munus triplex*, the threefold office of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. This framework is not an artificial theological construction imposed on the New Testament from outside; it is drawn from the Old Testament itself, developed with great sophistication in the Reformed theological tradition (above all by John Calvin in the *Institutes*), and confirmed by the New Testament's own way of presenting the person and work of Jesus. The three offices of prophet, priest, and king were the three divinely established offices through which God governed His covenant people Israel; all three required anointing with oil as the sign of divine appointment; and all three are fulfilled, transcended, and permanently held by Jesus Christ, the Anointed One (משיח, *Mashiach* in Hebrew; Χριστός, *Christos* in Greek), whose very name declares that He is the one on whom the oil of divine anointing rests in its fullest, most comprehensive, and most permanent form.

This introductory lesson establishes the framework that will govern the four lessons of Unit 6. It examines the Old Testament background of the three offices, the theological rationale for the threefold office as a framework for understanding Christ's work, the meaning of the name Christ as the title of anointing, the threefold human problem that the three offices address, and the unity of the offices in the one Person of Christ who exercises all three simultaneously, without rotating between them or holding one to the exclusion of the others. It is, in a word, the christological map for the territory that Lessons 17 through 19 will explore in detail.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND: THREE ANOINTED OFFICES IN ISRAEL

The Divinely Established Framework That Christ Inherits, Fulfills, and Transcends

A. The Office of Prophet

The prophetic office in Israel was the office of the divine spokesman, the one who received the word of God and delivered it to the covenant people with authoritative divine warrant. The foundational text for the prophetic office is Deuteronomy 18:15–18, in which Moses announces to Israel the promise of the Prophet who is to come: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him” (Deuteronomy 18:15, NASB 1995). Moses defines the prophetic function in terms of mediating the divine word to the people who could not stand directly before the consuming fire of the divine presence at Sinai: “Just as you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb... saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’ The Lord said to me... ‘I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him’” (Deuteronomy 18:16–18, NASB 1995).

The prophet in Israel was not primarily a predictor of the future (though predictive prophecy was one dimension of the prophetic ministry); he was first and foremost the mouth of God, the one through whom the divine word came to the people who needed to hear it. The anointing of the prophetic office was by the Spirit rather than by oil: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted” (Isaiah 61:1, NASB 1995), the text that Jesus applied to Himself in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:18–19), declaring the inauguration of His prophetic ministry as the fulfillment of the Isaianic vision.

B. The Office of Priest

The priestly office in Israel was the office of mediation between the holy God and the sinful people, the one who stood between the divine holiness and human sinfulness, offered the appointed sacrifices for sin, and represented the people before God in the sanctuary. The Aaronic priesthood, established by divine appointment at Sinai, was the institutional expression of the priestly function: the sons of Aaron were consecrated by anointing with oil (Exodus 29:7; 30:30) and appointed to serve at the altar, to offer the sacrifices prescribed by the law, and to pronounce the Aaronic blessing over the people (Numbers 6:22–27). The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) was the annual climax of the priestly ministry: the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with the blood of the sacrifice, made atonement for the sins of the entire covenant community, and emerged to declare the divine acceptance of the offering.

The limitations of the Aaronic priesthood were built into its structure from the beginning: the priests were themselves sinful and needed to offer sacrifices for their own sins before offering them for the people’s (Hebrews 5:3; 7:27); the sacrifices had to be repeated year after year, because no single offering could permanently remove sin (Hebrews 10:1–4); and the priests died, so the ministry was perpetually interrupted by the mortality of its ministers (Hebrews 7:23). These built-in limitations were not defects in the divine design but pedagogical features: they pointed beyond themselves to a

Priest who would be sinless, who would offer a once-for-all sacrifice of permanent and infinite efficacy, and who would live forever to exercise an indestructible priesthood.

C. The Office of King

The kingly office in Israel was the office of the covenant ruler, the one who governed the covenant people under the ultimate sovereignty of God, defended them from their enemies, administered justice in the land, and represented the covenant community before the nations. The institution of the monarchy in Israel began with Saul and was permanently associated with the tribe of Judah through the promise given to David: “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16, NASB 1995). The anointing of kings was the most visible of the three anointing ceremonies: Samuel anointed Saul (1 Samuel 10:1), Samuel anointed David (1 Samuel 16:13), and Zadok the priest anointed Solomon (1 Kings 1:39). The outpouring of oil on the head of the king was the public declaration of divine appointment and the token of divine empowerment for the royal mission.

The Davidic covenant was the theological heart of the kingly office: the promise that God would establish the throne of David forever, that the king who sat on that throne would be the son of God in a special covenantal sense, and that through this royal lineage the ultimate deliverance of the covenant people would come (2 Samuel 7:12–16; Psalm 2; Psalm 89; Psalm 110). The limitations of the actual Davidic kings were glaring: Solomon turned to idolatry, the kingdom divided, the northern tribes were exiled by Assyria, the southern kingdom was carried to Babylon, and the line of David appeared to have come to an end. The prophets, however, maintained the promise: a new David would come, a shoot from the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), a righteous Branch who would reign wisely and execute justice and righteousness in the land (Jeremiah 23:5–6; 33:15–16).

“The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’”

PSALM 110:4, NASB 1995

II. THE NAME “CHRIST”: THE ANOINTED ONE WHO HOLDS ALL THREE OFFICES

Why the Messianic Title Is the Theological Key to the Threefold Office

A. Mashiach / Christos: The Anointed One

The name that the New Testament most consistently applies to Jesus, Christ (Χριστός, Christos), is not a surname but a title, the Greek translation of the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ (Mashiach, Messiah), meaning “anointed” or “the Anointed One.” In the Old Testament, the term mashiach is applied to prophets

(Psalm 105:15: “Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm”, NASB 1995), priests (Leviticus 4:3: “the anointed priest”), and kings (1 Samuel 2:10; 2 Samuel 1:14; Psalm 2:2). The Messiah, in the eschatological sense in which the prophets used the term, is the one in whom all three forms of anointing converge, the one who will be prophet, priest, and king in the most complete and permanent sense imaginable, exercising all three offices not as three separate roles held by three separate persons but as three dimensions of the one comprehensive saving work of the one Anointed One.

The name “Jesus Christ” is, therefore, already a theological statement about the threefold office. It declares that Jesus is the Messiah, the one whom Israel has been expecting, the one in whom the prophetic, priestly, and royal promises of the Old Testament find their fulfillment. When Peter confesses “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16, NASB 1995), he is not merely giving Jesus a personal name; he is identifying Him as the one who holds the three anointed offices in their ultimate, eschatological, and permanent form. The theological depth of this confession is what Jesus declares to be the work of the Father’s revelation (Matthew 16:17), because to recognize Jesus as the Christ is to recognize Him as the fulfillment of everything the three anointed offices in Israel were pointing toward.

B. The Anointing of Jesus at His Baptism

The New Testament presents the baptism of Jesus as the public, visible, divine authentication of the messianic anointing that the title Christ implies. Luke 4:18–19, in which Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1–2 in the Nazareth synagogue (“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me”) and declares “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21, NASB 1995), provides the explicit self-identification of Jesus as the Anointed One of Isaiah 61 at the outset of His public prophetic ministry. The baptismal theophany (the descent of the Spirit like a dove, the Father’s declaration of the beloved Son) is the visible form of the anointing that the prophetic promise described: the Spirit of God descends upon the Anointed One, equipping Him for the comprehensive messianic mission that the three offices together describe.

Acts 10:38 provides Peter’s summary of this anointing in his Cornelius sermon: “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (NASB 1995). The language is explicitly anointing language (ἐχρίσεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ δυνάμει, echrisei auton ho theos pneumatī hagio kai dynamēi, God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and power), drawing on the Old Testament pattern of anointing for office. Jesus of Nazareth is the Anointed One; the Spirit is the oil of His anointing; and the comprehensive ministry of healing, teaching, and delivering that Peter describes is the outworking of the threefold office that the anointing confers.

III. THE THREEFOLD HUMAN PROBLEM AND THE THREEFOLD DIVINE ANSWER

Why Sinners Need All Three Offices, Not One or Two

A. Ignorance and the Need for a Prophet

The Reformed tradition has consistently identified three dimensions of the human problem under sin that correspond to the three offices of Christ. The first is the problem of ignorance: human beings, by nature, do not know God as He truly is, do not understand the nature of their own condition before Him, and do not possess the truth about salvation that is necessary for the rescue of their souls. The fall has affected the intellect as profoundly as it has affected the will and the affections: the mind is darkened (ἐσκοτωμένη, Ephesians 4:18, NASB 1995), the understanding is alienated from the life of God, the natural person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). Left to themselves, human beings will construct false images of God, false accounts of their condition, and false paths to safety that lead only deeper into darkness.

What sinners need, first of all, is truth, the divine, authoritative, saving truth about who God is, who they are, and how they may be reconciled to God through the one Mediator. This is what a prophet provides: the word of God delivered with divine authority to those who could not receive it directly from the divine source. Jesus Christ, as the supreme and final Prophet, is the one in whom the entire prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, every prophet who spoke and every word that was spoken, finds its fulfillment, its culmination, and its permanent embodiment. He does not merely speak the word of God; He is the Word of God (John 1:1, 14), the one in whom the divine self-communication reaches its most complete and most personal expression.

B. Guilt and the Need for a Priest

The second dimension of the human problem under sin is the problem of guilt: human beings stand under the legal condemnation of the divine law, which they have violated in thought, word, and deed, and which declares them guilty before the throne of the holy God. The guilt is not merely subjective, not merely the feeling of having done something wrong. It is objective: the legal status of those who have transgressed the law of the infinitely holy God, who are under the divine wrath and the divine curse (Galatians 3:10), and who cannot by any act of their own will, moral achievement, or religious performance lift the sentence that rests upon them.

What sinners need, secondly, is atonement, the removal of guilt through a sacrifice sufficient to satisfy the demands of divine justice and to turn away the divine wrath. This is what a priest provides: the offering of blood for sin, the representative mediation between God and the people, the intercession that presents the completed sacrifice before the divine throne. Jesus Christ, as the supreme and only High Priest of the new covenant, is the one in whom the entire Levitical sacrificial system, every bull

and lamb and dove, every sprinkled blood and waved offering, finds its fulfillment, its abolition as a repetitive system, and its permanent replacement by the once-for-all sacrifice that is infinitely sufficient. He does not merely offer a sacrifice; He is the sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

C. Bondage and the Need for a King

The third dimension of the human problem under sin is the problem of bondage: human beings, by nature, are enslaved to sin, death, and the devil, unable to free themselves from the power of sin's dominion over their wills, unable to overcome the power of death that is the consequence of their sin, and unable to escape the power of the adversary who "had the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14, NASB 1995) and who holds the world in his sway (1 John 5:19). The problem of bondage is distinct from the problem of guilt: guilt is the legal status of the condemned; bondage is the existential condition of the enslaved. A person can be forgiven of their crimes (guilt removed) and yet remain in prison (bondage maintained). The gospel addresses both.

What sinners need, thirdly, is deliverance, the exercise of sovereign royal power that conquers the enemies of the covenant people, breaks the dominion of sin over the will, and establishes the reign of God in the lives of those who have been redeemed. This is what a king provides: the exercise of sovereign authority for the protection and liberation of the people he represents. Jesus Christ, as the supreme and eternal King, is the one in whom the entire Davidic royal tradition finds its fulfillment, its transcendence, and its permanent establishment. He does not merely reign over Israel; He reigns over all things (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20–22), and His reign is the comprehensive authority of the one to whom all power in heaven and on earth has been given by the Father who exalted Him to the supreme position.

IV. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUNUS TRIPLEX

From the Church Fathers Through Calvin to the Westminster Standards

A. Patristic Anticipations

The use of the threefold office as a framework for understanding the person and work of Christ has deep roots in the patristic tradition, though it received its fullest systematic development in the Reformed theology of the sixteenth century. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–340 AD), in his Ecclesiastical History, observed that the name "Christ" contains a reference to the prophets, priests, and kings who were anointed in the old dispensation, and that Jesus as the Christ holds all three offices in their final and definitive form. Augustine, in the City of God, developed the priestly and kingly dimensions of Christ's work with great sophistication. Aquinas, in the Summa Theologiae,

organized his treatment of the mysteries of Christ's life and work around the two offices of Priest and King, with the prophetic office present implicitly in his treatment of Christ as the Teacher.

What was largely implicit in the patristic and medieval tradition was made explicit and systematically central in the Reformed theology of the sixteenth century. The decisive move was made by John Calvin, who in the 1543 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* organized his entire treatment of the work of Christ around the threefold office: "Now it is to be known that he was called 'Christ' with respect to these three offices, for the Father appointed him over us to be our Prophet, King, and Priest" (*Institutes* II.xv.1). Calvin saw in the *munus triplex* the most comprehensive and the most biblically grounded framework available for presenting the complete work of Christ, and his use of it proved enormously influential: it was adopted by the Reformed confessions (the Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 8; the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 43–45), the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 31), and the Belgic Confession (Art. 26–27).

B. Calvin's Contribution

Calvin's treatment of the threefold office in the *Institutes* (II.xv.1–6) is worth examining in some detail, because it identifies both the biblical grounding and the pastoral rationale of the framework with characteristic clarity and precision. On the prophetic office, Calvin writes that Christ "was anointed by the Spirit to be herald and witness of the Father's grace" and that this prophetic anointing extends beyond His earthly ministry through the preaching of the apostles and the ongoing testimony of the church: "the gospel is the scepter of his kingdom." On the priestly office, Calvin emphasizes that "until he made expiation for sins there was no access to God" and that the key question is always "by what means sins are forgiven, so that God may be gracious to us", a question that only the priestly office can answer. On the kingly office, Calvin insists that the kingdom of Christ is "not earthly or carnal" but "spiritual," advanced through the Word and Spirit, and that its present invisible reality is the source of the believer's confidence in the face of earthly opposition.

The Heidelberg Catechism's treatment of the name "Christ" in Q&A 31 is the most pastorally direct expression of the threefold office in the Reformed confessional tradition: "Why is He called Christ, that is, Anointed? Because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; and to be our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body, has redeemed us, and makes intercession with the Father for us; and to be our eternal King, who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation He has purchased for us." This catechetical formulation is the most efficient available summary of the threefold office, and it is well worth committing to memory.

V. THE UNITY OF THE THREE OFFICES: CHRIST DOES NOT ROTATE BETWEEN ROLES

The Simultaneity and Inseparability of the Prophetic, Priestly, and Kingly Ministries

A. The Three Offices Are Exercised Simultaneously

One of the most important things to understand about the threefold office is that Christ does not exercise the three offices sequentially or alternately, as if He were a Prophet in one moment, a Priest in the next, and a King in a third. The three offices are exercised simultaneously, continuously, and inseparably by the one Person of the eternal Son incarnate. In every act of the incarnate life and the exalted ministry, all three offices are operative together: He speaks the word of God (Prophet) while offering Himself as the atoning sacrifice (Priest) while exercising sovereign authority over all things (King). The analytical distinction between the three offices is a heuristic tool for understanding the different dimensions of the one comprehensive work of Christ; it is not a description of three separate, sequentially exercised functions.

This simultaneity has important pastoral implications. The believer who comes to Christ for any one of the three dimensions of the human need is coming to the one who addresses all three simultaneously. When a sinner comes to Christ for forgiveness of sin, he receives not only the priestly atonement (guilt removed) but also the prophetic illumination (the truth about God, himself, and salvation) and the kingly deliverance (freedom from the bondage of sin's dominion). The gospel is not a partial provision for a partial problem; it is a comprehensive provision for the comprehensive problem of human sinfulness in all its dimensions, ignorance, guilt, and bondage, addressed simultaneously and permanently by the one who holds all three offices in their fullest and most permanent form.

B. The Three Offices Mutually Illuminate One Another

The three offices are not only simultaneously exercised but mutually illuminating: each office casts light on the others in ways that deepen the understanding of all three. The prophetic office illuminates the priestly office: Christ does not merely offer the sacrifice of atonement; He reveals the meaning of that sacrifice through His own teaching and through the inscripturated Word of God, so that those who benefit from the atonement can understand what has been done for them and how to receive it through faith. The priestly office illuminates the prophetic office: the authoritative word that Christ speaks is not merely the instruction of a wise teacher but the proclamation of the one who has accomplished by His own sacrifice everything that His word declares available. The kingly office illuminates both: the sovereign authority with which Christ reigns over all things is the authority that protects the proclamation of His prophetic word and secures the application of His priestly atonement to all for whom He died.

Hebrews 1:1–3 provides the most concentrated expression of this mutual illumination of the three offices in all of Scripture: “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (NASB 1995). The prophetic office is present in “spoken to us in His Son”; the priestly office is present in “when He had made purification of sins”; the kingly office is present in “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” All three are expressed in a single flowing sentence that presents the one Person of the Son in the fullness of His comprehensive messianic work.

VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE ANOINTED ONE IS OUR ALL

The munus triplex, as a framework for understanding the work of Christ, is not merely a theological organizing principle; it is a doxological declaration. It announces that the one who bears the name Christ, the Anointed One, is the comprehensive answer to the comprehensive problem of human sinfulness. In His prophetic office, He is everything the human mind needs: the final and supreme Word of God, the Teacher who has fully revealed the Father, the light that shines in the darkness of human ignorance and cannot be overcome by it. In His priestly office, He is everything the human conscience needs: the once-for-all sacrifice that removes guilt permanently, the great High Priest who always lives to make intercession, the Advocate before the Father whose case on the sinner’s behalf is unanswerable. In His kingly office, He is everything the human will needs: the sovereign Lord who breaks the dominion of sin, the conquering King who has defeated the last enemy, the one who governs His people by His Word and Spirit and who will bring them safely through every opposition to the eternal kingdom.

Calvin put it with characteristic precision and pastoral warmth: “Hence it is easy to infer how necessary the knowledge of Christ is, since in him we have, so to speak, a complete summary of all that is necessary to know about God the Father’s kindness, of what we need to seek from him, and what we are to expect from him. For as he is the image of the invisible God, so he who would know God must look to him” (Institutes III.ii.1). The munus triplex is the theological structure of this knowledge: to know Christ as Prophet is to know the divine truth; to know Christ as Priest is to know the divine grace; to know Christ as King is to know the divine power. And to know all three, together, simultaneously, in the one Person of the Anointed Son, is to know the one in whom “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9, NASB 1995) and in whom the believer is “made complete” (Colossians 2:10, NASB 1995).

As we move into the three detailed lessons on the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices (Lessons 17–19), let this introductory lesson have established the governing conviction: the one who bears the name Christ holds all three offices simultaneously, permanently, and for the comprehensive benefit of His people. He is Prophet, Priest, and King, not as three functions distributed across three persons, not as three sequential phases of a single career, but as three inseparable dimensions of the one comprehensive saving work of the one Anointed One. And the believer who knows this holds in the name “Christ” the answer to every dimension of the human need that sin has produced. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Key Texts: *Deuteronomy 18:15–18; Psalm 2:1–6; Psalm 110:1–4; Hebrews 1:1–3; Acts 3:22–26; Acts 10:38; Luke 4:18–19; Isaiah 61:1–2; Matthew 16:16*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Munus Triplex	Latin: ‘threefold office.’ The classical Reformed theological framework for understanding the comprehensive work of Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. Developed most fully by John Calvin in the Institutes of the Christian Religion (II.xv) and incorporated into the Reformed confessional tradition (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 43–45; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 31; Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 8). The munus triplex is grounded in the Old Testament institution of three anointed offices (prophet, priest, king) that Christ inherits, fulfills, transcends, and permanently holds in their most complete form. The three offices are not sequential but simultaneous: Christ exercises all three continuously and inseparably as the one Anointed One.
Mashiach / Christos	Hebrew and Greek terms, respectively, meaning ‘anointed one.’ Mashiach (מָשִׁיחַ) is the Hebrew title used in the Old Testament for prophets, priests, and kings who were anointed with oil as the sign of divine appointment for office. Christos (Χριστός) is the Greek translation, used throughout the New Testament as the title applied to Jesus. The name ‘Jesus Christ’ is therefore a theological declaration: Jesus is the Anointed One in whom all three forms of Old Testament anointing (prophetic, priestly, kingly) find their final, comprehensive, and permanent fulfillment. To confess Jesus as Christ is to confess Him as the one in whom the entire messianic expectation of the Old Testament arrives at its goal.
Prophetic Office	The first of the three offices of the munus triplex. In the Old Testament, the prophet was the divinely appointed spokesman who received and delivered

Term	Definition
	the word of God to the covenant people, mediating the divine self-disclosure to those who could not stand directly before the divine presence. Christ fulfills this office supremely and permanently as the incarnate Word of God: He does not merely speak the divine word but is the divine Word (John 1:1, 14), the one in whom the entire prophetic tradition finds its goal (Hebrews 1:1–2). Christ’s prophetic ministry includes His earthly teaching, His authorization of the apostles as bearers of His own authority, and His continuing ministry through the inscripturated Word illuminated by the Spirit.
Priestly Office	The second of the three offices of the munus triplex. In the Old Testament, the priest was the divinely appointed mediator who stood between the holy God and the sinful people, offering the sacrifices prescribed by the law and representing the people before God in the sanctuary. Christ fulfills this office supremely and permanently as the one High Priest who is simultaneously the offerer and the offering (Hebrews 9:11–14; 10:10–14). His priestly work includes the once-for-all atoning sacrifice on the cross (the passive obedience) and the continuing intercession at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 7:25). The priesthood of Christ is not Aaronic (by hereditary descent) but after the order of Melchizedek (by divine oath, permanent and indestructible, Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7).
Kingly Office	The third of the three offices of the munus triplex. In the Old Testament, the king was the divinely anointed covenant ruler who governed the people under the ultimate sovereignty of God, defended them from their enemies, and administered justice in the land. Christ fulfills this office supremely and permanently as the risen, ascended, and exalted Lord who sits at the right hand of the Father, exercises all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), and will return in glory to consummate His kingdom. The kingly office of Christ is grounded in the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:12–16), exercised now in the age of the Spirit, and will be consummated at the return of Christ when every enemy is placed under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:24–28).
Anointing	The Old Testament ceremony by which prophets (Isaiah 61:1), priests (Exodus 29:7; 30:30), and kings (1 Samuel 16:13) were set apart for their offices by the outpouring of oil on their heads. The anointing was the visible, ceremonial token of divine appointment and the bestowal of the divine Spirit for the fulfillment of the office. Jesus Christ’s anointing is with the Holy Spirit rather than with physical oil (Acts 10:38; Luke 4:18), received at His baptism in the theophanic descent of the Spirit like a dove. His anointing is the archetype of all Old Testament anointings: they were anticipatory signs pointing forward to the one in whom the divine anointing would rest in its fullest and most permanent form.
Threefold Problem of Sin	The Reformed theological analysis of sin as producing three distinct dimensions of human need that correspond to the three offices of Christ: (1)

Term	Definition
	Ignorance, the darkening of the human mind and the inability to know God, oneself, and the way of salvation without divine revelation (met by the prophetic office); (2) Guilt, the legal condemnation of those who have violated the divine law and who stand under divine wrath and curse (met by the priestly office); (3) Bondage, the enslavement of the human will to sin, death, and the devil, from which sinners cannot free themselves (met by the kingly office). The munus triplex is not a theological framework imposed on the data but a structure demanded by the comprehensive nature of the human problem.
Simultaneity of the Offices	The theological affirmation that Christ does not exercise the three offices sequentially or alternately but simultaneously, continuously, and inseparably. In every act of His incarnate life and exalted ministry, all three offices are operative: He speaks the word of God (prophetic) while offering Himself as the sacrifice (priestly) while exercising sovereign authority (kingly). The analytical distinction between the offices is a heuristic tool for understanding the different dimensions of the one comprehensive work of Christ; it does not imply three separate or sequential functions. The simultaneity of the offices is expressed most concisely in Hebrews 1:1–3, which presents the prophetic, priestly, and kingly dimensions of Christ’s work in a single unified statement.
Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 31	The most concise and the most pastorally accessible statement of the munus triplex in the Reformed confessional tradition. Q: Why is He called Christ, that is, Anointed? A: Because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; and to be our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body, has redeemed us, and makes intercession with the Father for us; and to be our eternal King, who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation He has purchased for us.
Melchizedek	The enigmatic priest-king of Salem who appears in Genesis 14:18–20 and who is identified as the type of the messianic priest in Psalm 110:4 (‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’). The author of Hebrews devotes extensive treatment to the Melchizedekian priesthood (Hebrews 5:6–10; 6:20; 7:1–28) to establish that Christ’s priesthood is not Aaronic (which was temporary, hereditary, and repeatedly interrupted by the death of its ministers) but after the order of Melchizedek (permanent, established by divine oath, and indestructible). Melchizedek is the Old Testament figure who uniquely combines the offices of priest and king, anticipating the one Anointed One in whom prophet, priest, and king converge in a single Person.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the name “Christ” is not a surname but a theological title of the highest christological significance, a title that declares Jesus to be the Anointed One who holds the three anointed offices of prophet, priest, and king in their most complete, most permanent, and most comprehensive form. To confess Jesus as “Christ” without knowing what the title means is to confess a theological content without grasping its substance; to confess it with the full weight of the *munus triplex* is to confess the comprehensive answer to the comprehensive problem of human sinfulness. The congregation that has been catechized in the Heidelberg Q&A 31 answer to the question “Why is He called Christ?” possesses in that single catechetical answer the most compressed and most theologically rich summary of the work of Christ available in the confessional tradition.

We must also believe that the three offices are not merely a theological framework for organizing the material about Christ but a pastoral framework for understanding what Christ means for the believer’s daily life. The believer who faces ignorance about God, about themselves, or about the way of salvation runs not to a manual but to the Prophet who speaks with absolute, divine, final authority. The believer whose conscience is crushed under the weight of guilt runs not to a moral program but to the Priest whose atoning sacrifice is sufficient and whose intercession is perpetual. The believer who is enslaved to a pattern of sin they cannot break runs not to willpower but to the King who has authority over every enemy, including the enemies within. The *munus triplex* is not merely a theological taxonomy; it is the map of the Christian life.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the threefold name of Christ produce in you a threefold worship, worship shaped by the specific character of each office. Adore the Prophet who has spoken the final and supreme word of God in a world drowning in confusion, falsehood, and spiritual darkness. Adore the Priest whose blood has settled the question of guilt once and for all, and who stands before the Father at this moment as the perpetual advocate whose case on your behalf is unanswerable. Adore the King who reigns over all things with sovereign authority, whose purposes cannot be thwarted by any earthly or spiritual power, and who will bring you safely through every opposition to the eternal kingdom He is preparing for His people.

Desire a congregation whose knowledge of Christ is comprehensive rather than selective, one that knows Him as Prophet and not only as Priest, as King and not only as Savior, as the source of divine truth and not only as the ground of divine forgiveness. The congregation that knows only the priestly office of Christ will be a congregation that knows forgiveness but lacks the authoritative Word (prophetic) that gives forgiveness its meaning and the sovereign power (kingly) that applies it to their lives with transforming effect. The fullness of the Christian life is found in the fullness of Christ, and the fullness of Christ is the fullness of the *munus triplex*.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Memorize Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 31 and teach it to your congregation. This is among the most pastorally efficient theological formulations in the entire Reformed tradition: in a few sentences, it provides a complete, three-dimensional account of what the name 'Christ' means, what the three offices accomplish, and what the believer receives through each. A congregation that can recite and explain Q&A 31 has in their possession the christological framework for understanding the entire unit that follows.
- Preach a sermon series on the name 'Christ' using the munus triplex as the organizing structure. Three sermons, on Christ as Prophet, Christ as Priest, and Christ as King, following this introductory lesson would provide the congregation with a comprehensive and devotionally rich account of what the title means. These three sermons are, in miniature, the content of Lessons 17–19; an introductory sermon on 'Why Is He Called Christ?' following the pattern of Heidelberg Q&A 31 would be a fitting opening for such a series.
- Apply the threefold office to your pastoral care by diagnosing which dimension of the human problem is most pressing for the person you are counseling. Is the presenting problem primarily one of ignorance (they do not know what God says about their situation, their sin, or their hope)? Then the pastoral care needed is primarily prophetic: bring the word of Christ to bear with authority and specificity. Is the presenting problem primarily one of guilt (they cannot shake the sense of condemnation and divine displeasure)? Then the pastoral care needed is primarily priestly: bring the atoning work and the perpetual intercession of Christ to bear with pastoral precision. Is the presenting problem primarily one of bondage (they know what they should do but cannot do it)? Then the pastoral care needed is primarily kingly: bring the sovereign authority and transforming power of Christ the King to bear with faith and prayer.
- Read John Calvin's treatment of the threefold office in the Institutes II.xv.1–6. This is among the most concentrated and most pastorally oriented treatments of the munus triplex in the history of theology, Calvin never loses sight of the pastoral purpose of the theological framework, and his ability to move from doctrinal precision to personal application is a model for every pastor who wants to make the munus triplex more than an academic category.
- Introduce your congregation to the three anointed offices of the Old Testament as the background of the name 'Christ.' Many believers who have read and heard the Gospels for years have never understood why Jesus is called 'Christ' rather than merely 'Jesus.' A teaching session or sermon that traces the three anointed offices through the Old Testament, the prophets anointed by the Spirit (Isaiah 61:1), the priests anointed by oil (Exodus 29:7), the kings anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13), and then shows how all three converge in the person of Jesus at His baptism will give the congregation a transformed understanding of the most frequent title in the New Testament.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. Before studying this lesson, did you know that the word 'Christ' is a title meaning 'Anointed One' rather than a personal name? Did you know that the Old Testament had three anointed offices, prophet, priest, and king, all of which Jesus is identified as fulfilling? How has the absence or presence of this understanding affected the way you think about the name 'Jesus Christ' and what it declares about Him?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read Hebrews 1:1–4. Identify the three dimensions of Christ's work described in these verses and show how each corresponds to one of the three offices: (a) the prophetic office (the divine word spoken through the Son); (b) the priestly office (purification of sins); and (c) the kingly office (sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high). How does the author of Hebrews present all three dimensions in a single flowing description of the one Person? What does the structure of these verses suggest about the simultaneity of the three offices?

3. Read Deuteronomy 18:15–18. What is the specific context in which Moses announces the coming Prophet? What does Moses identify as the function of the prophetic office, what does the prophet do for the people? How does Acts 3:22–26 apply this text to Jesus? What does Peter's application of Deuteronomy 18:15 to Jesus establish about the relationship between Jesus and the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament?

4. Read Psalm 110:1–4. Identify the two distinct declarations of Psalm 110: the royal declaration in verse 1 ('Sit at My right hand') and the priestly declaration in verse 4 ('You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'). What is the significance of the fact that a single psalm addresses the same messianic figure both as King (v. 1) and as Priest (v. 4)? How does the New Testament use this psalm (cited more than any other Old Testament text in the New Testament) to establish both the kingly and priestly offices of Jesus?

5. Read Luke 4:14–21. What is the specific context of Jesus' visit to the Nazareth synagogue? What text does He read (Isaiah 61:1–2), and what claim does He make about its fulfillment in verse 21? How does the language of 'anointed' in Isaiah 61:1 connect to the munus triplex? What specific dimensions of the prophetic office are described in the Isaiah 61 text that Jesus cites?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

6. The lesson presents the threefold problem of sin (ignorance, guilt, bondage) as corresponding to the three offices of Christ (Prophet, Priest, King). Evaluate this theological analysis. Is the identification of these three dimensions of the human problem adequate to describe the full scope of what sin does to human beings? Are there dimensions of the human problem that are not captured by these three categories? How does the threefold analysis help you understand why Christ must be all three, Prophet, Priest, and King, rather than merely one or two of the three?
7. The lesson argues that the three offices are exercised simultaneously rather than sequentially or alternately. How does the example of Hebrews 1:1–4 illustrate this simultaneity? Can you identify other specific New Testament texts or episodes in the life of Jesus in which two or three of the offices are simultaneously operative? What pastoral implication follows from the simultaneity of the offices, what does it mean for the believer who comes to Christ with a specific need?
8. The lesson traces the historical development of the *munus triplex* framework from patristic anticipations through Calvin's systematic treatment to the Reformed confessions. Why did the threefold office become so central to Reformed Christology specifically, when other traditions (Lutheran, Roman Catholic) have tended to organize their Christologies differently? What is it about the Reformed theological approach to the relationship between the Old and New Testaments that makes the *munus triplex* framework so natural and so generative?
9. The Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 31 identifies the three offices as 'chief Prophet and Teacher,' 'only High Priest,' and 'eternal King.' The qualifiers are theologically significant: chief (not merely one prophet among many), only (not one priest among many), and eternal (not a temporary king). What does each qualifier add to the understanding of the office? What specific Old Testament figures does each qualifier implicitly contrast Jesus with, and why is the contrast important for the Christian doctrine of salvation?
10. The lesson argues that to know the name 'Christ' in its full theological depth is to hold 'in the name Christ the answer to every dimension of the human need that sin has produced.' Do you find this a convincing claim? Can you articulate, in your own words, how the prophetic office addresses the problem of ignorance, how the priestly office addresses the problem of guilt, and how the kingly office addresses the problem of bondage, in a way that is theologically precise and pastorally concrete?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson recommends applying the threefold office to pastoral care by diagnosing which dimension of the human problem is most pressing in a given pastoral situation. Think of a specific pastoral situation you have encountered or are currently navigating: someone struggling with doubt about God's word (prophetic need), someone crushed by guilt for past sin (priestly need), or someone enslaved to a habitual sin they cannot break (kingly need). How would the specific office of Christ

that addresses their specific need change the specific content of the pastoral care you provide? What texts, what promises, what aspects of Christ's work would you emphasize in each case?

12. The lesson recommends memorizing and teaching Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 31. Take five minutes right now to read Q&A 31 slowly, attentively, and repeatedly until you can roughly reproduce it from memory. Then write out in your own words the three things the Heidelberg says Christ does as Prophet, Priest, and King. How does having this formulation memorized equip you differently for ministry than not having it memorized? What specific pastoral conversations would be enriched by having this framework readily accessible?

13. The lesson describes the transition from Units 1–5 (the Person of Christ) to Units 6–11 (the Work of Christ) as the most significant architectural threshold in the series. Looking back over the fifteen lessons of Units 1–5, how has the christological precision about the Person of Christ, the hypostatic union, the impeccability, the active obedience, prepared the ground for understanding the Work of Christ through the threefold office? What specific connections do you already see between what you have learned about the Person and what you anticipate learning about the Work?

14. This lesson opens Unit 6 on the Threefold Office of Christ. Looking ahead to Lessons 17 (Prophet), 18 (Priest), and 19 (King), identify the one office whose significance you feel you understand least well, the one whose depth and pastoral relevance you are most hoping this unit will illumine. What specific questions do you bring to the study of that particular office? And which of the three offices do you find most naturally emphasized in your own preaching and teaching, and which do you find yourself neglecting, and why?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of Hebrews 1:1–3, the most concentrated biblical expression of the threefold office in all of Scripture, followed by a meditative reading of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 31. Read both texts slowly and attentively, letting the structure of the munus triplex become visible in the biblical language: "spoken to us in His Son" (prophetic), "when He had made purification of sins" (priestly), "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (kingly). Then let the Heidelberg's pastoral formulation, chief Prophet, only High Priest, eternal King, provide the words for adoration of the one in whom all three offices are held simultaneously, permanently, and for the comprehensive benefit of His people.

Spend time in worship structured around the three offices. Adore Christ as Prophet: the one who has spoken the final, supreme, and sufficient word of God in a world of spiritual darkness and confusion, the one in whom the divine self-disclosure reaches its most personal and most complete expression, the one who is not merely the messenger of the divine word but is Himself the Word of God. Adore Christ as Priest: the one who has offered the once-for-all sacrifice that removed guilt permanently

and irrevocably, the one who always lives to make intercession and whose advocacy at the right hand of the Father is ceaseless and unanswerable, the one whose blood speaks better than the blood of Abel. Adore Christ as King: the one who reigns at the right hand of the Father with all authority in heaven and on earth, the one who has defeated the last enemy and who will bring all things into subjection under His feet, the one who governs His people by His Word and Spirit and who will bring them safely through every opposition to the eternal kingdom.

Pray through the congregation's specific needs using the diagnostic framework of the three offices. Bring before the Prophet the specific areas of ignorance, confusion, and theological darkness that your congregation faces, the questions they cannot answer, the truths they do not yet know, the parts of God's character and purpose that remain opaque to them. Bring before the Priest the specific burdens of guilt, shame, and condemnation that weigh upon specific members of your congregation, ask the one who always lives to make intercession to present their case before the Father with the perfect advocacy of His completed atonement. Bring before the King the specific patterns of bondage, habitual sin, and spiritual defeat that your congregation is struggling with, ask the sovereign Lord to exercise His royal authority over every enemy that holds His people captive.

Close with the name of Christ spoken together as a theological confession, the most ancient and the most comprehensive christological declaration of the church:

"Jesus Christ, our chief Prophet and Teacher, our only High Priest, our eternal King. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood and has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM Q&A 31; REVELATION 1:5–6, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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