

An Humble Inquiry Into, and Prospect Of, the Infinite Wisdom of God, in the Constitution of the Person of Christ

by John Owen

John Owen's sermon examines the infinite wisdom of God as expressed in the incarnation of Christ and its implications for human redemption and divine glory.

Scripture: Job 28:21, Ephesians 3:10, Colossians 2:3, 1 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Redemption through Christ", "Divine Wisdom"

Description

John Owen explores the infinite wisdom of God in the incarnation of Christ, emphasizing that this divine mystery is essential for the redemption of humanity. He highlights that God's wisdom is evident in the way He orchestrated the salvation of mankind through Christ, who embodies both divine and human natures. Owen argues that the effects of sin necessitated a profound response from God, one that would uphold His holiness and justice while also demonstrating His love and grace. The sermon calls for a humble admiration of God's wisdom, as it surpasses human understanding and reveals the depths of His plan for salvation. Ultimately, Owen encourages believers to contemplate the glory of God revealed in Christ's work of redemption.

Transcript

From the consideration of the things before insisted on, we may endeavour, according unto our measure, to take a view of, and humbly adore, the infinite wisdom of God, in the holy contrivance of this great "mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." As it is a spiritual, evangelical mystery, it is an effect of divine wisdom, in the redemption and salvation of the church, unto the eternal glory of God; and as it is a "great mystery," so it is the mystery of the "manifold wisdom of God," Eph. iii. 9, 10 -- that is, of infinite wisdom working in great variety of acting and operations, suited unto, and expressive of, its own infinite fulness: for herein were "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" laid up, and laid out, Col. ii. 3. An argument this is, in some parts whereof divers of the ancient writers of the church have laboured, some occasionally, and some with express design. I shall insist only on those things which Scripture light leads us directly unto. The depths of divine wisdom in this glorious work are hid from the eyes of all living. "God [alone] understandeth the way thereof; and he knoweth the place thereof;" as he speaks, Job xxviii. 21, 23. Yet is it so glorious in its effects, that "destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof

with our ears," verse 22. The fame and report of this divine wisdom reach even unto hell. Those who eternally perish shall hear a fame of this wisdom, in the glorious effects of it towards the blessed souls above, though some of them would not believe it here in the light of the Gospel, and none of them can understand it there, in their everlasting darkness. Hence the report which they have of the wisdom is an aggravation of their misery.

These depths we may admire and adore, but we cannot comprehend: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord herein, or with whom took he counsel?" Concerning the original causes of his counsels in this great mystery we can only say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!" This alone is left unto us in the way of duty, that in the effects of them we should contemplate on their excellency, so as to give glory to God, and live in a holy admiration of his wisdom and grace. For to give glory unto him, and admire him, is our present duty, until he shall come eternally "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe," 2 Thess. i. 10.

We can do no more but stand at the shore of this ocean, and adore its unsearchable depths. What is delivered from them by divine revelation we may receive as pearls of price, to enrich and adorn our souls. For "the secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us," that we may do "the words of this law," Deut. xxix. 29. We shall not, therefore, in our inquiry into this great mystery, intrude ourselves into the things which we have not seen, but only endeavour a right understanding of what is revealed concerning it. For the end of all divine revelations is our knowledge of the things revealed, with our obedience thereon; and unto this end things revealed do belong unto us.

Some things in general are to be premised unto our present inquiry.

1. We can have no view or due prospect of the wisdom of God in any of his works, much less in this of "sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," or the constitution of his person, and the work of redemption to be accomplished thereby, unless we consider also the interest of the other holy properties of the divine nature in them. Such are his holiness, his righteousness, his sovereign authority, his goodness, love, and grace.

There are three excellencies of the divine nature principally to be considered in all the external works of God. (1.) His Goodness, which is the communicative property thereof. This is the eternal fountain and spring of all divine communications. Whatever is good in and unto any creature, is an emanation from divine goodness. "He is good, and he doeth good." That which acts originally in the divine nature, unto the communication of itself in any blessed or gracious effects unto the creatures, is goodness. (2.) Wisdom, which is the directive power or excellency of the divine nature. Hereby God guides, disposes, orders, and directs all things unto his own glory, in and by their own immediate proper ends, Prov. xvi. 4; Rev. iv. 11. (3.) Power, which is the effective excellency of the divine nature, effecting and accomplishing what wisdom doth design and order.

Whereas wisdom, therefore, is that holy excellency or power of the Divine Being, wherein God designs, and whereby he effects, the glory of all the other properties of his nature, we cannot trace the paths of it in any work of God, unless we know the interest and concernment of those other properties in that work. For that which wisdom principally designs, is the glorification of them. And unto this end the effective property of the divine nature, which is almighty power, always accompanies, or is subservient unto, the directive or infinite wisdom, which is requisite unto perfection in operation. What infinite goodness will communicate

ad extra -- what it will open the eternal fountain of the Divine Being and all sufficiency to give forth -- that infinite wisdom designs, contrives, and directs to the glory of God; and what wisdom so designs, infinite power effects. See Isa. xl. 13-15, 17, 28.

2. We can have no apprehensions of the interest of the other properties of the divine nature in this great mystery of godliness, whose glory was designed in infinite wisdom, without the consideration of that state and condition of our own wherein they are so concerned. That which was designed unto the eternal glory of God in this great work of the incarnation of his Son, was the redemption of mankind, or the recovery and salvation of the church. What hath been disputed by some concerning it, without respect unto the sin of man and the salvation of the church, is curiosity, and indeed presumptuous folly. The whole Scripture constantly assigneth this sole end of that effect of divine goodness and wisdom; yea, asserts it as the only foundation of the Gospel, John iii. 16. Wherefore, unto a due contemplation of divine wisdom in it, it is necessary we should consider what is the nature of sin, especially of that first sin, wherein our original apostasy from God did consist -- what was the condition of mankind thereon -- what is the concernment of the holy God therein, on the account of the blessed properties of his nature -- what way was suited unto our recovery, that God might be glorified in them all. Without a previous consideration of these things, we can have no due conceptions of the wisdom of God in this glorious work which we inquire after. Wherefore I shall so far speak of them, that, if it be the will of God, the minds of those who read and consider them may be opened and prepared to give admittance unto some rays of that divine wisdom in this glorious work, the lustre of whose full light we are not able in this world to behold.

When there was a visible pledge of the presence of God in the "bush that burned" and was not consumed, Moses said he "would turn aside to see that great sight," Exod. iii. 3. And this great representation of the glory of God being made and proposed unto us, it is certainly our duty to divert from all other occasions unto the contemplation of it. But as Moses was then commanded to put off his shoes, the place whereon he stood being holy ground, so it will be the wisdom of him that writes, and of them that read, to divest themselves of all carnal affections and imaginations, that they may draw nigh unto this great object of faith with due reverence and fear.

The first thing we are to consider, in order unto the end proposed, is -- the nature of our sin and apostasy from God. For from thence we must learn the concernment of the divine excellencies of God in this work. And there are three things that were eminent therein:--

(1.) A reflection on the honour of the holiness and wisdom of God, in the rejection of his image. He had newly made man in his own image. And this work he so expresseth as to intimate a peculiar effect of divine wisdom in it, whereby it was distinguished from all other external works of creation whatever, Gen. i. 26, 27, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." Nowhere is there such an emphasis of expression concerning any work of God. And sundry things are represented as peculiar therein.

[1st.] That the word of consultation and that of execution are distinct. In all other works of creation, the word of determination and execution was the same. When he created light -- which seems to be the beauty and glory of the whole creation -- he only said, "Let there be light; and there was light," Gen. i. 3. So was it with all other things. But when he comes unto the creation of man, another process is proposed unto our faith. These several words are distinct, not in time, but in nature. "God said, Let us make man in our image and likeness;" and thereon it is added distinctly, as the execution of that antecedent counsel, "So God made man in his own image." This puts a signal eminency on this work of God.

[2dly,] A distinct, peculiar concernment of all the persons of the holy Trinity, in their consultation and operation, is in like manner proposed unto us: "And God said, Let us make man." The truth hereof I have sufficiently evinced elsewhere, and discovered the vanity ¹⁸²of all other glosses and expositions. The properties of the divine nature principally and originally considerable, in all external operations, (as we have newly observed,) are goodness, wisdom, and power. In this great work, divine goodness exerted itself eminently and effectually in the person of the Father -- the eternal fountain and spring, as of the divine nature, so of all divine operations. Divine wisdom acted itself peculiarly in the person of the Son; this being the principal notion thereof -- the eternal Wisdom of the Father. Divine power wrought effectually in the person of the Holy Spirit; who is the immediate actor of all divine operations.

[3dly,] The proposition of the effecting this work, being by way of consultation, represents it a signal effect of infinite wisdom. These expressions are used to lead us unto the contemplation of that wisdom.

Thus, "God made man in his own image;" that is, in such a rectitude of nature as represented his righteousness and holiness -- in such a state and condition as had a reflection on it of his power and rule. The former was the substance of it -- the latter a necessary consequent thereof. This representation, I say, of God, in power and rule, was not that image of God wherein man was created, but a consequent of it. So the words and their order declare: "Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea," &c. Because he was made in the image of God, this dominion and rule were granted unto him. So fond is their imagination, who would have the image of God to consist solely in these things. Wherefore, the loss of the image of God was not originally the loss of power and dominion, or a right thereunto; but man was deprived of that right, on the loss of that image which it was granted unto. Wherein it did consist, see Eccles. vii. 29; Eph. iv. 24.

Three things God designed in this communication of his image unto our nature, which were his principal ends in the creation of all things here below; and therefore was divine wisdom more eminently exerted therein than in all the other works of this inferior creation.

The first was, that he might therein make a representation of his holiness and righteousness among his creatures. This was not done in any other of them. Characters they had on them of his goodness, wisdom, and power. In these things the "heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy-work." His eternal power and Godhead are manifest in the things that are made; but none of them, not the whole fabric of heaven and earth, with all their glorious ornaments and endowments, were either fit or able to receive any impressions of his holiness and righteousness -- of any of the moral perfections or universal rectitude of his nature. Yet, in the demonstration and representation of these things doth the glory of God principally consist. Without them, he could not be known ¹⁸³and glorified as God. Wherefore he would have an image and representation of them in the creation here below. And this he will always have, so long as he will be worshipped by any of his creatures. And therefore, when it was lost in Adam, it was renewed in Christ, as hath been declared.

The second was, that it might be a means of rendering actual glory unto him from all other parts of the creation. Without this, which is as the animating life and form of the whole, the other creatures are but as a dead thing. They could not any way declare the glory of God, but passively and objectively. They were as an harmonious, well-tuned instrument, which gives no sound unless there be a skilful hand to move and act it. What is light, if there be no eye to see it? or what is music, if there be no ear to hear it? How glorious and beautiful soever any of the works of creation appear to be, from impressions of divine power, wisdom, and goodness on them; yet, without this image of God in man, there was nothing here below to

understand God in them -- to glorify God by them. This alone is that whereby, in a way of admiration, obedience, and praise, we were enabled to render unto God all the glory which he designed from those works of his power.

The third was, that it might be a means to bring man unto that eternal enjoyment of Himself, which he was fitted for and designed unto. For this was to be done in a way of obedience; -- "Do this and live," was that rule of it which the nature of God and man, with their mutual relation unto one another, did require. But we were made meet for this obedience, and enabled unto it, only by virtue of this image of God implanted in our natures. It was morally a power to live unto God in obedience, that we might come to the enjoyment of him in glory.

Evident it is that these were the principal ends of God in the creation of all things. Wherefore this constitution of our nature, and the furnishment of it with the image of God, was the most eminent effect of infinite wisdom in all the outward works of the divine nature.

(2.) In the entrance of sin, and by apostasy from God, man voluntarily rejected and defaced this blessed representation of the righteousness and holiness of God -- this great effect of his goodness and wisdom, in its tendency unto his eternal glory, and our enjoyment of him. No greater dishonour could be done unto him -- no endeavour could have been more pernicious in casting contempt on his counsel. For as his holiness, which was represented in that image, was despoiled, so we did what lay in us to defeat the contrivance of his wisdom. This will be evident by reflecting on the ends of it now mentioned. For --

[1.] Hereon there remained nothing, in all the creation here below, whereby any representation might be made of God's holiness and righteousness, or any of the moral perfections of his nature. How could it be done, this image being lost out of the world? The brute, inanimate part of the creation, however stupendously great in its matter and glorious in its outward form, was no way capable of it. The nature of man under the loss of this image -- fallen, depraved, polluted, and corrupted -- gives rather a representation and image of Satan than of God. Hence -- instead of goodness, love, righteousness, holiness, peace, all virtues usefully communicative and effective of the good of the whole race of mankind, which would have been effects of this image of God, and representatives of his nature -- the whole world, from and by the nature of man, is filled with envy, malice, revenge, cruelty, oppression, and all engines of promoting self, whereunto man is wholly turned, as fallen off from God. He that would learn the divine nature, from the representation that is made of it in the present acting of the nature of man, will be gradually led unto the devil instead of God. Wherefore no greater indignity could be offered unto divine wisdom and holiness, than there was in this rejection of the image of God wherein we were created.

[2.] There was no way left whereby glory might redound unto God from the remainder of the creation here below. For the nature of man alone was designed to be the way and means of it, by virtue of the image of God implanted on it. Wherefore man by sin did not only draw off himself from that relation unto God wherein he was made, but drew off the whole creation here below with himself into a uselessness unto his glory. And upon the entrance of sin, before the cure of our apostasy was actually accomplished, the generality of mankind divided the creatures into two sorts -- those above, or the heavenly bodies, and those here below. Those of the first sort they worshipped as their gods; and those of the other sort they abused unto their lusts. Wherefore God was every way dishonored in and by them all, nor was there any glory given him on their account. What some attempted to do of that nature, in a wisdom of their own, ended in folly and a renewed dishonour of God; as the apostle declares, Rom. i. 18, 19, 21, 22.

[3.] Man hereby lost all power and ability of attaining that end for which he was made -- namely, the eternal enjoyment of God. Upon the matter, and as much as in us lay, the whole end of God in the creation of all things here below was utterly defeated.

But that which was the malignity and poison of this sin, was the contempt that was cast on the holiness of God, whose representation, and all its express characters, were utterly despised and rejected therein. Herein, then, lay the concernment of the holiness or righteousness of God in this sin of our nature, which we are inquiring after. Unless ¹⁸⁵some reparation be made for the indignity cast upon it in the rejection of the image and representation of it -- unless there be some way whereby it may be more eminently exalted in the nature of man than it was debased and despised in the same nature; it was just, equal, righteous with God -- that which becomes the rectitude and purity of his nature -- that mankind should perish eternally in that condition whereinto it was cast by sin.

It was not, therefore, consistent with the glory of God, that mankind should be restored, that this nature of ours should be brought unto the enjoyment of him, unless his holiness be more exalted, be more conspicuously represented in the same nature, than ever it was depressed or despised thereby. The demonstration of its glory in any other nature, as in that of angels, would not serve unto this end; as we shall see afterward.

We must now a little return unto what we before laid down. Wisdom being the directive power of all divine operations, and the end of all those operations being the glory of God himself, or the demonstration of the excellencies of the holy properties of his nature, it was incumbent thereon to provide for the honour and glory of divine holiness in an exaltation answerable unto the attempt for its debasement. Without the consideration hereof, we can have no due prospect of the acting of infinite wisdom in this great work of our redemption and recovery by the incarnation of the Son of God.

(3.) Sin brought disorder and disturbance into the whole rule and government of God. It was necessary, from the infinite wisdom of God, that all things should be made in perfect order and harmony -- all in a direct subordination unto his glory. There could have been no original defect in the natural or moral order of things, but it must have proceeded from a defect in wisdom; for the disposal of all things into their proper order belonged unto the contrivance thereof. And the harmony of all things among themselves, with all their mutual relations and aspects in a regular tendency unto their proper and utmost end -- whereby though every individual subsistence or being hath a peculiar end of its own, yet all their actings and all their ends tend directly unto one utmost common end of them all -- is the principal effect of wisdom. And thus was it at the beginning, when God himself beheld the universe, and, "lo, it was exceeding good."

All things being thus created and stated, it belonged unto the nature of God to be the rector and disposer of them all.

It was not a mere free act of his will, whereby God chose to rule and govern the creation according unto the law of the nature of all things, and their relation unto him; but it was necessary, from his divine being and excellences, that so he should do. Wherefore, it concerned both the wisdom and righteousness of God to take care that ¹⁸⁶either all things should be preserved in the state wherein they were created, and no disorder be suffered to enter into the kingdom and rule of God, or that, in a way suited unto them, his glory should be retrieved and re-established; for God is not the God of confusion -- neither the author nor approver of it -- neither in his works nor in his rule. But sin actually brought disorder into the kingdom and rule of God. And this it did not in any one particular instance, but that which was universal as unto all

things here below. For the original harmony and order of all things consisted in their subordination unto the glory of God. But this they all lost, as was before declared. Hence he who looked on them in their constitution, and, to manifest his complacency in them, affirmed them to be "exceeding good," immediately on the entrance of sin, pronounced a curse on the whole earth, and all things contained therein.

To suffer this disorder to continue unrectified, was not consistent with the wisdom and righteousness of God. It would make the kingdom of God to be like that of Satan -- full of darkness and confusion. Nothing is more necessary unto the good of the universe, and without which it were better it were annihilated, than the preservation of the honour of God in his government. And this could no otherwise be done, but by the infliction of a punishment proportionable in justice unto the demerit of sin. Some think this might be done by a free dismissal of sin, or a passing it over without any punishment at all. But what evidence should we then have that good and evil were not alike, and almost equal unto God in his rule -- that he doth not like sin as well as uprightness? Nor would this supposition leave any grounds of exercising justice among men. For if God, in misrule of all things, dismissed the greatest sin without any penalty inflicted, what reason have we to judge that evils among ourselves should at all be punished? That, therefore, be far from God, that the righteous should be as the wicked: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Wherefore, the order of God's rule being broken, as it consisted in the regular obedience of the creature, and disorder with confusion being brought thereby into the kingdom and government of God; his righteousness, as it is the rectorial virtue and power of the divine nature, required that his glory should be restored, by reducing the sinning creature again into order by punishment. Justice, therefore, must be answered and complied withal herein, according unto its eternal and unanswerable law, in a way suited unto the glory of God, or the sinning creature must perish eternally.

Herein the righteousness of God, as the rectorial virtue of the divine nature, was concerned in the sin and apostasy of men. The vindication and glory of it -- to provide that in nothing it were eclipsed or diminished -- was incumbent on infinite wisdom, according unto the rule before laid down. That must direct and dispose of all things anew unto the glory of the righteousness of God, or there is no recovery of mankind. And in our inquiry after the impressions of divine wisdom on the great and glorious means of our restoration under consideration, this provision made thereby for the righteousness of God, in his rule and government of all, is greatly to be attended to.

(4.) Man by sin put himself into the power of the devil, God's greatest adversary. The devil had newly, by rebellion and apostasy from his first condition, cast himself under the eternal displeasure and wrath of God. God had righteously purposed in himself not to spare him, nor contrive any way for his deliverance unto eternity. He, on the other side, was become obdurate in his malice and hatred of God, designing his dishonour and the impeachment of his glory with the utmost of his remaining abilities. In this state of things, man voluntarily leaves the rule and conduct of God, with all his dependence upon him, and puts himself into the power of the devil; for he believed Satan above God -- that is, placed his faith and confidence in him, as unto the way of attaining blessedness and true happiness. And in whom we place our trust and confidence, them do we obey, whatever we profess. Herein did God's adversary seem for a season to triumph against him, as if he had defeated the great design of his goodness, wisdom, and power. So he would have continued to do, if no way had been provided for his disappointment.

This, therefore, also belonged unto the care of divine wisdom, -- namely, that the glory of God in none of the holy properties of his nature did suffer any diminution hereby.

All this, and inconceivably more than we are able to express, being contained in the sin of our apostasy from God, it must needs follow that the condition of all mankind became thereby inexpressibly evil. As we had done all the moral evil which our nature was capable to act, so it was meet we should receive all the penal evil which our nature was capable to undergo; and it all issued in death temporal and eternal, inflicted from the wrath of God.

This is the first thing to be considered in our tracing the footsteps of divine wisdom in our deliverance by the incarnation of the Son of God. Without due conceptions of the nature of this sin and apostasy -- of the provocation given unto God thereby, of the injury attempted to be done unto the glory of all his properties, of his concernment in their reparation, with the unspeakable misery that mankind was fallen into -- we cannot have the least view of the glorious acting of divine wisdom in our deliverance by Christ; and, therefore, the most of those who are insensible of these things, do wholly reject the principal instances of infinite wisdom in our redemption; as we shall yet see farther afterward. And the great reason why the glory of God in Christ doth so little irradiate the minds of many, that it is so much neglected and despised, is because they are not acquainted nor affected with the nature of our first sin and apostasy, neither in itself nor its woeful effects and consequents.

But, on the supposition of these things, a double inquiry ariseth with reference unto the wisdom of God, and the other holy properties of his nature immediately concerned in our sin and apostasy.

1. Whereas man by sin had defaced the image of God, and lost it, whereby there was no representation of his holiness and righteousness left in the whole creation here below -- no way of rendering any glory to him, in, for, or by, any other of his works -- no means to bring man unto the enjoyment of God, for which he was made; -- and whereas he had brought confusion and disorder into the rule and kingdom of God, which, according unto the law of creation and its sanction, could not be rectified but by the eternal ruin of the sinner; and had, moreover, given up himself unto the rule and conduct of Satan:-- whether, I say, hereon it was meet, with respect unto the holy properties of the divine nature, that all mankind should be left eternally in this condition, without remedy or relief? or whether there were not a condescency and suitableness unto them, that at least our nature in some portion of it should be restored?

2. Upon a supposition that the granting of a recovery was suited unto the holy perfections of the divine nature, acting themselves by infinite wisdom, what rays of that wisdom may we discern in the finding out and constitution of the way and means of that recovery?

The first of these I shall speak briefly unto in this place, because I have treated more largely concerning it in another. For there are many things which argue a condescency unto the divine perfections herein -- namely, that mankind should not be left utterly remediless in that guilt of misery whereinto it was plunged. I shall at present only insist on one of them.

God had originally created two sorts of intellectual creatures, capable of the eternal enjoyment of himself -- namely, angels and men. That he would so make either sort or both, was a mere effect of his sovereign wisdom and pleasure; but on a supposition that he would so make them, they must be made for his glory. These two sorts thus created he placed in several habitations, prepared for them, suitable unto their natures and the present duties required of them; the angels in heaven above, and men on earth below. Sin first invaded the nature of angels, and cast innumerable multitudes of them out of their primitive condition. Hereby they lost their capacity of, and right unto, that enjoyment of God which their nature was prepared and made meet for; neither would God ever restore them thereunto. 189And in the instance of

dealing with them, when he "spared them not, but shut them up in chains of everlasting darkness unto the judgement of the great day," he manifested how righteous it was to leave sinning, apostate creatures in everlasting misery. If anything of relief be provided for any of them, it is a mere effect of sovereign grace and wisdom, whereunto God was no way obliged. Howbeit, the whole angelical nature, that was created in a capacity for the eternal enjoyment of God, perished not; nor doth it seem consistent with the wisdom and goodness of God, that the whole entire species or kind of creatures made capable of glory in the eternal enjoyment of him, should at once immediately be excluded from it. That such a thing should fall out as it were accidentally, without divine provision and disposal, would argue a defect in wisdom, and a possibility of a surprisal into the loss of the whole glory he designed in the creation of all things; and to have it a mere effect of divine ordination and disposal, is as little consistent with his goodness. Wherefore, the same nature which sinned and perished in the angels that fell, abideth in the enjoyment of God in those myriads of blessed spirits which "left not their first habitation."

The nature of man was in like manner made capable of the eternal enjoyment of God. This was the end for which it was created, unto the glory of him by whom it was made; for it became the divine wisdom and goodness, to give unto everything an operation and end suited unto its capacity. And these, in this race of intellectual creatures, were to live unto God, and to come unto the eternal enjoyment of him. This operation and end their nature being capable of, they being suited unto it, unto them it was designed. But sin entered them also; we also "sinned, and came short of the glory of God." The inquiry hereon is, whether it became the divine goodness and wisdom that this whole nature, in all that were partakers of it, should fail and come short of that end for which alone it was made of God? For whereas the angels stood, in their primitive condition, every one in his own individual person, the sin of some did not prejudice others, who did not sin actually themselves. But the whole race of mankind stood all in one common head and state; from whom they were to be educed and derived by natural generation. The sin and apostasy of that one person was the sin and apostasy of us all. In him all sinned and died. Wherefore, unless there be a recovery made of them, or of some from among them, that whole species of intellectual nature -- the whole kind of it, in all its individuals -- which was made capable of doing the will of God, so as to come unto the eternal fruition of him, must be eternally lost and excluded from it. This, we may say, became not the wisdom and goodness of God, no more than it would have done to have suffered the whole angelical nature, in all its individuals, to have perished for ever. No created understanding could have been able to discern the glory of God in such a dispensation, whereby it would have had no glory. That the whole nature, in all the individuals of it, which was framed by the power of God out of nothing, and made what it was for this very end, that it might glorify him, and come unto the enjoyment of him, should eternally perish, if any way of relief for any portion of it were possible unto infinite wisdom, doth not give an amiable representation of the divine excellencies unto us.

It was therefore left on the provision of infinite wisdom, that this great effect, of recovering a portion of fallen mankind out of this miserable estate, wherein there was a suitableness, a condecency unto the divine excellencies, should be produced; only, it was to be done on and by a free act of the will of God; for otherwise there was no obligation on him from any of his properties so to do.

But it may be yet said, on the other side, that the nature of man was so defiled, so depraved, so corrupted, so alienated and separated from God, so obnoxious unto the curse by its sin and apostasy, that it was not reparable to the glory of God; and therefore it would not argue any defect in divine power, nor any unsuitableness unto divine wisdom and goodness, if it were not actually repaired and restored. I answer two things.

(1.) The horrible nature of the first sin, and the heinousness of our apostasy from God therein, were such and so great, as that God thereon might righteously, and suitably unto all the holy properties of his nature, leave mankind to perish eternally in that condition whereinto they had cast themselves; and if he had utterly forsaken the whole race of mankind in that condition, and left them all as remediless as the fallen angels, there could have been no reflection on his goodness, and an evident suitableness unto his justice and holiness. Wherefore, wherever there is any mention in the Scripture of the redemption or restoration of mankind, it is constantly proposed as an effect of mere sovereign grace and mercy. See Eph. i. 3-11. And those who pretend a great difficulty at present, in the reconciliation of the eternal perishing of the greatest part of mankind with those notions we have of the divine goodness, seem not to have sufficiently considered what was contained in our original apostasy from God, nor the righteousness of God in dealing with the angels that sinned. For when man had voluntarily broken all the relation of love and moral good between God and him, had defaced his image -- the only representation of his holiness and righteousness in this lower world -- and deprived him of all his glory from the works of his hands, and had put himself into the society and under the conduct of the devil; what dishonour could it have been unto God, what diminution would there have been of his glory, if he had left him unto his own choice -- to eat for ever of the fruit of his own ways, and to be filled with his own devices unto eternity? It is only infinite wisdom that could find out a way for the salvation of any one of the whole race of mankind, so as that it might be reconciled unto the glory of his holiness, righteousness, and rule. Wherefore, as we ought always to admire sovereign grace in the few that shall be saved, so we have no ground to reflect on divine goodness in the multitudes that perish, especially considering that they all voluntarily continue in their sin and apostasy.

(2.) I grant the nature of man was not reparable nor recoverable by any such actings of the properties of God as he had exerted in the creation and rule of all things. Were there not other properties of the divine nature than what were discovered and revealed in the creation of all -- were not some of them so declared capable of an exercise in another way or in higher degrees than what had as yet been instanced in -- it must be acknowledged that the reparation of mankind could not be conceived compliant with the divine excellencies, nor to be effected by them. I shall give one instance in each sort; namely, first in properties of another kind than any which had been manifested in the works of creation, and then the acting of some of them so manifested, in another way, or farther degree than what they were before exerted in or by.

[1.] Of the first sort are love, grace, and mercy, which I refer unto one head -- their nature being the same, as they have respect unto sinners. For although there were none of them manifested in the works of creation, yet are they no less essential properties of the divine nature than either power, goodness, or wisdom. With these it was that the reparation of our nature was compliant -- unto them it had a condecency; and the glory of them infinite wisdom designed therein. That wisdom, on which it is incumbent to provide for the manifestation of all the other properties of God's nature, contrived this work unto the glory of his love, mercy, and grace; as in the gospel it is everywhere declared.

[2.] Of the second sort is divine goodness. This, as the communicative property of the divine nature, had exerted itself in the creation of all things. Howbeit, it had not done so perfectly -- it had not done so to the uttermost. But the nature of goodness being communicative, it belongs unto its perfection to act itself unto the uttermost. This it had not yet done in the creation. Therein "God made man," and acted his goodness in the communication of our being unto us, with all its endowments. But there yet remained another effect of it; which was, that God should be made man, as the way unto, and the means of, our recovery.

These things being premised, we proceed to inquire more particularly 192by what way and means the recovery of mankind might be wrought, so as that God might be glorified thereby.

If fallen man be restored and reinstated in his primitive condition, or brought into a better, it must either be by himself, or by some other undertaking for him; for it must be done by some means or other. So great an alteration in the whole state of things was made by the entrance of sin, that it was not consistent with the glory of any of the divine excellencies that a restoration of all things should be made by a mere act of power, without the use of any means for the removal of the cause of that alteration. That man himself could not be this means -- that is, that he could not restore himself -- is openly evident. Two ways there were whereby he might attempt it, and neither jointly nor severally could he do anything in them.

1. He might do it by returning unto obedience unto God on his own accord. He fell off from God on his own accord by disobedience, through the suggestion of Satan; wherefore, a voluntary return unto his former obedience would seem to reduce all things unto their first estate. But this way was both impossible, and, upon a supposition of it, would have been insufficient unto the end designed. For --

(1.) This he could not do. He had, by his sin and fall, lost that power whereby he was able to yield any acceptable obedience unto God; and a return unto obedience is an act of greater power than a persistency in the way and course of it, and more is required thereunto. But all man's original power of obedience consisted in the image of God. This he had defaced in himself, and deprived himself of. Having, therefore, lost that power which should have enabled him to live unto God in his primitive condition, he could not retain a greater power in the same kind to return thereunto. This, indeed, was that which Satan deceived and deluded him withal; namely, that by his disobedience he should acquire new light and power, which he had not yet received -- he should be "like unto God." But he was so far from any advantage by his apostasy, that one part of his misery consisted in the loss of all power or ability to live to God.

This is the folly of that Pelagian heresy, which is now a third time attempting to impose itself on the Christian world. It supposeth that men have a power of their own to return unto God, after they had lost the power they had of abiding with him. It is not, indeed, as yet, pretended by many that the first sin was a mere transient act, that no way vitiated our nature, or impaired the power, faculty, or principle of obedience in us. A wound, they say, a disease, a weakness, it brought upon us, and rendered us legally obnoxious unto death temporal, which we were naturally liable unto before. Wherefore, it is not said that men can return unto that perfect obedience which the law required; but that they can comply with and perform 193that which the gospel requireth in the room thereof. For they seem to suppose that the gospel is not much more but an accommodation of the rule of obedience unto our present reason and abilities, with some motives unto it, and an example for it in the personal obedience and suffering of Christ. For whereas man forsook the law of obedience first prescribed unto him, and fell into various incapacities of observing it, God did not, as they suppose, provide, in and by the Gospel, a righteousness whereby the law might be fulfilled, and effectual grace to raise up the nature of man unto the performance of acceptable obedience; but only brings down the law and the rule of it into a compliance unto our weakened, diseased, depraved nature; -- than which, if anything can be spoken more dishonourably of the Gospel, I know it not. However, this pretended power of returning unto some kind of obedience, but not that which was required of us in our primitive condition, is no way sufficient unto our restoration; as is evident unto all.

(2.) As man could not effect his own recovery, so he would not attempt it. For he was fallen into that condition wherein, in the principles of all his moral operations, he was at enmity against God; and

whatever did befall him, he would choose to continue in his state of apostasy; for he was wholly "alienated from the life of God." He likes it not, as that which is incompliant with his dispositions, inclinations, and desires -- as inconsistent with everything wherein he placeth his interest. And hence, as he cannot do what he should through impotency, he will not do even what he can through obstinacy. It may be, we know not distinctly what to ascribe unto man's impotency, and what unto his obstinacy; but between both, he neither can nor will return unto God. And his power unto good, though not sufficient to bring him again unto God, yet is it not so small but that he always chooseth not to make use of it unto that end. In brief, there was left in man a fear of divine power -- a fear of God because of his greatness -- which makes him do many things which otherwise he would not do; but there is not left in him any love unto divine goodness, without which he cannot choose to return unto God.

(3.) But let us leave these things which men will dispute about, though in express contradiction unto the Scripture and the experience of them that are wrought upon to believe; and let us make an impossible supposition -- that man could and would return unto his primitive obedience; yet no reparation of the glory of God, suffering in the loss of the former state of all things, would thereon ensue. What satisfaction would be hereby made for the injury offered unto the holiness, righteousness, and wisdom of God, whose violation in their blessed effects was the principal evil of sin? Notwithstanding such a supposition, all the disorder that was brought into the rule and government of God by sin, with the reflection of dishonour upon him, in the rejection of his image, would still continue. And such a restitution of things wherein no provision is made for the reparation of the glory of God, is not to be admitted. The notion of it may possibly please men in their apostate condition, wherein they are wholly turned off from God, and into self -- not caring what becomes of his glory, so it may go well with themselves; but it is highly contradictory unto all equity, justice, and the whole reason of things, wherein the glory of God is the principal and centre of all.

Practically, things are otherwise among many. The most profligate sinners in the world, that have a conviction of an eternal condition, would be saved. Tell them it is inconsistent with the glory of the holiness, righteousness, and truth of God, to save unbelieving, impenitent sinners -- they are not concerned in it. Let them be saved that is, -- eternally delivered from the evil they fear -- and let God look unto his own glory; they take no care about it. A soul that is spiritually ingenuous, would not be saved in any way but that whereby God may be glorified. Indeed, to be saved, and not unto the glory of God, implies a contradiction; for our salvation is eternal blessedness, in a participation of the glory of God.

Secondly, It followeth, therefore, that man must make satisfaction unto the justice of God, and thereby a reparation of his glory, that he may be saved. This, added unto a complete return unto obedience, would effect a restitution of all things; it would do so as unto what was past, though it would make no new addition of glory unto God. But this became not the nature and efficacy of divine wisdom. It became it not merely to retrieve what was past, without a new manifestation and exaltation of the divine excellencies. And therefore, in our restitution by Christ, there is such a manifestation and exaltation of the divine properties as incomparably exceeds whatever could have ensued on, or been effected by, the law of creation, had man continued in his original obedience. But at present it is granted that this addition of satisfaction unto a return unto obedience, would restore all things unto their just condition. But as that return was impossible unto man, so was this satisfaction for the injury done by sin much more. For suppose a mere creature, such as man is, such as all men are, in what condition you please, and under all advantageous circumstances, yet, whatever he can do towards God is antecedently and absolutely due from him in that instant wherein he doth it, and that in the manner wherein it is done. They must all say, when they have done all that they can do, "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what was our

duty." Wherefore, it is impossible that, by anything a man can do well, he should make satisfaction for anything he hath done ill. For what he so doth is due in 195and for itself; and to suppose that satisfaction will be made for a former fault by that whose omission would have been another, had the former never been committed, is madness. An old debt cannot be discharged with ready money for new commodities; nor can past injuries be compensated by present duties, which we are anew obliged unto. Wherefore -- mankind being indispensably and eternally obliged unto the present performance of all duties of obedience unto God, according to the utmost of their capacity and ability, so as that the non-performance of them in their season, both as unto their matter and manner, would be their sin -- it is utterly impossible that by anything, or all that they can do, they should make the least satisfaction unto God for anything they have done against him; much less for the horrible apostasy whereof we treat. And to attempt the same end by any way which God hath not appointed, which he hath not made their duty, is a new provocation of the highest nature. See Micah vi. 6-8.

It is therefore evident, on all these considerations, that all mankind, as unto any endeavours of their own, anything that can be fancied as possible for them to design or do, must be left irreparable, in a condition of eternal misery. And unless we have a full conviction hereof, we can neither admire nor entertain the mystery of the wisdom of God in our reparation. And therefore it hath been the design of Satan, in all ages, to contrive presumptuous notions of men's spiritual abilities -- to divert their minds from the contemplation of the glory of divine wisdom and grace, as alone exalted in our recovery.

We are proceeding on this supposition, that there was a condecency unto the holy perfections of the divine nature, that mankind should be restored, or some portion of it recovered unto the enjoyment of himself; so angelical nature was preserved unto the same end in those that did not sin. And we have showed the general grounds whereon it is impossible that fallen man should restore or recover himself. Wherefore we must, in the next place, inquire what is necessary unto such a restoration, on the account of that concernment of the divine excellencies in the sin and apostasy of man which we have stated before; for hereby we may obtain light, and an insight into the glory of that wisdom whereby it was contrived and effected. And the things following, among others, may be observed under that end:--

1. It was required that there should be an obedience yielded unto God, bringing more glory unto him than dishonour did arise and accrue from the disobedience of man. This was due unto the glory of divine holiness in giving of the law. Until this was done, the excellency of the law, as becoming the holiness of God, and as an effect thereof, could not be made manifest. For if it were never kept in any instance, never fulfilled by any one person in the world, how should the glory of it be declared? -- how should the holiness of God 196be represented by it? -- how should it be evident that the transgression of it was not rather from some defect in the law itself, than from any evil in them that should have yielded obedience unto it? The obedience yielded by the angels that stood and sinned not, made it manifest that the transgression of it by them that fell and sinned was from their own wills, and not from any unsuitableness unto their nature and state in the law itself. But if the law given unto man should never be complied withal in perfect obedience by any one whatever, it might be thought that the law itself was unsuited unto our nature, and impossible to be complied withal. Nor did it become infinite wisdom to give a law whose equity, righteousness, and holiness, should never be exemplified in obedience -- should never be made to appear but in the punishment inflicted on its transgressors. Wherefore the original law of personal righteousness was not given solely nor primarily that men might suffer justly for its transgression, but that God might be glorified in its accomplishment. If this be not done, it is impossible that men should be restored unto the glory of God. If the law be not fulfilled by obedience, man must suffer evermore for his disobedience, or God must

lose the manifestation of his holiness therein. Besides, God had represented his holiness in that image of it which was implanted on our nature, and which was the principle enabling us unto obedience. This also was rejected by sin, and therein the holiness of God despised. If this be not restored in our nature, and that with advantages above what it had in its first communication, we cannot be recovered unto the glory of God.

2. It was necessary that the disorder brought into the rule and government of God by sin and rebellion should be rectified. This could no otherwise be done but by the infliction of that punishment which, in the unalterable rule and standard of divine justice, was due thereunto. The dismissal of sin on any other terms would leave the rule of God under unspeakable dishonour and confusion; for where is the righteousness of government, if the highest sin and provocation that our nature was capable of, and which brought confusion on the whole creation below, should for ever go unpunished? The first express intimation that God gave of his righteousness in the government of mankind, was his threatening a punishment equal unto the demerit of disobedience, if man should fall into it: "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt die." If he revoke and disannul this sentence, how shall the glory of his righteousness in the rule of all be made known? But how this punishment should be undergone, which consisted in man's eternal ruin, and yet man be eternally saved, was a work for divine wisdom to contrive. This, therefore, was necessary unto the honour of God's righteousness, as he is the supreme Governor and Judge of all the earth

1973. It was necessary that Satan should be justly despoiled of his advantage and power over mankind, unto the glory of God; for he was not to be left to triumph in his success. And inasmuch as man was, on his part, rightfully given up unto him, his deliverance was not to be wrought by an act of absolute dominion and power, but in a way of justice and lawful judgement; which things shall be afterward spoken unto.

Without these things the recovery of mankind into the favour and unto the enjoyment of God was utterly impossible, on the account of the concernment of the glory of his divine perfections in our sin and apostasy.

How all this might be effected -- how the glory of the holiness and righteousness of God in his law and rule, and in the primitive constitution of our nature, might be repaired -- how his goodness, love, grace, and mercy, might be manifested and exalted in this work of the reparation of mankind -- was left unto the care and contrivance of infinite wisdom. From the eternal springs thereof must this work arise, or cease for ever.

To trace some of the footsteps of divine wisdom herein, in and from the revelation of it by its effects, is that which lieth before us. And sundry things appear to have been necessary hereunto. As --

1. That all things required unto our restoration, the whole work wherein they consist, must be wrought in our own nature -- in the nature that had sinned, and which was to be restored and brought unto glory. On supposition, I say, of the salvation of our nature, no satisfaction can be made unto the glory of God for the sin of that nature, but in the nature itself that sinned and is to be saved. For whereas God gave the law unto man as an effect of his wisdom and holiness, which he transgressed in his disobedience, wherein could the glory of them or either of them be exalted, if the same law were complied withal and fulfilled in and by a nature of another kind -- suppose that of angels? For, notwithstanding any such obedience, yet the law might be unsuited unto the nature of man, whereunto it was originally prescribed. Wherefore, there would be a veil drawn over the glory of God in giving the law unto man, if it were not fulfilled by obedience

in the same nature; nor can there be any such relation between the obedience and sufferings of one nature in the stead and for the disobedience of another, as that glory might ensue unto the wisdom, holiness, and justice of God, in the deliverance of that other nature thereon.

The Scripture abounds in the declaration of the necessity hereof, with its condecency unto divine wisdom. Speaking of the way of our relief and recovery, "Verily," says the apostle, "he took not on him the nature of angels," Heb. ii. 16. Had it been the recovery of angels which he designed, he would have taken their nature on him. But this would have been no relief at all unto us, no more than the assuming of our nature is of advantage unto the fallen angels. The obedience and sufferings of Christ therein extended not at all unto them -- nor was it just or equal that they should be relieved thereby. What, then, was required unto our deliverance? Why, saith he, "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same," verse 14. It was human nature (here expressed by flesh and blood) that was to be delivered; and therefore it was human nature wherein this deliverance was to be wrought. This the same apostle disputes at large, Rom. v. 12-19. The sum is, that "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one" (of one man, Jesus Christ, verse 15) "are many made righteous." The same nature that sinned must work out the reparation and recovery from sin. So he affirms again, 1 Cor. xv. 21, "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." No otherwise could our ruin be retrieved, nor our deliverance from sin with all the consequents of it be effected, -- which came by man, which were committed and deserved in and by our nature, -- but by man, by one of the same nature with us. This, therefore, in the first place, became the wisdom of God, that the world of deliverance should be wrought in our own nature, -- in the nature that had sinned.

2. That part of human nature wherein or whereby this work was to be effected, as unto the essence or substance of it, was to be derived from the common root or stock of the same nature, in our first parents. It would not suffice hereunto that God should create a man, out of the dust of the earth or out of nothing, of the same nature in general with ourselves; for there would be no cognation or alliance between him and us, so that we should be any way concerned in what he did or suffered: for this advance depends solely hereon, that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men," Acts xvii. 26. Hence it is that the genealogy of Christ is given us in the Gospel -- not only from Abraham, to declare the faithfulness of God in the promise that he should be of his seed, but from Adam also, to manifest his relation unto the common stock of our nature, and unto all mankind therein.

The first discovery of the wisdom of God herein was in that primitive revelation, that the Deliverer should be of "the seed of the woman," Gen. iii. 15. No other but he who was so could "break the serpent's head," or "destroy the work of the devil," so as that we might be delivered and restored. He was not only to be partaker of our nature, but he was so to be, by being "the seed of the woman," Gal. iv. 4. He was not to be created out of nothing, nor to be made of the dust of the earth, but so "made of a woman," as that thereby he might receive our nature from the common root and spring of it. Thus "he who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one," Heb. ii. 11, -- "of the same mass, of one nature and blood; whence he is not ashamed to call them brethren. This also was to be brought forth from the treasures of infinite wisdom.

3. This nature of ours, wherein the work of our recovery and salvation is to be wrought and performed, was not to be so derived from the original stock of our kind or race as to bring along with it the same taint of sin, and the same liableness unto guilt, upon its own account, as accompany every other individual

person in the world; for, as the apostle speaks, "such a high priest became us" (and as a high priest was he to accomplish this work) "as was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." For, if this nature in him were so defiled as it is in us -- if it were under a deprivation of the image of God, as it is in our persons before our renovation -- it could do nothing that should be acceptable unto him. And if it were subject unto guilt on its own account, it could make no satisfaction for the sin of others. Here, therefore, again occurs dignus vindice nodus -- a difficulty which nothing but divine wisdom could expedite.

To take a little farther view hereof, we must consider on what grounds these things (spiritual defilement and guilt) do adhere unto our nature, as they are in all our individual persons. And the first of these is -- that our entire nature, as unto our participation of it, was in Adam, as our head and representative. Hence his sin became the sin of us all -- is justly imputed unto us and charged on us. In him we all sinned; all did so who were in him as their common representative when he sinned. Hereby we became the natural "children of wrath," or liable unto the wrath of God for the common sin of our nature, in the natural and legal head or spring of it. And the other is -- that we derive our nature from Adam by the way of natural generation. By that means alone is the nature of our first parents, as defiled, communicated unto us; for by this means do we become to appertain unto the stock as it was degenerate and corrupt. Wherefore that part of our nature wherein and whereby this great work was to be wrought, must, as unto its essence and substance, be derived from our first parents, -- yet so as never to have been in Adam as a common representative, nor be derived from him by natural generation.

The bringing forth of our nature in such an instance -- wherein it should relate no less really and truly unto the first Adam than we do ourselves, whereby there is the strictest alliance of nature between him so partaker of it and us, yet so as not in the least to participate of the guilt of the first sin, nor of the defilement of our nature thereby -- must be an effect of infinite wisdom beyond the conceptions of any created understanding. And this, as we know, was done in the person of Christ; for his human nature was never in Adam as his representative, nor was he comprised in the covenant wherein he stood. For he derived it legally only from and after the first promise, when Adam ceased to be a common person. Nor did it proceed from him by natural generation -- the only means of the derivation of its depravation and pollution; for it was a "holy thing," created in the womb of the Virgin by the power of the Most High. "O the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

It was necessary, therefore, on all these considerations -- it was so unto the glory of the holy properties of the divine nature, and the reparation of the honour of his holiness and righteousness -- that he by whom the work of our recovery was to be wrought should be a man, partaker of the nature that sinned, yet free from all sin, and all the consequent of it. And this did divine wisdom contrive and accomplish in the human nature of Jesus Christ.

But yet, in the second place, on all the considerations before mentioned, it is no less evident that this work could not be wrought or effected by him who was no more than a mere man, who had no nature but ours -- who was a human person, and no more. There was no one act which he was to perform, in order unto our deliverance, but did require a divine power to render it efficacious. But herein lies that great mystery of godliness whereunto a continual opposition hath been made by the gates of hell; as we manifested in the entrance of this discourse. But whereas it belongs unto the foundation of our faith, we must inquire into it, and confirm the truth of it with such demonstrations as divine revelation doth accommodate us withal. And three things are to be spoken unto.

First, We are to give in rational evidences that the recovery of mankind was not to be effected by any one who was a mere man, and no more, though it were absolutely necessary that a man he should be; he must be God also. Secondly, We must inquire into the suitableness or condecency unto divine wisdom in the redemption and salvation of the church by Jesus Christ, who was God and man in one person; and thereon give a description of the person of Christ and its constitution, which suiteth all the ends of infinite wisdom in this glorious work. The first of these falls under sundry plain demonstrations.

1. That human nature might be restored, or any portion of mankind be eternally saved unto the glory of God, it was necessary, as we proved before, that an obedience should be yielded unto God and his law, which should give and bring more glory and honour unto his holiness than there was dishonour reflected on it by the disobedience of us all. Those who are otherwise minded care not what becomes of the glory of God, so that wicked, sinful man may be saved 201one way or other. But these thoughts spring out of our apostasy, and belong not unto that estate wherein we loved God above all, and pr

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