

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION Chapter 2

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AS REVEALED IN MAN

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Transcript

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Chapter 2

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Creation makes manifest the Creator, and having considered some of the mighty products of Omnipotence therein, we turn now to that which comes closer home unto each of us. We are not obliged to go far afield and turn our attention to objects in the heavens or the depths of the ocean in order to find evidences of God's existence—we may discover them in ourselves. Man himself exhibits a Divine Maker, yea, he is the chief of His mundane works. Accordingly we find that Genesis I, after giving a brief but vivid account of how the heavens and earth were called into existence by a Divine fiat and both of them furnished for the benefit of the human race, God made man last—as though to indicate he is the climax of His works. In each other instance we are told "God said," "God called," "God created," etc., but in our case there is a marked difference: "And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness" (1:26), as if to signify (speaking after the manner of men) there was a special conference of the Divine Trinity in connection with the formation of that creature who should be made in the Divine image. All the works of God bear the impress of His wisdom, but man alone has stamped upon him the Divine likeness. The fact that man was made by the Triune God and "in Their image" plainly indicates that he was constituted a tripartite being, consisting of spirit and soul and body—the first being capable of God-consciousness, the second of self-consciousness, and the third of sense-consciousness. The dual expression, "in Our image, after Our likeness," imports a twofold resemblance between God and man in his original condition: the former referring to the holiness of his nature, the latter to the character of his soul—which competent theologians have rightly distinguished as "the moral image" and the "natural image" of God in man. That is a real and necessary distinction, and unless it be observed we inevitably fall into error when contemplating the effects of man's defection from God. To the question, Did man lose the image of God by the Fall? the orthodox rightly answer in the affirmative; yet many of them are quite at a loss to understand such verses as Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9, which teach that fallen man retains the image of God. It was the moral image which was destroyed when he apostatized, and which is restored to him again at regeneration (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Fallen man is made in the image of his fallen parent, as Genesis 5:3, and Psalm

51:5 solemnly attest. But fallen man still has plainly stamped upon him the natural image of God, evidencing his Divine origin. What that "natural image" consists in we will now consider. We have called attention to some of the wonders observable in the human body, and if God bestowed such exquisite workmanship upon the casket, what must be the nature of the gem within it! That "gem" is the spirit and soul of man, which was made in the natural image of God—we shall not here distinguish between them, but treat of them together under the generic term "soul." If the human body bears upon it the impress of the Divine hand, much more so does the soul with its truly remarkable faculties and capabilities. The soul is endowed with understanding, will, moral perception, memory, imagination, affections. Man is comprised and possessed of something more than matter, being essentially a spiritual and rational being, capable of communion with his Maker. There was given unto man a nature nobler than of any other creature on earth. Man is an intelligent being, capable of thinking and reasoning, which as much excels the instinct of animals as the finished product of the artist's brush does the involuntary raising of his hand to protect his face, or the shutting of his eye without thought when wind blows dust into it. From whence, then, has man derived his intelligence? The soul is certainly something distinct from the body. Our very consciousness informs us that we possess an understanding, yea, an intelligent entity which, though we cannot see, yet is known by its operations of thinking, reasoning, remembering. But matter possesses no such properties as those, no, not in any combination of its elements. If matter could think, then it would still be able to do so after the soul was absent from the body. Again—if matter had the power of thought, then it would be able to think only of those things which are tangible and material, for no cause can ever produce effects superior to itself. Intelligence can no more issue from non-intelligence than the animate from the non-animate. A stone cannot think, nor a log of wood understand a syllogism. But the human soul is not only capable of thinking, it can also commune with itself, rejoice in itself. Nor is its ability to rationalize restricted to itself: it is so constituted that it can apprehend and discourse of things superior to itself. So far from being tied down to the material realm, it can soar into the heavens, cognize the angels, and commune with the Father of spirits. Consider the vastness of the soul's capacity! What cannot it encompass? It can form a concept of the whole world, and visualize scenes thousands of miles away. As one has pointed out, "it is suited to all objects, as the eye to all colors or the ear to all sounds." How capacious is the memory to retain so much, and such variety! Consider the quickness of the soul's motions: nothing is so swift in the whole course of nature. Thought is far more rapid in its action than the light-waves of ether: in a single moment fancy may visit the Antipodes. With equal facility and agility it can transport itself into the far away past or the distant future. As the desires of the soul are not bounded by material objects, so neither are its motions restrained by them. Consider also its power of volition. The will is the servant of the soul, carrying out its behests, yet it knows not how its commissions are received. Now matter has no power of choice, and what it is devoid of it certainly cannot convey. As man's intelligence must have its source in the supreme Mind, so his power of volition must proceed from the supreme Will. The nature of man also bears witness to the existence of God in the operations and reflections of his conscience. If the external marvels of creation exhibit the wisdom and power of the Creator, this mysterious faculty of the soul as clearly exemplifies His holiness and justice. Whatever be its nature or howsoever we define it, its forceful presence within presents us with a unique phenomenon. This moral sense in man challenges investigation and demands an explanation—an investigation which the Infidel is most reluctant to seriously make, and for which he is quite unable to furnish satisfactory explanation. "Conscience is a court always in session and imperative in its summons. No man can evade it or silence its accusations. It is a complete assize. It has a judge on its bench, and that judge will not be bribed into a lax decision. It has its witness stand, and can bring witnesses from the whole territory of the past life. It has its jury, ready to give a verdict, "guilty" or "not guilty," in strict accordance with the evidence, and it has its

sheriff, Remorse, with his whip of scorpions, ready to lash the convicted soul. The nearest thing in the world to the bar of God is the court of conscience. And though it be for a time drugged into a partial apathy or intoxicated with worldly pleasure, the time comes when in all the majesty of its imperial authority this court calls to its bar every transgressor and holds him to a strict account" (A. T. Pierson). Conscience is that which conveys to the soul a realization of right and wrong. It is that inward faculty which passes judgment upon the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our desires and deeds. It is an ethical instinct, a faculty of moral sensibility, which both informs and impresses its possessor, being that which, basically, constitutes us responsible creatures. It is an inward faculty which is not only of a vastly superior order, but is far keener in perception than any of the bodily senses: it both sees, hears and feels. Its office is twofold: to warn us against sin and to prompt us unto the performance of duty—and this it does according to the light shining into it—from natural reason and Divine revelation. Though the heathen be without the Bible, yet their conscience passes judgment on natural duties and unnatural sins. Hence, the more spiritual light a person has, the greater his responsibility, and it is according to that principle and on that basis he will be dealt with at the grand Assize. "That servant which knew his lord's will and prepared not, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:47-48). Punishment will be proportioned to light received and privileges enjoyed. To this moral sensibility of man as the basis of his accountability, the Apostle refers in Romans 2: "For when the Gentiles [heathen] which have not the Law, do by nature the things contained in the Law, these, having not the Law, are a law unto themselves" (v. 14). The "nature" of anything is the peculiarity of its being, that in virtue of which it is what it is: it is that which belongs to its original constitution, in contradistinction from all that is taught or acquired. This ethical sense is an original part of his being, and is not the product of education—a power of discrimination by which he distinguishes between right and wrong is created in man. The natural light of reason enables the uncivilized to distinguish between virtue and vice. All, save infants and idiots, recognize the eternal difference between good and evil: they instinctively, or rather intuitively, feel this or that course is commendable or censurable. They have a sense of duty: the natural light of reason conveys the same. Even the most benighted and degraded give evidence that they are not without a sense of obligation: however primitive and savage be their mode of life, yet the very fact that they frame some form of law and order for the community, proves beyond any doubt they have a definite notion of justice and rectitude. The very nature of the heathen, their sense of right and wrong, leads to the performing of moral actions. In confirmation thereof, the Apostle went on to say, "which show the work of the Law written in their heart, their conscience also bearing witness [to the existence of God and their accountability to Him], and their thoughts the meanwhile [or "between themselves," margin] accusing or excusing [the conduct of themselves and of] one another" (Rom. 2:15). The "work of the Law" is not to be understood as a power of righteousness operating within them, still less as their actual doing of what the Law requires; but rather the function or design of the Law, which is to direct action. The natural light of reason informs them of the distinction between right and wrong. "Their conscience also bearing witness," that is, in addition to the dictates of reason, for they are by no means the same thing. Knowledge of duty and the actions of conscience are quite distinct: the one reveals what is right, the other approves of it, and condemns the contrary. They have sufficient light to judge between what is honest and dishonest, and their moral sense makes this distinction before commission of sin, in the commission, and afterward—as clearly appears in their acquitting or condemning one another. Those who have given Romans 2:14 any serious thought must have been puzzled if not stumbled by the statement that those in Heathendom, "do by nature the things contained in the Law," since they neither love the Lord God with all their hearts nor their neighbors as themselves—the sum of what it requires. The

American Revised Version is much to be preferred: "Do by nature the things of the Law," which describes not the yielding of obedience to the Law, but the performing of its functions. The proper business of the Law is to say, This is right, that is wrong; you will be rewarded for the one, and punished for the other. To command, to forbid, to promise, to threaten—these are "the things of the Law," the "work" of it (v. 15). The Apostle's assertion is this—an assertion exactly accordant with truth, and directly bearing on his argument: "The Gentiles who have no written Divine Law, perform by nature from their very constitution, to themselves and each other, the functions of such a law. They make a distinction between right and wrong, just as they do between truth and falsehood. They cannot help doing so. They often go wrong by mistaking what is right and what is wrong, as they often go wrong by mistaking what is true and what is false. But they approve themselves and one another when doing what they think right; they disapprove themselves and one another when they do what they think to be wrong; so that, though they have no written law, they act the part of a law to themselves. This capacity, this necessity of their nature, distinguishes them from brutes, and makes them the subjects of Divine moral government. In this way they show 'that the work of the law'—the work which the Law does—is 'written in their hearts,' woven in their constitution, by the actings of the power we call conscience. It is just, then, that they should be punished for doing what they know to be wrong, or might have known to be wrong" (Professor Brown). Man is the only earthly creature endowed with conscience. The beasts have consciousness and a limited power to acquire knowledge, but that is something very different. Certain animals can be made to obey their masters. With the aid of a stick, even a cow may be taught to refrain from plucking the green leaves over the garden fence, which her mouth craves—the memory of the beatings she has received for disobedience incline her to forgo her inclinations. Much more intelligent is a domesticated dog: he can be trained to understand that certain actions will meet with reward, while others will receive punishment. But memory is a very different thing from that ethical monitor within the human breast, which weighs whatever is presented to the mind and passes judgment either for or against all our actions, secretly acquainting the soul with the right and wrong of things. Wherever we go, this sentinel accompanies us: whatever we think or do, it records a verdict. Much of our peace of mind is the fruit of a non-accusing conscience, while not a little of our disquietude is occasioned by the charges of wrong-doing which conscience brings against us. Conscience is an integral part of that light which "lightens every man which comes into the world." Forceful testimony is borne to its potency by the rites of the heathen and their self-imposed penances, which are so many attempts to appease the ones they feel they have offended. There is in every man that which reproves him for his sins, yea, for those to which none other is privy, and therefore the wicked flee when no man pursues (Prov. 28:1). At times the stoutest are made to quail. The most hardened have their seasons of alarm. The specter of past sins haunts them in the night watches. Boast loudly as they may that they fear nothing, yet "there were they in great fear where no fear was" (Ps. 53:5)—an inward horror where there was no outward occasion for uneasiness. When there is no reason for fright, the wicked are suddenly seized with panic and made to tremble like an aspen leaf, so that they are afraid of their own shadows. The fearful reality of conscience is plainly manifested by the fact that men who are naturally inclined to evil nevertheless disapprove of that which is evil, and approve of the very good which they practice not. Even though they do not so audibly, the vicious secretly admire the pure, and while some be sunk so low they will scarcely acknowledge it to themselves, nevertheless they wish they could be like the morally upright. The most blameworthy will condemn certain forms of evil in others, thus evincing they distinguish between good and evil. Whence does that arise? By what rule do they measure moral actions, but by an innate principle? But how comes man to possess that principle? It is not an attribute of reason, for at times reason will inform its possessor that a certain course of conduct would result in gain to him, but conscience moves him to act in a way which he knows will issue in temporal loss. Nor is it a product of the

will, for conscience often acts in opposition to the will, and no effort of the will can still it. It is a separate faculty which, in various degrees of enlightenment and sensitiveness, is found in civilized and uncivilized. Now even common sense tells us that someone other than ourselves originated this faculty. No law can be without a lawgiver. From whence, then, this law? Not from man, for he would annihilate it if he could. It must have been imparted by some higher Hand, which Hand alone can maintain it against all the violence of its owner, who, were it not for this restraining monitor, would quickly reduce the world to a charnel house. If, then, we reason rationally, we are forced to argue thus: I find myself naturally obliged to do this and shun that, therefore there must be a Superior who obliges me. If there were no Superior, I should myself be the sole judge of good and evil, yea, I should be regulated only by expediency and recognize no moral distinctions. Were I the lord of that principle or law which commands me, I should find no conflict within myself between reason and appetite. The indubitable fact is that conscience has an authority for man that cannot be accounted for except by its being the voice of God within him. If conscience were entirely isolated from God, and were independent of Him, it could not make the solemn, and sometimes the terrible impressions it does. No man would be afraid of himself if self were not connected with a higher Being than himself. As God has not left Himself without witness among the lower creatures (Acts 14:17), neither has He left Himself without witness within man's own breast. There is not a rational member of the human race who has not at some time more or less smarted under the lashings of conscience. The hearts of princes, in the midst of their pleasures, have been stricken with anguish while their favorites were flattering them. Those inward torments are not ignorant frights experienced only by children, which reason throws off later on, for the stronger reason grows, the sharper the stings of conscience, and not the least so in maturity and old age. It often operates when wickedness is most secret. Numerous cases are on record of an overwhelming terror overtaking wrongdoers when their crimes were known to none, and they have condemned themselves and given themselves up to justice. Could that self-accuser originate from man's own self? He who loves himself would, were it possible, destroy that which disturbs him. Certainly conscience has received no authority from its possessor to lash himself, to spoil the pleasures of sin, to make him "like the troubled sea, which cannot rest." The very fact there is that in man which condemns him for sins committed in secret, argues there is a God, and that he is accountable unto Him. He has an instinctive dread of a Divine Judge who will yet arraign him. "They know the judgment of God" (Rom. 1:32) by an inward witness. It is a just provision of the Lord that those who will not reverently fear Him, have a tormenting fear of the future. Why is it that, despite all their efforts to escape from the conclusion that God is, they dread a retribution beyond death?—often demonstrated by the most callous wretches in their last hours by asking for a chaplain or "priest." If there be no God, why do men strive to silence conscience and dispel its terrors? And why are their efforts so unavailing? Since they cannot still its accusations, some Higher Power must maintain it within the soul. That the most enlightened nations recognize men have no right to force the conscience, is a tacit acknowledgment it is above human jurisdiction, answerable only to its Author. Conscience is the vicegerent of God in the soul, and will torment the damned for all eternity.

Source:

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