

The Total Depravity of Man Chapter 13

REMEDY

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

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Perhaps some readers are inclined to demur thus: "Why devote a separate section to this? We already know all about it. The remedy for ruined man is to be found in God's salvation." But that is a very superficial view, and a wrong one too; for the greatest and grandest of all the wonderful works of God ought never to be spoken of so lightly or dismissed so cursorily. Moreover, the matter is far from being as simple as that; and since there is such widespread ignorance concerning the disease itself it is necessary to examine closely and in some detail a description of its cure. The fact needs to be deeply realized at the outset that as far as all natural wit is concerned the condition of fallen man is beyond repair, that as far as self-help or human skill is concerned his case is hopeless. None other than the Son of God Himself declared, "With men this is impossible" (Matt. 19:26); and it is only as we perceive, to some extent at least, the various respects in which that impossibility lies that we can begin to appreciate the miracle of grace which secures the recovery of lost sinners.

Man's Deadly Disease The deadly disease which has seized man is not a simple but a compound one, consisting of not a single element but a combination, each of which is fatal in itself. Look at some of them. Man's very nature is thoroughly corrupt, yet he is in no way horrified because of it. Not only is sin part and parcel of his being, but he is deeply in love with it. He is filled with enmity against God, and his heart is as hard as a stone. He is wholly paralyzed Godward, and completely under the dominion and sway of Satan. He is devoid of righteousness, a guilty sinner without a spark of holiness, a moral leper. He is utterly incapable of helping himself, for he is "without strength" (Rom. 5:6). The wrath of God abides on him, and he is dead in trespasses and sins. Fallen man is not merely in danger of ruin and destruction, but is already sunk in them. He is like a brand on the very edge of a raging fire, which will swiftly be consumed unless the divine hand plucks him out (Zech. 3:2). His condition is not only wretched but desperate, inasmuch as he is altogether incapable of devising any expedient for his cure. The sinner is guilty, and no creature can make an atonement for him. He is an outcast from God, terrified by His very perfections; therefore he does his best to banish Him from his thoughts. No tongue can express or heart be suitably affected with the woeful plight and abject misery of the natural man. And such will be his condition forever unless God intervenes. Yet all of this presents only one side of the problem—the easier one—which stands in the way of man's recovery. To finite intelligence

it would seem that a creature so vile and polluted, so wayward and rebellious, so obnoxious to the righteous God, is beyond all hope; surely it would not comport with the divine honor to save such a wretch. How a transgressor could be pardoned consistently with the requirements of that law which he had despised and flouted, and be delivered from the penalty which it justly demands, and how he could be brought back into God's favor in concord with the maintaining of the divine government, presented a difficulty which no angelic wisdom could solve. It was a secret hidden in God till He was pleased to make it known. There are those—with no regard to the Word of truth—who suppose that God must pardon and receive into favor those who throw down the weapons of their rebellion against Him and ask for mercy. But the solution to the problem is far from being as simple as that. Human reason can advance no valid and sufficient argument why God should forgive the sinner merely because he repents, or that this could be done consistently with His moral government. Rather the contrary is evident. The contrition of a criminal will not exonerate him in a human court of law, for it offers no satisfaction and reparation for his crimes. Any sinner who cherishes the idea that his repentance gives him a claim to divine clemency and favor demonstrates that he is a total stranger to true repentance; and he will never repent until he abandons such presumption. Universal experience and observation, as well as Scripture, fully attest the fact that no one ever repents while he is left to himself. He is not made the subject of those divine operations to which he has no claim, and which mere reason is incapable of concluding that God will grant. It is obvious that an adequate remedy for the complicated and fatal malady by which man is stricken must be of God. It must be of His devising, His providing, His applying, His making effectual. That is another way of saying it must be wholly of Him from start to finish, for if any part is left to the sinner, at any stage, it is certain to fail. Yet it must be pointed out once more that God was under no obligation whatever to make such provision, for when man deliberately apostatized from Him he forfeited all favorable regard from his Maker. Not only might God righteously inflict the full penalty of His broken law on the entire human race; consistent with His holy nature He could have left all mankind to perish eternally in that condemnation into which they had cast themselves. Had He utterly forsaken the whole of Adam's apostate posterity and left them as remediless as the fallen angels, it would have been no reflection whatever on His goodness, but rather a display of His inexorable justice. Therefore, whenever redemption is mentioned, it is constantly described as proceeding from sovereign grace and mere mercy (Eph. 1:3-11). Yet something more than a gracious design was required on God's part in order for any sinner to be saved. Grace was indeed the source of God's action, yet it was not sufficient of itself. One may have the most admirable intentions, yet be unable to carry them out. How often is the deep love of a mother impotent in the presence of her suffering child! There has to be the putting forth of divine power also if the purpose of grace is to be accomplished. And it can be no ordinary power, but, as Scripture affirms, "the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph. 1:19). It calls for the exercise of far more might to recreate a fallen creature than it did to create the universe out of nothing. Why so? Because in that there was no opposition, nothing to resist God's working; whereas in the case of fallen man there is the hostility of his will, the alienation of his heart, the inveterate enmity of his carnal mind, to be overcome. Furthermore, the malice and opposition of Satan must be neutralized, for he endeavors with all his might to retain his hold on his victims. The devil must be despoiled of the advantage which he had gained, for it is not consistent with the glory of God that he should be left to triumph. But something more than the exercise of God's power was still required. Omniscience must be exercised as well as omnipotence. Strength itself will not build a house; there must also be art to contrive and proportion the materials. Skill is the chief requirement of an architect. Let that faintly illustrate what we are here trying to express. Those who are saved are not only the products of God's amazing grace and almighty power but also "his workmanship" (Eph. 2:10). God's wisdom wonderfully appears in the beautiful fabric of His grace, in the

spiritual temple which He erects for His own residence. He has "wrought for us the selfsame thing" (II Cor. 5:5). As stones are carved and polished, so believers are made "living stones" in that edifice in which God will dwell forever. Now that which is exquisite in execution points to the excellent skill in its planning. The counterpart of God's law in the hearts of His quickened children is no less the fruit of His wisdom than the writing of it on the tables of stone. His wisdom was shown in the first framing of it; His wisdom is apparent also in the imprinting of it upon the understanding and the affections. God's Redemptive Cure The depths and riches of God's wisdom are to be found neither in the marvels of creation nor in the mysteries of providence. Rather they are most fully and illustriously revealed in the plan and fruits of redemption. This is clear from several scriptures. In the God-Man Mediator "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). He is expressly designated "the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24). "Unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places" is now being made known by means of "the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). The devising of a method whereby a part of mankind should be recovered out of their miserable state is indeed the masterpiece of divine wisdom. Nothing but Omniscience could have found a way to effect such a triumph in a manner suited to all the divine perfections. The wise men of this world are termed "princes" (I Cor. 2:6, 8), but angels are designated "principalities and powers in the heavenlies" because of their superior dignity, wisdom and strength. Yet though they are so great in intelligence, always beholding the face of the Father, a new and grander discovery of God's wisdom is made to them through the church, for His work in the redemption of it far transcends their understanding. The celestial hierarchies had witnessed the dishonor done to the authority of God and the discord brought into the sphere of His government by the sin and rebellion of Adam. It was therefore necessary, morally speaking, that the defiance of God's rule should be dealt with, and that the affront to His throne should be rectified. This could not be done except by the infliction of that punishment which in the unalterable rule and standard of divine justice was necessary. The dismissal of sin on any other terms would leave the rule of God under unspeakable dishonor and confusion. As John Owen stated: 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 punishment equal unto the demerit of disobedience if man should fall into it: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely 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.

Not only was it necessary for the honor of God's righteousness, as He is the moral Governor and supreme Judge of all the earth, that sin should be summarily punished; it was required that there should be obedience to God, such obedience as would bring more glory to Him than the dishonor and reproach which resulted from the disobedience of man. We again quote Owen: This was due unto the glory of His holiness in giving the Law. Until this was done, the excellency of that 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 be 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? 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.

It did not become the Rector of the universe to give man a law whose spirituality and equity should never be exemplified in obedience. That law was not imposed, primarily, that man might suffer justly for its transgression, but rather that God should be glorified in its performance. But since Adam's offense brought ruin upon all his posterity, so that they are incapable of meeting its requirements, how could perfect obedience be rendered to it? Omniscience alone could supply the answer. It is truly amazing that the wisdom of God has, by our redemption, made that which is the greatest possible dishonor to Him the occasion of His greatest glory. Yet this is indeed the case. Nothing is so displeasing to the Most High as sin, nothing so dishonoring to Him, for it is in its very nature enmity against Him, contempt of Him. Sin is a reproach to His majesty, an insult to His holiness, an insurrection against His government. And yet this "abominable thing" which He hates (Jer. 44:4), upon which He cannot look but with infinite disfavor (Hab. 1:13), is made the occasion of the greatest possible good. What a miracle of miracles that the Lord makes the wrath of man to praise Him (Ps. 76:10), that the very evil which aims at dethroning Him is transmuted into the means of magnifying Him; indeed, that thereby He has made the grandest manifestation of His perfections. Sin casts contempt upon the law of God, yet through redemption that law is made supremely honorable. Never was the King of heaven so grievously slighted as when those made in His image and likeness revolted against Him. Never was such honor paid Him as by the way He chose to effect the salvation of His people. Never was the holiness of God so slighted as when man preferred to give allegiance to that old serpent the devil. Never did God's holiness shine forth so illustriously as in the victory He gained over Satan. It is equally wonderful that God contrived a way whereby a flagrant transgressor should become not guilty, and that he who was completely destitute of righteousness should be justified, or pronounced righteous, by the Judge of all the earth. Had such things as these been submitted for solution, they had forever appeared to be irreconcilable contradictions to all finite understandings. It seems to be utterly impossible for a condemned culprit to be cleared of any charge against him. Sin necessarily entails punishment; how then can any committer of it escape the "due reward" of his deeds (Luke 23:41) except by a manifest violation of justice? God has declared plainly that He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:7). He has determined by an unalterable decree that sin shall be paid its wages. Then how can the guilty be exempted from the sentence of death? Nor is the problem any less formidable of how God can, with perfect equity, declare righteous those who have not themselves met the requirements of the law. To judge as entitled to the reward of obedience those whose record is a lifelong disobedience appears to be worse than an irregularity. Nevertheless, Omniscience contrived a solution to both of these problems, a solution which is in every respect a perfect and a glorious one. Without that solution, the restoration of any of mankind to favor and fellowship with God and to enjoyment of Him was utterly impossible. It was so not only because of the total depravity of man himself, but because of the concernment of the glory of the divine perfections in our sin and apostasy. Not only was man stricken with a fatal disease, from which there was not the slightest hope of deliverance unless a supernatural remedy be provided, but the government of God had been so grievously outraged by man's revolt that full compensation must be made to His insulted scepter, and complete satisfaction offered to His broken law, before the throne of heaven could be satisfied. Great beyond conception to finite intelligence was the difficulty of repairing the damage worked in the whole of our constitution by sin, yet greater far were the obstacles which stood in the way of the exercise of God's grace and mercy in restoring the outcast. That way of restoration must be one wherein God was magnified. His justice must be vindicated, His threatenings realized, His holiness glorified. The manner in which all of those ends were achieved and those results secured is the adoring marvel alike of the redeemed and of the angels. As others before us have pointed out, if the divine government was to be vindicated the whole work of our recovery must be performed in our nature. The very nature of those who had sinned was to be recovered

from the ruin of the fall and brought to everlasting well-being. Human nature was not only to be freed of any pollution, but made intrinsically holy. In order to effect the salvation of sinners, no satisfaction could be made to the glory of God for the vitiation of apostate man's nature with all its evil fruits, but only in the nature of those who had sinned and were to be saved. Since God's giving of the law to our first parents was itself an effect of His wisdom and holiness, wherein could the glory of them be exalted if that rule of righteousness were complied with by a nature of a totally different kind? Should an angel fulfill it, his obedience would be no proof that the law was suited to man's nature, to which it was originally prescribed; rather would an angel's compliance with the law have been a reflection on the divine goodness in giving it to men. Nor could there have been the necessary relation between the nature of the substitute and those on whose behalf he acted and suffered; and therefore such an arrangement would not have magnified the divine wisdom, but would have been at best an unsatisfactory expedient. God's Representative The Scriptures are very explicit in their teaching about the necessity of the same nature in the representative and in those whom he represented, as being consistent with God's wisdom. Speaking of the way of our relief, the apostle declared, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [the Deliverer] also himself likewise took part of the same" (Heb. 2:14). It was human nature—here expressed by "flesh and blood"—that was to be delivered, and therefore it was human nature in which this deliverance was to be wrought. The apostle entered into considerable detail on this point in Romans 5:12-21, the sum of which is in verse 19: "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one ['by one man,' v.15] shall many be made righteous." The same nature that transgressed must work out the remedy. This truth is reiterated in I Corinthians 15:21: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." Our ruin could not be retrieved, nor deliverance from our guilt be effected, except by one in our own nature. Observe that the deliverance needed to be accomplished by one whose substance was derived from the common stock of our first parents. It would not have met the exigencies of the case for God to create a second man out of the dust of the ground, or out of anything which was different in nature from ourselves; in such a case there would have been no relation between him and us, therefore we could have been in no way concerned in anything he did or suffered. That alliance depended solely on the fact that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26). But another difficulty was presented, one which also would have proved insurmountable to all created intelligences had not "the only wise God" revealed His provision for resolving it. Any deliverer of sinful men must derive his nature from their original stock, yet he must not bring along with it the least taint of corruption or liability to guilt on his own account; for if his nature were defiled, if it lacked the image of God, it could do nothing that would be acceptable to Him. And were he subject to the penalty of the law on his own account, he could make no satisfaction for the sins of others. But since every descendant of Eve is shaped in sin and conceived in iniquity, how could any of her seed be sinless? Only Omniscience could bring an immaculately clean thing out of thorough uncleanness. We must not lose sight of the grounds on which defilement and guilt adhere to our nature, as they do in all individuals alike. First, our participation in sin was in Adam as our covenant head and federal representative. Therefore his offense was ours also, and justly imputed to us. Because we sinned in him, we became "by nature the children of wrath," the subjects of God's judicial displeasure. Second, we derived our nature from Adam by way of natural generation, so that his defilement is communicated to all his offspring. We are the degenerate plants of a degenerate stock. Thus, still another difficulty was presented: The nature of a deliverer for fallen man must, as to its substance, be derived from our first parents, yet so as not to have been in Adam as a legal representative, nor be derived from him by natural generation. But how could it be that his nature should relate as truly to Adam as does ours, while neither partaking of the guilt of Adam's transgression nor participating in his pollution? Such a one was utterly beyond the concept of

every finite mind. We have considered some of the difficulties—yes, seeming impossibilities—which stood in the way of the recovery of any of the fallen sons of Adam, showing that something more than a benign purpose of grace on God's part was required to effect that recovery—something more than the putting forth of His mighty power. The obstacles which needed to be removed were so many and so great that "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10) also needed to be called into play. The difficulty from the human side was the desperate state of the sinner. How could his darkness be changed into light, his enmity into love, his unwillingness into willingness, without any violence being done to his moral agency? The obstacles from the divine side were how the Most High could restore such wretches to His favor, and yet not compromise His perfections; how He could have dealings with moral lepers without sully His holiness, clear the guilty without repudiating His law, exercise mercy consistently with His justice. To provide a remedy for such a malady, and to do so in a way that honored the throne of God, was far beyond the reach of created intelligence. In order to save a law-cursed and hell-deserving sinner it was necessary that some method and means be devised whereby he could be delivered from all the consequences of the fall, and at the same time meet all the requirements of the divine government. Sin had to be dealt with unsparingly, yet transgressors be exempted from their merited doom. Full conformity to the law must be accomplished, yet by one in the same nature as those who had violated it. That was clearly signified by the Old Testament types: the redeemer had to be a kinsman of those he befriended (Lev. 25:25; Ruth 4:4-6). Moreover, the requirements of the law could be met only by one whose nature was derived from the same stock as those on whose behalf he transacted, yet his humanity must not be tainted in the least degree by their common defilement. It was necessary that he be a man of the seed of Adam (Luke 3:31) and of Eve (Gen. 3:15), yet an absolutely pure and holy man, for none other could personally and perpetually obey in thought, word and deed. But none such existed: "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccles. 7:20); nor would there ever have been one had the human race been left to itself. Nothing but the manifold wisdom and miracle-working power of God could produce him. Yet one was needed who was more than man, indeed, far superior to those heavenly beings who veil their faces in the presence of Deity, in order to discharge the liabilities of depraved sinners, and renew them in holiness. This is evident from several considerations. The most exalted creature, simply because he is a creature, is obligated to give perfect obedience to his Maker, and therefore could merit nothing on behalf of others. If he fully performed his duty, he would indeed work out a righteousness and be entitled to the reward of the law; but he would need that righteousness on his own account, and therefore it would not be available for imputation to another—still less to many others. Also, the work he had to do—pay in full that incalculable debt incurred by those who were to be saved, make expiation for all their sins, reconcile them to God, restore them to His favor, make them fit for the inheritance of the saints in light—was far beyond the compass of any mere creature, no matter how high his rank in the scale of being. Moreover, any deliverer of the apostate sons of Adam must be essentially and infinitely holy, for none less qualified could put away the infinite guilt of their countless iniquities. In order for any portion of mankind to be eternally saved for the glory of God, it was not only necessary that flawless obedience be given to God's law, but that such obedience bring more honor to His holiness than the dishonor brought on it by the disobedience of all. To affirm that it matters little what becomes of the glory of God so long as poor sinners are saved in some way or other is nothing but a fabrication of the carnal mind. Where God is revered and loved above all, the sentiments will be very different: better far that the whole of Adam's race perish than that the character of Deity be sullied and the foundations of His throne undermined. But such obedience could not be given by any mere creature, no matter how pure his nature or how eminent his rank; there must be somewhat of the divine in it' in order for his performance to have infinite value. Nor might his obedience be constrained, but rather voluntary, for that which is forced does not proceed from love and is valueless.

Also, his conformity to the law could not be one which he was personally responsible to render to it, for in that case it could not be accepted as a due compensation for the disobedience of all. It was not a single individual who was to be recovered from the fall and be brought to glory, but "ten thousands" (Jude 14), each of them with more sins to his account than the hairs on his head; and every sin had in it immeasurable guilt, since it was committed against the infinite Majesty of heaven. The woe to which all of them were consigned was also infinite, its duration being eternal—everything unspeakably dreadful and painful which our nature is capable of suffering. Nor could they be delivered from the awful consequences of their sin without adequate satisfaction being made to the offended justice of God. To assert the contrary is to say it does not matter to God whether He is obeyed or disobeyed, whether He is honored or dishonored in and by His creatures; and that would be to deny His very being, seeing it is directly contrary to the glory of all His perfections. But where was the person who was qualified and capable of making the requisite propitiation for sin? Where was the one fitted to act as mediator between God and men, between the holy One and the unholy? Where was the one who could bestow life on the dead and merit everlasting blessedness for them? If a remedy were to be provided for sinners, it must be one that would restore them to the same state and dignity in which they were placed before the fall. To recover them to any lesser honor and blessedness than that which was theirs originally would not consist with either the divine wisdom or bounty. Owen stated: "Seeing it was the infinite grace, goodness and mercy of God to restore him, it seems agreeable unto the glory of the Divine excellencies in their operations that he should be brought into a better and more honourable condition than that which he had lost." In his primitive state man was subject to none but his Maker. Though he was less in dignity than the angels, yet he owed them no obedience; they were his fellow servants of the Lord God. Obviously (as Owen also pointed out), if the sinner were saved by any mere creature, he could not be restored to his first state and dignity, for in such a case he would owe allegiance and subservience to that creature who had redeemed him—he would become the property of the one who bought him. That would not only introduce the utmost confusion, but the sinner would be in a still worse case than he was before the fall, for he would not be in the position where he owed subjection and honor to God alone. From the foregoing it will be seen that the only sufficient deliverer of fallen men must be one possessed of infinite dignity and worthiness, in order that he might be capable of meriting infinite blessings. He must be a person of infinite power and wisdom, for the work he must perform could be successfully accomplished by none less. But another requisite was that he should be a person who was infinitely dear to God the Father, in order to give his transactions an infinite value in the Father's esteem, and that the Father's love to him might balance the offense and provocation of our sins. He must also be a person who could act in this matter in his own right, who in himself was not a servant and subject of the Most High; otherwise he could not merit anything for those he wished to save. Moreover, he must be a person possessed of infinite mercy and love, for none other would voluntarily undertake a task so arduous, so humiliating, and involving such unspeakable suffering, for creatures so unworthy and foul as fallen men. But where in all the universe was such a one to be found? No created person possessed the necessary qualifications. When the Apostle John saw the vision of the seven-sealed book, we are told that he wept because no man in heaven or earth was found worthy to open the book (Rev. 5:1-4). Had not the manifold wisdom of God found the solution to all these problems, men and angels alike forever would have been nonplussed by them. The various elements in the complicated problem of salvation for any of Adam's children are far from being exhausted in those already pointed out. Man was made to serve and glorify God. In spirit and soul and body, in all his faculties and powers, in all that was given to and entrusted with him, he was not his own, but was in the place of a servant. The same was equally the case with the angels. But from that condition and status the human race in Adam revolted, determining to be "as gods"-lords over themselves. There is something of that in

every sin: a preferring of self-will to the will of the Almighty. By his insurrection, man fell into complete bondage to sin and Satan. In order to free the sinner from his captivity, it was necessary for any deliverer to take the position man originally occupied. He must enter the place of absolute subjection to God, entirely subordinating his own will to His; for in no other way could adequate compensation be made to the outraged government of God, and the damage done by our first parents be repaired. But how could any uncreated being occupy the position of a creature? With what propriety could one possessed of infinite dignity and excellence suffer such humiliation? How could one who was above all law come under the law and give obedience to it? In his original state man had nothing but what his Creator had given him. Made out of the dust of the ground, he was endowed with intelligence and moral agency—to be employed in the divine service. He was also dependent on his Maker for every breath he drew. But he deliberately left that state of need and dependence, determining to enrich himself and assume absolute dominion. But his awful crime brought upon him and all whom he represented the loss of his original endowments. He lost the image of God, his dominion over the animals, his own soul. Consequently, any savior for him needed to experience the degradation and poverty which the sinner had brought on himself. But how was such an experience possible for anyone who was infinitely rich in himself and in his own right? Since Adam stood for and transacted on the behalf of all whom he legally represented, it follows that any savior would need to serve not in a private capacity but as the covenant head of those whom he was to recover. Finally, since God made the first man lord of the earth, giving him dominion over all creatures, which dominion he forfeited upon his fall, then a deliverer must be capable of recovering that lost state. But where was one that was able to purchase so vast an inheritance? "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). Omniscience found a solution to all those problems which baffled the minds of men. Scripture places not a little emphasis on this. It is referred to as "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory [salvation]" (I Cor. 2:7). "In a mystery" connotes that which is undiscoverable by human reason, incomprehensible to the finite capacity, completely concealed until divinely revealed, and even then beyond our powers to comprehend fully. In Ephesians 1:8 we are told of it: "Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence." The word "abounded" has the force of gushing out, overflowing. It is called "all wisdom" for its excellence. It was not a single concept or act, but a conjunction of many excellent ends and means to the glory of God. To wisdom is added "prudence." The former refers to the eternal contriving of a way, the latter to the ordering of all things for the accomplishment of God's counsel or purpose—wisdom in devising, prudence in executing. In Ephesians 3:10 it is designated "the manifold wisdom of God" because of its complexity and variety: the salvation of sinners, the defeat of Satan, the full discovery of the blessed Trinity in Their different persons, separate operations, combined actions and expressions of goodness; and because of the vastness of its extent. That manifold wisdom of God, now exhibited before the angels in the redemption of the church, is said to be "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). The eternal Son of God, predestined to be the God-Man Mediator, is the grand medium, means and manifestation of the divine omniscience, and therefore He is called "The Word of God" (Rev. 19:13) and "the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24). "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him" (Eph. 1:9-10). We again quote Owen: The mystery of the will of God is His counsels concerning His own eternal glory in the sanctification and salvation of the Church here below, to be united unto that above. The absolute original hereof was in His own good pleasure, or the sovereign acting of His wisdom and will. But it was all to be effected in Christ, which the apostle twice repeats: He would gather "all things into a head in Christ, even in Him," that is, in Him alone.

Thus it is said of Him with respect unto His future incarnation and work of mediation that "the Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was" (Prov. 8:22, 23). The eternal personal existence of the Son of God is supposed in these expressions . . . without it none of these things could be affirmed of Him. But there is a regard in them both unto His future incarnation and the accomplishment of the counsels of God thereby. With respect thereto, God "possessed" Him in the beginning of His way, and set Him up from everlasting. God possessed Him eternally as His essential wisdom, as He was always and is always in the bosom of the Father, in the mutual, ineffable love of the Father and Son, in the eternal bond of the Spirit. But He signally possessed Him "in the beginning of His way" as His wisdom acting in the production of all the ways and works that are outwardly in Him. The beginning of God's way before His works, are His counsels concerning them, even as our counsels are the beginning of our ways with respect unto future works. And He "set Him up from everlasting" as the foundation of all the counsels of His will, in and by whom they were to be executed and accomplished.

Proverbs 8 is an exceedingly profound chapter, but a most blessed one. In it, as verse 1 shows, the voice of "wisdom" is heard. That a person is in view is evident from verse 12: "I wisdom dwell with prudence" and verse 17: "I love them that love me." That it is a divine person may be seen from verse 15: "By me kings reign." But it is equally clear from the statement "I was brought forth" in verses 24 and 25, and from "I was by him [the Father], as one brought up with him" in verse 30, that such expressions could not be predicated of the Son of God absolutely, that is, as coeternal and coequal with the Father. "Wisdom" is here to be understood as the Son as God-Man Mediator in His two natures, as the One ordained to be the incarnate "wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24). When He declares, "The LORD possessed me. . . [the Hebrew is without the 'in'] the beginning of his way, before his works of old" (Prov. 8:22) it is the Mediator speaking in the covenant subsistence which He had with God the Father and the Spirit before the universe was called into existence. The eternal Son was from "the beginning" (cf. Rev. 1:8) of the triune God's "way," for in all things He must "have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). The first counsel of God had respect to the Man Christ Jesus, for He was appointed to be not only the Head of His church but "the firstborn of every creature" (Col. 1:15). The One whom the Lord of hosts addresses as "the man, my fellow" (Zech. 13:7, literal trans.) shared the divine union and glory. He stated, "In the volume [Greek, head] of the book it is written of me" (Heb. 10:7). He was the Object and Subject of God's original decree. Charnock said, Our Redeemer came forth of the womb of a decree from eternity, before He came out of the womb of the Virgin in time. He was hid in the will of God before He was made manifest in the flesh of a Redeemer. He was a Lamb slain in purpose before He was slain upon the cross. He was possessed by God in the beginning or the beginning of His way (the Head of His works), and set up from everlasting to have His delights among the sons of men.

The person of the God-Man Mediator was the origin of the divine counsels. As such, the triune Jehovah "possessed" or embraced Him, as a treasury in which all the divine counsels were laid up, as an efficient Agent for the execution of all His works. Christ was God's first Elect (Isa. 42:1) and then the church was chosen in Him (Eph. 1:4). "I was set up from everlasting" (Prov. 8:23). That declaration concerns Him not essentially as God the Son, but economically as the Mediator: "set up" or literally "anointed" by a covenant constitution and by divine subsistence. Before all worlds Christ was appointed and anointed to His official character. Before God planned to produce any creature, He first "set up" Christ as the great archetype and original. "Then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" (v.30). It is not the Father's complacency in the second Person in the Trinity (as such) which is there in view, but His satisfaction and joy in the Mediator, as God contemplated Him as the repository of

all His designs. The Hebrew word for "brought forth" also signifies "master-builder," and is so rendered in the English Revised Version. How blessedly it describes Him who could be relied upon to carry out the Father's purpose. In God's eternal thoughts the Man Christ Jesus was the object of His love. By Him all things were to be created. By Him vessels were to be formed for His glory. By Him the grand remedy was to be provided for sin's victims. It is indeed lamentable that so few of the Lord's people have been instructed in these "deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:10), for they have been revealed for their edification and consolation. What we have sought to explain in Proverbs 8 throws light on other passages. For example, many a thoughtful person has been puzzled by John 6:62: "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" In what sense had He been in heaven as Man before He became incarnate? Though we are ignorant of this awesome truth, the Old Testament saints were not, as is clear from Psalm 80:17: "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself." Though the Man Christ Jesus had no historical existence, He had a covenant subsistence with the Father, as taken into union with the second Person of the Trinity. As faith gives a present "substance" (the Greek word means "a real subsistence") in the believer's heart and mind of the things hoped for, so that he has a present enjoyment of things yet future, so in the mind of Him before whom all things are ever present, Christ as incarnate was ever a living reality. Thus when God said, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26) the ultimate reference was to the God-Man who is par excellence "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Infinite Wisdom of God Let us pause here and admire and adore the glorious wisdom of God, which found a way to save His people in a manner that was infinitely becoming and honoring to Himself; and let us bow in wonder and worship before the Lord Jesus who, notwithstanding the unspeakable shame and suffering involved, delighted to do the Father's will. The manifold wisdom of God is seen in His choice of the One to be the Head and Saviour of the church, since that One was in every respect fit to perform that office and work, possessed of all the necessary qualifications—in fact He was the only person suited to the work. God's great wisdom appeared in His knowing that Christ was a fit Person. None but Omniscience could have thought of God's dear Son becoming the Redeemer of hell-deserving sinners. God's choice of the Person who was to be the Restorer of His honor, the Vanquisher of Satan, the Victor of death, and the Deliverer of His fallen people, was a perfect one. Who but One endowed with infinite wisdom would have thought of selecting his only begotten Son for such a fearful undertaking? For Christ, as God, is one of the eternal Three who were offended by sin, and from whom men had revolted. They were His avowed enemies, and they deserved His infinite vengeance. Who, then, could have conceived of Him as One who would set His heart on depraved wretches, who would exercise infinite love and pity toward them, would be willing to provide an all-sufficient remedy for all their ills? But even if that choice were made, seemingly insurmountable difficulties would have stood in the way of its realization. How was it possible for a divine person to enter the place of ruined sinners, to come under the law and give perfect obedience to it, and so work out a perfect righteousness for those who had none? And how could it be possible for the holy One to be made a curse, for the Lord of glory to suffer the penalty of the broken law, for the Beloved of the Father to experience the fires of divine wrath, for the Lord of life to die? Such problems as those would have forever baffled all created intelligences. But divine wisdom found a solution. First, the manifold wisdom of God ordained that His dear Son should be constituted the last Adam, that as He made a covenant of works with the first man who was of the earth, so He would make a covenant of grace with the second Man, who is the Lord from heaven. As the first Adam stood as the covenant head and federal representative of all his posterity, so the last Adam would stand as the covenant Head and Representative of all His seed. But as the first Adam broke the covenant of works and brought ruin upon all those for whom he acted, so the last Adam would fulfill the terms of the covenant of grace, and thereby secure the everlasting blessedness of

all on whose behalf He transacted. Accordingly, a covenant was entered into between the Father and the Son, the Former promising a glorious reward upon the Latter's meeting all the conditions. That wonderful transaction is referred to in Psalm 89:3-5: "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto [the antitypical] David [which means 'the beloved'] my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah. And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints." That passage, like Proverbs 8, takes us back to the eternal counsels of God, for verse 19 declares, "Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty." That One was fully able to accomplish heaven's vast and gracious designs. That covenant of grace was a mutual compact voluntarily entered into between the Father and the Son, the One promising a rich reward in return for the fulfillment of the terms agreed upon; the Other solemnly pledging Himself to carry out its stipulations. Many are the scriptures which speak of Christ in connection with the covenant. In Isaiah 42:6 we hear the Father saying to the Son, "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will give thee for a covenant of the people." In Malachi 3:1 Christ is designated "the messenger of the covenant" because He came here to make known its contents and proclaim its glad tidings. In Hebrews 7:22 He is designated "a surety of a better testament [covenant]," in 9:15 "the mediator of the new testament," while in 13:20 we read of "the blood of the everlasting covenant." In that covenant the Son agreed to be the Head of God's elect, and to do all that was required for the divine glory and the securing of the elect's eternal blessedness. Reference is made to that in "his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9). A federal relation then existed between God (Christ) and the church, though this was not made fully manifest until He became incarnate. It was then that the Son was appointed to the mediatorial office, when He was "set up" or "anointed," when He was "brought forth" from the everlasting decree (Prov 8:23-24) and given a covenant subsistence with the triune God. It was proposed and freely agreed upon that the Beloved of the Father should take upon Him the form of a servant and be made in the likeness of sin's flesh. Accordingly, in the fullness of time He was "made of a woman," taking a human spirit and soul and body into perpetual union with Himself. As the body of Adam was supernaturally made out of the virgin earth by God's immediate hand, so the body of Christ was supernaturally made out of the virgin's substance by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit. So too the union of soul and body in Adam prefigured the hypostatic union of our nature with the Son of God, so that He is not two persons in one, but one Person with two natures—those natures not being confounded, but each preserving its distinctive properties. Owen's remark is significant: His conception in the womb of the Virgin, as unto the integrity of human nature, was a miraculous operation of the Divine power. But the prevention of that nature from any subsistence of its own, by its assumption unto personal union with the Son of God, in the first instance of its conception, is that which is above all miracles, nor can be designated by that name. A mystery it is, so far above the order of all creating or providential operations, that it wholly transcends the sphere of them that are most miraculous. Herein did God glorify all the properties of the Divine nature, acting in a way of infinite wisdom, grace and condescension.

He who was the Lord of all and owed no service or obedience to any, being in the form of God and equal with Him, descended into a condition of absolute subjection. As Adam deliberately forsook the place of complete submission to God, which was proper to his nature and acceptable to God, and aspired after lordship, so the Son of God left that state of absolute dominion which was His by right, and took upon Him the yoke of servitude. The Son's descent involved far greater humiliation to Himself than was the glory to which the first man aspired in his pride. As others have shown, this self-abasement of the Lord of glory to an estate of entire subjection is referred to by the apostle in Hebrews 10:5, where Christ is heard saying "A body hast thou prepared me." Those words are an explanatory paraphrase of "Mine ears hast thou opened"—margin "digged"—in Psalm 40:6, which in turn looks back to Exodus 21:6, where a statute was

appointed to the effect that one who voluntarily gave himself up to absolute and perpetual service signified it by having his ear bored with an awl. Thus, Hebrews 10:5, in the light of Psalm 40:6 and Exodus 21:6, implies that Christ's body was prepared for Him with the express design of His absolute service for God. Christ the Mediator By His assumption of human nature, not only was Christ fitted to render subjection to God, but He became qualified to serve as Mediator between God and men. For it is required that a mediator be related to both of the parties he would reconcile, and that he be the equal of each of them. An angel would not be qualified for this office, since he possesses neither the divine nor the human nature. It was necessary for Christ to be real man as well as God in order to perform the work of redemption: the former so that He should be susceptible to suffering, qualified to offer Himself as a sacrifice, capable of dying. So too the assumption of human nature fitted Christ to be the Substitute of His people, to act not only on their behalf but in their room and stead, actually to take their lawful place and offer full satisfaction to the law by obeying its precepts and enduring its penalty. But that, in turn, required that He be their Surety and Sponsor, that He be so related to them legally and federally that He could fittingly serve as their Substitute. As there was a federal and representative oneness between the first Adam and those he stood for, so there must be a like oneness between the last Adam and those for whom He transacted, that as the guilt of the former was charged to the account of his posterity, so the righteousness of the Latter might be imputed to all His seed. Yet the truth concerning the position which the Son of God took is not fully expressed by the above statements. It is not sufficient to say that He became their Surety and Substitute. We must go farther back and ask what it was that made it proper that He should serve as the Sponsor of His people before their offended Lawgiver and Judge. The answer is Their covenant union. Christ served as their Surety and Substitute because He was one with them, and therefore He could and did assume and discharge all their liabilities. In the covenant of grace Christ had said to the Father, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me" (Heb. 2:12-13). Most blessedly is that explained in what immediately follows: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same," therefore He is not ashamed to call them brothers. Federation is the repository of this amazing mercy, identification the key which unlocks it. Christ came not to strangers but to His "brethren"; He assumed human nature, not in order to procure a people for Himself, but to secure a people already His (Matt. 1:21; Eph. 1:4). Since a union has existed between Christ and His people from all eternity, it inevitably follows that when He came to this earth He took on Himself their debts, and now that He has gone to heaven they must be clothed (Isa. 61:10) with all the rewardableness of His perfect obedience. This is very much more than a technicality of theology, being the strongest buttress of all in the walls of truth which protect the atonement, though it is one of the most frequently and fiercely assailed by its enemies. Men have argued that the punishment of the innocent Christ as though He were guilty was an outrage upon justice. In the human realm, to punish a person for something when he is neither responsible nor guilty is, beyond question, unjust. But that objection is invalid and entirely pointless in connection with the Lord Jesus, for He voluntarily entered the place and lot of His people in such an intimate way that it could be said, "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one" (Heb. 2:11). They are not only one in nature, but are also so united in the sight of God and before His law as to involve an identification of legal relations and reciprocal obligations and rights. "By the obedience of one shall many be made [legally constituted] righteous" (Rom. 5:19). It was required of the Surety of God's people that He should not only render full and perfect obedience to the precepts of the law, and thereby provide the meritorious means of their justification, but should also make full satisfaction for their sins by having visited upon Him the curse of the law. But before that penalty could be inflicted, the guilt of the transgressors must be transferred to Him; that is to say, their sins must be

judicially imputed to Him. To that arrangement the holy One willingly consented, so that He who "knew no sin" was legally "made sin" for them (II Cor. 5:21). God laid on Him the iniquities of them all, and then the sword of divine justice struck Him (Zech. 13:7), exacting full satisfaction. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Blotting out our transgressions, procuring for us the favor of God, purchasing the heavenly inheritance, required the death of Christ. That which demanded the death sentence was the guilt of our sins. Let that be removed, and condemnation for us is gone forever. But how could guilt be "removed"? Only by its being transferred to another. The punishment due to the church was borne by her Surety and Substitute. God charged to Him all the sins of His elect, and moved against Him accordingly, visiting on Him His judicial wrath. How marvelous are the ways of God. As death was destroyed by death—the death of God's Son—so sin by sin—the greatest that was ever committed, the crucifixion of Christ—putting it away as far as the East is from the West. Because God imputed the trespasses of His people to their Surety, He was condemned that they might be acquitted. Christ took upon Him their accumulated and incalculable debt and, by discharging it, made them forever free and solvent. By His precious blood all their iniquities were expiated, so that the triumphant challenge rings out: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom. 8:33). Throughout His life and by His death Christ was repaying and repairing all that injury which the sins of the church had done to the demonstrative glory of God. God now remits the sins of all who truly believe in Christ, because Deity has received a vicarious but full satisfaction for them in the person of their Substitute. Through Christ they are delivered from the wrath to come. Necessarily so, for God's acceptance of the Lamb's sacrifice obtained the eternal redemption of all for whom it was offered. Just as a storm cloud empties itself on earth and then melts away under the rays of the sun, so when the storm of divine judgment had exhausted itself upon the cross our sins disappeared from before God's face, and we were received into His everlasting favor. Wonderful as was the work that the incarnate Son performed for His people, something more was still needed in order to provide a complete remedy for their complicated ruin, for the former covered only the legal aspects of their plight. A miracle of grace needed to be worked in them in order to make them experientially worthy of everlasting glory; indeed, such a work was absolutely indispensable to fit them to commune with God in this life. His elect needed to be quickened into newness of life, their enmity against God destroyed, their darkness dispelled, their wills freed, their love of sin and hatred of holiness rectified. In a word, they needed to experience a thorough change of heart, a principle of grace had to be communicated to them, and they needed to be made new creatures in Christ. That miracle of grace is performed by the Holy Spirit in those who are "by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3). But how little this is realized today. Insistence on this fact has all but disappeared from the modern pulpit, even in those who pride themselves on being orthodox. The work of the Spirit in the saving of sinners has no place in the creed of many a churchgoer; and where it is nominally acknowledged it possesses no real weight and exerts no practical influence. In the majority of places where the Lord Jesus is still formally owned as the only Saviour, the current teaching is that He has made it possible for men to be saved, but that they themselves must decide whether or not they will be saved; thus the greatest of all God's works is left contingent on the fickle will of men as to whether it is a success or a failure. Narrowing the circle to those places where it is still held that the Spirit has a mission and ministry in connection with the gospel, the general idea prevailing is that, when the Word is faithfully preached, the Spirit convicts men of sin and reveals to them their need of a Saviour; but beyond that, very few are prepared to go. The popular view is that the sinner has to cooperate with the Spirit, that he must yield himself to His "striving," or he will not and cannot be saved. But such a pernicious and God-insulting concept repudiates two cardinal facts. To affirm that the natural man is capable of cooperating with the Spirit is to deny that he is "dead in trespasses and sins," for a dead man is powerless to do any good. To say that the specific operations of

the Spirit in a man's heart and conscience are capable of being so resisted as to thwart His endeavors is to deny His omnipotence. The solemn and unpalatable fact is that were the Spirit of God to suspend His operations, not a single person on earth would savingly benefit from the redemptive work of Christ. The natural man is such an enemy to God and so obstinate in his rebellion that he dislikes a holy Christ, and remains opposed to His way of salvation until his heart is divinely renewed. The criminal darkness and delusion which fill every soul in which sin reigns cannot be removed by any agent but God the Spirit—by His giving a new heart and enlightening the understanding to perceive the exceeding sinfulness of sin. There are indeed thousands of people ready to respond to the fatal error that sinners may be saved without throwing down the weapons of their warfare against God. There are many who receive Christ as their Saviour, but are unwilling to surrender to Him as their Lord. They would like His rest, but they refuse His yoke, without which His rest cannot be had. His promises appeal to them, but they have no heart for His precepts. They will believe in an imaginary Christ who is suited to their corrupt nature, but they despise and reject the Christ of God. Like the multitudes of old, they are pleased with His loaves and fishes; but for His heart-searching, flesh-withering, sin—condemning teaching they have no appetite. Nothing but the miracle-working power of the Spirit can change them. C. H. Spurgeon stated: Man is utterly and entirely averse to everything that is good and right. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8, 7). Turn you all Scripture through, and you will find continually the will of man described as being contrary to the things of God. What said Christ in that text so often quoted by the Arminian to disprove the very doctrine which it clearly states? What did Christ say to those who imagined that men would come without Divine influence? He said, first, "No man can come unto Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him"; but He said something more strong—"Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." Herein lies the deadly mischief: not only that he is powerless to do good, but that he is powerful enough to do that which is wrong, and that his will is desperately set against everything that is right. Men will not come; you cannot force them to by all your invitations. Until the Spirit draw them, come they neither will, nor can.

The manifold wisdom of God is just as evident in the official task assigned the Holy Spirit as in the work that the Son was commissioned to perform. The miracles of regeneration and sanctification are as wonderful as were the obedience and sufferings, the death and resurrection, of Christ; and the saint is as truly and as deeply indebted to the One as he is to the Other. If it was an act of amazing condescension for God the Son to leave heaven's glory and assume human nature, it was equally so for God the Spirit to descend to this earth and take up His abode in fallen men and women; and if God pointed up the marvel and importance of the one by mighty wonders and signs, so did He in connection with the latter—the song of the angelic choir (Luke 2:13) having its counterpart in the "sound from heaven" (Acts 2:2), the Shekinah "glory" (Luke 2:9) in the "tongues like as of fire" (Acts 2:3). If we admire the gracious and mighty works of Christ in cleansing the leper, strengthening the palsied, giving sight to the blind and imparting life to the dead, no less is the Spirit to be adored for His supernatural operations in quickening lifeless souls, illuminating their minds, delivering them from the dominion of sin, removing their enmity against God, uniting them to Christ and creating in them a love of holiness. How complete and perfect is the remedy which the grace and wisdom of God have provided for His people. As they were federally in Adam, and therefore held responsible for what he did, so they are federally in Christ, and therefore enjoy all the benefits of His meritorious work. As they were ruined by the breaking of one covenant, so they are restored by the keeping of another. As they were made guilty by Adam's disobedience being charged to their account, so they are justified before the throne of God because the righteousness of their Surety is imputed to them. As they fell under the curse of the law, were alienated from God and became children of wrath, through Christ's redemption they are entitled to the reward of the law, reconciled to God and

restored to His favor. As they inherited a corrupt nature from their first head, so they receive a holy nature from their second Head. In every respect the remedy answers to the malady.

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