

Lessons of the Potter's House

Part Two

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BEFORE we proceed any further, let us remind ourselves of the reason (or reasons) for the creation of humanity.

A whole eon had gone by before humanity came into being, and all the events of that eon, whatever they were, had terminated in "the disruption of the world," that is, the disruption of the society as it existed at that time. That society was clearly a celestial one, for it was in being before the earth was even founded, as Job 38:4-7 makes plain:

Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell, if you know with understanding. Who placed its measurements, in case you know? Or who stretched out a leveling tape over it? on what are its sockets sunk? Or who directed its cornerstone into place, When the stars of the morning jubilated together And all the sons of Elohim were shouting in joy?

Man was not there when this happened, but there were creatures in existence, described in this passage as the stars of the morning and the sons of Elohim, who were so moved by what took place as to sing together in sheer jubilation.

It seems evident that elements among this celestial society went into a measure of rebellion against God, and the spread of this is indicated by the fact that the eon ended in total disruption, accompanied by darkness. Genesis 1:2 and 2 Peter 3: 5,6, tell us of this. Never let us think that God created the earth out of darkness, as many have supposed. All is out of Him, as Paul tells us in Romans 11:36, and God Himself is light, and darkness in Him there is none (1 John 1:5). Nor was the earth created a chaos; Isaiah 45:18 establishes this. No, darkness and barrenness and waste and desolation and chaos came into being as a result of previous opposition to God. From then on, the jurisdiction of darkness is contrasted with the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Col.1:13).

SPIRITUAL FORCES OF WICKEDNESS

The nature of the original rebellion would doubtless be an attempt at the usurpation of the Headship given by God to the Son of His love. Among the celestials are forces which are described, in Ephesians 6, as being *not* of blood and flesh, but as sovereignties, authorities, world-mights of this darkness and spiritual forces of wickedness. All of these are under the control of the Adversary, as verse 11 makes clear. They would seem to be powerful and numerous. The very terms used suggest opposition to Him Whom God declares to be Sovereign (Col.1:18).

Now it was against such a background that humanity was created. The sinning hosts among the celestials had no means of delivering themselves from the consequences of their rebellion, and thus restoring the state of harmony and peace with God. Did they see in this new development some hope for the reconciliation of their own defectors with God? Whether they did or not, this was indeed the case, because, before any reconciliation anywhere in the universe could be effected, the question of sin itself had to be dealt with, and only the one sinned against, namely God, could adequately see to this. Hence His decision to bring into being a fresh creation (i.e., humanity), unique, apart from His Son, in being in the image and likeness of Himself, so that One in the form of humanity could give Himself up, and suffer death, for the sake of all. In suffering death, such a One would take sin with Him into death, thereby accomplishing its own destruction.

HUMANITY CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF ELOHIM

Humanity was the vessel made by the Divine Potter. Let us read Genesis 1:26,27. "And saying is Elohim, 'Make will We humanity in Our image, and according to Our likeness, and sway shall they over the fish of the sea, and over the flyer of the heavens, and over the beast, and over all land life, and over every moving animal moving on the land.' And Elohim is creating humanity in His image. In the image of Elohim He creates it. Male

and female He creates them."

Here we find a creation, made in the image and likeness of its Creator, and immediately given dominion over other forms of creation. As we have previously stated, no one else in the universe, other than the Lord Jesus Himself, is described as being in the image of God. We suggest that only those in the image and likeness of God are entitled to exercise dominion, since only such can truly represent Him or deputize for Him. When we compare Psalm 8 with Hebrews 2, we see how the dominion originally given to humanity is enlarged from a sway over the lower creatures to dominion over all. Hebrews 2:8 reads, "For in the subjection of all to him [man], He leaves *nothing* unsubject to him. Yet now we are not *as yet* seeing all subject to him."

At this point, let us note a very fine distinction, which may explain much that may in the past have seemed obscure. Many have wondered how God could have created humanity in His own image and likeness when men have proved themselves to be so vile and sinful. They have supposed that man was originally created perfect and then suffered a fall from perfection. The idea of a "fall" is, however, a human invention, not taught in scripture.

The point of distinction is this. In Genesis 1, there is *no mention or suggestion of souliness in respect of humanity*-- in respect of animals, yes (see verses 20-24), but not in respect of humanity. Nor in this first chapter is there any mention of the Potter at work. All this must come in chapter 2.

It must be appreciated that the accounts in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are not describing two separate events, but are complementary to each other, presenting the coming into being of humanity on the sixth day from two different aspects.

In chapter 1, it is the *concept of humanity* which is being created, that which will be used of God to deal with the problems caused by the estrangement of the celestials. Its importance is indicated by the threefold use of the word "create" both here and in Genesis 5:1. Even at this stage, God had His sights fixed upon the creation of the new humanity, to be headed up by His own Son. As a new concept, designed to further His purpose, the creation of humanity was "very good" in the eyes of its Creator. It must be so, or the Son of God could never have come in the form of humanity.

Yes, indeed, after the creation of humanity, God surveyed the work of the six days, and pronounced it very good. All was exactly how He required it to be in order that His purpose might go forward in the way He had designed. He does not improvise, for nothing ever takes Him by surprise. He operates all in accord with the counsel of His will, and sees the end from the beginning because He has planned and purposed the whole.

But humanity must never be able to boast in itself, either at the time of its creation or afterwards; it must be shown that it is merely a vessel in the hands of the Potter, an instrument for His use as He wills, and so it was to suffer a traumatic experience which would prevent future boasting. Its head was to become marred, and the marring was to spread to the whole vessel, for through one man's transgression "sin entered the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned" (Rom.5:12,13).

THE POTTER AT WORK

Humanity had its beginning in Adam; in fact, Adam takes his name from humanity, for the Hebrew for humanity is the same as the Hebrew for Adam, and carries the meaning of likeness. But now comes an interesting point. In Genesis 2:7, where it declares that God (Yahweh Elohim) is "forming the human of soil from the ground," the word translated "forming" is the one rendered "potter" in Jeremiah 18. (The same word is used in Jeremiah 10: 16--" the Former of all is He.") Here, in Genesis 2, the Potter is truly at work. Can we not see His hands fashioning humanity, working lovingly on the clay to form a beautiful vessel?

It has long been a puzzle to many as to why there are two separate accounts of the bringing into being of humanity, and why they should be so different. It has even been suggested that the book of Genesis was written by two different authors. This is thought to be supported by fact that two different designations of the Deity are used. In chapter 1, God is referred to as Elohim, while in the second chapter, after verse 4, the name Yahweh (Ieue, Jehovah) is added. But a thoughtful examination will show that the different terms are in accord with God's relations with humanity.

To a fresh creation, brought into being to further His purpose, He is Elohim, the Subjector (the title is in plural form). All rebellious forces are to be made subject to His will, and that means being made subject to the One against Whose Headship the celestials had rebelled. Humanity is to be the medium through which this subjection is to be brought about, for humanity is the form in which the Saviour would eventually come. To humanity, therefore, God is presented as Elohim, and, humanity, being in His image and likeness, is the perfect creation for His purpose.

But in the second chapter, a different picture is presented. The first man, Adam, is made a living soul formed by Yahweh Elohim as the Divine Potter, out of the soil of the ground. Thus man was made both soilish and soulish, and God takes on the role of Keeper or Preserver (Neh.9:6). The name Yahweh (meaning "Who was, and is, and shall be") indicates the continuity of God's protection over the new vessel, and humanity will never be allowed to fall out of His hand. However, this does not mean that the vessel will not be found to be marred while remaining in the hand of God.

In fact, the vessel which God made was soon to be marred, or ruined, in His hand. When once a thing displays a fault, it is ruined in God's sight, and has eventually to be remade.

And so it was with humanity. In God's sight, the old humanity was eventually destroyed on the cross of Christ in order that the new humanity might be created "in righteousness and benignity of the truth" (Eph.4:24). Thus we read, "Our old humanity was crucified together with Him" (Rom.6:6) and, "Judging this, that if One died for the sake of all, consequently all died" (2 Cor.5: 14).

FIRST THE SOULISH, THEN THE SPIRITUAL

The craft of the potter is thus the oldest in history, for it was first practiced by God Himself in the forming of humanity out of the clay, or soil, of the earth.**[1]** And God intended that the first vessel should become marred (ruined), for He made it soulish. It had to be first the soulish, then the spiritual, for we read in 1 Corinthians 15:45, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam a vivifying Spirit. But not first the spiritual, but the soulish, thereupon the spiritual."

The fact that the soulish had to come first, and then the spiritual follow, is in conformity with scriptural practice. The primitive, or temporary, or less blest, comes first; the perfect and permanent and more blest comes afterwards. The principle is first illustrated in Genesis 1, where the evening precedes the morning in God's appraisal of the division of time which He termed a day. The first Adam had to fulfill his role in God's purpose before the last Adam appeared on the scene, just as Jacob had to come before Israel ("Upright with God"); or Saul, the people's king, had to come before David, the man after God's own heart; or Saul, the persecutor, before Paul, the apostle of Christ.

We all know how Adam sinned and became, in consequence, subject to death. In the person of Adam, the old humanity became marred (ruined), but the concept of humanity, as being God's means of reconciling the universe to Himself, was not abandoned. On the contrary, God sent His own Son in the form of humanity, and in the likeness of sin's flesh, in order that sin itself should be crucified--dealt with to a finality--in the person of His Son. "The One not knowing sin God makes to be sin for our sakes that we may be becoming God's righteousness in Him" (2 Cor.5:21). (Note that here the word "offering," in light type, is not in the original, and is better omitted. Christ is indeed a sin-offering (Heb.10:12), but here in Corinthians, the contrast is between sin and righteousness. Christ has been made to be sin for our sakes; we may be becoming God's righteousness in Him.)

The same Hebrew word is also used (figuratively) in Isaiah 45:7 and Psalm 74:17, "Former of light and Creator of darkness, Maker of good and Creator of evil," and "Summer and winter, Thou dost *form* them."

[1] In a sense, the craft of the potter is even older than this, for the Hebrew word "itzr" ("yatsar" in Young's Concordance), translated "potter" in Jeremiah 18, also occurs in Isaiah 45:18, where it is used in relation to the coming into being of the earth itself. There we read, "For thus says Yahweh, Creator of the heavens; He is the

Elohim, and *Former* of the earth, and its Maker. And He, He established it. He did not create it a chaos. He *formed* it to be indwelt." (The forming of the earth is described, in figurative language, in Job 38:4-8.)

"ALL SINNED AND ARE WANTING"

The ruining of the old humanity is summarized by Paul in Romans 3:11. "Not one is just--not even one. Not one is understanding. Not one is seeking out God." This is an absolute statement. In other passages some are declared to be just, or righteous; for example, Abel, Lot, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph the husband of Mary, and Joseph of Arimathea, to mention a few. These are righteous because they are being measured by the standard of righteousness evident in their own times, and against the failure of their contemporaries to live up to this standard. Abel is righteous compared with Cain, Lot in contrast with the inhabitants of Sodom, Zechariah with the priesthood of his time, later shown to be corrupt by the actions of Ananias and Caiaphas. But here in Romans, not one is just, since each is being compared with the absolute righteousness of God as contained in the evangel proclaimed by Paul. "All sinned and are wanting of the glory of God" (v.23); there are no distinctions. None could keep the perfect law of God, nor of himself attain to His righteousness. The entire world becomes "subject to the just verdict of God, because, by works of law, no flesh at all shall be justified in His sight, for through law is the recognition of sin" (vs.19,20).

Humanly speaking, we have reached an impasse comparable with that in which the erring celestials found themselves. By no means could humanity save itself. Without God's intervention there was no way out of the impasse.

JUSTIFIED GRATUITOUSLY

But thankfully God has intervened. "Yet now, apart from law, a righteousness of God is manifest (being attested by the law and the prophets), yet a righteousness of God through Jesus Christ's faith," and this righteousness is "for all and on all who are believing."

"Being justified gratuitously in His grace through the deliverance which is in Christ Jesus...."The clay is still in the Potter's hand, yet it can do nothing of itself to effect the result which the Potter desires. We are justified gratuitously, that is, without a cause. There is nothing within ourselves that would cause the Potter to do this. As Paul wrote elsewhere, "All is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself" (2 Cor.5:18).