

Lessons of the Potter's House

Part Three

By John H. Essex

THE NEW VESSEL

IF, as we saw in our last study, the condemnation of the old humanity, because of sin, is absolute ("not one is just, not even one"), then the justification of the new humanity in Christ Jesus is equally absolute. "If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation: the primitive passed by. Lo! there has come new" (2 Cor.5:17). "Nothing, consequently, is now condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. Not according to flesh are they walking, but according to spirit" (Rom.8:1). The perfection of the new humanity is guaranteed by the Divine Potter Himself. When God created humanity in His own image and likeness, He had the perfected vessel, the new humanity, in mind. Christ is the Head of the new humanity; the ecclesia is its firstfruits, and *through* Christ and His ecclesia is the reconciliation of all to be effected, and *in* the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus, God is to have the glory for the eons of the eons (Eph.1:23; 3:21).

The old humanity was infirm from the beginning. In its soulish nature were the factors which would lead to its being marred and consequently to its own destruction. its re-creation lies entirely in the hands, and according to the will, of the Potter.

But the ruining of the old cannot affect the perfection of the new, since the latter is, in effect, a new creation. To bring about the new, the old had to be crushed in the Potter's hand. Or, to use another metaphor, our old humanity must be crucified together with Him if we are to put on the new (Rom.6:6).

NOT JUDGING ONE ANOTHER

In Romans 14:10, Paul asks two very pertinent questions. He writes, "Now why are you judging your brother? Or why are you also scorning your brother?" Apparently, to judge our brother is bad enough; to scorn him is much worse. The apostle continues, "For all of us shall be presented at the dais of God, for it is written: Living am I, the Lord is saying, for to Me shall bow every knee, and every tongue shall be acclaiming God! Consequently, then, each of us shall be giving account concerning himself to God. By no means, then, should we still be judging one another, but rather decide this, not to place a stumbling block for a brother, or a snare."

If we continue to see faults in one another, it is a sign that we are still acquainted with each other according to flesh (cf 2 Cor.5:16). We are seeing ourselves, and our brethren, as members of the old humanity instead of as members of the new. We are not judging the old to be (in God's sight) dead, crucified together with Christ, crushed in the hand of the Potter. In God's sight, we are already a new creation in Christ, for He sees us holy and flawless in Him. But in practice, we are still inhabiting these fleshly bodies of the old humanity, which presents us with problems. Yet we are exhorted, as regards our former behavior, to be putting off the old humanity and be putting on the new (Eph.4:20-25), or to be stripping off the old with its practices and be putting on the young (Col.3:8-11).

THE CELESTIALS LEARN THROUGH HUMANITY

In Ephesians 3:10, we read...that now may be made known to the sovereignties and the authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia, the multifarious wisdom of God, in accord with the purpose of the eons, which He makes in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

To learn the ways of God, the celestials have to "go down to the Potter's house." No one finds it easy to accept instruction from, or through, those of lesser rank. The celestials must humble themselves sufficiently to be taught of God through observing His dealings with humanity. And these dealings with humanity included the putting to death of His Own Son--the One Who was the Firstborn of every creature--the One Whose Headship celestials had challenged. How completely strange are God's ways! Celestials challenged the Headship of Christ; God brought His Son down to the very lowest position in the universe, so that He was

numbered among the transgressors and gibbeted on a Roman cross. Yet out of this humiliation of the Lord of glory, the way is opened for the reconciliation of all.

The blood of Christ's cross is the *means* by which peace with God is restored, and the reconciliation of all creation is effected, and in this, those in heaven are included with those on earth (Col.1:20). But it is the ecclesia which becomes the *medium* through which the multifarious wisdom of God is made known to the celestials, even to the sovereignties and authorities among them. The sovereignties and authorities are the highest ranks in their sphere; the ecclesia is chosen, in the main, from the lower ranks of humanity, which in itself is a lower creation, for only in such can God's grace be displayed to the uttermost.

LEARNING BY OBSERVATION AND EXPERIENCE

There are two ways by which knowledge may be gained; one is from outside, by observation and hearing, and the other is by actual experience. The celestials are undoubtedly learning much by observing God's ways with humanity.

Humanity itself has certainly learned by experience what it means to be estranged from God, and even God's Son, Who came in the form of humanity, but Who gave no cause whatever for estrangement from His Father, nevertheless was made to experience the terrible pangs of such a position. He, Who once said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), was to learn, in a most poignant way, what the temporary disruption of that oneness would mean.

Christ was by no means afraid of the physical pain associated with crucifixion, nor was He frightened by the revilings of the mob, or of the judgment of the rulers. When He cried to His Father in Gethsemane, "If it is possible, let this cup pass by from Me," He was not asking to be relieved of any of these. No, what He felt to be approaching was the terrible darkness which would indicate the breaking, however temporarily, of the bond of unity between God and Himself. The darkness was unnatural. It came at noon, when normally the day would be at its brightest. The Son was carrying out His Father's will to the uttermost, and was entitled to receive the sunshine of the Father's smile. Instead, He experienced, for the one time in all eternity, the gloom of separation, and thereby learned the meaning of estrangement. He, the Firstborn, voluntarily became estranged from God; thereby opening the way for the long estrangement of others to be ended in complete reconciliation.

Christ was God's Son, the Beloved, in Whom the Father constantly delighted. There was nothing in Christ's actions or conduct which could cause God to turn away from Him. No, it was because God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. The One not knowing sin was made to be sin, and it was from this that God, in His absolute righteousness, turned away.

CHRIST'S OBEDIENCE UNTO DEATH

What must the celestials have thought of all this? The One possessing the great honors of Colossians 1:15-17 was put to death on the cross. He was the Light of the world, yet God gave Him up to the powers of darkness. Satan had sought to usurp His Headship, yet God gave Him over to Satan's jurisdiction (Luke 22: 53,54) and allowed Him to suffer ignominy and shame at the hands of Satan's followers, before being eventually crucified as a malefactor. Yet God did this for a purpose, and in the knowledge that He could rouse the stricken Saviour from the dead, and make Him the Firstborn of all who are to be subsequently roused. Indeed, because of Christ's obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, God could highly exalt Him, and give Him "the name that is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should be bowing, celestial and terrestrial and subterranean, and every tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God, the Father."

First the emptying of Himself to take the form of humanity, and then the humbling of Himself to become obedient unto death... the celestials must have observed all this, and marvelled. This was the complete opposite of pride and usurpation, the antithesis of rebellion. And in it, they should be perceiving blessings accruing to themselves, for in "the blood of His cross," that is, in our Lord's sufferings while fulfilling all that was required of Him as the supreme Sacrifice, peace on behalf of all is made with God, and the reconciliation of all follows, those in the heavens as well as those on earth.

In passing, we should note that Christ Himself learned much through His coming in the form of humanity--

not just the meaning of estrangement, as we noted earlier, but also the meaning of obedience, as we read so revealingly in Hebrews 5:8. Christ had always been obedient to the Father's will, but obedience is not tested until it is accompanied by adversity. Christ was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. This is where His obedience was perfected, and in the experiences of Gethsemane and Golgotha, He learned the full meaning of the word.

GOD'S GRACE SHOWN TO THE ECCLESIA

The ecclesia, which is the body of Christ, has also learned the ways of God by experience. All its members were at one time, in their nature, "children of indignation, even as the rest" (Eph.2:3), all part of the same clay, and part of the old humanity, the vessel which became ruined in the hand of the Potter. But they have been saved in grace, owing nothing to anything that they might feel they could themselves contribute, but becoming solely and entirely His workmanship and "His achievement, being created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God makes ready beforehand, that [they] should be walking in them" (Eph.2:10). They are being made part of that new humanity which is headed up in Christ; their bodies of humiliation will eventually be transfigured, to conform them to the body of His glory. In the oncoming eons, they will be used by God to display to the celestials the transcendent riches of that grace which is so evident in God's kindness to them in Christ Jesus, just as now they are being used by Him to make known to their leaders His multifarious wisdom.

Surely the celestials must have marvelled when they saw the Lord Jesus, in His risen glory, arrest the chief persecutor of His followers, as he was on the way to Damascus breathing threats and murder, and transform him into a chosen vessel, a choice instrument to bear His name before both nations and kings, besides the sons of Israel (Acts 9:15). And they must marvel, too, when they see God's choice of us, totally unworthy as we are, and yet being prepared for the reception of the highest honors. God's ways are not men's ways, nor are they the ways of any of His creatures, but He is operating all according to the counsel of His will, and in furtherance of His preconceived purpose, from which He has never deviated one iota.

The members of the ecclesia have a prior expectancy, but not a sole expectancy. If we have been granted an insight into the purpose of God, let us understand that we shall be used by Him to make known His grace to others until ultimately it embraces all. Let us set an example by following Paul's injunction in Ephesians 4:22,23, where he writes, "put off from you, as regards your former behavior, the old humanity which is corrupting in accord with its seductive desires, yet to be rejuvenated in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new humanity, which, in accord with God, is being created in righteousness." Thus may we be even now vessels, "utensils for honor, hallowed, and useful to the Owner, made ready for every good act" (2 Tim.2:21).

THE REST OF HUMANITY

What are we to say about the rest of humanity, the vast bulk of mankind, including even those accountable for the betrayal and crucifixion of the Lord of glory? At best these are indifferent to God; at worst, they are hostile to Him. Yet the celestials will learn from these, too, for they will see the magnanimity and magnificence of the grace of God which is able and willing to save to the uttermost. And humanity itself will have a special reason for rejoicing when it hears the loud voice out of the throne saying, "Lo! the tabernacle of God is with mankind, and He will be tabernacling with them, and they will be His peoples, and *God Himself* will be with them. And He will be brushing away every tear from their eyes." What a delightful personal touch! "And death will be no more, nor mourning, nor clamor, nor misery; they will be no more, for the former things passed away" (Rev.21:3,4).

Celestials and humans will rejoice in both unison and harmony when God has made all new.