

Old Theology Quarterly

No. 62—The Divine Plan of the
Ages for Human Salvation—Why
Evil Was Permitted

Bible Students'
1903
TRACTS

OLD THEOLOGY QUARTERLY.

THE
Divine Plan of the Ages

— FOR —
HUMAN SALVATION.

WHY EVIL WAS PERMITTED.

Showing the Harmonious Co-operation of
the Creator's Justice, Wisdom,
Love and Power.

BIBLE STUDENTS'

TRACTS.

NO. 62.—JULY, 1903.

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MAIL MATTER AT THE POSTOFFICE, ALLEGHENY, PA.
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OLD THEOLOGY QUART'LY

— FOR THE —

PROMOTION OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

PUBLISHED BY THE

WATCH TOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOC'Y

BIBLE HOUSE, ALLEGHENY, PA., U.S.A.

BRITISH BRANCH, 131 GREEN ST., FOREST GATE, LONDON

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AN EPITOMIZED STATEMENT OF THE *DIVINE PLAN OF THE AGES.*

A recent writer has truly said: "The summary want of the age is that *last* philosophy into which shall have been sifted all other philosophy, which shall be at once catholic and eclectic, which shall be the joint growth and fruit of reason and faith, and which shall shed forth through every walk of research the blended light of discovery and revelation."

Many who admit that such a philosophy can emanate from God only, and that the Bible *should* reveal it, nevertheless fail to find it there, because they do not seek it in an orderly or philosophical manner. Such we advise to read a book of 350 pages entitled "The Plan of the Ages," which presents the soul-satisfying outlines of the divine plan of human redemption in a form that is acceptable to humble and consecrated reason. This little tract is a crumb of its teachings.

The careful and reverent student of the sacred Scriptures will find, in the light now due to the household of faith, that the Word of God presents a complete and systematic plan for the salvation and development of the human race, which for ages has been in operation, which, up to the present time, has been a success in its gradual development, and which in due time will be gloriously completed. The past six thousand years of human history have been necessary to work out that plan to its present degree of development, and one thousand years more will witness its full consummation in the restitution of every willing member of the race to the original likeness of God, and their establishment in righteousness, with the eternal ages of glory and blessing before them.

Such is the scope of God's plan which^a he formed before the foundation of the world, to be wrought out in Christ, who is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last of Jehovah's direct creation—his *only* begotten Son—Rev. 1: 8, 10; John 1: 14, 18; Col. 1: 13. "By him were all things made, and without him was not anything made that was made." "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. By him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers; all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (John 1: 3; Col. 1: 15, 17.) In him also "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."—Col. 1: 14.

'God, having thus honored his Son by making him his instrument or agent for the accomplishment of all his grand designs, declared to men: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." He "hath exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour," and "would have all men honor the Son (as the Father's agent and representative) even as they honor the Father." (Matt. 17: 5; Acts 5: 31; John 5: 23.) Nor does the Son claim higher honor than to be the Father's agent and messenger, "the messenger of the (Jehovah's) covenant" (Mal. 3: 1); for he says, "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me," and "My Father is greater than I." (John 6: 38; 5: 30; 4: 34; 14: 28.) To us, as to the apostle, "there is one God, the Father, of whom are all

things; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *by* whom are all things; and we by him."—I Cor. 8:6.

After the creation of angels came the creation of man, a being adapted to live on the earth and to be its lord and king. Man, as well as the angels, was created in the divine image—that is, with faculties of reason, conscience, etc., capable of discerning right and wrong. Man, as king of earth and perfect, as created, was only "*a little lower than the angels*" (Heb. 2:7, 9), and that little consisted in his being limited by his nature to the earth, while the angelic nature, being spiritual, has a wider range for observation and hence a broader plane for reasoning. To be an image of God implies freedom of choice or will with respect to one's own conduct. With such freedom man was originally endowed by his Creator, and the alternatives of good and evil were placed before him as a necessity to his trial for lasting life, though not without warning on God's part as to the blessed results of righteousness and the baneful results of evil. On account of man's inexperience, implicit obedience to God's will was required of him for his safety and protection, as well as for a test of his loyalty to his rightful Lord and Sovereign. Nevertheless, God, by divine intuition, foresaw the course that Adam would take and the fall of the whole race with him into death, and also the lessons which that experience with sin and death might be overruled to teach them when, in due time, through the merit of Christ's sacrifice, he would grant them remission of sins upon their repentance and turn to righteousness. He therefore determined to let man take his chosen course, and to

inflict on him its just penalty, and then in due time to deliver him from it with a great salvation.

God foresaw that, even with good intentions, man's limited knowledge and experience would continually offer temptations to doubt the wisdom of divine arrangements, if not to disobey them; he therefore embraced this opportunity to convey to all of his creatures, as well as to man, a fuller conception of himself, in order that they might the more fully and heartily worship and obey him. As a revelation and illustration of his attributes—Justice, Wisdom, Power and Love—God placed his human son in his own image—perfect though inexperienced, and but slightly informed respecting his Creator's attributes—on trial, in order that he might gain a valuable experience, yet foreknowing that, although in every respect fairly tried, he would, in the use of his own free will, fall into sin. But God did not purpose to abandon his disobedient and death-deserving creature to eternal ruin, but provided a way of redemption whereby he might be just and yet the justifier of the truly penitent and believing (Rom. 3: 26), so that the painful experience gained under the reign of sin and death might eventually, under this overruling influence of divine providence, serve the more firmly to establish them in righteousness and willing loyalty to God.

The trial in Eden was merely a test of obedience, or loyalty to God. The fruit of the forbidden tree was good (for all the trees of the garden were good) and was desirable to make one wise; and had they proved their loyalty to God by obedience, probably the restriction

would in due time have been removed. Knowledge is a blessing only to those who are subject to the divine will. This, God had arranged that man should acquire by experience, and angels by example. The penalty of man's disobedience was death—"In the day that thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die." The penalty was fulfilled to the letter: the dying began as soon as the penalty was pronounced, when they were cast out of Eden and restrained from eating its life-sustaining fruits; and it was completed within the thousand-year day, as predicted. (2 Pet. 3: 8.) The penalty, death, being gradually and not suddenly inflicted left the condemned pair free to propagate their species, yet subject to the weakness and all the penalty under which they themselves groaned.

Thus, by one man's disobedience, sin entered into the world, and death by (as a result of) sin; and thus death passed upon all men, because all are sinners and imperfect by heredity.—Rom. 5: 12.

Sin, and death its penalty, by thus gaining control of Adam, controlled the world, and reigned from Adam to Moses—with but few divine promises, even, to illuminate the dark way. Then "the law came by Moses," offering lasting life to any one who would observe it in every particular. But in their fallen condition none of the condemned race was able to obey it, and by it to gain the reward of life. As God had designed, however, the law did serve a purpose: it served to show the helplessness of man for his own justification; and it served to point out, as from another than the corrupt and condemned seed of Adam, the holy, harmless,

undefiled Lamb of God, whose sacrifice, as Adam's substitute or Redeemer, satisfied the claims of justice, bought the world from the slavery of sin and death, and made possible the gospel offer of forgiveness and lasting life, not through our righteousness in keeping God's law (which is impossible by reason of the weakness of the flesh), but by our acceptance of Christ as our Master, and of his ransom-sacrifice as the satisfaction for our sins before God.

It might be supposed that the work of blessing the world should have begun at once when the sacrifice for sin was accepted by the Father, as signified by the giving of the spirit of adoption at Pentecost; but not so. Another feature of the divine plan had first to be accomplished, viz. : the selection and development of the Church to be joint heirs with Christ in his glory and kingdom and work of blessing the world. This was from the beginning a part of the divine plan; and therefore the glorious reign and work of blessing the world could not begin at Christ's resurrection, nor at Pentecost, but had to be delayed until the selection of all its tried and faithful members could be accomplished. Or, to state it otherwise, the Father's appointed time for blessing the world is during the seventh thousand years, and had it not been for his purpose to select the Church, the "bride" or "body" of Christ, to share with him in the work of blessing the race, the reneed not have been two advents of our Lord. One would have been sufficient; for he could have come now, in the end of the sixth thousand years, could have redeemed all and at once begun the great work of blessing and

restoring mankind. He came to redeem the world eighteen centuries previous to the appointed time of blessing, so as to leave time, before that day, for the selection of his bride from among the redeemed race.

As the occasion of man's fall became God's opportunity for exhibiting to all his creatures his wonderful character from every standpoint—his justice, his wisdom, his power and his love—so it also became an opportunity for the testing in all points of his only begotten Son, preparatory to his yet higher exaltation (Phil. 2 : 8-10) to the the divine nature, with all which that implies of glory, honor and immortality, and of position next to the Father, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. And the same occasion, as pre-arranged of God, also makes possible the calling, selection and trial of the Gospel Church, now soon to be completed and made joint-inheritors, with our Lord and Savior, of glory, honor and immortality, and like him to be exalted far above men and angels, even to the divine nature.—2 Pet. 1 : 14.

Only the *justice* of God's character has yet been made manifest to the world, and much of its glory is sadly beclouded by human tradition, which falsely declares the wages of sin to be eternal torment instead of "everlasting destruction." God's *love* for his creatures, the *wisdom* of his plan of salvation, and his *power* to save, are as yet but partially revealed, and even distortedly seen by but few indeed. God's *justice* has been revealed to all for the past six thousand years in the reign of death, the penalty which he prescribed for sin. God's *love* began to be revealed eighteen hundred years

ago, but not seeing all of the plan, few rightly appreciate the love. Nevertheless, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9.) The *wisdom* of the Lord's plan will not be appreciated until the Millennial Sun of Righteousness has arisen, revealing those features of his plan which then will bring blessings to all the billions which his *justice* condemned, and which his *love* redeemed. But the *power* of God will not be seen in its fulness until well on in that Millennial Day. Although partially revealed in the work of creation, the grandest and fullest exhibition remains to be shown in the resurrection from death of those redeemed ones, who, accepting of the gracious provisions of his love, bow in glad submission to all his just requirements.

It is a mistake made by many to suppose that Jehovah's *justice* and his *love* are ever in conflict with each other. Both are perfect—his *love* never desires or attempts what his *justice* does not endorse: his *justice* and his *love* must both approve every act for which his *power* is exercised. With men, because of lack of wisdom and power, love and justice often conflict. Man's love often has gracious designs which he has not the wisdom or power to accomplish except by violating justice. We must gauge our views by the infinite and stay close to the revelation he makes of his plans, not seeking to make plans of our own for God. God's plan, when clearly seen, fully vindicates his *justice* as well as his *love*. The plan of redemption devised by divine *wisdom* is the essence of unfathomable *love* based

upon uncompromising *justice*, and will be fully accomplished by divine *power*. The first act of God's love was to provide a *ransom* for Adam, and thus for all his race, since it was by his transgression that all fell into sin and death. Until the ransom was given nothing was done in the way of saving the world: promises and types of coming salvation were made, but nothing more could be done. God had rendered a just sentence, and the penalty could not be set aside: it had to be met. Before Adam and his family could be released from the death sentence by a resurrection, the life of another man not under the sentence had to be paid as its corresponding price, that God might be just in justifying and accepting back to harmony and life all who believe in Jesus and turn unto God in his name. (Acts 4:12.) And having accepted Christ as the ransom of all such, the apostle assures us that now "he is *faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."—1 John 1:9.

Thus we see, from God's own declaration, that since Christ died for our sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, or rather, since he ascended up on high, and there appearing in the presence of God on our behalf presented the price of our redemption and became Lord of all, of both the living and the dead, there is no longer any legal hindrance in the way of the return of all mankind to fellowship with God, and to all the blessings and privileges lost under the penalty of the first transgression. The only difficulties remaining are on man's part. In his fallen condition his mind is sick as well as his body. He inclines to

believe falsely and is disinclined to believe in so great a salvation, such "good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people." Besides, he is weak through the fall, and does those things which he often does not at heart approve and leaves undone much that at heart he really desires to do, and there is no help in himself. Some assistance in overcoming sinward tendencies must reach him or else the cancellation of past sin and the opportunity for reconciliation will be a valueless offer.

This necessity, which we recognize, is fully met in those features of the divine plan which are yet to be fulfilled. He who redeemed all is appointed to be both king and judge of all; for God "hath appointed a day in which he will *judge the world* in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained," Jesus Christ. (Acts 17:31.) That is, he will righteously grant the world a new, individual trial for eternal life, having cancelled the sentence of the first trial by the propitiatory sacrifice of his Son.

And the redeemed, tried and glorified Church, the faithful bride of Christ, is to share with her Lord in this great work, as kings and priests and judges. (Rev. 5:10; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3.) As kings they will rule the world in righteousness, enforcing and establishing order and justice and truth; as priests they will teach the people, and through the merit of the one sacrifice for sins forgive the penitent, and cleanse and help them out of their weaknesses—mental, moral and physical; as judges they will judge of the measure of the guilt of all in respect to their course in the future as well as in their past lives, judging not by the hearing of the

ear, nor by the sight of the eye, but by an infallible judgment for which they will be abundantly qualified by their exaltation to the divine nature.

While the promise of God to the Church is a *change of nature* from human to divine, to be effected at the second advent of her Lord, as the completion of *his* resurrection—the first resurrection (2 Peter 1 : 4 ; 1 Cor. 15 : 50-53 ; Phil. 3 : 10-11 ; Rev. 20 : 6)—the provision of God's plans for the world at large is quite different, viz.: a "*restitution*" or *restoration* to all the grand qualities and powers of the human nature (an earthly likeness of the divine), now so sadly blurred and defaced by the six thousand years of slavery to sin and death.

Rightly to appreciate human *restitution*, it must be remembered that every excellent quality exhibited among men is but an imperfect exhibition of what belongs to each perfect man, whether it be logical acuteness, mathematical precision, æsthetic taste, art, wit, eloquence, poetic imagination, music, or any other intellectual grace or moral refinement ; and that these, to a higher degree than we have ever seen them exhibited by any fallen men, will, in the process of restitution, become, as at first designed by the Creator, the endowments of each obedient member of the human family. With the restitution of perfect mental and moral balance to man, the original king of earth, will come also a blessing through man to all his subjects—the beasts of the field, the fowl of heaven, and the fish of the sea (Psa. 8 : 6, 8) ; and the ordering of the earth itself is likewise promised.

The "times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3: 19-21) are, we believe the Scriptures to teach, just at the door. Soon the last members of the body of Christ will have finished their course, and then, with their glorious Head and all the other members of the body, they will shine forth as the sun for the blessing of the entire redeemed race.

" See the mystic Weaver sitting
High in heaven—His loom below.
Up and down the treadles go.
Takes, for web, the world's dark ages,
Takes, for woof, the kings and sages.
Takes the nobles and their pages,
Takes all stations and all stages.
Thrones are bobbins in His shuttle.
Armies make them scud and scuttle—
Web into the woof must flow:
Up and down the nations go!
At the Weaver's *will* they go!

" Calmly see the mystic Weaver
Throw His shuttle to and fro;
'Mid the noise and wild confusion,
Well the Weaver seems to know
What each motion and commotion,
What each fusion and confusion,
In the grand result will show!

" Glorious wonder! What a weaving:
To the *dull*, beyond believing.
Such no fabled ages know.
Only faith can see the mystery,
How, along the aisles of history,
Where the feet of sages go,
Loveliest to the fairest eyes,
Grand the mystic tapet lies!
Soft and smooth, and ever spreading,
As if made for angels' treading—
Tufted circles touching ever!

Every figure has its plaidings,
Brighter forms and softer shadings,
Each illumined—what a riddle!—
From a cross that gems the middle.

“’Tis a saying—some reject it—
That its light is all reflected;
That the tapet’s lines are given
By a Sun that shines in heaven!
’Tis believed—by all believing—
That great God, Himself, is weaving,
Bringing out the world’s dark mystery,
In the light of faith and history;
And, as web and woof diminish,
Comes the grand and glorious finish,
When begin the Golden Ages,
Long foretold by seers and sages.”

* * *

Reader, whether a believer in the Word of God or a skeptic, you cannot afford to be without the book of which this little tract is merely a notice—viz.: THE PLAN OF THE AGES—350 pages. It is sold at the small price of 25 cents, postpaid, for the purpose of spreading a knowledge of the divine plan—“the good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people.”

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C. T. SMITH. ("B. Arp.")