

Vessels of Honor and Glory

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It is in the nature of fallen mankind to blunder forth into things too much for our finite natures to bear or grasp or, in the alternative, to refuse to enter in and partake of that which God has so graciously given for us. Perhaps no greater example of this propensity can be found than that of Albert Einstein, the man *Time* named “Person of the Century” (Dec. 27, 1999), whose theories on light, gravity and relativity laid the groundwork for atomic power and quantum theory and overturned Newton’s “laws” of physics – yet he spent the rest of his life in a futile search for a theory that would unify the laws of physics, an idea that eludes the “great thinkers” of this world to this day. What the spiritual man readily and easily (if incompletely and inadequately) comprehends as “God” – transcendent, immortal, alive “in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom belong honor and everlasting power” (1 Tim. 6:16) and in whom all things are held together (Col. 1:17) – Einstein and his descendants seek to capture and encapsulate in a formula, vainly attempting to force even Him to bow down to their independent knowledge of good and evil (see Gen. 3:22) Men persist in groping blindly in the dark rather than humbly turning in faith to the One who gives true enlightenment and boldness to enter into His holiest places by the new and living way He made through the veil that separates men from God, that is, the blood and flesh of Jesus the Messiah. (Heb. 10:19-20, Mt. 27:51) Sad and futile indeed are men’s efforts to bypass God.

What is perhaps most often overlooked is that humankind has been created to simply be a vessel. Mankind was always meant to be a dwelling place for God (Jn. 14:23, etc.) but by choosing to step away from God, mankind opened himself to become the dwelling place for other, less benign spiritual entities. Men under the influence of these other beings resent the fact of God’s right to stand as the ultimate Judge over all the acts of all men everywhere. They reject His holy and righteous requirements which He has placed upon all men and they concoct whatever philosophies, mythologies or even “theologies” that seem right in their own eyes. (Jdgs. 21:25) Men deceived by these other spiritual beings – whom the Bible names as Satan or the devil and his demonic and fallen angelic cohorts – reject even the notion that man is, at his “bottom line,” only a clay pot. This is far too demeaning for those “great thinkers” who pursue “human potential” apart from such “bondages” as bowing down to and serving God. Yet it is precisely here where men allow themselves to be robbed of the divine honor and glory for which God created them.. Men who did *not* create the universe conduct their lives, postulate their theories and write their books that are in rejection of and opposition to the transcendent wisdom and power of Him who so easily and expertly *did* bring forth life in His universe.

The human tendency to resist God is indeed nothing new. Paul wrote, “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” (Rom. 9:20-24) Paul is not, as some have wrongly concluded, that the vessels here have absolutely no choice whatsoever in whether they will be a vessel of wrath or a vessel of mercy. Indeed, “whoever will” (Jn. 3:15, etc.) can recognize their need for mercy and may call out to God for mercy and gracious reconciliation with God and find that these are freely

given. No, those who are destined to be vessels filled with God's wrath are those whom Paul elsewhere calls "the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6), those who reject and resist God's right to be their King and Lord. (Lk. 19:27)

It is not to be supposed either that there are only these two types of vessels – those of wrath and those of mercy – discussed in the New Testament. These are only the first and ultimate categories by which the Creator will divide all people. Nor should it be supposed that all who claim to be the vessels of God's mercy are truly such – any more than one should presume that all who stand outside of some "Christian" group's man-made "theological" and religious boxes are vessels of wrath. Paul goes on to describe the Jews as having "a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, ...ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness [by the works of religious laws], [and] have not submitted to the righteousness of God." (Rom. 10:2-3) These Jews, as do many "Christians" today, consider themselves "God's chosen people" but live only in their own form of godliness while having no concept of, nor experience with, the life-changing power of God. (2 Tim. 3:5) Clearly, men's ideas of what is right and good are vastly different from God's ideas! (see Lk. 16:15)

Consider the contrast of Christ's abundant life (Jn. 10:10) and the way of religion (outward ceremony and mere appearance of piety). Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Mt. 11:28-30) But of the religious Jews who trusted in their own righteousness, He said, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you, observe and do, but do not do according to their works, for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." (Mt. 23:2-4) This same indictment holds true of many, perhaps even most "church" "pastors" today as much more time and effort is given to the man's persona and aura of infallibility projected from behind the pulpit and to surrounding himself with zealous sycophants (yes-men) blind to these deceptions than is given to "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7:1)

The New Testament uses the picture of vessels in various places. Paul wrote, "For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not us." (2 Cor. 4:6-7) The great Light that is God is freely given and clearly shown in Jesus Christ. It is this Light that Jesus spoke of when He said, "No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand that those who enter may see the light." (Lk. 8:16) God never intends to light His "lamp" in our hearts only to have it covered up and blocked from view by our clay vessel. This is not flattering to men but the nature of God is never brought out in us by flattering our flesh or souls. In fact, the wise wedding maids are those who "took oil in their vessels *with* their lamps." (Mt. 25:4) These had oil – the Holy Spirit personally leading and guiding them – and they were able to keep their lamp lit even as the Bridegroom long delayed His return. They had no need to run to the heaped up teachers and spiritual gurus who sell oil (Mt. 25:9-10) – they had and followed God. And yet again, no room is left for men to boast. (1 Cor. 1:29)

In perhaps the most often overlooked and under-appreciated usage of the picture of man as a vessel, Paul wrote, "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor." (2 Tim. 2:20) Here again Paul is

using the same picture as before, speaking of the vessels of mercy who are destined for honor and the vessels of wrath destined for dishonor. But this time he goes on to say, “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.” (2 Tim. 2:21) Because this translation incorporates words that have been taken over by the “church” industry, we may not at first grasp the depth of Paul’s thought. Consider the Amplified version:

“So whoever cleanses himself [from what is ignoble and unclean, who separates himself from contact with contaminating and corrupting influences] will [then himself] be a vessel set apart and useful for honorable and noble purposes, consecrated and profitable to the Master, fit and ready for any good work.”

What ought to jump out at us most is Paul’s *condition* for attaining to the desire result - *If anyone cleanses himself...* What?! Isn’t that intruding upon the finished work of Christ? Isn’t it sacrilege and heresy to even suggest that we must actually do something to be saved? That these kinds of questions even arise demonstrates how effective the devil and the demonic have been in deceiving and confusing people about following Christ. The rightly divided truth in this matter may be ungraspable even to an Einstein (1 Cor. 2:14) but it is readily revealed through the Spirit of Christ and God and comprehended by those who are spiritually mature. The rightly divided truth of this matter passes beyond one-liners and simple formulas, however, and those who cling to those have neither rightly divided the truth nor grasped the whole counsel of God

Elsewhere Paul wrote:

“Therefore, having these promises [of divine sonship], beloved, *let us cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (2 Cor. 7:1 – emphasis added)

And John wrote:

“And *everyone* who has this hope in Him [of being eternally transformed into the likeness of Christ] *purifies himself*, just as He is pure.” (1 Jn. 3:3 – emphasis added)

When John in his vision is asked by an elder who the vast multitude before God’s throne wearing white robes are, he is told:

“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and [they have] washed their [own] robes and [they have] made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev. 7:13-14 – emphasis added)

An angel tells John:

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife *has made herself ready*. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the *righteous acts [works] of the saints*.” (Rev. 19:7-8 – emphasis added)

Men, from their disadvantaged place in time and space, suppose there is some sort of “theological” separation between the work of Christ on the cross and the work of Christ in a believer. Thus they concoct phrases like “once saved, always saved” and “eternal security” that only introduces confusion and deception into the minds and hearts of believers, confusion and deception that may well prove to be the first step taken in turning away from the Lord who by His Spirit gives life and truth. Jesus said, “My sheep *hear My voice*, and I know them, and *they follow Me*. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” (Jn. 10:27-28) Eternal life and a secure position in Christ is given to those whose lives are characterized by hearing His voice and following wherever He leads! The acts subsequent to one’s initial interaction with Christ are as necessary and inseparable as is one’s initial conversion because they are the “things that *accompany* salvation.” (Heb. 6:9) It is the responsibility of each believer to be taught by the Spirit of God and to remain (abide) in the work Christ is doing in their life. (1 Jn. 2:27) It is the strategy of the devil and the demonic to deceptively lure a believer away from their secure position in Christ. (2 Pet. 3:17, etc.) Perhaps the greatest tool and aid to the devil’s work are the mis-applied *doctrines* of eternal security that promise eternal life apart from an abiding, interactive relationship with the Person and Spirit of Christ.

But if anyone cleanses himself from the things of the flesh by the blood of Christ, he will be, Paul wrote, “a vessel for honor.” The Greek word here is *time* [5092] and refers to the price or value or esteem assigned to something. Here Paul is saying that the one who cleanses himself in the blood of Christ from the filthy and worthless things of the world will begin to experience a life that has value and purpose and is found, not in itself or for its own sake, but in the fact that one is prepared to do every good work that the Master, the Lord of life, love and truth, has previously planned for that one to do and be. (Eph. 2:10)

As this world passes on into crushing socialism and tyranny of the wealthy and privileged few, those who are poor in this world’s resources may still be wealthy in the resources of God’s kingdom. (Jas. 2:5) Our lives do not need to be defined in terms of “eat, work, sleep” in endless, unbroken repetition. One current songwriter has captured the thought well:

“We know we were made for so much more than ordinary lives.
It’s time for us to more than just survive.
We were made to *thrive!*”

He then goes on to sing of “Joy unspeakable, faith unsinkable, love unstoppable. Anything is possible!” (Matthew West, *Thrive*)

So why do we find such a discrepancy between this high calling of Christ and the usual experiences found in attending “church”? The difference is found in the *source* to which one turns. As surely as Einstein turned to the science of numbers (mathematics, an art and “magic” first developed in Babylon) in his futile attempts to define and encapsulate what can only and ultimately be called God, the “church” has turned to the science of “theology” (“homiletics” and “hermeneutics,” a “science” drawn from pagan Greek sophistry, rhetoric and even mythology as hermeneutics takes its very name from the Greek messenger god Hermes!) and, rather than seek to be content with being seated in the heavenly realms with Christ where He alone is King and God (Eph. 2:6), has instead brought “God” down from heaven, forced “Him” into their man-made box (the “church” building where they isolate themselves from the world and from one

another, much like a coffin) and then wonder why those who seek life are repelled by the putrid smell of death that arises from the dead flesh with which they have constructed their denominational misrepresentation of God!

As the “church” embraces more and more of this world’s deceptions, the “church,” because it is constructed of worldly philosophies and empty traditions and even demonic doctrines (teachings) and run too often by arrogant, self-aggrandizing evil men, can only “grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (2 Tim. 3:13) No man-made, and certainly no demonically devised counterfeit of the way of following Christ and God will ever produce the abundant and everlasting life of Christ. Only *Christ* builds His ekklesia (the original Greek word [1577] poorly translated as “church” – Mt. 16:18) and only those who truly and wisely co-labor with Him (1 Cor. 3:9, 2 Cor. 6:1) bring forth His truth, grace (power) and life!

The one who has cleansed himself from the filth of the flesh and this world through the blood and work of Christ is set apart (holy, a “saint” in the original sense of the word) and is useful or suitable for the purposes of the Master. It is not to be supposed that this is a painless process. It has been rightly said that God intends to use us in precisely the same way He used His Son. The way of Christ and the cross is a bloody way – one that flatly rejects the notion that any good thing can be found in our flesh, either individually or corporately. (Rom. 7:18) The sooner we recognize that nothing of ourselves is of value, that we bring no “marketable skill” to His “table,” and that we can do nothing of eternal value apart from Him (Jn. 15:5), the sooner we become useful and suitable to the needs and issues of His kingdom. This *is* the inherent paradox of the true way of following Christ and God.

As Augustine express so well in the 5th century, our soul will find no rest until we find it in God. Peace and true abundant life is found only in God who has offered us reconciliation with Himself through Christ Jesus. Those who refuse to receive and enter into His gracious offer will find themselves to be vessels of God’s wrath. Those who do receive and enter into God’s offer of reconciliation will find themselves to be vessels of God’s mercy. Those who cleanse themselves in the blood of Christ will find themselves prepared and ready to be vessels of God’s grace (power) that are useful for the building up (edifying) of His people and His kingdom. That we are a vessel, a clay pot, is simply the nature of our existence to which the sooner we reconcile ourselves the better. Whether we will be a vessel of wrath or of mercy, vessels of dishonor or of honor, vessels of mere false religion or of His genuine goodness, truth, grace and life, is our choice to make and no other can make it nor bear the consequences of our choices. This *is* God’s offer of redemption, reconciliation, mercy and grace displayed in a picture that any man, whether a “great thinking” genius or a “Galilean fisherman” dumber than a rock, can easily and readily grasp, leaving all men without excuse before God who has made Himself visible and touchable in the Person of Christ Jesus. This *is* His good news, His gospel.

Let he who has ears hear.

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