

The Divine Order in the Believer's Works and Perseverance.
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Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.¹ Ephesians 5:1-2

Our themes in this conference are the saints' good works and their perseverance in grace to the end. In pursuing this theme the title of this paper uses the word "order" in two ways². One is the *command* explicit in the text: "Be imitators of God as beloved children." The other is the *priority* this command implies: to properly direct our thoughts, we ought to contemplate God and his word first in seeking to understand any subject. Relevant to our two themes, we focus on understanding good works and perseverance first *in God himself*. God's work of creation placed the stamp of his own likeness upon our human nature. Therefore creation itself and Scripture, including this Pauline text, direct us to consider God before and above anyone or anything else.

The thesis of this paper then is that regarding good works and perseverance, the saints throughout their lives are best and do best when they imitate God. Every Christian is to reflect the heavenly image that was lost in Adam, was repurchased by Christ, is being applied by the Spirit to each believer and will be perfected in them at their death or at Christ's return. As in every other aspect of their lives, God himself, in his communicable attributes, is or should be the believer's model in the matter of good works and perseverance.

Having established this, however, someone may object that because God is a perfect being, each person of the godhead infinite and unchangeable, why elaborate beyond the simple exhortation to learn, master, remember and strive to imitate God in Christ? Is this thesis worthy of a paper?

¹ γίνεσθε οὖν μιμηταὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς τέκνα ἀγαπητά καὶ περιπατεῖτε ἐν ἀγάπῃ, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν προσφορὰν καὶ θυσίαν τῷ θεῷ εἰς ὁσμὴν εὐωδίας.

² In Spanish this distinction can be denoted by the mere change in gender of the definite article before the word *orden*; but as we have no way of doing that in English, we admit the lack of such finesse and need to clarify.

One important answer is that sin dulls and shakes even the most solid believer. The earth-bound tendency of sin is a spiritual osteoporosis with astonishing and all too often stultifying success. And our enemy within and those without, with relentless ferocity, see to it that if at all possible we become used to and tolerate this downward bent. Little wonder that if we are to contemplate God at all we need to be exhorted to lift up our eyes to the hills; and having done so, we can then receive the word that the hills cannot help us, nor any other terrestrial person or thing. It can only come from the Creator of the hills and of everything above and below them.³

Thus with heads held high and eyes lifted to heaven, let us consider and stir ourselves up to imitate in some measure the works of our triune God and his perseverance in them. Without doubt God's works provide the model for ours. And the perfect divine pattern for us is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh. Our contemplation must go to his works and his perseverance in them, to the reality of his death, even death on a cross. This accords with our text and the Savior's saving sacrifice it sets before us.

A careful reading of both these chapters in the *Savoy Declaration* with which we are concerned will not reveal the divine priority in our second use of the word "order" except by implication. In the first sentence of chapter 16, we read: "Good works are only such as God has commanded in his Holy Word..." and the first sentence of the second paragraph: "These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are fruits..." Scripture is replete with commands to do good works. It describes what they are and what they are not, what God accepts and what he does not accept. It calls on the faithful to persevere, through every providential dispensation and to the end of their lives or Christ returns. But the apostle in our text raises our thoughts to the highest place when he calls on us *to be or to become imitators of God himself*.

The second translation of the verb is viable, and though it does not imply intentional delay, it does suggest that a believer's imitation of God will not necessarily be something immediate upon conversion, certainly not a *full* imitation, any more than a babe can articulate speech or walk. Growth is imperative. Some level of maturity must be visible in time if we are to comply with this command. As believers we are to seek God, though God must come to meet us if there is to be communion with him, a walking with him. He must be known before he can or will

³ Psalm 121:1-2

be loved and he must be loved before we may rightly imitate him.⁴ The first and great commandment directs every human person to this end. God is worthy of such love because of what he has done. This must inevitably lead the true believer to press on beyond God's *works* and *gifts* to love God in his glorious and merciful *persons*. For God is to be loved for who he is in all his Trinitarian fullness; and most particularly, he is to be loved for whom he has revealed himself to be for believers *in Christ*. This is made crystal clear for us in the end for which God foreknew and predestined believers: to be conformed to the image of his Son.⁵

Thus if we would imitate God, we must, with the apostle, set our eyes and focus on Christ.⁶ Our text does this. It sets forth the Lord Jesus in his supreme work as an expression of love for us and of persevering in that love to the point of having handed himself over⁷ to God the Father as an offering and savory sacrifice.⁸ It is to the cross of Christ to which the New Testament would have us continually return as the wellspring of all our meditations on God. When in Corinth the apostle determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified.⁹ It was for Christ and his gospel that Paul had suffered the loss of all things and in order to gain Christ counted them as refuse.¹⁰ Thus to the Galatians he testifies that he wished to boast in no person or object save the cross of Jesus Christ. For in that person on that cross the world had been crucified to Paul and he to the world.¹¹

So then let us briefly consider the good works and perseverance in them of the Son of God 1)in eternity past and during the Old Testament period; 2)in his life upon earth in humiliation as Jesus of Nazareth; 3)in his heavenly session, now exalted to the highest place at the Father's right hand; and 4)finally in Christ's coming glory.

1)GOD THE SON IN ETERNITY PAST AND DURING THE OLD TESTAMENT PERIOD

God is and he acts. We are time-bound creatures and might prefer to state that God is *before* he acts, or that he *was* before he *acted*. We struggle with the mere concept of eternity past and

⁴ Consider, in total contrast and as an exemplar of the idolatry God hates, the raucous and bloody prayer life of the prophets and servants of Baal (1 Kings 18:26-29). To a Christian even superficially familiar with them, the mere words "Hinduism" or "Islam" take demonic worship to new depths.

⁵ Romans 8:29

⁶ Hebrews 12:2-3

⁷ "παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν" The verb is translated "betray" in the case of Judas Iscariot. See Matthew 26:24,25, 45, and the parallel passages.

⁸ Consider in Genesis 27:4 the dim but distinct physical harbinger of Christ's spiritual savor to the Father.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:2

¹⁰ Philippians 3:8

¹¹ Galatians 6:14

the infinite, eternal and immutable nature of God. We can affirm these as biblical certainties but scarcely imagine the endless space and bottomless ocean of eternity before creation when there was only God, the three ineffable persons, needing nothing, the perfect community in perfect communion.

We cannot grasp the concept of a non-created, eternal 'being'. For us as creatures, 'is' implies a starting point. God has no such point. He inhabits eternity.¹² It is a cardinal principle of Scripture that as a tree is known by its fruit, so a person is known as to what he is by what he says and does, or conversely what he doesn't say or do.¹³ Thus God can be known only from what he reveals of himself in words or actions. This is how we may know his goodness and his perseverance in that goodness.

The New Testament tells us that all things were created and exist in, through and for God the Son.¹⁴ It is he alone who is the one timeless Mediator between God and man.¹⁵ So throughout the Old Testament, as we read of the works of God in preparing for a Savior, they are the works of God the Son, his good and wondrously persevering works.

Because God's words and works reveal his character, we can scarcely do better than start with the question as to *why* God created in the first place? Stephen Charnock has argued that God created in order to show a particular aspect of his glory, namely his *goodness*.¹⁶ This is a magnificent biblical term that is all too frequently by-passed in our speaking or writing about God and preaching his word. We tend to use other biblical words, such as *mercy*, *grace* and *love*.

¹² Isaiah 57:15

¹³ For example the silence of those representing Hezekiah before the Rabshakeh's blasphemous fulminations was a mark of wisdom (Isa.36:21) while a rashly spoken vow reveals character and in Jephtha's case brought deep sorrow (Jud.11:30-31,34f.).

¹⁴ Colossians 1:16 For in [or by] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

¹⁵ Job 33:22-30; 1 Timothy 2:5. See also, for example, 1 Corinthians 10:4.

¹⁶ *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979 reprint), vol. 2, 215. Charnock's fuller statement is as follows: *No perfection of the Divine nature is more eminently, nor more speedily visible in the whole book of the creation, than this. His greatness shines not in any part of it, where his goodness doth not as gloriously glisten: whatsoever is the instrument of his work, as his power; whatsoever is the orderer of his work, as his wisdom; yet nothing can be adored as the motive of his work, but the goodness of his nature. This only could induce him to resolve to create: his wisdom then steps in, to dispose the methods of what he resolved; and his power follows to execute, what his wisdom hath disposed, and his goodness designed. His power in making, and his wisdom in ordering, are subservient to his goodness; and this goodness, which is the end of the creation, is as visible to the eyes of men, as legible to the understanding of men, as his power in forming them, and his wisdom in tuning them.* Emphasis added.

These three words sharpen the focus by their precision but are inevitably narrower in scope. Each proceeds from God's goodness.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism captures this in answering question #4: *What is God?* The answer does not mention God's love, grace, mercy, patience or other related attributes and actions, but rather embraces them all in the term "goodness".¹⁷ Why? Perhaps one verse will suffice from Psalm 119, that great poem centered on the word of God. It reads in verse 68, "You are good and do good; teach me your statutes." Only what is good can proceed from one who is good. A good tree will produce good fruit; a pure spring, good water.

And so out of his goodness, God did good in creating all things, persevering through the six days and resting on the seventh in order to contemplate and be *refreshed by his work*.¹⁸ The Father has ever still been at work¹⁹ in providentially caring for his creation and, together with the Son and Spirit, in bringing all toward the triune God's designed end.

But in pursuing the subject at hand, we focus our consideration on the Son of God in eternity past, forever contemplating his incarnation and everything that would comprise his earthly existence from conception to ascension. There was never a moment when every word, every deed, every minutia of his terrestrial life were not clearly before him. In that unfathomable eternity before God created time, there was still the unchangeable perfection of glory of the Son to be enjoyed with the Father and with the Spirit. In that eternity past all of eternity future was comprehended: creation, fall, sin, death, hell and the multitude of abominable evils that would be poured out on him who is our righteousness, our life, our heaven.

We may speak or write such words as these, but the capacity to take hold of them eludes us, finite and time-bound as we are. The merit of such thoughts, however, is the reality that from the well-spring of infinite goodness that resides in and among the three Persons, mercy, grace and love came and culminated in the task assigned to and taken up by the Son, namely, that he would come in order to display divine goodness in its every detail in a human life. In this way

¹⁷ Some years ago the author, present at an examination of a candidate for the pastorate, heard a fellow-examiner and professor of theology at an evangelical seminary sharply criticize the WSC precisely because it did not mention God's love among his attributes but his 'mere' goodness.

¹⁸ Exodus 31:17

¹⁹ John 5:17

God's glory would be more fully known by angels and men and the divine decree would reach its fulfillment in restoring, as far as the curse is found, what sin had destroyed.

Let us labor to visualize that before he became Jesus of Nazareth, God the Son from all eternity had every single one of his words to be spoken and works to be done after the incarnation upon his mind and ever before him--including from Gethsemane to the tomb. These events were always there in his mind in one eternal present instant, decreed, therefore certain, agreed upon among the three Persons and, Scripture tell us, taken up *for the joy that was set before him*.²⁰

We grow quickly sluggish under such a meditation as we try to hold its enormity before our mind's eye. We, creatures of animated dust, shrink from the slightest difficulty, pain, illness or uncomfortable situation or even phone call. But the spotless, holy, infinitely good, wise and powerful Son of God held before his eyes the joy of converted sinners, redeemed from the pit, as the counterpoise to the cross, which was the culmination of all his work. This included all the human and satanic abuse which he would undergo to attain that joy. Is it any wonder that long before this *degree* of divine joy was revealed Nehemiah sought to stir up God's people to good works and to persevere in them by telling them that the joy of the Lord was their strength?²¹

Turning now to the Old Testament record, as with all of Holy Scripture, "In the beginning" is for our benefit, not God's. What follows Genesis 1:2 is the ordering – by command and with precise structure - of a dark and watery morass unfit for human habitation. It is a picture of the first occasion of God not only at work but of God *preparing a place for us*.²² How unspeakably good of him to do so! He was under no necessity, no constraint other than from his own eternal purpose and decree--that expression of the counsel of the three glorious Persons.

God 'persevered' through the great work of creation when with methodical deliberateness of expression and in six days he brought into being by the word of his power a mature heavens

²⁰ Hebrews 12:2

²¹ Nehemiah 8:10

²² John 14:2-3. A repeated theme and reality: Joseph was 'sent' to prepare a place for his family; their full cup of iniquity prepared the Canaanites and their land to be removed and renovated respectively by God's power through his people; and away from the blood but using the booty of David's wars, Solomon erected the glorious "house of the Lord". The fullest picture of this that we have in this life is the gift of the Holy Spirit who renovates the mind, affections and will of every converted person by the application of Christ's purchased benefits.

and earth, all that his infinite wisdom had designed. Six times God judged his work as “good” and upon completion pronounced all “very good” – a Sabbath of “good”!²³

In carrying out God’s second great work, that of providentially caring for all that he had made, his patience throughout the Old Testament period with human and demonic sin is surely a major aspect of his perseverance in effecting his eternal plan. From the ante-diluvial world until Jesus initiated his public ministry with his baptism, we read of numerous instances where the promise of a Savior and of salvation was put at risk, even by the most illustrious of saints in one way or another, but was sustained and assured by God himself, to whom alone belong all glory, honor and blessing.

For example:

consider the generations from godly Seth to godly Noah and that they ended with God destroying the earth – except for eight souls -- when his patience had come to an end with those whose *every thought was only evil continually from their youth*;²⁴

consider Abraham twice lying about his wife and so Sarah was taken into the harem of a pagan ruler. This risked her becoming pregnant by someone other than he to whom the promise of the earth’s blessing was given; ²⁵

consider Abraham taking Sarah’s advice to treat her maid as wife, despite the clear implication of God’s promise that Sarah herself would bear the promised seed.²⁶ And thus a great thorn was produced in Israel’s side in the descendants of the circumcised but mocking Ishmael;

consider Isaac’s lie in imitation of his father, thus risking a foreign seed with Rebecca;²⁷

²³ See Genesis 1:1-31.

²⁴ Genesis 6:5 & 8:21

²⁵ Genesis 12:11f. & 20:2f.

²⁶ Sarah was Abraham’s wife when the promise was first made in Genesis 12. With the taking of Hagar as wife, so began among the godly the frequent practice of violating creation’s design for marriage: one man and one woman for life.

²⁷ Genesis 26:7f.

consider the capital crimes of meditating on murder and the actual kidnapping of Joseph, though he was God's prophet among his brothers and the one who was to become their human means of salvation. This included Judah – the ancestor of David and the Christ;²⁸

consider the life of Moses, the future lawgiver and mediator of his people's deliverance from satanic slavery, whose parents committed him in infancy to a second ark under the edict to abort all Hebrew male infants;²⁹

consider God's patience with Moses eighty years later in overcoming his reluctance to be the divine mouthpiece to denounce and destroy Egypt's gods³⁰ and to proclaim deliverance for Israel from their bondage;³¹

consider God's merciful faithfulness to his covenant promises in his continual restraint of wicked intentions, words and deeds that characterized so many in Israel and Judah throughout their history, as they heeded false prophets, ignored and persecuted true prophets, perverted God's worship, rejected his leadership in their desire to be like the nations around them; and followed along as even their best kings fell into sin of one kind or another, eventually died and left the throne to an uncertain future under another sinner-king. And so this cycle continued until both kingdoms suffered exile and the covenant people and its chief city seemed irrevocably destroyed, as Jeremiah lamented.³²

After the exile consider:

in light of Psalm 137:5-6³³ -- along with many other passages promising that salvation would and must come from Jerusalem -- the small remnant that returned there; so precious were they that two chapters are devoted to counting not only the human persons who returned but also their animals and utensils.³⁴ Why so few? Where were the rest?

²⁸ Genesis 37 and Psalm 105:16-22

²⁹ Exodus 2:1-10

³⁰ Exodus 12:12

³¹ Exodus 3 & 4.

³² The book of Lamentations.

³³ If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *its skill!* If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth -- if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.

³⁴ Ezra 2 & Nehemiah 7

consider as perhaps illustrative of the best among those Hebrews who remained among the nations, Mordecai and Esther. Contrary to the law, Mordecai permitted his cousin— brought up by him as a daughter--to be taken into the harem of a godless tyrant for the sole certainty of one evening of fornication with the king and the remote possibility of promotion to the dubious honor of becoming Persia's queen. This same Mordecai later put the entire Jewish population then alive throughout Xerxes' kingdom at risk of extermination by his refusal to honor Haman, a man beneath but elevated by the king, and by the king whom Mordecai honored and who had commanded honor be given to Haman. And the result of God's overcoming these his saints' evil with countless acts of his goodness? a biblically unauthorized festival named "luck"³⁵ and commemorating to this day among the Jews the achievements of man. Little wonder the name of God is absent from this book and its festival, but by his ever-present and overruling providence, the promise of a Savior was sustained and once again, taken as prey from the Satan's mouth.

The words of Jeremiah in regard to the preservation of a remnant after Jerusalem's destruction are true of the entire Old Testament period, that it was because of God's mercies that the Jews were not obliterated, because his compassions did not fail. Great is his faithfulness,³⁶ to his own word and promise to bring a Savior and salvation for the world through him.

2)GOD THE SON IN OUR NATURE ON EARTH AS JESUS

Throughout all this history and in the concrete certainty that all God's works and those of his creatures were known to him from eternity past, we ought to labor to keep in mind that it was upon the heart of the Son of God, not only to create all things and that his glory in the church³⁷ would be the goal of creation, but, as noted above, ever present was the reality of his incarnation with all its humiliating degradation.

Though we cannot fathom eternity in the abstract, we may begin to grasp it when we read that the Eternal God entered time. To the person of the God the Son was added a human nature in the womb of the virgin Mary, and the primacy of his early love for the things of his Father is shown in the only instance we have from his words and actions during childhood.³⁸ Identified

³⁵ The meaning of "Purim"

³⁶ Lamentations 3:22-23

³⁷ Ephesians 3:21

³⁸ Luke 2:40-52

with sinners from the start of his public ministry,³⁹ we continually see his persevering goodness toward them and love for them.⁴⁰ And so Jesus pressed on until the infinite price of the covenant of Grace had been paid in full during those final hours of his life and his death, in the sacrifice required to redeem all the Father had given him from sin, death and hell.

It is endemic for many to think of God as having some *need* to create, perhaps to avert loneliness or for any other reason. We must be clear: the concept of “need”, as in “lack”, could never exist in the eternal communion of the divine community. Rather we must know and acknowledge that in creating all things because of his *goodness*, God *began* to *display* his *glory*. Each word is worthy of its own emphasis. There was the will to display, to portray something of his being and work before those he created, so that his sentient creatures might see and enjoy him and his works.

Another error we must carefully avoid is to imagine that God, by creating and redeeming, increased his glory--something which can neither be increased nor diminished. For it is eternally and immutably infinite. Rather what we can say, and what does occur in everything that happens, is that the *display* of God’s glory is increased. This display was and is and it is to come in greater measure. If we knew nothing else this would be clear from Jesus’ words just before he was arrested. When announcing that “the hour” had come – known from eternity by Father and Son--Jesus asked that the Father would glorify him so that he might glorify the Father. And we recall that after that prayer and the time spent in Gethsemane, he would proceed directly to the public ignominy of Calvary. In persevering inexorably toward the cross, where Jesus did more good for more people than in all his life,⁴¹ he set his face to go to Jerusalem,⁴² --a stern and definitive act of perseverance unto death.

Indeed, all during Jesus’ earthly life he had been sinlessly good before the Law of God and had done nothing but good, both toward men and God.⁴³ His every thought, word and deed brought honor to the Father in a manner and reality never before seen or known in the history of the world; but without doubt when the Savior prayed here for glory just before his most intense suffering was to begin, he intended that the infinite, eternal and unchangeable glory that he had

³⁹ Matthew 3:13-17

⁴⁰ E.g. Mark 10:21; John 13:1

⁴¹ Cf. Judges 16:30 as a type of Jesus’ sacrifice.

⁴² Luke 9:51-53

⁴³ “I always do those things that please him [the Father].” John 8:29

with the Father before the world was should now begin to be manifested *in a degree* hitherto unknown and in works unimaginable until displayed in this, the depths of his suffering, in body and soul, as if the worst of criminals.

And it is this emphasis in the New Testament on our Lord's priestly work that so prominently manifests the stark antinomy of the depths of evil human deeds and humanity's continuance in them on the one hand and Christ's persevering goodness unto glory on the other. Jesus' miracles are commonly associated with his prophetic ministry as teacher or illustrative of his power over all things as king and sovereign.⁴⁴ Yet it was his priestly work that purchased our salvation. For without a word and without a miracle, Christ performed his greatest, his most difficult good work.⁴⁵ Indeed, as to his human nature, he was enabled to do this only by the eternal Spirit of God, through whom he offered himself up to death, death by crucifixion.⁴⁶

Reflect on those moments in the Garden of Gethsemane when eternity and time came together in our Lord's mind and soul in an indescribable manner, where divine Goodness Incarnate did not make the request of having his cup of filth pass without adding, "Not my will but thine be done." Were ever words more precious?! Without them the Father would have been bound to relieve his Son of this cup, *our* cup, and we have to drink it to its wormwood dregs throughout all eternity. Omit this clause and the sinless Holy One of Israel would have been praying what was only right and just; and he would have been heard! But he did not stop. He continued – he persevered—three times to the final clause of his prayer and did so, no doubt in part, in order to indelibly portray mercy to us in his agony.

No, the Father's will was also the Son's will. So that Jesus was reconciling his divine and human natures in those interminable minutes of anguished and psychological havoc within himself, as he pleaded on the one hand and answered on the other. And as a token of the brutality of those moments, blood evidently was dripping all the while from his pores under the anguished stress of body and soul.

⁴⁴ As good and great as were the signs Jesus performed, storms, hunger, thirst, illness and death returned to all who benefited from these miracles. And in regard to his teaching, the words that pointed most clearly to his saving work were the most misunderstood, namely that he must suffer, die, be buried and rise from the dead.

⁴⁵ Hence "Good" Friday

⁴⁶ Hebrews 9:14

Our Lord Jesus Christ in performing this crowning good work in the depths of humiliation at the same time showed the most profound perseverance. We flinch from a hot stove or slight knife cut. Our corporeal nature is constantly self-preserving and we persevere in this with both instinct and deliberation. We self-consciously and surely unconsciously consider it among the most important constituents of our highest good to prioritize our bodily needs and wishes. Self-denial of any kind is not attractive to us naturally, even when we know that what we want to do will later, or perhaps sooner, bring pain and suffering.

But here during this time in Gethsemane while the disciples slept when asked to watch, the word “goodness” as to our Lord is pressed well beyond its capacity, and we thankfully reach for “grace”, “patience”, and “love” in their most profound sense and say, “With these, with these words, we will try to describe our Jesus!” They bring Psalm 119:68 to new heights.⁴⁷ Saving good for human sinners came about through the prolonged excruciation in body and soul of him who in enduring it displayed the greatest perseverance ever known.

Thus it was out of profound mystery that the good, the spotless Son of God had earlier predicted that he was to be lifted up.⁴⁸ But how? Even as Moses had lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness – the very emblem of what was killing the rebellious Israelites. So Jesus must be lifted up; he must be treated as if he were a serpent hanging upon a pole, one cursed of God, in those hours when God abandoned him and when, as a fitting response in the natural world, the sun refused to shine. It was then that *God made him to be sin* – not made him a *sinner* or *sinful*, but he was made *to be sin, he who knew no sin*, who was incarnate goodness, made, as it were, sin incarnate. And why? The apostle completes this astonishing verse, so filled with wonder, with the explanation: *that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*⁴⁹

Thus our Jesus bore in his human nature at Calvary what Satan, his hosts and his human slaves will bear throughout eternity: the full force of the wrath of God. To be sure it was God’s wrath against *human sin*, but let us keep in mind that *every sin deserves God’s wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come.*⁵⁰ Here we see the payment of our salvation’s infinite

⁴⁷ “You are good and do good.”

⁴⁸ John 3:13-15. Consider also Luke 9:51 in this regard – a passage usually tied exclusively to Jesus’ ascension.

⁴⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁵⁰ WSC #84.

price, transacted in utmost shame but earning – by Jesus’ good work – the grandest *display* of God’s glory ever known. The fruit of this work is made evident in the transformation of every repentant, believing sinner – before and after Christ’s earthly life. And the merits of this great good deed will be consummated when the Lord Christ returns in manifest victory and splendor with all the holy angels, to be admired by his saints⁵¹ and to produce eternal consternation and horror in all his enemies.⁵²

In all this may we not see in a clearer light how we must “fix our eyes on Jesus,” particularly in his suffering and sacrifice, in order to learn what our Ephesians’ text directs us to do, namely *imitate God as beloved children*? The Hebrews passage goes on to state that in this act Christ was “the author and perfecter of our faith” – the one who persevered in his good works to their intended end. “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, though despising the shame.”⁵³ Such brief ordinary words describe what our Jesus endured, what he persevered through, in bringing many sons to glory.

3)THE SON OF GOD NOW EXALTED TO THE HIGHEST PLACE IN HIS HEAVENLY SESSION AT THE FATHER’S RIGHT HAND

As our thoughts traverse the period beginning with our Lord’s ascension to the present day, we can only wonder at and praise the King of the universe for his patience and perseverance in executing the eternal plan in this world of saints, demons and the ungodly, ever ripening for either glory and perfect holiness or justice and punishment from on high. His kingdom advances through his word and Spirit as he rules and defends his own while restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.⁵⁴

It is in this context that we ought to see our own works and perseverance as Christians. For against this backdrop and in an ever deepening estate of humility and abasement that befits us, every believer has the privilege of joyfully living for and serving the Lord Christ.

Now from heaven, exalted to the highest place, Christ’s goodness perseveres; for there *he ever lives to make intercession for all who come to God through him.*⁵⁵ He continues his work as the

⁵¹ 2 Thessalonians 1:10

⁵² Revelation 6:15-17

⁵³ Hebrews 12:2

⁵⁴ WSC #26

⁵⁵ Hebrews 7:25

church's high priest – a high priest after the order of Melchizedek about whom there is no record of beginning of days or end of life.⁵⁶ Thus this shadowy figure was a type of a priest and of a priesthood that appeared chronologically before but extend far beyond the intermediate priesthood of Aaron, both in time and merit.

Victoriously living before the Father, Jesus' yet visible wounds testify for and preserve the safety of his erring saints. Every believer is beset with sin and weakness but because each is *in Christ*, the Father beholds no blot or stain in them.⁵⁷ As the hymn writer has put it,

“By Thee my prayers acceptance gain, although with sin defiled;
Satan accuses me in vain, and I am owned a child.”⁵⁸

Though he spoke partial truth when he saw the high priest Joshua was still clothed in filthy garments,⁵⁹ the malicious assaults of the accuser of the brethren⁶⁰ have no merit against those who by faith now are dressed in the spotless robe of Jesus' own perfect righteousness, ready to serve and impervious in God's eyes even to the dust of sin. George Herbert, early seventeenth century English poet and pastor in the Church of England, exquisitely described it in this way in his poem entitled “Aaron”:

HOLINESSE on the head,
Light and perfections on the breast,
Harmonious bells below, raising the dead
To leade them unto life and rest;
Thus are true Aarons drest.⁶¹

Profanenesse in my head,
Defects and darknesse in my breast,
A noise of passions ringing me for dead
Unto a place where is no rest;

⁵⁶ Hebrews 7:3

⁵⁷ Numbers 23:21; Psalm 32:2; Romans 4:4-8; 1Corinthians 1:30; Philippians 3:9; 1 Peter 1:1

⁵⁸ John Newton. A verse unfortunately often omitted from “How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds”.

⁵⁹ Zechariah 3:1-5

⁶⁰ Revelation 12:10

⁶¹ Exodus 28:29-37

Poore priest thus am I drest.

Onely another head
I have, another heart and breast,
Another musick, making live not dead,
Without whom I could have no rest;
In him I am well drest.

Christ is my onely head,
My alone onely heart and breast,
My onely musick, striking me e'en dead,
That to the old man I may rest,
And be in him new drest.

So holy in my head,
Perfect and light in my deare breast,
My doctrine tun'd by Christ, (who is not dead,
But lives in me while I do rest),
Come people! Aaron's drest.⁶²

And so, having dressed us in his righteousness when by faith we are justified, our Jesus bears with us, perseveres for us in the goodness of his intercession. Hear the hymn writer again:

“Could we bear from one another what he daily bears from us?
Yet this glorious Friend and Brother, loves us though we treat him thus;
though for good we render ill, he accounts us brethren still.”⁶³

And so because Jesus' work is continually effective for us, we have as this comforting benefit from his death the certainty of the *increase of grace and perseverance therein to the end*.⁶⁴

4)THE SON OF GOD IN HIS COMING GLORY

⁶² Herbert, George. *The English Works of George Herbert*, Vol.V. Ed.by George Herbert Palmer. Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1905. 11-12.

⁶³ “One There Is, Above All Others” by John Newton

⁶⁴ WSC #36

Here is the perseverance of divine goodness to completion, to its designed perfection! The plan of the eternal Three cannot fail. For the coming glory will be ushered in by the final revelation of Christ triumphant with all his holy angels. There the greatest display of the sum total of God's attributes will be displayed. This manifestation of the divine beauty in Christ himself and in the church is what will constitute Christ's glory, and it will be seen by all his sentient creatures.⁶⁵ So on that day, at the end of time, all the goodness of God will be unveiled in this one whose name is Wonderful, a name surpassing speech and comprehension,⁶⁶ but revealed in Jesus Christ – despised and rejected by so many but precious beyond utterance to those who have tasted his goodness,⁶⁷ believed him, obeyed him, loved him and longed for him to appear.⁶⁸

The entirety of the book of Revelation is the final expression of this reality. Its form is in the language of signs,⁶⁹ taken from the Old Testament and made visible through the prism of Christ and the New Testament apostolic writings. So that amid all the judgments, fire, smoke and woes that are to come on all who do not know God nor have obeyed his gospel,⁷⁰ Christ's precious saints, the church in perfected holiness, will take her place beside the one, *who having loved his own*, will then – throughout all eternity – *show them the full extent of his love*.⁷¹ Then will be consummated what good works and perseverance in them to the end truly mean. For our Lord Jesus Christ will have brought to maturity the bud, blossom and fruit of his work in the church and in the new heavens and new earth, made for the holy angels and the church to inhabit.

At that time Christ will hand over the kingdom – all of his mediatorial work - to the Father. This will come *after he shall have put down all other rule and authority and power* and removed by his power every vestige of resistance to his goodness. Death of any kind for the saints and physical death for the wicked will have been done away with; all things will be under Christ's feet. With his work completed, the Son as Mediator will be subject to the one who subjected all things to him as Mediator. And so the apostle closes this magnificent passage with these

⁶⁵ Zechariah 12:10; Revelation 1:7

⁶⁶ Judges 13:17-18; Isaiah 9:6

⁶⁷ 1 Peter 2:3. Peter quotes Psalm 34:8 verbatim. Where the LXX (33:9) reads ὅτι χρηστός ὁ κύριος the Hebrew reads: כִּי יֵשׁוּב יְהוָה "for the Lord is good".

⁶⁸ 2 Timothy 4:8

⁶⁹ Revelation 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him to show to his bondservants what things must come to pass soon and he signified it (ἐσήμανεν) by sending it to his bondservant John through his angel.

⁷⁰ 2 Thessalonians 2:8

⁷¹ John 13:1 εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς

explanatory words: “So that God will be all in all.”⁷² It was the plan of the three persons. Each had his part. Thus the fullness of the persevering goodness of the triune God will be finally manifested.

Therefore, brethren, let us be encouraged and comforted by the apostle’s words:

... be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor. Ephesians 5:1-2

⁷² 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 v.28c ἵνα ἢ ὁ θεὸς πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν.