

THE REDEMPTION OF CREATION

Study 4

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INTRODUCTION

In Christ Jesus, God has spoken, and is speaking. This speaking awakens hope. Some people prefer perpetual silence, and a lifetime of distractions, or even years of pessimistic mumbling and commentary, to a word, which breaks that silence, brings comfort - yet probingly so – and so, demands much more of us.¹

We saw in **Study 2** that a tragic guilt has come to the human race. Sin enters the world. Communion has been broken on a large scale, with huge ramifications. Wholeness, unity and peace on a personal, and global scale have been shattered. However, as Christians we have, by faith, experienced the *healing* of our broken lives in Jesus Christ.

SELF-HEALING AND REPAIR

A marvel occurs when we cut our hand: immediately the body goes to work. An anaesthetic, and the great healing power of our own blood flows forth – spreading, congealing and eventually bridging and plugging the gaping gash in our skin, and finally healing over, with what can surely be described as - a remarkable repair job! Similarly, some months after a scorching bushfire blackens the Australian scrub, we see small, power-filled green shoots emerging from charred stumps. What then of the whole world?

Is there a moral order a self-healing power, as nature overgrows in course of time catastrophes volcanic in violence and in area continental? Has it a *Vis medicatrix*,² a power of innate self-recuperation, corresponding to what we find in physical organisms? Is there in it an indwelling tendency, which moves to repair all damage at last, and a power to overbear those elements, which arrest its development?³

Creation does appear to have inbuilt dynamic powers of its own. *Let the earth bring forth living creatures* (Genesis 1:24), and it does; creatures themselves are *blessed*, commanded and equipped to *be fruitful*, and they are. Powers of procreation, medicines and powers of healing lie within creation. As we look to Scripture, and our hear Christ speaking in it, we see that creation has a future. This future is however, always integrally bound up with the person - Jesus Christ. Scripture records that the earth shook at Christ's crucifixion⁴ and the whole creation now waits with eager longing for the unveiling of the future, the sons of God participating in the life of total liberty, where death and decay are

¹ Mark 8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.."

John Piper has a thoughtful book title: *What Jesus Demands From the World*, Crossway Books, 2006.

² Vis Medicatrix naturae means: the healing power of nature.

³ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, NCPI, 1988, p. 59

⁴ Matthew 27:51, 54 'The earth shook, and the rocks were split' '... the centurion saw the earthquake...'

no more⁵; this future is that which God has planned. But there is not merely, an inbuilt self-directing powerful *pressure* for good that brings new life to the world. There is a Person! That person is the Redeemer.

THE PERSON

It is the personality and deeds of Jesus Christ, as Lord of creation, Lord of life, and Lord over death, which brings the future into being. Firstly, together with the eternal Father, as the eternal Son, he freely selects and sets out what the future goal of creation will be. And he brings this future into being in a way, which is truly moral (not moralistic), where moral actions matter. Forsyth says:

...we construe the universe in terms of its crowning product, soul, conscience, and society. It exists for the growing of personality, which is an end in itself, and, in so far as it serves, it serves only another personality, and grows men of God, who is the end for all ends.⁶

In Christ, God is:

...that One who has His universal end completely in Himself, who is identical with the end of the disordered universe – with its redemption. He is *the* Redeemer because He is identical with His own redemption.⁷

What does this mean for our lives? How does it affect our living?

The following points outline the matter in brief:

1. There is a Person – Christ – unifying all things, himself the guarantor of the goal.
2. We are called to participate with Christ, as he takes us towards, and to the goal.
3. As participants, we nevertheless, of ourselves, have severe limitations.
4. Creation appears to have innate qualities of self-repair and healing, but in fact, all of these are contingent upon the Living Redeemer.
5. Evil also has an inbuilt tendency to disorganise itself – to self-destruct.
6. The atonement of the cross, flowing from a Holy God, however, is the only way of dealing fully with the moral situation of the human race. It is a moral Act that is required, and marks a new beginning for the human race. There is no other.

WE DON'T JUST FIND A SPOT TO PARK OUR CARAVAN

Christian faith is about willing participation in the workings of Christ. It is a moral struggle to do so (Ephesians 6:12). Many miss this fact. As such, some believers are virtually 'still-born', upon their new birth into God's kingdom. Our lives, our actions have a direct bearing upon what shall be, in eternity. Moral or immoral action has significant bearing on the way in which history unfolds.

Faith in the Living Christ excludes the idea of fate, but includes the realisation of destiny:

⁵ Romans 8:19 For 'the creation wais with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God;'

⁶ Forsyth, p. 63

⁷ Ibid.

We do not find our freedom and peace merely by finding ourselves, but by finding ourselves in a world Saviour. We do not reach rest merely by finding our place in an objective order, and reconciling ourselves to it. For that is rather resignation than reconciliation. What we find is a power rather than a place, a power working congenially in us both to will and to do. We do not merely win a fortitude, which accepts our niche in the universe, or takes the room assigned in the caravanserai⁸ of life. We recognise ... our own Master's voice, the voice of One whose mastery of us is our own true self, true power, and true freedom.⁹

Hearing God, we begin to participate in his will – at first, and ever anew:

Moral power is, at the last, personality. That is the only form in which we know what power really is – our own sense of acting as persons, or of being acted on by persons.¹⁰

Our destiny, however, is always a gift, a grace, redemptive. It is only possible because there is a Living Redeemer. And this Redeemer carries out many repairs.

THE LIMITATIONS OF CREATURE AND CREATION

In answer to his own questions, (see the start of this paper), Forsyth thus reminds us:

The moral order is self-repairing only in the sense that it is repaired continuously and creatively by the Holy One whose end is in Himself, and who is its true self and more. (So that to love God is to love ourselves in the truest way).¹¹

For the human race the fact of our mortality, limits any *self-repair* we may be given:

There comes a point when the power of physical self-repair ceases – in death.¹²

As to the renewal of this creation; we are not to expect evil to be a *self-solvent*¹³. Nor does the good make *its slow and ebbless way through creation*. The wicked are often caught in their own net (Psalm 141:10), and their evil deeds are turned to work together for God's purposive good, as in Joseph's life (Gen. 50:20). However, it is in the cross of Christ, (Acts 2:23) that God works Redemption – and in no other way, does history come to its appointed goal. The creature and creation need the Creator for Redemption!

⁸ Caravanserai: an inn in some eastern countries with a large courtyard that provides accommodation for caravans

⁹ Forsyth, p. 64

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 65

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. p. 66

Paul teaches that in the new creation, the old things have become new (1Corinthians 5:17).¹⁴ Revelation 21:1 shows the new heaven and new earth is the same heaven and earth, “but gloriously rejuvenated, with no weeds, thorns or thistles, and so on”.¹⁵

The following comment by Forsyth regarding the new creation is consistent with this:

The new creation must, of course, arise out of the first, for, though it is an absolute Act, it does not take place in an absolute way. But it is a more grave matter to regenerate the first creation into the second that it was to organise chaos into the first. The opposition of chaos, void and formless, was passive, but the opposition of the creature is active. It is a family quarrel, and they are the worst. It is not matter against force but will against will. It has behind it all the power of the freedom, which makes the first creation what it chiefly is. So that it is really more true ethically to speak of God’s goal as a New Humanity than as two stages or states of the old Humanity – so long as we do not put the old and the new out of all organic connection whatever.... The Redeemer was not the mere agent of a process. He was the New Creator.¹⁶

WHAT IS REDEMPTION?

It is an Act, with a capital ‘A’. Redemption is not a process. Rather, it is a concentrated Act, with an eternal and universal bearing.¹⁷

Forsyth takes us on, into the cross, as that necessary and crucial Act of God:

Nothing offers a future for such a world as this but its redemption. But by redemption what do we mean? We mean that the last things shall crown the first things, and that the end will justify the means, and the goal glorify a Holy God. We mean (if we will allow ourselves theological language) an eschatology and a theodicy in it – a divine Heaven, a divine Salvation, and a divine Vindication in the result of history. But more. We mean a consummation, which can only come by way of rescue and not mere growth. We mean rescue from evil by a God whose manner of it is moral, which is the act of a moral absolute, the act of a holy God doing justice to righteousness at any cost to Himself. We mean rectification of the present state of things on His own principles; that is, not mere rectification, mere straightening of a tangle, but justification on a transcendent plane of righteousness, the moral adjustment of man and God in one holy, loving, mighty, final, and eternal act. We mean something more crucial than Meliorism¹⁸.

We will continue to explore and expound these things in the next study.

¹⁴ Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Creation and the Liberating Glory*, NCPI, p. 144

¹⁵ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, Tyndale Press, 1940, p. 198 says: ‘The word used in the original implies that it was a ‘new’ but not an ‘other’ world. Fn: The original has *kainos*, not *neos*.’

See also Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Creation and the Liberating Glory*, p. 73, 121

¹⁶ Forsyth, p. 68

¹⁷ Forsyth, p. 74

¹⁸ Meliorism: the belief that the world tends to improve and that humans can aid its betterment.