

Sixthly

Introduction of grace by Jesus Christ into the whole of our relation unto God, and its respect unto all the parts of our obedience

- No mystery of grace in the covenant of works
- All religion originally commensurate unto reason
- No notions of natural light concerning the introduction of the mediation of Christ and mystery of grace, into our relation to God, Ephesians 1:17-19
- Reason, as corrupted, can have no notions of religion but what are derived from its primitive state
- Hence the mysteries of the gospel esteemed folly
- Reason, as corrupted, repugnant unto the mystery of grace
- Accommodation of spiritual mysteries unto corrupt reason, wherefore acceptable unto many
- Reasons of it
- Two parts of corrupted nature's repugnancy unto the mystery of the gospel: —

Sixthly. We can never state our thoughts aright in this matter, unless we have a clear apprehension of, and satisfaction in, the introduction of grace by Jesus Christ into the whole of our relation unto God, with its respect unto all parts of our obedience. There was no such thing, nothing of that nature or kind, in the first constitution of that relation and obedience by the law of our creation. We were made in a state of immediate relation unto God in our own persons, as our creator, preserver, and rewarder. There was no mystery of grace in the covenant of works. No more was required unto the consummation of that state but what was given us in our creation, enabling us unto rewardable obedience. "Do this, and live," was the sole rule of our relation unto God. There was nothing in religion originally of that which the gospel celebrates under the name of the grace, kindness, and love of God, whence all our favorable relation unto God does now proceed, and whereinto it is resolved; nothing of the interposition of a mediator with respect unto our righteousness before God, and acceptance with him; — which is at present the life and soul of religion, the substance of the gospel, and the center of all the truths revealed in it. The

introduction of these things is that which makes our religion a mystery, yea, a “great mystery,” if the apostle may be believed, 1 Timothy 3:16. All religion at first was suited and commensurable unto reason; but being now become a mystery, men for the most part are very unwilling to receive it. But so it must be; and unless we are restored unto our primitive rectitude, a religion suited unto the principles of our reason (of which it has none but what answer that first state) will not serve our turns.

Wherefore, of this introduction of Christ and grace in him into our relation unto God, there are no notions in the natural conceptions of our minds; nor are they discoverable by reason in the best and utmost of its exercise, 1 Corinthians 2:14. For before our understanding were darkened, and our reason debased by the fall, there were no such things revealed or proposed unto us; yea, the supposition of them is inconsistent with, and contradictory unto, that whole state and condition wherein we were to live to God, — seeing they all suppose the entrance of sin. And it is not likely that our reason, as now corrupted, should be willing to embrace that which it knew nothing of in its best condition, and which was inconsistent with that way of attaining happiness which was absolutely suited unto it: for it has no faculty or power but what it has derived from that state; and to suppose it is now of itself suited and ready to embrace such heavenly mysteries of truth and grace as it had no notions of, nor could have, in the state of innocence, is to suppose that by the fall our eyes were opened to know good and evil, in the sense that the serpent deceived our first parents with an expectation of. Whereas, therefore, our reason was given us for our only guide in the first constitution of our natures, it is naturally unready to receive what is above it; and, as corrupted, has an enmity thereunto.

Hence, in the first open proposal of this mystery, — namely, of the love and grace of God in Christ, of the introduction of a mediator and his righteousness into our relation unto God, in that way which God in infinite wisdom had designed, — the whole of it was looked on as mere folly by the generality of the wise and rational men of the world, as the apostle declares at large, 1 Corinthians 1; neither was the faith of them ever really received in the world without an act of the Holy Ghost upon the mind in its renovation. And those who judge that there is nothing more needful to enable the mind of man to receive the mysteries of the gospel in

a due manner but the outward proposal of the doctrine thereof, do not only deny the depravation of our nature by the fall, but, by just consequence, wholly renounce that grace whereby we are to be recovered. Wherefore, reason (as has been elsewhere proved), acting on and by its own innate principles and abilities, conveyed unto it from its original state, and as now corrupted, is repugnant unto the whole introduction of grace by Christ into our relation unto God, Romans 8:7. An endeavor, therefore, to reduce the doctrine of the gospel, or what is declared therein concerning the hidden mystery of the grace of God in Christ, unto the principles and inclinations of the minds of men, or reason as it remains in us after the entrance of sin, — under the power, at least, of those notions and conceptions of things religious which it retains from its first state and condition, — is to debase and corrupt them (as we shall see in sundry instances), and so make way for their rejection.

Hence, very difficult it is to keep up doctrinally and practically the minds of men unto the reality and spiritual height of this mystery; for men naturally do neither understand it nor like it: and therefore, every attempt to accommodate it unto the principles and inbred notions of corrupt reason is very acceptable unto many, yea, unto the most; for the things which such men speak and declare, are, without more ado, — without any exercise of faith or prayer, without any supernatural illumination, — easily intelligible, and exposed to the common sense of mankind. But whereas a declaration of the mysteries of the gospel can obtain no admission into the minds of men but by the effectual working of the Spirit of God, Ephesians 1:17-19, it is generally looked on as difficult, perplexed, unintelligible; and even the minds of many, who find they cannot contradict it, are yet not at all delighted with it. And here lies the advantage of all them who, in these days, do attempt to corrupt the doctrine of the gospel, in the whole or any part of it; for the accommodation of it unto the common notions of corrupted reason is the whole of what they design. And in the confidence of the suffrage hereof, they not only oppose the things themselves, but despise the declaration of them as enthusiastical canting. And by nothing do they more prevail themselves than by a pretense of reducing all things to reason, and contempt of what they oppose, as unintelligible fanaticism. But I am not more satisfied in any thing of the most uncontrollable evidence, than that

the understandings of these men are no just measure or standard of spiritual truth. Wherefore, notwithstanding all this fierceness of scorn, with the pretended advantages which some think they have made by traducing expressions in the writings of some men, it may be improper, it maybe only not suited unto their own genius and capacity in these things, we are not to be “ashamed of the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth”.

Of this repugnancy unto the mystery of the wisdom and grace of God in Christ, and the foundation of its whole economy, in the distinct operations of the persons of the holy Trinity therein, there are two parts or branches:

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1. That which would reduce the whole of it unto the private reason of men, and their own weak, imperfect management thereof. This is the entire design of the Socinians. Hence, —
 - (1.) The doctrine of the Trinity itself is denied, impugned, yea, derided by them; and that solely on this account. They plead that it is incomprehensible by reason; for there is in that doctrine a declaration of things absolutely infinite and eternal, which cannot be exemplified in, nor accommodated unto, things finite and temporal. This is the substance of all their pleas against the doctrine of the holy Trinity, that which gives a seeming life and sprightly vigor to their objections against it; wherein yet, under the pretense of the use and exercise of reason, they fall, and resolve all their seasonings into the most absurd and irrational principles that ever the minds of men were besotted withal. For unless you will grant them that what is above their reason, is, therefore, contradictory unto true reason; that what is infinite and eternal is perfectly comprehensible, and in all its concerns and respects to be accounted for; that what cannot be in things finite and of a separate existence, cannot be in things infinite, whose being and existence can be but one; with other such irrational, yea, brutish imaginations; all the arguments of these pretended men of reason against the Trinity become like chaff that every breath of wind will blow away. Hereon they must, as they do, deny the

distinct operations of any persons in the Godhead in the dispensation of the mystery of grace; for if there are no such distinct persons, there can be no such distinct operations. Now, as upon a denial of these things no one article of faith can be rightly understood, nor any one duty of obedience be performed unto God in an acceptable manner; so, in particular, we grant that the doctrine of justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ cannot stand.

- (2.) On the same ground the incarnation of the Son of God is rejected as “atopoon atopootaton”, — the most absurd conception that ever befell the minds of men. Now it is to no purpose to dispute with men so persuaded, about justification; yea, we will freely acknowledge that all things we believe about it are “graodeis muthoi”, — no better than old wives’ tales, — if the incarnation of the Son of God be so also. For I can as well understand how he who is a mere man, however exalted, dignified, and glorified, can exercise a spiritual rule in and over the hearts, consciences, and thoughts of all the men in the world, being intimately knowing of and present unto them all equally at all times (which is another of their fopperies), as how the righteousness and obedience of one should be esteemed the righteousness of all that believe, if that one be no more than a man, if he be not acknowledged to be the Son of God incarnate.

Whilst the minds of men are prepossessed with such prejudices, nay, unless they firmly assent unto the truth in these foundations of it, it is impossible to convince them of the truth and necessity of that justification of a sinner which is revealed in the gospel. Allow the Lord Christ to be no other person but what they believe him to be, and I will grant there can be no other way of justification than what they declare; though I cannot believe that ever any sinner will be justified thereby. These are the issues of an obstinate refusal to give way unto the introduction of the mystery of God and his grace into the way of salvation and our relation unto him.

And he who would desire an instance of the fertility of men's inventions in forging and coining objections against heavenly mysteries, in the justification of the sovereignty of their own reason, as unto what belongs to our relation unto God, need go no farther than the writings of these men against the Trinity and incarnation of the eternal Word. For this is their fundamental rule, in things divine and doctrines of religion, — That not what the Scripture says is therefore to be accounted true, although it seems repugnant unto any reasonings of ours, or is above what we can comprehend; but what seems repugnant unto our reason, let the words of the Scripture be what they will, that we must conclude that the Scripture does not say so, though it seem never so expressly so to do. “Itaque non quia utrumque Scripture dicat, propterea haec inter se non pugnare concludendum est; sed potius quia haec inter se pugnant, ideo alterutrum a Scriptura non dici statuendum est”, says Schlichting ad Meisn. Def. Socin. p.102; — “Wherefore, because the Scripture affirms both these” (that is the efficacy of God's grace and the freedom of our wills), “we cannot conclude from thence that they are not repugnant; but because these things are repugnant unto one another, we must determine that one of them is not spoken in the Scripture:” — no, it seems, let it say what it will. This is the handsomest way they can take in advancing their own reason above the Scripture; which yet savors of intolerable presumption. So Socinus himself, speaking of the satisfaction of Christ, says, in plain terms: “Ego quidem etiamsi non semel sed saepius id in sacris monumentis scriptum extaret, non idcirco tamen ita prorsus rem se habere crederem, ut vos opinamini; cum enim id omnino fieri non possit non secus atque in multis illis Scripturae Testimoniis, una cum caeteris omnibus facio; aliqua, quae minus incommoda videretur, interpretatione adhibita, eum sensum ex ejusmodi verbis elicere qui sibi constaret;” — “For my part, if this (doctrine) were extant and written in the holy Scripture, not once, but often, yet would I not therefore believe it to be so as you do; for where it can by no means be so (whatever the Scripture says), I would, as I do with others in other places, make use of some less incommodious interpretation, whereby I would draw a sense out of the words that should be consistent with itself.” And how he would do this he declares a little before: “Sacra verba in alium sensum, quam verba

sonant, per inusitatos etiam tropos quandoque explicantur”. He would explain the words into another sense than what they sound or propose, by unusual tropes. And, indeed, such uncouth tropes does he apply, as so many engines and machines, to pervert all the divine testimonies concerning our redemption, reconciliation, and justification by the blood of Christ.

Having therefore fixed this as their rule, constantly to prefer their own reason above the express words of the Scripture, which must, therefore, by one means or other, be so perverted or wrested as to be made compliant therewith, it is endless to trace them in their multiplied objections against the holy mysteries, all resolved into this one principle, that their reason cannot comprehend them, nor does approve of them. And if any man would have an especial instance of the serpentine wits of men winding themselves from under the power of conviction by the spiritual light of truth, or at least endeavoring so to do, let him read the comments of the Jewish rabbins on Isaiah, chap. 53, and of the Socinians on the beginning of the Gospel of John.

2. The second branch of this repugnancy springs from the want of a due comprehension of that harmony which is in the mystery of grace, and between all the parts of it. This comprehension is the principal effect of that wisdom which believers are taught by the Holy Ghost. For our understanding of the wisdom of God in a mystery is neither an art nor a science, whether purely speculative or more practical, but a spiritual wisdom. And this spiritual wisdom is such as understands and apprehends things, not so much, or not only in the notion of them, as in their power, reality, and efficacy, towards their proper ends. And, therefore, although it may be very few, unless they be learned, judicious, and diligent in the use of means of all sorts, do attain unto it clearly and distinctly in the doctrinal notions of it; yet are all true believers, yea, the meanest of them, directed and enabled by the Holy Spirit, as unto their own practice and duty, to act suitably unto a comprehension of this harmony, according to the promise that “they shall be all taught of God.” Hence, those things which appear unto others contradictory and inconsistent one with another, so as that they

are forced to offer violence unto the Scripture and their own experience in the rejection of the one or the other of them, are reconciled in their minds and made mutually useful or helpful unto one another, in the whole course of their obedience. But these things must be farther spoken unto.

Such an harmony as that intended there is in the whole mystery of God. For it is the most curious effect and product of divine wisdom; and it is no impeachment of the truth of it, that it is not discernible by human reason. A full comprehension of it no creature can in this world arise unto. Only, in the contemplation of faith, we may arrive unto such an understanding admiration of it as shall enable us to give glory unto God, and to make use of all the parts of it in practice as we have occasion. Concerning it the holy man mentioned before cried out, “O anexichniastou demiourgias” — “O unsearchable contrivance and operations”. And so is it expressed by the apostle, as that which has an unfathomable depth of wisdom in it, “O bathos ploutou”, etc. — “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding Romans 11:33-36. See to the same purpose, Ephesians 3:8-10.

There is a harmony, a suitableness of one thing unto another, in all the works of creation. Yet we see that it is not perfectly nor absolutely discoverable unto the wisest and most diligent of men. How far are they from an agreement about the order and motions of the heavenly bodies, of the sympathies and qualities of sundry things here below, in the relation of causality and efficiency between one thing and another! The new discoveries made concerning any of them, do only evidence how far men are from a just and perfect comprehension of them. Yet such a universal harmony there is in all the parts of nature and its operations, that nothing in its proper station and operation is destructively contradictory either to the whole or any part of it, but every thing contributes unto the preservation and use of the universe. But although this harmony be not absolutely comprehensible by any, yet do all living creatures, who follow the conduct or instinct of nature, make use of it, and live upon it; and without it neither their being could be preserved, nor their operations continued.

But in the mystery of God and his grace, the harmony and suitableness of one thing unto another, with their tendency unto the same end, is incomparably more excellent and glorious than that which is seen in nature or the works of it. For whereas God made all things at first in wisdom, yet is the new creation of all things by Jesus Christ ascribed peculiarly unto the riches, stores, and treasures of that infinite wisdom. Neither can any discern it unless they are taught of God; for it is only spiritually discerned. But yet is it by the most despised. Some seem to think that there is no great wisdom in it; and some, that no great wisdom is required unto the comprehension of it: few think it worth the while to spend half that time in prayer, in meditation, in the exercise of self-denial, mortification, and holy obedience, doing the will of Christ, that they may know of his word, to the attaining of a due comprehension of the mystery of godliness, as some do in diligence, study, and trial of experiments, who design to excel in natural or mathematical sciences. Wherefore there are three things evident herein: —

1. That such an harmony there is in all the parts of the mystery of God, wherein all the blessed properties of the divine nature are glorified, our duty in all instances is directed and engaged, our salvation in the way of obedience secured, and Christ, as the end of all, exalted. Wherefore, we are not only to consider and know the several parts of the doctrine of spiritual truths but their relation, also, one unto another, their consistency one with another in practice, and their mutual furtherance of one another unto their common end. And a disorder in our apprehensions about any part of that whose beauty and use arises from its harmony, gives some confusion of mind with respect unto the whole.
2. That unto a comprehension of this harmony in a due measure, it is necessary that we be taught of God; without which we can never be wise in the knowledge of the mystery of his grace. And herein ought we to place the principal part of our diligence, in our inquiries into the truths of the gospel.

3. All those who are taught of God to know his will, unless it be when their minds are disordered by prejudices, false opinions, or temptations, have an experience in themselves and their own practical obedience, of the consistency of all parts of the mystery of God's grace and truth in Christ among themselves, — of their spiritual harmony and cogent tendency unto the sane end. The introduction of the grace of Christ into our relation unto God, makes no confusion or disorder in their minds, by the conflict of the principles of natural reason, with respect unto our first relation unto God, and those of grace, with respect unto that whereunto we are renewed.

From the want of a due comprehension of this divine harmony it is, that the minds of men are filled with imaginations of an inconsistency between the most important parts of the mystery of the gospel, from whence the confusions that are at this day in Christian religion do proceed.

Thus the Socinians can see no consistency between the grace or love of God and the satisfaction of Christ, but imagine if the one of them be admitted, the other must be excluded out of our religion. Wherefore they principally oppose the latter, under a pretense of asserting and vindicating the former. And where these things are expressly conjoined in the same proposition of faith, — as where it is said that “we are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,” Romans 3:24, 25, — they will offer violence unto common sense and reason, rather than not disturb that harmony which they cannot understand. For although it be plainly affirmed to be a redemption by his blood, as he is a propitiation, as his blood was a ransom or price of redemption, yet they will contend that it is only metaphorical, — a mere deliverance by power, like that of the Israelites by Moses. But these things are clearly stated in the gospel; and therefore not only consistent, but such as that the one cannot subsist without the other. Nor is there any mention of any especial love or grace of God unto sinners, but with respect unto the satisfaction of Christ as the means of the communication of all its effects unto them. See John 3:16; Romans 3:23-25; 8:30-33; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Ephesians 1:7; etc.

In like manner, they can see no consistency between the satisfaction of Christ and the necessity of holiness or obedience in them that do believe. Hence they continually glamor, that, by our doctrine of the mediation of Christ, we overthrow all obligations unto a holy life. And by their sophistical reasonings unto this purpose, they prevail with many to embrace their delusion, who have not a spiritual experience to confront their sophistry withal. But as the testimony of the Scripture lies expressly against them, so those who truly believe, and have real experience of the influence of that truth into the life of God, and how impossible it is to yield any acceptable obedience herein without respect thereunto, are secured from their snares.

These and the like imaginations arise from the unwillingness of men to admit of the introduction of the mystery of grace into our relation unto God. For suppose us to stand before God on the old constitution of the covenant of creation, which alone natural reason likes and is comprehensive of, and we do acknowledge these things to be inconsistent. But the mystery of the wisdom and grace of God in Christ cannot stand without them both.

So, likewise, God's efficacious grace in the conversion of sinners, and the exercise of the faculties of their minds in a way of duty, are asserted as contradictory and inconsistent. And although they seem both to be positively and frequently declared in the Scripture, yet, say these men, their consistency being repugnant to their reason, let the Scripture say what it will, yet is it to be said by us that the Scripture does not assert one of them. And this is from the same cause; men cannot, in their wisdom, see it possible that the mystery of God's grace should be introduced into our relation and obedience unto God. Hence have many ages of the church, especially the last of them, been filled with endless disputes, in opposition to the grace of God, or to accommodate the conceptions of it unto the interests of corrupted reason.

But there is no instance more pregnant unto this purpose than that under our present consideration. Free justification, through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, is cried out against, as inconsistent with a

necessity of personal holiness and obedience: and because the Socinians insist principally on this pretense, it shall be fully and diligently considered apart; and that holiness which, without it, they and others deriving from them do pretend unto, shall be tried by the unerring rule.

Wherefore I desire it may be observed, that in pleading for this doctrine, we do it as a principal part of the introduction of grace into our whole relation unto God. Hence we grant, —

1. That it is unsuited, yea foolish, and, as some speak, childish, unto the principles of unenlightened and unsanctified reason or understandings of men. And this we conceive to be the principal cause of all the oppositions that are made unto it, and all the deprivations of it that the church is pestered withal. Hence are the wits of men so fertile in sophistical cavils against it, so ready to load it with seeming absurdities, and I know not what unsuitableness unto their wondrous rational conceptions. And no objection can be made against it, be it never so trivial, but it is highly applauded by those who look on that introduction of the mystery of grace, which is above their natural conceptions, as unintelligible folly.

2. That the necessary relation of these things, one unto the other, — namely, of justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and the necessity of our personal obedience, — will not be clearly understood, nor duly improved, but by and in the exercise of the wisdom of faith. This we grant also; and let who will make what advantage they can of this concession. True faith has that spiritual light in it, or accompanying of it, as that it is able to receive it, and to conduct the soul unto obedience by it. Wherefore, reserving the particular consideration hereof unto its proper place, I say, in general, —
 - (1.) That this relation is evident unto that spiritual wisdom whereby we are enabled, doctrinally and practically, to comprehend the harmony of the mystery of God, and the consistency of all the parts of it, one with another.

- (2.) That it is made evident by the Scripture, wherein both these things — justification through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and the necessity of our personal obedience — are plainly asserted and declared. And we defy that rule of the Socinians, that seeing these things are inconsistent in their apprehension or unto their reason, therefore we must say that one of them is not taught in the Scripture: for whatever it may appear unto their reason, it does not so to ours; and we have at least as good reason to trust unto our own reason as unto theirs. Yet we absolutely acquiesce in neither, but in the authority of God in the Scripture; rejoicing only in this, that we can set our seal unto his revelations by our own experience. For, —
- (3.) It is fully evident in the gracious conduct which the minds of them that believe are under, even that of the Spirit of truth and grace, and the inclinations of that new principle of the divine life whereby they are acted; for although, from the remainders of sin and darkness that are in them, temptations may arise unto a continuation in sin because grace has abounded, yet are their minds so formed and framed by the doctrine of this grace, and the grace of this doctrine, that the abounding of grace herein is the principal motive unto their abounding in holiness, as we shall see afterward.

And this we aver to be the spring of all those objections which the adversaries of this doctrine do continually endeavor to entangle it withal. As, —

1. If the passive righteousness (as it is commonly called), that is, his death and suffering, be imputed unto us, there is no need, nor can it be, that his active righteousness, or the obedience of his life, should be imputed unto us; and so on the contrary: for both together are inconsistent.
2. That if all sin be pardoned, there is no need of the righteousness; and so on the contrary, if the righteousness of Christ be imputed unto us, there is no room for, or need of, the pardon of sin.

3. If we believe the pardon of our sins, then are our sins pardoned before we believe, or we are bound to believe that which is not so.
4. If the righteousness of Christ be imputed unto us, then are we esteemed to have done and suffered what, indeed, we never did nor suffered; and it is true, that if we are esteemed our selves to have done it, imputation is overthrown.
5. If Christ's righteousness be imputed unto us, then are we as righteous as was Christ himself.
6. If our sins were imputed unto Christ, then was he thought to have sinned, and was a sinner subjectively.
7. If good works be excluded from any interest in our justification before God, then are they of no use unto our salvation.
8. That it is ridiculous to think that where there is no sin, there is not all the righteousness that can be required.
9. That righteousness imputed is only a putative or imaginary righteousness, etc.

Now, although all these and the like objections, however subtilely managed (as Socinus boasts that he had used more than ordinary subtlety in this cause, — “In quo, si subtilius aliquanto quam opus esse videretur, quaedam a nobis disputate sunt”, De Servat., par. 4, cap. 4.), are capable of plain and clear solutions, and we shall avoid the examination of none of them; yet at present I shall only say, that all the shades which they cast on the minds of men do vanish and disappear before the light of express Scripture testimonies, and the experience of them that do believe, where there is a due comprehension of the mystery of grace in any tolerable measure.