

**GOD AS ARTIST**  
**By Pastor Paul Penno, Jr.**  
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“The great Master Artist calls our attention to the soulless flowers of the field, pointing out the beautiful tints and the wonderful variety of shades one flower may possess. Thus God has revealed His skill and care. Thus He would show the great love He has for every human being.

“Every flower is an expression of the love of God” (Letter 24, 1899). {5BC 1086.9}

“Educate the children and youth to consider the works of the great Master Artist, and to imitate the attractive graces of nature in their character building. As the love of God wins their hearts, let them bring into their lives the beauty of holiness. So shall they use their capabilities to bless others and to honor God.” {CG 48, 49}

Think about your Elder Brother, the Son of God who became the Son of man. The Bible says He was a “carpenter.” The Greek word is *TEKTON* from which we get our word “tectonic.” Jesus was no bumbling rough carpenter; He was an architect and building contractor (look up the word in your dictionary). At 30 years of age He was capable of being the biggest, most successful architect and building contractor in Galilee, the richest man. But when He came to His last hour He had nothing to bequeath of His wealth except His clothing. He had said that the foxes have their holes and the birds their nests, but He had not where to lay His head. He gave all He had. Let’s “remember” Him.

It’s a never failing encouragement to “arise and go down to the potter’s house . . . to hear [the Lord’s] words” (Jer. 18:2).

(a) You are a “vessel” He has been forming on the potter’s wheel. He has a happy purpose for you to be useful in His great work of lighting the earth with the glory of His “everlasting gospel” message.

(b) No matter who you are, as a vessel you have in some way been “marred,” because “all” of us “have sinned, and [do] come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). The only “vessel” the Potter has succeeded in turning on His wheel that has turned out perfect is Jesus Christ Himself. His experience on the “wheel” is illustrated in Isaiah 50:4, 5, where the Father awakened Jesus “morning by morning . . . to hear as the learned.” The Father taught Him during those early hours. He constantly resisted our temptation to be “rebellious” and “turn away back.”

(c) The divine Savior-Potter never throws any marred vessel (us) in the trash, no matter how lowly it may have become in its being “marred.” There’s always a useful purpose left that you and I can serve. There is the “good news” encouragement.

(d) Always the Potter “[makes] it again into another vessel, as it seem[s] good to the Potter to make” (v. 4). This is redemption in action.

(e) Every “vessel” is made to receive something, from which it can be poured out in some act of service to others. It’s a container to be filled and emptied continuously.

(f) But the “vessels” are living beings who have been given freedom of choice who can “resist God’s will.” “But who are you, my friend” asks Paul, “to talk

back to God? A clay pot does not ask the man who made it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Rom. 9:19, 20, GNB).

(g) Obviously, the “clay pot” needs to be reconciled in heart to the Potter! This is accomplished in an amazing way.

(h) The Potter Himself has become clay; the Son of God Himself has emptied Himself in those seven steps of condescension in Philippians 2:5-8, “even [to] the death of the cross” which involved enduring being “made” the “curse of God” (cf. Gal. 3:13). Tried and tempted, feeling “forsaken” by God, He has known to the full what no other human being in history has known to the full—what it feels like for the Potter to throw someone into the trash. He “took” upon His sinless nature our “sinful flesh” that He might “in every way be tempted that we are, but did not sin” (Heb 4:15). Then He died the world’s “second death” for every man (2:9), so that no one of us might have to feel what it’s like to be thrown in the eternal trash heap (cf. Rev. 20:15).

(i) Each of us is an empty vessel each new morning of life. But “God has poured out His love [*agape*] into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God’s gift to us” (Rom. 5:5, GNB). He fills each empty, willing vessel.

Jesus said something very strange that has puzzled many people since the day He said it: “Whosoever shall fall on this Stone [Himself, His history as Saviour of the world] shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Mt. 21:44).

The leaders of the nation were planning to kill Him; Caiaphas, the high priest, hated Him; Pilate the Roman governor would deliver Him, knowing He was innocent, to death; and King Herod would agree to His death. The greatest judicial travesty in all history! Jesus had just reminded them of the well-known story of building Solomon’s temple. One large stone had baffled the workmen—they couldn’t figure out where to put it and they abandoned it in the weeds, to the heat of summer and the frost of winter and the storms. Finally they discovered that it was the “head stone of the corner,” where it proved to be an exact fit. So, said Jesus, He is the “head stone which the builders rejected.”

So far, it is clear. But why the idea of anyone “falling on the Stone and being broken”? Well, Peter was an example of such a person. Arrogant and proud, he was sure he would never give in to pressure and deny his Lord, but before the rooster crowed in the morning he had denied Jesus three times. Peter wept bitterly when he realized the sinfulness of his own heart. His repentance was deep. He “fell upon the Stone and was broken.” The love of self was broken up; his heart was broken. It was reported in early times that ever afterward there was a tear glistening in his eyes. On the other hand, look at Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod: all they have is the final judgment. Christ will not grind them to powder—what will do it is their own history. He will not say a word to condemn them in that final judgment; they will do it themselves. They will salvage nothing for eternity.

A wise writer has used this text about the *Stone* in appealing to church members to let the Holy Spirit melt their proud hearts, and to teachers in Christian schools whose self-centered pride hides Jesus from the view of their students, and to ministers and church leaders who repeat Peter's denial of Christ. It's an *either/or* judgment we all face: self must be humbled eventually. Either "by our own voluntary choice to take up the cross on which self is crucified," *or* to go on making self the center of our heart's devotion. The former calls for tears of melted-heart repentance now; the latter points to "powder" being blown away like dust in a windstorm, an eternal record of nothingness. Herod, Caiaphas, and Pilate have given us an expensive object lesson.

Then David's psalm goes on to offer encouragement: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Ps. 118:22, 23). Its builders despised the most important stone in Solomon's temple at first! It lay out in the weather, abandoned and resented. Christ applied the text as a prophecy to Himself (Mt. 21:42); it also was fulfilled in Wycliffe's subsequent history; but as a principle it applies to God's work in these last days. No "stone" can become the "headstone" of the "temple" unless it is first "rejected by the builders"! In other words, a repentance on the part of "the builders," the leaders of "the church of the Laodiceans," must precede the finishing of the great gospel commission (Rev. 3:14, 19; 18:1-4). The Good News is that it is

certain; and it will be "marvelous in our eyes." Thank God for eyes that can see it—for a life redeemed from the accident wreckage! (And you? If you but knew it, you too are "alive from the dead").

Back to that "lost" temple stone out in the weeds, that "the builders refused" which finally ended up in the most honorable place in Solomon's Temple: please don't think of the "builders" as evil men; no, not at all. They sincerely desired to see the great Temple finished; but they were ignorant, uninformed; thought themselves "rich and increased with architectural skill." In the end when the "stone" of "most precious" truth is recovered and fitted in place, all will see that "it is the Lord's doing," not in any way the cleverness or goodness of faithfulness of man. Then will be heard the glad anthem, "We will rejoice and be glad" (Ps. 118:24), like the glad Hallelujah choruses of Rev 19:1-9. The day is coming! The Lord give us grace to let Him hold our hand until then!

In the early centuries there was some serious talk that the Book of Hebrews doesn't belong in the Bible. Even today in the year 2000 some dear Christian people don't like the main theme of the Book of Hebrews: perfection of character. They say it's impossible, that God can never have a group or body of people on earth who have "overcome even as [Christ] overcame," who reflect as in a mirror the beauty of Christ's perfect character of self-denial. They say that as long as Christ's body on earth is composed of people who have a fallen or sinful nature, that it will be impossible for them to be perfect in character. But for all such the Book of

Hebrews presents a formidable challenge: no less than eleven times we read there that perfection of character in His people is the goal that Jesus is working toward. (You can read them, 5:14; 6:1; 7:11, 19, 25, 28; 8:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 13:21). How does He accomplish this seemingly impossible task? The answer: through His ministry as Great High Priest (also a theme that makes Hebrews unique in the New Testament, for nowhere else in the NT is He so designated).

We modern people have a problem identifying with the word “priest.” especially “high priest.” It embraces so many “offices” that Jesus fills, for He wears many hats: He is a Counselor, a Teacher, a Leader, an Executive, but best of all, He is a Physician not only of our bodies (He was called “the Great Physician”), but also of our souls. In other words, Jesus as our Great High Priest is functioning as our Divine Psychiatrist. That’s what Hebrews 4:15 is telling us: “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” “Wherefore He is able to save them perfectly that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (7:25). Your problem and mine is simply this: are we willing to humble our hearts and confess that we need the services of a Psychiatrist? Most people will angrily say “No!” They’re okay, they insist, “rich and increased with goods” spiritually and mentally; they don’t need healing. But the Book of Revelation is in tandem with the Book of Hebrews, and there we

read that we are woefully in need of such a Divine Psychiatrist (3:14-21).

But the Book ends with the assurance that Jesus will have a people on earth who, as a body, respond to His appeal, accept His ministry of “perfection,” repent, and prepare for His second coming (7:1-4; 14:1-5, and 19:7-9).

We thank the Lord for preserving for us the Christian experience of David, the Psalmist. He is brutally honest with himself: he confesses that he is a sinner of sinners, that he deserves to have the Lord remove from him forever the blessing of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:11). This meant—his eternal salvation.

He makes no effort to hide the guilt of his double crime—his sin of adultery, his coveting of his neighbor’s wife, plus the sin of adultery with her, plus the terrible sin of his murdering the lady’s husband (we can’t say one sin was worse than the other!). David is reduced to the lowest place and he doesn’t try to hide it.

In Psalm 27 he teaches us in a simple way how to be happy in the Lord:

(1) He begins by recognizing the truth: The Lord [alone] is his light of life, and his salvation. A good confession of faith; let this be our confession, to begin with (vs. 1).

(2) He accepts the Lord’s New Covenant promises and contradicts Satan’s effort to make him afraid (vss. 2, 3).

(3) He states the truth in powerful terms: even if an enemy army comes against him, he chooses that his heart shall not be afraid (that’s how to conquer

fear: choose not to let your heart be troubled, says Jesus in John 14:1-3).

(4) David makes the choice: what he wants above all else in life is simply to “dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (vs. 4).

(5) And that’s not to become wealthy: no, his prayer is to behold “the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (vs. 4). The infinite wealth of the Lord is for anyone to take, and it makes Him happy to see someone on earth who appreciates Him enough to desire Him more than what this earth can offer us.

(6) “The time of trouble” scares many serious-minded Christians; it doesn’t hurt to think about it ahead of time, BUT think as David does—in absolute confidence that the Lord whom you worship “in His temple” will “hide you in the secret of His tabernacle” (vss. 5, 6).

(7) You are not to feel proud because of this holy preference the Lord has for you; it’s simply His “family love” for you since you are a member of His family by adoption (see Eph. 1:3-6)!

(8) Your heart is moved to sing, because His love (*agape*) has redeemed you (vs. 6).

(9) But yes, there is something for you to do: when the Lord said to you, “Seek My face,” you responded immediately, no dilly-dallying about it, “Your face, Lord, I WILL seek!” (vs. 8). Your heart was one with the heart of the Lord!

(10) You think of the loving care your earthly father and mother lavished on you, but good as they were, your parents could only go with you a certain

distance: they had to leave you to go on alone with the Lord in ways they could not understand (vs. 10).

(11) David confesses that he would have “fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (vs. 13), that is, unless he had believed that he would see the answer to all his prayers while he was still living—before the Lord comes. Sobering thought!

(12) But what you can’t see with your earthly eyes, see with eyes of faith. Psalm 27 is a treasure; adopt it as yours.

The gospel truth is embedded in these few words (2 Cor. 5:18-20):

“All things are of God.” In other words, from beginning to end it is the work of the Lord to reconcile us alienated humans to Himself. He takes the initiative in this work of healing wounded souls.

He “hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, . . . and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (vss. 18, 19).

But you object, “I have not yet been reconciled! I still have the ‘carnal mind [which] is enmity against God’ (Rom. 8:7). I still love the things of this world. I still would rather watch TV than read the Bible; if the Lord were to take me to heaven today, I am not sure I would be happy there!”

The beginning of our positive response to the Lord’s plan of salvation is honesty of heart; we can sing “I have been redeemed” when in fact we haven’t yet realized it by personal faith.

Scholars would like to describe that as “objective” salvation, although that word is not in the Bible.

They use that word to try to describe the reality of the Lord's plan of salvation: He is "the Savior of the world," He has saved us; the Samaritans were right when they declared of Him that He is "the Savior of the world," even though most people in the world didn't recognize Him yet as such, still they told the truth.

There are two things that are yet to happen:

(a) The Lord would never dare to descend down the skies in glory at His second coming unless first the people of the world had had the chance to hear the gospel proclaimed in all its powerful beauty. The Lord is fair to all; He must be sure that everyone has an equal chance to hear. His people will one day have to apologize to the world for thus hindering and delaying this message, and thus delaying Christ's second coming.

(b) Revelation 18:1-4 tells us that before the second coming of Christ the entire world will be "lightened" with the glory of the fourth angel's message: "And . . . I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with His glory."

That mighty angel came down 120 years ago to begin His final work of lighting the earth with glory; but the Lord is such a Gentleman that He will never force entry into anyone's home unless He is first invited.

He wasn't. And that's why we're still here, and the earth is still in darkness.

Life today is solemnly exciting—more than at any time in 6000 years: this is the cosmic, grand "Day of Atonement." It's the antitype of ancient Israel's one

Day of days when the nation was in such heart-stopping excitement that they ate nothing all day. They (and God, too!) were on trial in an awe inspiring Day of Judgment. But now the real thing is going on.

In Israel, it was the one Day of the year when everything got straightened out and all questions were answered. At Day's end, the nation was in heart-oneness with God. In miniature, "the great controversy" (between Christ and Satan) was finished. Sin and sinners were no more. The entire nation was clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beat throughout. Sin and sinners were as no more. Life and light and gladness flowed from the Lord. It seemed to Israel, all things in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy declared that God is love—on that one grand day of the year, the Day of Atonement.

Now the message from our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, is this: "be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). "Atonement" is not obscure Latin, Greek or Hebrew—it's pure simple Anglo-Saxon, "be at-one with God." It's time for your doubts to be resolved, those deep feelings that He has not been fair with you. It's time to join that distraught father in Mark 9 who cried with tears (when everything seemed against him), "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (vs. 24). It's time for "Jacob" the Supplanter to wrestle with God and get a new name, "Israel."

But can we shake ourselves by our shoulders and just DO it—reconcile ourselves to Him? It means a change of mind (Greek, *metanoia*) which actually is

repentance. Now wait a moment: do we have a self-start button to press for “repenting ourselves”? Acts 5:31 says it’s a “gift” from our “Prince and Saviour.” A “gift” is not what you work for.

Which reminds us: the Israelites never “cleansed” their own sanctuary: the high priest alone always did it. It wasn’t a works-trip for them. Yes, bitter as this pill may be for do-it-yourself legalists: we have to LET Him do it for us and in us on this cosmic Day of Atonement. He takes the initiative and we cooperate “through faith.” So stop resisting the blessed Holy Spirit. Your High Priest loves you more than you ever dreamed He does. To understand, “behold” and “comprehend” what happened on His cross.

This little tid-bit of “bread” will come too late for those who are giving special attention to the Lord’s last-days message to the shepherds of His flock in Laodicea. But don’t trash it—if you are alive spiritually you’ll be studying that message until earth’s last day.

\* Jesus says something strange in Revelation 3:20. It grips our attention—“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” He is quoting the Old Testament, but not the Hebrew text. He decides to use its Greek translation instead. And therein lies a profound revelation.

\* Jesus has quoted His Old Testament Bible from the Song of Solomon, chapter 5, verse 2. The ancient Greek translation (known as the Septuagint, LXX) has three little words that are not in the Hebrew version—“at the door” (*epi ten thuran*, if you want the Greek). And why this miniscule but

tectonic choice on the part of this divine Author? Why does He quote the Greek version? This: Jesus reveals Himself here as the disappointed Lover who has just come from His safari to His Beloved. It’s night; it’s cold; it’s raining; He is hungry; He is lonely; He wants her. But she doesn’t want Him, apparently. He is hurt.

\* Standing outside in the cold, He says He goes on knocking, knocking “at the door.” The object of His love has just gone to bed, is in that twilight zone between waking and sleeping. Then she hears Him. (You can’t understand this unless you’ve lived in a mud hut with a cow-dung floor!). She is annoyed; why does He bother her at this hour? She doesn’t want to get her feet soiled on that floor—she’s comfy in bed. Finally, however, she stops thinking of her own selfish laziness, and thinks of Him outside. Belatedly she gets up to go to the door to let Him in. And, lo, He is gone. He got tired of waiting, waiting. (Yes, there is evidence that Jesus and the angels do get tired waiting).

\* Hundreds of years ago a few thoughtful scholars in Europe discerned that the Laodicean message is tied to the Song of Solomon. Has it somehow eluded us? This is a love story! It brings us to chapter 19:7-9 where the long-disappointed Bridegroom is perplexed what to do with His dilatory Bride-to-be. He can’t force her to marry Him. The next move is hers.