

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130-c. 200), *Against Heresies*

Ephesians 1:8-10: “With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up [recapitulate] all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

But it is much more suitable that we, directing our inquiries after this fashion, should exercise ourselves in the investigation of the mystery and administration of the living God, and should increase in the love of him who has done, and still does, so great things for us. . . . God should forever teach, and man should forever learn the things taught him by God.

For inasmuch as He had a pre-existence as a saving Being, it was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence, in order that the Being who saves might not exist in vain.

In the beginning, therefore, did God form Adam, not as if he stood in need of man, but that He might have [someone] upon whom to confer benefits. . . . For as God is always the same, so also humanity, when found in God, shall always go onward toward God. For neither does God at any time cease to confer benefits upon, or to enrich humanity; nor does humanity ever cease from receiving the benefits, and being enriched by God. For the receptacle of God’s goodness, and the instrument of his glorification, is the human who is grateful to the Creator.

Wisdom 2:23-24: “for God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it.”

For it was not possible that the man who had once for all been conquered, and who had been destroyed through disobedience, could reform himself, and obtain the prize of victory; and . . . it was impossible that he could attain to salvation who had fallen under the power of sin.

For I have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist, being with the Father from the beginning; but when He became incarnate, and was made man, He commenced afresh [or recapitulated] the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensible manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam—namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God—that we might recover in Christ Jesus.

There is therefore, as I have pointed out, one God the Father, and one Christ Jesus, who came by means of the whole dispensational arrangements [connected with him], and gathered together all things in Himself.

Roman 5:19: “For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

What is joined together could not otherwise be put asunder than by inversion of the process by which these bonds of union had arisen; so that the former ties be cancelled by the latter, that the latter may set the former again at liberty.

But since an unlooked-for salvation was to be provided for men through the help of God, so also was the unlooked-for birth from a virgin accomplished; God giving this sign, but man not working it out. . . . And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so is it rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience.

For doing away with [the effects of] that disobedience of man which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree, 'He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;' rectifying that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience which was [wrought out] upon the tree [of the cross].

But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons?

By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God—the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying everything into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, and ascending toward the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One.

This, therefore, was the [object of the] long-suffering of God, that man, passing through all things, and acquiring the knowledge of moral discipline, then attaining to the resurrection from the dead, and learning by experience what is the source of his deliverance, may always live in a state of gratitude to the Lord, having obtained from Him the gift of incorruptibility, that he might love Him the more; for 'he to whom more is forgiven, loveth more.'

For life does not arise from us, nor from our own nature; but it is bestowed according to the grace of God. And therefore he who shall preserve the life bestowed upon him, and give thanks to Him who imparted it, shall receive the length of days for ever and ever.

But because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by obedience to God.

For the receptacle of His goodness, and the instrument of His glorification, is the man who is grateful to Him that made him; and again, the receptacle of His just judgment is the ungrateful man, who both despises his Maker and is not subject to His Word.

For He did not set us free for this purpose, that we should depart from Him (no one, indeed, while placed out of reach of the Lord's benefits, has power to procure for himself the means of salvation), but that the more we receive His grace, the more we should love Him. Now the more we have loved Him, the more glory we shall receive from Him, when we are continually in the presence of the Father.