

and that the Father "has made us pleasing in his beloved Son" (Eph 1:6), and things of this sort. This manner of speaking, as was said above, explains the mystery of Christ as the head and the just as his living members, joined intimately to him so that the good they have received may be preserved and grow. If these sayings were understood to say that the just did not possess these goods within themselves, but because Jesus Christ possesses them, what response could be given to Saint Paul, who says that "the just are justified through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ" (Rom 3:24)? Since there was no "captivity" in him, there was no "redemption." Therefore, it has to reside in the justified, even though won by the Lord.

The same apostle says, "Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ?" (Rom 8:35). But it does not follow from this that it is not within us, and very deeply within, since he says in another place that "the love of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given to us" (Rom 5:5). He speaks similarly when he says, even of natural goods, that "in God, we live and move and are" (Acts 17:28). But no one will say that we do not have being, life, and operations distinct from those of God.

Scripture speaks thus to show that we do not have this good from ourselves, and we are unable to preserve it within ourselves. Sometimes it says that such goods are not ours and we do not work them, exactly as the Lord says to his disciples, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). Yet in another place he says, "It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaks in you" (Matt 10:20). Lest anyone understand this to mean that the man himself was not acting freely, he says elsewhere that the man does such a good but he does not mention that God does it. "I will give you a new heart" (Ezek 36:26), says God in Ezekiel, and he says to men in the same prophet: "Make for yourselves a new heart" (Ezek 18:31). Saint Paul says that "it is not of him that wills nor is it of him that runs" (cf. Rom 9:16), but in another place he says, "I desire the good, and I run, and not as for an uncertain thing" (cf. Rom 7:15-21). Thus he speaks in many other places, implying that the good that they have, they have from God, and that God and man concur in the good work (1 Cor 9:26), but that the glory of the one and the other is owed to God, since all good comes from him. In the same way our Lord said, "My doctrine is not mine but his that sent me" (John 7:16). So he could say, "My works and my justice are not mine but his that sent me." Anyone who would interpret this to mean that the Lord did not possess wisdom, doctrine, and other goods within himself would clearly be deceiving himself seriously. "My

doctrine is not mine" means "I do not have it of myself but from my Father." Therefore, it must not be drawn from similar words that the just do not have "within themselves their own justice," but rather, that they do not have it "from themselves."

Thus, what the Council of Trent says agrees with what the Lord says. The council says that justice is ours because through it, placed within ourselves, we are justified; the Lord says here and elsewhere that "the word which you heard is not mine" (John 14:24). Even though it abides in us, we do not have it from ourselves but as given from God's hand. For this reason it is said to be the justice "of God."

CHAPTER 92

Knowing a truth and knowing how to use it properly are two very different things. The first without the second is not only useless but even causes harm. As Saint Paul says, "The one who thinks that he knows something has not known as he ought to know" (1 Cor 8:2). He says this because some Christians knew that what had been sacrificed to idols could be eaten just as what had not been sacrificed. But they used that knowledge badly, because they ate in front of those who were scandalized to see it eaten.

I have told you this so that you are not content with knowing the truth that those who are in the grace of the Lord are just and pleasing with their own grace and justice, and that the value of their good works is so high that it merits for them an increase of grace and glory. Try to put this truth in its place, for there are people who make poor use of it either by excess or defect. The first run the risk of pride and the second of laziness and cowardice. Many have seen that, by the grace of God, they are in a short time freed from great evils in which they had long been, and yet are not free in many years from the dangers that their good works present to them. Remember what David says: "The wicked put a trap along his way" and also "They put it on the road itself" (cf. Ps 140:6). Not only do our enemies seek "to draw us from the right path" by inciting us to do evil, but they also place the trap "in the very road" (cf. Ps 142:3) of good works, inciting us not to use the good as we ought, so that the Sage's words may be verified in us: "I have seen another evil under the sun: riches gathered to the hurt of their owner" (Eccl 5:12). It would be better for one who misuses a thing not to have it at all.

Such people see their good works and hear people say how much they merit by them. Then their head becomes giddy with vanity and haughty complacency. They do not look at the many faults in their

works, and they do not regard them as God's favor—which they are—and they do not try to advance. They are like people of mean and mediocre heart who are satisfied with very little. It is right, as Saint Bernard says, that “we should not be careless in looking at the things we have from God, but we should be careful to attain the great deal which is lacking to us.”¹⁴¹ Some are so blind with ignorant pride that, even though their tongue says something else, their heart feels it very true that, because of their merits, God is obliged through pure justice to give them what they ask and hope for. They do not see that their merits are God's grace. If he denies them something, they complain within their hearts and hold themselves as offended that, since they have served so well, he does not do them justice when he denies them something.

Do not let this evil pride move you, for at times God has to complain of it in Isaiah, saying, “They ask of me judgments of justice and desire to approach God and say: why have we fasted and you have not seen it, and humbled our souls, and you have not approved it” (Isa 58:2–3). That such a dangerous poison may not enter your soul with other poisons that follow upon it, you ought to adopt the excellent teaching that Jesus Christ our Lord said in Saint Luke:

Which of you having a servant who plows or feeds cattle, would say to him when he comes in from the field: “Go now and rest,” and would not rather say to him, “prepare my supper, gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you shall eat and drink?” Does he by chance thank that servant for doing the things that he commanded him? I think not. So you also, when you have done everything that has been commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants; what we were obliged to do, we have done. (Luke 17:7–10)

From such words, you ought to gather how advantageous a sentiment it is for a Christian to consider himself as God's slave. He should do what the slave does, but not with the heart of a slave that is full of fear and not love. Of this, Saint Paul says: “You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of the adoption of sons, by which we cry,” saying to God: “Father, Father” (cf. Rom 8:15). As Saint Augustine says, “The difference in brief of the Old Law from the gospel is the fear that there is in love.”¹⁴²

Leave aside, then, the “spirit of bondage,” because it does not belong to “sons of God,” and leave behind the “spirit of fear,” because even though fear of God is God's gift and therefore is not evil,

nonetheless fear is imperfect when it is directed to punishment. Understand by *servant* a man who considers himself subject to God by obligations stronger and more just than those of the slave of any other man, however high his price. From this perspective, everything within or outside of him that works for good, everything he does as a loyal slave for God's glory and pleasure, as well as all that he gains, he gives to his Lord. Likewise, there is no slack or neglect in his service today just because he has served many years in the past. He does not consider himself without obligation to perform one service because he has done another. As the holy gospel says, he possesses continually a “hunger and thirst for justice” (cf. Matt 5:6). He considers all that he has done as little in view of the greatness of what he has received and of what the Lord deserves from anyone who serves him. Thus he fulfills what Saint Paul says: “Forgetting the things that are past, he stretches forth to serve again in the future” (cf. Phil 3:13). He also understands that what he does, however much, does not profit God; neither is God obligated to thank the doer as though he regards the works as born from our own natural strength. In fact, the one who works is unable to pay even what he owes. Therefore, the holy gospel says, “When you have done all the things that were commanded you, say: we are unprofitable servants; we did what we had to do” (Luke 17:10). I say that the works do not profit God but those who perform them, who gain eternal life, as will be said in the next chapter.

Having understood the name of slave in this way, you will see that it is a name connoting humility, obedience, diligence, and love. The Virgin Mary possessed such sentiments when, taught by the Holy Spirit, she responded, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). She confesses her own lowliness; she offers her service and love freely, without attributing to herself any other honor or interest than being considered as serving as a slave in whatever the Lord might command for his glory. She felt all of this in calling herself by the name of servant. Saint Paul boasts of the same name and calls himself by it when he says: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:1). Finally, all who serve God, whether great or lowly, have to feel this about themselves if they desire that their service does not change into ruin for them.

Profit, then, from this truth, and you will find an effective remedy against the dangers that usually arise from good works, not because of their nature, but through the imperfection of the one who does them. Get used to saying many times with heart and lips:

I am God's slave because he is God and because of the thousands of benefits that I have received from his hand. No matter how much I do for him, I will pay back neither the least measure of what he has given me in becoming man, nor the least of the torments he suffered for me, nor any sin which he has pardoned me, nor any other from which he has freed me, nor any good intention that he has given me to serve him, nor one day of heaven, which I hope to obtain.

As Jacob said, "I am too small for any of God's mercies" (Gen 32:11). The Lord says that those who do "all that is commanded" must humble themselves and say: "we are unprofitable servants; we did what we had to do." How much more ought I to humble myself since I fall into such great failings through ignorance, weakness, or malice? I am a slave, and a poor one at that, for I do not serve God as I can and ought. If my merits were the measure, there would have been days when I would have been sent to hell for the sins I committed, and for many others into which I could justly have been permitted to fall.

Let this, then, be your sentiment concerning yourself, and let this be the position in which you place yourself since this is what you merit on your part. Let your care be to serve the Lord as well as you can, without casting a glance at your service, and without imagining that God owes you thanks "or that you can respond" to what you owe him, "even one for a thousand," as Job says (cf. Job 9:3). If you hear talk of how much your good works merit, do not let your heart be consoled but say: "It is your favor, Lord. Let thanks be given to you that you give such value to our unworthy service." Thus you may always remain in your place as a negligent and unworthy servant.

CHAPTER 93

Now that your soul has been reassured about the above-mentioned dangers by the knowledge of the Lord's teaching, you can rejoice safely at the greatness and worth the Lord bestows on those who belong to him. You can bless him for infusing his grace into those who by nature are slaves, thus making them adopted sons of God, "and if sons, heirs also" (Rom 8:17). It is right that those received as God's sons should live and work in conformity with the condition of their Father. For this, the Lord gives them the Holy Spirit, together with many virtues and gifts with which they can serve him, fulfill his word, and please him. Those whose services, however great in themselves, did not rise up to eternal life, have already drunk from the

water of grace, which is so powerful that "it has become a fountain within them springing up into eternal life" (John 4:14). It is a fountain of such value that their good works, however small, "ascend to eternal life," and even merit it, for the reasons already mentioned.

Look at what proceeds from you by looking at yourself within yourself; then look at yourself in God and in his grace. Considered in yourself, you are a great sum of debts, and however much you might do, not only will you not be able to merit eternal life, but you will not even pay what you owe. But in God and his grace, the very service you are obligated to render is received as merit for eternal life. Though the Lord is not obligated either to thank you or to pay for what you have done, he ordains things so creatively that the good works of those who belong to him may be rewarded by possession of him in heaven. Though he acts in this way, God owes nothing to *anyone* because of who he is, yet he owes *himself*, whose arrangement is very just and ought to be accomplished in its entirety. Glorify God, then, for these favors. Understand that if God had not been a merciful Father to Saint Paul, giving him a life full of good merits, he would not have dared to say when he was already near to death that "the just judge had laid up for him a crown of justice" (cf. 2 Tim 4:6-8). God crowned him through justice, but he first gave him the merits of grace. Thus, everything redounds to the glory of God, whether he is just in rewarding the good done or is merciful in giving us the good we have done. No one can deny this unless he desires to deprive God of his honor.

Put yourself, then, in your proper place, and consider yourself worthy of hell and of all evils and unworthy of the smallest goods. Do not be discouraged at such lowliness. Rather, trample underfoot all cowardice, and hope in God's mercy that placed you on the road and will strengthen you along it so that you may take it forward, until in eternal life you lay hold of the fruit of the good works that you have done here by his grace.

C. SEEING THE NEIGHBOR IN CHRIST (CHAPS. 94-96)

CHAPTER 94

You have already heard with what eyes you must look at yourself and at Christ. To complete consideration of the words of the prophet who