

Against Heresies – Book IV, Chapter 14

If God asks obedience from human beings, if he made them, called them, and gave them laws to live by — it was entirely for their own good. Not because God needed anything from them, but because he freely chose to pour out his goodness on them in every way he could.

Section 1

In the beginning, God made Adam — not because he needed someone, but because he wanted someone to give his gifts to.

Even before Adam existed — in fact, before any of creation existed — the Word was already glorifying the Father, dwelling in him, and being glorified by the Father in return. As the Word himself declared: *Father, glorify me with the glory I had with you before the world existed.*

And when God called us to follow him, it wasn't because he needed our service either. He did it to bring salvation to us. Because to follow the Saviour is to share in salvation. To follow the light is to receive the light.

Those who live in the light don't themselves light up the light — they are lit up and made visible by it. They contribute nothing to it at all. They simply receive the benefit and are illuminated.

It is the same with serving God. Our service brings God nothing, and God has no need of our obedience. But to those who follow and serve him, he gives life, and incorruptibility, and eternal glory. He pours out his goodness on those who serve him — because they serve him. He blesses those who follow him — because they follow him. He receives nothing back from them. He is rich, complete, and in need of nothing.

So the reason God asks for service from human beings is precisely this: because he is good and merciful, and he wants to bless those who stay close to him.

Because just as God lacks nothing, human beings lack everything unless they have fellowship with God. That fellowship — that closeness — is what true human glory is. It is humanity's glory to remain permanently in God's service.

This is why the Lord said to his disciples: *You did not choose me — I chose you.* He was making the point that they didn't add anything to his glory by following him. On the contrary — by following the Son of God, they were glorified by him.

And again he said: *I want those who are with me to be where I am, so that they may see my glory* — not said out of empty boasting, but out of a genuine desire for his disciples to share in his glory.

Isaiah speaks of this too: *I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the ends of the earth — everyone who bears my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.*

And as the saying goes: wherever the body is, the eagles will gather. In the same way, we share in the glory of the Lord — he who both made us and prepared us for this very purpose: that when we are with him, we may take part in his glory.

Section 2

It was in this same spirit — out of sheer generosity — that God first made human beings at all.

And it was for the sake of their salvation that he chose the patriarchs. He prepared a people for himself, teaching the stubborn and headstrong to follow God. He raised up prophets on the earth, gradually accustoming human beings to carry his Spirit within them and to be in real communion with God.

God himself needed none of this. But he was reaching out to those who needed him — sketching out, like an architect drawing up plans, the shape of salvation for those who were open to him.

He himself guided those who could not see him — in Egypt. To those who became rebellious in the desert, he gave a law suited to their condition. To the people who entered the promised land, he gave a rich and noble inheritance. And for those who turned back to the Father, he killed the fatted calf and gave them the finest robe.

In all these different ways, he kept adjusting and shaping his approach to the human race in order to bring them into agreement with salvation.

This is what John means in the book of Revelation when he says: *His voice was like the sound of many waters*. For the Spirit of God is truly like many waters — because the Father is both rich and great. And the Word, moving through all these people and all these ages, generously poured out his blessings on those under his care — giving each group a form of the law fitted and suited to their particular situation.

Section 3

It was in this same way that God gave the Jewish people all their specific requirements — the construction of the tabernacle, the building of the temple, the setting apart of the Levites, the system of sacrifices and offerings, the legal instructions, and all the rest of the religious observance in the law.

God himself had no need of any of it. He is always completely full of every good thing. He already had within himself all the fragrance of kindness and every sweet perfume — long before Moses ever existed.

But the people were constantly inclined to drift towards idols. So God instructed them patiently, calling them back again and again to persevere and remain devoted to him. He used secondary things to draw them towards what really mattered. He used visible, outward things to point them towards the real things beneath. He used temporary things to lead them towards the eternal. He used physical things to guide them towards the spiritual. He used earthly things to direct their attention towards the heavenly.

This is exactly what he said to Moses: *You shall make everything according to the pattern of the things you were shown on the mountain.* For during forty days, Moses was being taught to hold in his memory the words of God — the heavenly patterns, the spiritual images, the signs pointing forward to things still to come.

As Paul also says: *They drank from the rock that followed them — and that rock was Christ.* And again, after speaking about the various things contained in the law, Paul says: *All these things happened to them as signs and shadows — but they were written down for our instruction, for us on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.*

For through these outward forms and symbols, the people were learning to hold God in reverence and to remain devoted to his service.