

Part Three

PERSON OF CHRIST

10

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

What The Gospels Teach About Jesus

There is no Christ other than the Christ of the Bible. Some men talk of Christ while they deny the Biblical account of Him, but the Christ of whom they talk is the product of their own imaginations—a mere idol. The facts about Jesus are given in the reliable testimonies of the Bible, or there is no knowledge of Him available to man. What is more, if the manner of testimony given by the Biblical witnesses is not reliable, there never can be any such thing as historical knowledge, for by every test the testimony of the Bible writers is equal or superior to any other testimony anytime, anywhere, on any subject.

The fact of Jesus' person or true identity is the most important matter that will ever be considered in the minds of men. His divine sonship is the essential fact and central message of the New Testament, and consequently of Christianity.

In all His teaching about the kingdom, Jesus directed the people to faith in himself and made actual participation in the kingdom a matter of such faith. Thus, appropriately, the work of John the Baptist, announcer of the kingdom, was to prepare the way for the King and to bear witness of Him "that all might believe through him" (John 1:7). See John 1:30-34; 3:28-36. Thus, Jesus' ministry and teaching were planned to make himself known to men (John 17:3-8). All the preaching of the apostles and prophets of the first century was designed to establish in men's hearts the truth and importance and fruits of the fact that He is the Son of God. (See Acts 2:36; 9:20; and everywhere that message is recorded.) See also the stated purpose of the written Word in John 20:30, 31.

"Who Say Ye That I Am?" (Matthew 16:15)

The confession that Jesus is the Son of God was made to Him by the apostles on different occasions (John 1:49; Matthew 14:33; John 6:69). But as the time approached for His death and for their great responsibilities, they had to be brought to a distinct understanding of His deity. What any man thinks of Christ is an all-

J E S U S , T H E S O N O F G O D

important matter. Jesus was especially concerned about these apostles that they should be prepared to endure the trial of His crucifixion and prepared for their lifework of preaching this faith. The former confessions made in time of excitement or enthusiasm must be quietly and thoughtfully reaffirmed. So we who have once confessed Him publicly under favorable circumstances and inducements need to restate our faith soberly in the face of special trials of faith.

The announcement that Jesus was about to make of His coming death was contrary to all their ideas about the Messiah. In order to receive it they needed to be conscious of the faith they had in Him personally. We, too, must prepare ourselves to believe Him and follow Him even though our natural minds cannot understand. Jesus knew the difficulties and the misunderstandings of all the people. He sometimes avoided telling them that He was the Christ when He knew that the word Christ or Messiah would arouse in their minds only false hopes and misconceptions. But He never left any doubt about His claim to come from God and to speak with all authority for God (Matthew 10:40; John 5:30; 8:26-29). He always identified one's doing the will of God with believing and following His words (Matthew 7:22-27). He repeatedly used expressions about himself that could be said only of deity:

"The Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10).

"The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom" (Matthew 13:41).

"All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: . . . neither doth any know the Father, save the Son" (Matthew 11:27).

"He that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man" (John 3:13).

"Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58).

"I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25).

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

"I am the bread of life . . . he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

"I am come down from heaven" (John 6:38).

"I am the good shepherd . . . I came that they may have life" (John 10:14, 10).

"I am the true vine . . . apart from me ye can do nothing" (John 15:1, 5).

"I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

PERSON OF CHRIST

"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

"The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:27).

In John 5:17-29 Jesus called God His Father, "making Himself equal with God," called himself "the Son of God," said that He would raise all the dead and execute judgment upon all.

Three times Jesus directly said, "I am the Son of God" (Mark 14:62; John 9:37; John 10:36). That He claimed to be the Son of God was commonly recognized by the people, by the rulers, by the devil, and by the soldiers who crucified Him (Matthew 27:40, 43, 54; John 19:7; Matthew 4:3, 6; 14:33).

More citations than this page could hold could be listed. But these should show that one must worship Jesus as God or reject Him as a fraud. Jesus said that in order to work the works of God men must believe on Him, whom God sent (John 6:29). He said, "I am from above . . . not of this world . . . except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:23, 24). He is asking us today. "Who say ye that I am?"

His claims are sustained by:

1. His divine birth (Luke 1:30-35).
2. The fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament (John 5:39, 46; Luke 24:44).
3. The divine, sinless life He lived.
4. The divine quality of His teaching.
5. The miracles He worked.
6. The manner of His death.
7. His resurrection from the dead.
8. His divine influence throughout the ages.
9. The testimony of inspired men before and after His earthly life (Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:1-4; Colossians 1:14-17; John 1:1-18; Mark 1:1).
10. By the testimony of His enemies, His disciples, Pilate, Judas, demons, angels, a Roman centurion.

"Him the Father, even God, hath sealed" (John 6:27)

"Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). God had revealed the person of Christ through His words and works (John 5:36, 37; John 3:34, 35). God was in Christ revealing himself and reconciling the world unto

himself. God also bore direct testimony to Him in word at His baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration, although Peter probably did not hear the former and heard the latter one week after this confession. Should we form our idea of Jesus from the opinions of the crowd, from our "inner consciousness" (which is our own selfish heart), or from the revelation and record that God has given us? Why?

"Every spirit that confesseth . . . Jesus Christ" (I John 4:2)

Confessing Christ is not just saying words that are soon to be forgotten. It is making a public expression of a wholehearted conviction that affects everything else. The Lord is not arbitrary or unjust in judging us according to what we think of Jesus. For, what we think of Him, and what we do about it, is the key to our whole attitude toward truth and authority and guilt and pardon. We may hear of the midnight sun in polar regions and admit that it is a fact, but, although we suppose it makes some difference to some people there, it doesn't affect our lives. But when we hear of Jesus manifested to the world in Palestine two thousand years ago it is not distant or indifferent matter to us to admit that is a fact! That is a decision that cannot be forgotten without being denied.

If our Creator has appointed a Master and Teacher over us who will also be our Judge, and has commanded all men to acknowledge His lordship, then we cannot safely ignore Him. "Hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). Believing on Him, we accept all that He teaches. We bow to His authority in all things. Confessing Christ as the divine Lord means a submission that accepts not only His authority, but also that which He delegates, and those whom He appoints. Accepting Him, we accept the New Testament. He is our creed, but the whole New Testament becomes our rule of faith and duty. His Word becomes the final authority on any subject as far as He speaks expressly on that subject. Religion may seem to be a big problem, and to contain many problems in it, but there is really only one question to be settled: "What think ye of the Christ?" (Matthew 22:42). That is the question that settles all others that really have to be settled. God has given us abundant evidence upon which to settle that. Since divine grace offers pardon and salvation and eternal life to all who accept and obey Him, we certainly need to confess Him, and cannot be indifferent to the issue. Confession is unto salvation (Romans 10:10), and denial unto damnation; for to deny Christ is to refuse God's help and to defy God's government.

PERSON OF CHRIST

"He That Denieth Me" (Luke 12:9)

Let Him state for himself (and through His apostles) what He thinks of those who will not believe on Him and confess Him: "Him will I also deny" (Matthew 10:33). See II Timothy 2:12. "This is the deceiver and the antichrist (II John 7). See I John 4:2, 3; 2:22. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son" (I John 5:10). They "shall die in [their] sins" (John 8:24). "The same hath not the Father" (I John 2:23). "The wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). They are "false teachers" of "destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (II Peter 2:1).

It is possible (and all too common) to profess to know Him, but by works to deny Him, being disobedient (Titus 1:16).

"He that is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30).

For Further Study:

Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1954. Pp. 54-56.

Lewis, C. S. *God in the Dock*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970. Essay "What Are We To Make of Jesus Christ?" Pp. 156-160. Lewis, in other of the above, makes it very clear that Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic or Lord and God.

Machen, J. Gresham. *Christian Faith in the Modern World*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1936. Pp. 131-187. Clear-cut defense of the deity of Christ.

Stott, John R. W. *Basic Christianity*, rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971. Pp. 21-34. Sets forth clearly Jesus' direct and indirect claims to be God in the flesh. Outstanding chapter.

THE MAN WHO IS GOD

It is vitally important to examine the claims of Jesus Christ and come to a rational decision about Him. A decision is demanded by what Jesus says about himself. Acceptance of His claims demands unconditional surrender to His person in absolute faith and obedience. If we do not consent to unqualified commitment to Him, we do not accept His claims, and thus we are condemning His teaching about himself. His claims allow no middle ground of accepting Him *merely* as a good teacher.

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God: "For this cause therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because . . . he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). Jesus said, "Say ye of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (John 10:36). Lazarus' "sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby" (John 11:4). On oath He declared that He was the "Son of God" (Matthew 26:63, 64).

Jesus refers with unmistakable clarity to His pre-existence with God: "For I am come down from heaven" (John 6:38). "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8:23). "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). "And now, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

Jesus claimed divine supremacy in both worlds: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom" (Matthew 13:41). "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory" (Matthew 25:31). "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you" (Matthew 25:34). He claimed, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). "And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man" (John 3:13). John heard Jesus say, "I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Revelation 1:18). "I will give unto each one of you according to your works" (Revelation 2:23).

Jesus claimed indisputable power in dealing with every moral duty and destiny: In His Sermon on the Mount, He said, "Ye have heard

that it was said . . . but I say unto you . . ." (Matthew 5:21, 22, 31-34, 38, 39, 43, 44). At the conclusion of the sermon He claimed to be the solid rock on which wise men are to build (Matthew 7:24). Other inspired teachers appealed to the law and to the testimony (Isaiah 8:20), but Jesus claimed an inherent power to apply perfectly or to supersede the law in righteousness (Matthew 12:3-8). He charged His disciples in His name to teach "them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). John said Christ claimed to be "he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand" (Revelation 2:1). "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne" (Revelation 3:21). "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10) are statements by Jesus to the churches.

Jesus asserted full possession of the power to forgive sins: "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house" (Matthew 9:6). "And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). "If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Jesus claimed the power to raise His own body from the grave, and to raise all the dead at the last great day: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up . . . but he spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2:19, 21). "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). "Every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). "All that are in the tombs . . . shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28, 29).

Jesus claimed to be the source of life that is real and eternal: "But the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life" (John 4:14). "For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom he will" (John 5:21). "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). "For this is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life" (John 6:40). "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves . . . he that eateth this bread shall live for ever" (John 6:53, 58). "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" (John 10:28). "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live;

and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me" (John 15:4). "Glorify thy Son . . . that to all whom thou hast given him, he should give eternal life. And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John 17:1-3).

Jesus declared he had power to do all His Father's works: "My Father worketh even until now, and I work" (John 5:17). "What things soever he doeth, these the Son doeth in like manner" (John 5:19). "I do always the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:29). "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do them, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (John 10:37, 38).

Jesus claimed to know the Father uniquely: "Neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). "I know him; because I am from him, and he sent me" (John 7:29). "Ye have not known him: but I know him" (John 8:55). "O righteous Father, the world knew thee not, but I knew thee" (John 17:25).

Jesus claimed to reveal the Father flawlessly: "And he that beholdeth me beholdeth him that sent me" (John 12:45). "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). "He that hateth me hateth my Father also" (John 15:23). "That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee" (John 17:21).

Jesus claimed to obey the Father perfectly: "I can of myself do nothing: . . . because I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 5:30). "For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). "But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I heard from God" (John 8:40). "I speak the things which I have seen with my Father" (John 8:38). "For I spake not from myself; but the Father that sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak . . . the things therefore which I speak, even as the Father hath said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:49, 50b). "The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works" (John 14:10).

Jesus unequivocally demands faith in himself: "I said therefore

unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). "If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). "If a man keep my word, he shall never see death" (John 8:51). "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture" (John 10:9). "And whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (John 11:26). "Believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

Such claims must be taken seriously, as either true or false. Jesus must either be obeyed as the Lord of all, or be rejected as a blasphemous impostor. He could not be a good man and be only a man.

He could not make such sweeping claims and still profess to be meek and humble, unless He does have the authority of God; and did take upon himself the place of a lowly servant in revealing God and bringing us to salvation. In His lesson to the disciples in John 13 on humility, He states that because He is their Lord and Master, His washing of their feet is an act of humility. If he were a mere man, it would hardly be an act of humility to tell others, "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

Have you considered how strange it was that a man could stand in front of others and claim to be the only one who knew about God, the only one who could satisfy the needs of all men, and say at the same time; "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29)? In the midst of His strongest claims, "If a man keep my word, he shall never see death" (John 8:51), He says, "I seek not mine own glory" (John 8:50).

He commanded the hearts of men and demanded absolute submission and allegiance to himself with as much authority as any absolute monarch. Yet, at the same time He admitted being homeless as a beggar, not having a place to lay His head (Luke 9:57-62).

It seems impossible for such extremes to combine with any harmony in one person. Yet, in Jesus this combination is possible because of the uniqueness of His divine nature and the grace of His human condescension. The only way to understand Him is as the humble incarnation of the divine Lord, the eternal Word. This is what He wants us to understand because this is what He really is. For this reason we should love and appreciate Him, both for His majesty in eternity and His ministry to earth for us.

An honest inquirer must conclude that Jesus Christ is the Lord

THE MAN WHO IS GOD

of life and death, the Lord of heaven and earth, and that He holds in His hands the destiny of every soul. The man who knows Christ, then, ought to do His will out of joyous obedience to one who "existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:6, 7).

His commands are for the purpose of making us "partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:3). With this in mind, Jesus demanded absolute faith in himself: "Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). He required men to make an abrupt turnabout of allegiance from themselves to himself when He said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish" (Luke 13:3). He made clear the need for a life of courageous confession of Him as Lord before mankind in the statement: "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32). He provided remission of our sins when He "humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8), and He asks us to demonstrate our death to sin by a symbolic burial and resurrection to new life in the act of baptism. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). He unmistakably links faith and trust in Him to obedience in baptism for the remission of sins, as a demonstration of our faith and commitment to Him.

As His followers we will be distinguished by our love for Him and each other, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Because Christ lives in our hearts, by His power we will have a forgiving spirit toward our brother (see Matthew 6:12; 18:21-35; Luke 17:3, 4). Our lives will be characterized by good works, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). We have been directed to follow Paul's admonition "Present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13).

Because we are His new creation we will put to death the sins listed by the apostles of Jesus in their Spirit-inspired writings: for example, Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 2:2, 3; Colossians 3:5-9; James 3:1-16. We will surely be bound to live by the principle of life given in Colossians 3:17: "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father

PERSON OF CHRIST

through him," with all its implications of a wholehearted desire to please the Lord Jesus in every area of life.

When one has reached a conclusion about this Jesus of Nazareth, action is demanded: either the action of full faith and obedience because He is the reigning Lord of glory, or the action of complete rejection because He is a shameful imposter.

For Further Study:

- Bruce, F. F. and William J. Martin. "The Deity of Christ" in *Christianity Today*, IX (December 18, 1964). Pp. 283-289. Careful study on the New Testament teaching on the deity of Christ. Exposes the misinterpretations of those who deny the deity of Jesus.
- Henry, Carl F. H. ed. *Jesus of Nazareth: Savior and Lord*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960. Scholarly defense of the New Testament picture of Christ in answer to the subjectivizing of modern theology.
- McDowell, Josh. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. San Bernardino: Campus Crusade For Christ, International, 1972. Pp. 91-112. Clear presentation of the claims of Christ and the necessity of decision on our part concerning his claims.

12

THE WORD . . . DWELT AMONG US (JOHN 1:1-18)

The Old Testament begins: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," (Genesis 1:1). Then it tells how man was made in the image of God to rule God's creation, how men fell into sin and separation from God, how God chose the family of Abraham to be His instrument through which to reveal himself and to prepare a great salvation for all the families of men.

John, the fisherman of Galilee, was one of the descendants of Abraham. He had learned from the Old Testament about God and His promises to Israel. When John the Baptist came prophesying in the Jordan Valley and baptizing people in preparation for the promised kingdom of God, the fisherman John and his brother James left their fishing business for a while to go hear the prophet. There they saw Jesus. They heard the prophet point Him out as the "Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

They began that day to follow Jesus, and for more than three years they lived with Him and were among His closest friends. They saw His miraculous signs. They heard His teachings that revealed who He was—the Son of God who was before Abraham (John 8:58), who had glory with God before the world was (17:5), who came into the world that men might have life (10:10), the light of the world (8:12), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the only way of life eternal for every man (6:53; 14:6). What a wonderful person to know and serve! They also saw Jesus rejected and crucified; then they saw Him repeatedly after He arose in triumph from the dead.

By all these experiences their faith and understanding were increased. But human understanding, even with such experiences, was not enough. They, with all the apostles, were given the power of God's Holy Spirit to bring to memory all that Jesus had taught them and to guide them into all truth. Thus John gained such clear and sure knowledge, even of things beyond human experience, that he was able to tell us about Jesus, that "In the beginning was the Word . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory . . .)" (John 1:1, 14).

The first eighteen verses of the first chapter of the Gospel according to John are an introduction to John's account of the events in Jesus' earthly life and ministry. This prologue or introduction sets forth the theme for the whole book, and attracts the mind of the reader

PERSON OF CHRIST

to the exceptional importance and solemnity of the book's contents.

All Christians would do well to memorize and meditate upon this precious gem of divine revelation. It is simple in its form and wording, but very profound in meaning. We know almost too easily what it means to say in a general way, so that we do not realize the force and significance of these tremendous truths. In very simple language it declares:

1. The eternal existence of Jesus Christ—"In the beginning was the Word" (v. 1).
2. His deity—"the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (vv. 1, 2).
3. His relation to the world as Creator—"All things were made through him" (v. 3).
4. His relation to the needs of man—"In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (v. 4).
5. His forerunner, John the Baptizer—"a man sent from God . . . that he might bear witness of the light" (vv. 6-8, 15).
6. His tragic rejection by men—"He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not" (v. 11).
7. His redemption and regeneration of those who did believe on Him—"To them gave he that right to become children of God . . . who were born . . . of God" (vv. 12, 13).
8. His incarnation and sojourn with men—"The Word became flesh; and dwelt among us" (v. 14).
9. His revelation of the glory, grace, and truth of God, and His revelation of God himself (vv. 14, 16-18).

These are supremely significant truths of Christianity. Other religions, at their very best, are capable only of showing man's seeking after God. Christianity is the result of God's seeking after men! Other religions show man's need of God. Christianity offers God's help for man. If religion were, as some conceive it, only a collection of the best wisdom of men for ordering our personal lives and social relationships, it would probably be, even then, of some value for our short life on this earth. But Christianity is far more and better than that. Christianity is not merely the experience of our fathers preserved for us; it is the wisdom and power of God present with us—God with us and in us for our perfection and preservation here and hereafter, now and forever! Our religion is not a philosophy to be experimentally confirmed or disproved, revised or refined; but it

is a matter of facts faithfully witnessed, things done and forever unchangeable, divine truths unerringly revealed.

This Scripture records the coming into the world of the greatest thing that has ever been in the world: life, light, glory, grace, and truth, all embodied in the person of Jesus Christ.

Here is told briefly but plainly

1. Who came,
2. Why He came,
3. How He was received, and
4. What He accomplished.

The Word and God

John is writing of the life and nature of Jesus Christ. In telling who it was that came, John uses a title for Him that is used only in John's writings—"The Word." The Word was in the beginning. The Word was with God. The Word was God; that is, the Word was deity, and had the nature of God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory. See I John 1:1, Revelation 19:13.

The Greek word used in these expressions is *logos*, which means much more than merely a word as a unit of speech. It often means a saying or extended utterance, the faculty of speech, instruction, a matter under discussion, a reason, an act of reasoning, or power of reason. The Greek language has another term for a mere word as a thing spoken or a unit of language; it is *rhema*, which is the "word" used in Hebrews 11:3 and at least 66 other times in the New Testament.

The words of a man are a most important expression of his character. The Christ is the supreme expression of God's character. He was much more than mere actions of God; He was and is a person, but in His whole personality and life He is the perfect expression of what God is and does. As John says in 1:18, He "declared him." That is, He expressed plainly to human senses the nature and the will of God, whom no man had seen or known adequately. Jesus was such an adequate manifestation of God that He was able to say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9), and "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He well deserves the title "Word."

God is a person. That is, He is a Spirit Being, having will and power of choice, capable of personal relations with others such as feeling love or obligation, being pleased or displeased, showing goodness or judgment, and the like. Since God is a person, a perfect

PERSON OF CHRIST

revelation of God must be made in the life and character of a person. The only one who can be the kind of character and live the kind of life that will manifest the supreme being adequately must himself be equal with God in the possession of divine attributes.

John makes plain the fact of the personal, eternal existence of the Word from the beginning with God and like God, and acting in the creation of all things. But our understanding of such a grand truth, so beyond human reason and experience, is helped by other statements in divine revelation. Genesis says God created the world; but it also uses a plural word for God and quotes God as saying, "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26). John in verse three declared that not even one thing was made without the Word. Christ's pre-existence in the form of God and on equality with God is expressed in Philippians 2:5-8. See also John 8:58; 17:5, 24; Revelation 1:8. He was not a created being, but is eternal and uncaused, like God. His work as Creator is affirmed in Colossians 1:16, 17 and in Hebrews 1:1-4. His deity and glory with God before coming to earth are stated or implied in John 17:5, 24; 6:62; Isaiah 9:6; and Micah 5:2. The following works of divine power and scope are attributed to Him:

1. Creation of all things,
2. The work of upholding and holding together the universe,
3. Raising the dead,
4. Eternal judgment of all men,
5. Forgiveness of sins,
6. Regeneration or renewal of those who were dead in sin,
7. Bestowal of the gift of eternal life,
8. Transformation of the bodies of the redeemed.

The deity of Christ is not a matter of cold, stale, abstract theology that has no practical importance to us. Rather, it is a truth of the greatest importance for us, for it is a matter of knowing whom we have believed and being fully persuaded that whatever He has promised He will do.

Life And Light

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). All life originated with Him, and He is the power that sustains life in the universe. As John proceeds with His account, it becomes plain that he is thinking of the spiritual and eternal life that is offered to men in Christ, and only in Christ. Life manifests itself in many forms, but in man it becomes intellectual and moral light, reason

and conscience. All the light of men came from Christ the Creator even before He came into the world as Jesus.

The light of moral truth and God's revelation of Himself has been shining into the darkness of human sin and folly through the ages. Before Jesus came, a measure of divine light had been given to man in his moral nature, in the original knowledge of God, in the progressive revelation in the Old Testament. When the light was manifested the darkness did not understand it or did not overcome it (John 1:5). The Greek verb can be translated either way. Either of these meanings expresses what is true, and each may fit the context. Men in the darkness of sin did not receive and appropriate the light as they should have; nor on the other hand, did the darkness overpower the light.

All the real light that any man receives comes from Christ. Through His life and His gospel Christ furnishes light for all men, although some may not receive it, and many love the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19; 12:35, 36, 46). Christ was the true light coming into the world. He is the "light which enlightens every man." When Jesus came in the flesh, the world knew not that He was the Creator and Lord of all. Some came to know Him, but most did not. The original language helps us understand verse eleven. John says, "He came unto His own things and His own people received him not." The first "own" is neuter, suggesting things, and the second "own" is masculine, suggesting people. The Jews, who had been chosen and prepared to know God and to serve Him, were peculiarly His own people. There is pathos in this simple statement.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). Not all rejected the Lord; a few were believing and appreciative. Though most Jews rejected, many Gentiles have received Him. The original word means "authority" rather than "power." God does not give the believers ability or force to become sons of His by their own efforts; but He gives the authorization or right to come into Christ by His grace.

Some persons have used John 1:13 to refer to the virgin birth of Jesus. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary but this verse does not affirm that fact. John here states that believers become children of God, not by natural descent or ordinary birth and not by the efforts of their own will, but by being born anew from God. This is a birth of water and the Spirit (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; Romans 6:4-11). It is accomplished through believing and obeying Christ. Thus we appropriate His life and light.

PERSON OF CHRIST

Unique And Incomparable

God came to us in human flesh and for a brief time lived among men, showing in His life and works the goodness and truth of God. In Him men saw the glory of God, unique and incomparable. John plainly identifies the eternal Word in His earthly sojourn as Jesus Christ. In many versions, we read in John 1:14 of "the only begotten of the Father," and in John 1:18 we see "the only begotten Son." The word translated "only begotten" is *monogenes*. It does not necessarily refer to begetting, but may mean "the only one of his kind." Thus it is used in Hebrews 11:17 to describe Isaac, who was not literally the only begotten son of Abraham. Ishmael was begotten by Abraham before Isaac, and six brothers were begotten by Abraham after Isaac. But Isaac was indeed Abraham's unique son of miraculous birth and divine choice.

Applied to Jesus, the word *monogenes* seems not intended to emphasize the fact that He was the begotten Son among others who were adopted, though that is true. But the word refers to His unique relationship with the Father in all eternity, *before He was begotten in the flesh* as well as after. No one else had such a relationship; He was the one and only. He not only was with God; He also *was* God. So John 1:18 tells us that no man has known God face to face, but one who is of the nature of God has come from the heart of God to us. In some of the oldest and best Greek manuscripts we find in John 1:18 the reading *monogenes* God instead of *monogenes* Son. This represents a difference of only one letter in the way manuscripts were copied. This would express not the sonship but the deity of the one who has come in the flesh to expound the invisible Father (Col. 1:15; 2:9).

Jesus is not important simply because His teachings are superior and effective; but His teachings are supremely important because He is in reality *God with us*, speaking the eternal truth of God! Because He is God with us, His death is more than an example of self-sacrificing meekness; it is rather the accomplishment of a divine plan of redemption with power to save the lost and purge the sinful.

We need also to realize that the God revealed by Jesus is the only God there is. There is no God but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we must have no other gods beside Him. If we make any philosophy about God that considers Him to be different from the character and purposes and teachings of Jesus, we make an idol as surely as if we carved one out of wood.

Therefore, also, if we would pay any respect to God or serve Him,

we must do it through Christ and according to God's will as revealed in Christ. We cannot know God or serve Him while rejecting or disregarding Jesus Christ. Beware of all those occasions on which men claim to honor God or to teach His will while they bypass Jesus and include in their ceremonies men who deny Christ. "He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent him" (John 5:23).

Christ Among Us And In Us

Try to imagine what significance it would have if the apostle Paul were to come to preach among us for three months! What if he were with us to correct our concepts of Christian teaching, to direct our emphasis in Christian work, and to demonstrate what real faith and holy zeal are like? But how much more wonderful than even that would be is the fact that the very Son of God came and lived among men for thirty-three years as a perfect demonstration of God's love, wisdom, purposes, and holiness! He showed us, throughout an entire lifetime, the way of righteousness, the glory of service, the power of love, the life of prayer, and the victory of complete trust in God.

His earthly life was perfect in godliness, but it was truly human at the same time. For our sakes He came to be really one of us, to be tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. For having suffered being tempted, He is able to help those who are now being tempted. He lived a very real and complete human life, as a helpless babe, as a growing boy, as a working youth, as a man of sorrows, serving and saving humanity. His humanity is not to be denied any more than His deity is (see I John 4:2; II John 7). He became one of us that He might represent us as our priest before God. He even suffered our death, that through it He might free us from the sentence of the second death and the fear of the first one.

His coming to dwell among us is especially significant when we let Him come and dwell within us. For the Word of God not only dwelt *among men* nineteen hundred years ago; He will *dwell in our hearts* today through faith. This is the real purpose of the incarnation and the teaching of the Gospel—to bring Christ into the lives of all men, to be their life and righteousness and their hope of eternal glory (see Col. 1:27; Gal. 4:19). When we really accept Him as Lord, and His death as the death our sins deserve, we are baptized into His death and are counted as "crucified with Christ." Henceforth, the life of faith in Him is not our own life, but Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20 compare Rom. 6:1-11). This is the divine purpose and the abiding glory of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

PERSON OF CHRIST

For Further Study:

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THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES

Why did Jesus heal? The New Testament states plainly the main reason for the miracles wrought by Christ and the apostles.

Jesus said, "The works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (John 5:36). "The works that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness of me" (John 10:25; see also 37, 38). Even to the apostles at the last supper Jesus offered the same evidence: "The Father abiding in me doeth his works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake" (John 14:10, 11).

A Demonstration

A very clear case is given in Mark 2:4-12. When the paralyzed man was let down through the roof for Jesus to heal him, Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Scribes who were in the crowded house thought Jesus was blaspheming in claiming to forgive sins.

Jesus answered their thoughts: "Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins (He said to the paralytic), 'I say unto you, Arise, take up your bed and go to your house.' " And he did!

Signs That Bear Witness

The book of Hebrews reports that this great salvation, "having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will" (Heb. 2:3, 4).

John regularly called Jesus' miracles "signs." In the twenty-one chapters of his Gospel, he refers to them fourteen times as "signs." As Nicodemus saw, and as Jesus said, they were signs that God was with Jesus and was doing His works in Him (see John 3:2).

Peter preached on Pentecost that Jesus was "a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know" (Acts 2:22).

When the apostles worked miracles in Jesus' name, they gave evidence that Jesus was at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33), evidence of the power of His name (Acts 3:16), evidence that God was with them and their message was from God (Acts 13:9-12). Their miracles gave boldness and strength to the new witnesses faced by overwhelming opposition (Acts 4:29-33; 5:12-16). Their miracles gave to their persecutors more convincing evidence than they were really willing to admit (see Acts 4:16; 5:17-24, 33-39; 6:7).

Miracles gave proof that the Gentiles were to be accepted in Christ through obedience to the gospel, the same as Jews (Acts 10:9-16, 44-47; 11:15-17; 15:8, 9, 12). They were the evidence, even to the elders and the church at Jerusalem, that the preaching of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles was according to God's will (Acts 15:12-22).

The great miracles of God, wrought through the apostles and some on whom they laid their hands, were so clear and so certain that even sorcerers and people who practiced magical arts saw the proof of real truth and gave up their superstitions and trickery (Acts 8:6-13; 19:11-20).

Miracles Not Always for Compassion

The miracles of the Bible taught God's power and authority, sometimes His love and goodness, sometimes His righteous and fearsome judgments.

Consider the death of Uzzah, who touched the ark (II Sam. 6:6, 7); of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron who offered strange fire (Lev. 10:1, 2); and of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about their offering (Acts 5:1-11). Consider the leprosy of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha who coveted Naaman's gifts (II Kings 5:20-27); and of Miriam, the sister of Moses, when she questioned Moses' leadership (Num. 12:1-15). Consider the blindness of Elymas (Acts 13:8-12), or of the Syrian band (II Kings 6:18-20); the destruction of armies (27,000 Syrians killed by the falling walls of Aphek—I Kings 20:30; and 185,000 Assyrians smitten by an angel outside Jerusalem—II Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:33-38), or of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24, 25) and Jericho (Josh. 6:20).

Although such miracles as healing and feeding people did show the merciful goodness of God and did express the compassion of Jesus, the accounts show that they were not worked merely to relieve suffering.

Physical healing, material blessing, or the prolongation of this earthly life are not the real purposes of God's grace toward us. He

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES

did these things sometimes as visible examples of His power and loving goodness, to encourage faith.

But miracles have always been limited to few and special cases. Never have they been used impartially to relieve suffering or prolong this life for all of God's people. Their benefit was usually temporary and only a demonstration to engender and support an abiding faith.

All who were delivered from sickness or affliction had other times to suffer and to die. All who were raised from the dead had to die again. Once and again Peter was delivered from prison and from persecutors; but another time he was left to die, when God was no less compassionate and Peter was no less believing. So it was also with Paul.

Some received no miraculous deliverance here, but a better resurrection for the life hereafter (Heb. 11:35-40). John the Immerser, greatest of the prophets, worked no miracles, nor was he miraculously delivered from prison and death (Matt. 11:7-11; 14:8-12; John 10:41).

Jesus could have healed all the sick or raised all the dead. But he did not and would not. Many were healed by Paul (Acts 19:11, 12), but Trophimus and Timothy were not (II Tim. 4:20; I Tim. 5:23). A multitude of sick and afflicted lay by the pool at Jerusalem, but Jesus healed only one man (who did not know Him or ask Him to) and then hid himself from the others (John 5:3, 5-9, 13). But later He sought the healed man again to teach him and to meet the debate which the Sabbath miracle had aroused with the Pharisees.

Miracles form part of the foundation of our faith, being divine demonstrations witnessing to the origin of the message we have believed. But they are not an inherent part of the faith and its practice in the lives of obedient believers. The miracles wrought by the messengers of God while the faith was being "once for all delivered to the saints" are still effective evidences to establish the truth and authority of that faith.

Modern Miracles

Miracles claimed by preachers today do not clearly confirm the message of ancient apostles and prophets; they seem instead to have the opposite effect. They are not the conclusive and undoubtable kind that established the faith in the beginning. They are claimed by men whose message does not altogether agree with the sure Word of God as given in the Bible.

We should not hastily suppose that anything we cannot explain must, therefore, have been done by God. The mere fact that something marvelous or apparently miraculous has happened does not

PERSON OF CHRIST

necessarily attest a divine religion or indicate a revelation from God, not in the same way that Bible miracles prove that the Bible is from God. There are false miracles and misleading wonders (Matt. 24:24; 7:22; II Thess. 2:8-10; Rev. 13:14; 16:14; 19:20; I John 4:1-6).

Bible miracles were a part of a coherent combination of many miracles and messages to which they were significantly related. They were closely connected with the message that explained them, and thoroughly consistent with it in character. Satan tempted Jesus to work miracles, which He would not do because they were not consistent with the purpose of God. The whole body of Biblical miracles verify and explain each other. Any unexplained wonder here or there must be tested by its coherence with that undeniable body of complete evidence which is found in the miracles and prophecies of the Bible. The certainty, the extent and the quality of miracles and revelations by the apostles and other Bible writers are different from the many various "miracles" and "prophecies" that have been claimed since the days of the New Testament.

Even if true miracles were worked today by men who taught the truth of God's Word, they would add little or nothing to the proof of that divine revelation. In fact, they would make men tend to depend upon continual miraculous demonstration rather than upon the unchanging authority and veracity of God. When miracles are reported or claimed today, they tend to make men overly eager for physical and material aid, more than they are concerned for spiritual and eternal salvation or for faithfulness to God by knowing and obeying His Word.

The spiritual transformation of a sinner through birth of water and the Spirit and the reality of Christ dwelling in him through faith is a greater work than even the mightiest miracles wrought by Jesus in Galilee. Miracles in the spiritual realm are greater than miracles in the physical realm. They have a more significant quality and a more lasting consequence. Making real saints out of sinners is a greater work than turning water into wine. This is surely what Jesus meant by John 14:12: "Greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father." Surely no greater miracles in the physical realm have ever been worked by anyone. But the humblest believer by the power and instrumentality of God's Word may convert a sinner and produce the fruit of the Spirit, and so participate in a new creation (II Cor. 5:17) which shall shine as the stars forever to the eternal glory of God (study Eph. 1:12-14; 2:19-22; 3:10, 11, 17-21; 4:13, 22-24; and 5:26, 27). Pray that we may.

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES

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