

Berean Expositor Volume 2 & 3

The Doctrine of Christ. pp. 21-25

“And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, ‘Answerest Thou nothing? What is it which these witness against Thee?’ But He held His peace and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, and said unto Him, ‘Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am’” (Mark xiv. 60, 61).

Some of our readers may have received during the month of September, 1911, an “Open Letter” addressed to the writer, having reference to the important subject, “The Deity of Christ.”

Several reasons prevented us from answering the “Open Letter,” one being that in our estimation an Open Letter is a most unfair means of dealing with a fellow worker, and that in many instances it savours of the hand of Sanballat (Neh. vi. 5). Our reply may be summarised in the words of Nehemiah, when he declined a conference, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down, why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” Or, in his prayer after he had received the Open Letter, “Now therefore O God, strengthen my hands.”

We desire no personalities to mar our service, but would seek to answer or refrain, in harmony with the silence or answer as recorded in the above quotation from Mark xiv. We shall not advertise the name of the writer of the Open Letter, but knowing that the question of the Deity of Christ is exercising the minds of so many, and that, moreover, the definitions and creeds of Christendom in their wording often exhibit human folly rather than Divine wisdom, we have felt it right to seek to exhibit the teaching of the Word itself, giving as little argument as possible, so that the reader may see for himself what the Scriptures really teach concerning this tremendous theme. In II John 9 we read:--

“Whosoever leadeth forward (*proagōn*) and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God! He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither greet him, for he that biddeth him rejoice hath fellowship with his wicked works.”

Some teach that by the words, “the doctrine of Christ,” we are to understand all that Christ taught. If this be the meaning, there is not a single believer living who comes up to the standard, none fully abide in the teaching, or even a part of that teaching (for example, the Sermon on the Mount). If this be the meaning, fellowship with any saint is at an end, we should have to excommunicate ourselves. Worse than this, the dreadful words, “hath not God,” would be uttered over every believer. The words, “the doctrine of Christ,” however, do not mean the teaching which Christ gave, but the doctrine of the

Scriptures concerning Christ Himself. This can be seen by turning to I John ii. 22, 23 and iv. 3.

The evil in I John iv. 3 is defined as a denial that “Jesus Christ *has come* in the flesh,” whereas the evil of II John 7 is that “many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ *is coming* in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” The doctrine of Christ, therefore, has reference not to His teaching, but to the teaching of the Scriptures concerning Himself, both in relation to His first and second advent. How solemn the warning of verse 9, “Whoso leadeth forward.” Think of the “forward movements” of to-day. The modern “Gospels,” the “Humanism,” as well as its kindred “Spiritism,” every one of them seeking to degrade the Lord Jesus Christ to the level of a mere human teacher and example.

Dispensational truth, as compared with the teaching of the times, may be truthfully called, “a leading forward,” but the hall-mark upon the final revelation of God (the revelation which the apostles were not able to bear while our Lord was on earth), is indicated in the words, “*He shall glorify Me*” (John xvi.). In no part of the Scriptures do we find the glory of Christ so prominent a theme, and so transcendently magnificent in its heavenly majesty, as in the epistles of the mystery, the truth for the present time. Not only does the Epistle of John speak concerning Christ’s Person in the 4th chapter, but we read in the 5th chapter:--

“This is He Who came through water and blood, and it is the Spirit Who beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth; for three there are that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water and the blood. And these three are with a view to the unity” (I John v. 6-8).

This passage, like the rest of Scripture, has suffered at the hand of believer and unbeliever alike. A mistaken zeal, which sees the “Church” everywhere, robs the Saviour of this three-fold witness, in order to bolster up self-devised systems of Church Fellowship. The *Spirit* is supposed to represent the “gifts” as in I Cor. xii. The *water*, to represent Believer’s Baptism, and the *blood*, the Lord’s Supper. This is supposed to be the “threefold cord” of Church Unity. There is certainly plenty to *do* and *see*, ordinances to be performed, and “gifts” to be hoped for, but *these* are not the “bond of peace” of the only unity worthy the name (Eph. iv.).

Simon’s baptism (Acts viii.), the Lord’s table of I Cor. xi. 18-34, the Spirit’s gifts of Heb. vi. 4, 5, witness to the *divisions of the flesh*, rather than “the unity of the Spirit.” This passage, however, has nothing to do with the Church—it is essentially the “the doctrine of Christ.” In verse 9 we have the Scriptural interpretation of the passage, it is “the witness of God concerning His Son.”

John was bearing testimony against the blasphemy of the Gnostics. They taught that upon a *man*, Jesus, there came the “anointing,” the “Christ,” at His baptism, but that this “anointing,” or “Christ,” left Him before His death on the cross, leaving a *man*, Jesus, to die, thereby denying the Scriptures, which not only emphasise the *manhood* of the Redeemer, but which also say, “The church of *God* which *He* hath purchased with His own blood.” We may now understand why John so definitely says that Jesus was the

Christ before baptism, and after death, “This is He Who came through water and blood, Jesus the Christ.” He was Jesus the Christ before His baptism. A reference to John i. 32-34 will show how vividly this is portrayed in I John v. All the words of verse 34 occur in this epistle, and in the same order. The witness that Jesus was the Christ is in the same manner upheld before, at and after the crucifixion (cf. Matt. xvi. 16; xxvii. 54; John xx. 28, and Rom. i. 4).

The *Spirit* of truth (Matt. iii. 16), the *water* of Jordan (Matt. iii. 13; John i. 31, 32), and the *blood* of the Cross (Acts xx. 28), are the three-fold witness to the Person of Jesus the Christ throughout the whole of that wondrous walk on earth. I John v. 9 declares that this is the witness of God concerning His Son, and verse 10 breaks in with the antichrist’s denial of I John iv. by shewing that they who reject this witness “make God a liar.” Verses 9 and 11 link the truth concerning the Person and work of Christ with the believers’ assurance of eternal life:--

“The witness of God is this, that He hath borne witness concerning His Son” (verse 9).

“The witness is this, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life” (verse 11).

Here the apostle gathers up his argument. Chapter i. 1-3 speaks of Christ as “that eternal life.” Christ is our life, and to know this is to have assurance. The final words of I John v. clinch the two-fold teaching of the epistle:--

“We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. *This One is the true God and eternal life.*”

Here we see how the two-fold theme is linked together. He that denies the Son hath not God, and he that hath not the Son hath not life. Let us notice the force of the final words of John’s first epistle. This One, Who is Jesus the Christ, Who came in the flesh, this One is “the true God and eternal life.”

In John xvi. 13-15 and xvii. 1-5 are words which must be remembered in this consideration. “He shall glorify Me” were the words of the promise. This glory is specially connected with the work of redemption. “I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do, and now, O Father, glorify Thou Me” (cf. Also Phil. ii. 6-11 and Heb. xii. 2). In John xvii. 3 Christ links eternal life with the knowledge of God the Father as the only true God, while the Holy Spirit in I John v. 20 as definitely links eternal life with the knowledge of the Son as the only true God.

The Open Letter referred to above says:--

“You have taken the honour, the position, and attributes of my Father—God the Creator—and have given them to His creature and Servant-Son, the man Christ Jesus.”

We believe that to the fair minded reader, a comparison of John xvii. 1-5 with I John v. 20 will shew that this charge must also be laid against the apostle John (and the Holy Spirit Who inspired the epistle), for He too gives the title and honour of God the Father to Jesus Christ the Son; *both* are called “the true God,” and a knowledge of the Father and

the Son are vitally linked with eternal life. These verses should make all who hesitate to ascribe equal honour to the Son as to the Father consider the validity of their claim to eternal life.

The confusion between the great truth that there is one God, and the revelation of the “Persons,” as related to creation and redemption, is to be deplored. We must rid ourselves of the creeds and traditions of men, but we must “hold fast that which is good,” and realize that the Father and the Son equally share the attributes of Deity. The title “Son of God” of course has reference to the mediatorial office of Christ, and sometimes it is difficult for us to distinguish the line of demarcation between His true Deity (“the true God”) and the voluntarily assumed humanity, “Christ come in the flesh.” Nevertheless, it is for us to believe that which is written. “Who by searching can find out God unto perfection?” “God is Spirit,” and has revealed Himself to men in a way that fills the Scriptures with wonder. It is a delight to study passages of Scripture wherein all the attributes of Deity ascribed to the Father, to Jehovah, or to the Creator as such, are equally ascribed to the Son of God, and which effectually give the lie to the words of the Open Letter, “His creature and Servant-Son,” for while the Lord Jesus was man, born of woman, yet He was, nevertheless, according to Holy Writ, “the true God and eternal life.”

The title “Son of God” is used by many to belittle the glory of the Lord Jesus. It is clear from the Scriptures that the Jews understood this title to be a blasphemous claim to Divine attributes. They understood him to claim *equality with God* (John v. 18); and to *make Himself God* (John x. 33).

Some may object and say, “the Jews misunderstood Him, and we must not build a doctrine upon such a frail foundation.” Did they misunderstand Him? It would have been easy for the Lord to have corrected their mistake. It was indeed imperative that He should do so, not only for Himself and for the glory of His Father, but for the sake of these men, who by their mistaken views (if such they were), were thirsting for His blood.

The Lord did not mitigate in one iota the fulness of His claim. He allowed it to remain in all its repulsiveness to the Jewish mind, and died at last upon the cross, giving no sign that His claim had been misunderstood. The Lord Jesus accepted the Jewish interpretation of the title Son of God, and sealed its acceptance with His blood.

The Doctrine of Christ. pp. 108-109

“A Scriptural answer is asked for the following question: If Christ had no being before birth, when did He Who *was rich* become poor for our sakes? When *after* Bethlehem was He *rich*, and when did He *become* poor?” (quoted by Critic-see page 17-from Editor’s reply).

Psalm ii. 8: “Ask of Me, and I will give thee the nations for thine *inheritance*, and the uttermost parts for thy possession.”

John xvii. 9: “I make not request for the world (inheritance).” Satan makes the offer of the kingdoms of the world, but Jesus would not take them from his hand, but renounced them: the way of redemption was by way of the cross. Christ was the “heir of all things,” but he beggared himself of his inheritance! The “world inheritance” was his for the asking, but he would not take it up with death upon it, but he would first of all redeem man from the power of death and the grave, and this he could only do by dying, and in dying he destroyed him that had the power of death.

We have quoted the above from a letter received on the subject of the Deity of Christ. Whilst seeking to respect the convictions of others, we feel that the above answer cannot do anything but harm to the position of those who adopt such teaching.

Psa. ii. 8 is referred to to answer the question quoted at the commencement, but Psa. ii. is quoted by Peter and by Paul with exclusive reference to *resurrection*. Acts xiii. 30-37 has entirely to do with resurrection and its result, and in verse 33 we read, “He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, “Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.” It is upon this basis, namely, of resurrection, that the words follow, “ask of Me and I will give Thee,” &c.

It is utterly untrue to say that the Lord Jesus could have scripturally “asked” for the inheritance before resurrection, and this being so, we again ask, “When, *after* Bethlehem, was He *rich*? and when did He *become* poor?” We are sorry to have to write in this fashion, but the honour of the Lord must come before our desire for peace, or the consideration of other persons’ feelings. We earnestly ask those who favour the position advocated by the one whose reply we have quoted to reconsider such an answer and see whether it really is Scriptural.

The statements made in the reply are in measure true so far as they refer to redemption, but they contain no answer to the question. Born at Bethlehem, brought up at Nazareth, living for thirty years as an obscure mechanic’s son, “He *became* poor,” but “He *was* rich.” When?