

The Doctrine of Christ

The late Dr. Clarence E. Macartney, who had an expert knowledge of the history of Napoleon Bonaparte, and who wrote a remarkable biography of the renowned Frenchman, gives us a most interesting comparison of Napoleon and the Lord Jesus Christ. In his volume on *What Jesus Really Taught*, Dr. Macartney says—

The two characters of history about whom more books have been written and more words spoken than others, are Napoleon and Jesus Christ. But what a contrast between these two men who—more than all others—have engrossed the mind of man! Napoleon shed rivers of blood upon which to float his ambitions. The only blood the other shed was His own, which He poured out upon the cross, for the redemption of mankind.

Dr. Macartney then proceeds to describe the accomplishments of the two—one leaving behind him a ghastly trail of dead; the other leaving behind Him a trail of mercy and compassion and life. “These are two men who have had more words written about them, more opinions uttered concerning them, than any other men.” Some men are fascinated by the character of Napoleon, others with the Person and work of Christ. That Napoleon himself was drawn to a Greater than he, is proven by the following generally accepted testimony he gave of Christ—

I know men, and I tell you, Jesus is not a man. He commands us to believe, and gives no other reason than His awful word, *I am God*. Philosophers try to solve the mysteries of the universe by their empty dissertations: fools: they are like the infant that cries, to have the moon as a plaything. Christ never hesitates. He speaks with authority. His religion is a mystery: but it subsists by its own force. He seeks, and absolutely requires the love of men, the most difficult tiling in the world to claim. Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal, conquered the world but they had no friends ... I founded my empire upon what?—force. Jesus founded His empire on love: and at this hour millions would die for him ... What an abyss between my misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, who is proclaimed, loved, adored and which is extending all over the earth. Is this death? I tell you, the death of Christ is the death of a God. I tell you, *Jesus Christ is God*.

No other man, born of woman, has gathered around His claims and character such voluminous literature as Jesus Christ. John says that “the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” about His accomplishments (John 21:24, 25). Libraries all over the world contain a mountain of books that have been written of Him who came as—

The promised Messiah and Saviour of the world;
The Founder of Christianity;
The Lord and Head of the Christian Church;
The complete Revelation of God to man.

The doctrine before us is the loftiest and sublimest that can engage the mind of man, and presents a course of study of transcendent importance, of vast and varied range, of unrivaled attraction and fraught with the highest practical issues. Theologians, philosophers and poets have written about Christ, one way or the other, often forgetting that our concept of Him cannot be over-estimated because what He is determines what Christianity is, which stands or falls with Him. In all that He is in Himself is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, the key of the battle between faith and unbelief.

While literature, poetry and art have vied with each other in their tributes to the Saviour, and have been stirred to their highest achievements under the influences of His unrivaled glory, beauty, wisdom and might, it is to the Bible alone we turn for the full and final revelation of Him who came as "the Fairest of all the earth beside." Because the doctrine concerning Him is so vast in its range, it is no easy task to classify it. It may be, however, that thinking of all associated with Christ as a whole, we can examine the facts in this threefold way.

1. His past manifestation, which takes us back to the dim, eternal past—to the Old Testament history—to His entrance into our humanity—to His return to heaven.

2. His present ministry, which bids us dwell upon all that He is accomplishing on His church's behalf in the Father's heavenly abode.

3. His prospective majesty, which covers all the future has for His church, the world, and the eternal ages. What glory is to be His!

His Past Manifestation

Coeternal with the Father, and with the Holy Spirit, the beginning of the revelation of Christ goes back beyond the beginning of creation and of man. "In the beginning—a beginning before Genesis 1:1—was the Word" (John 1:1). Claiming for Himself powers and attributes belonging only to God, Christ asserted His *pre-existence*. When among men, He could claim, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). John also reminds us that Jesus dwelt in "the bosom of the Father" (1:18), which, strange though it may seem, declares that Jesus lived before He was born. He, Himself, could say that He "came forth from the Father" (John 16:28). He also prayed, "Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee *before the world was*" (John 17:5). What a manifestation of His excellent glory the angelic host must have witnessed in that past eternity when their Lord was the brightness of the Father's glory (Hebrews 1:3). Did He not share the Father's attribute of eternity, and come into the world as the Everlasting Father, the King Eternal, the Eternal Son, and as the Ancient of Days? (Isaiah 9:6; 23:7; 1 Timothy 1:17).

A further mystery is that, in that past eternity, before the present earth was formed with man as its occupant, the omniscient God foresaw that man, after his creation would sin, and require a Saviour, who ultimately came as the Lamb slain *before* the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). The true church, composed of redeemed souls was chosen in Him *before* the same foundation (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9). Thus, in that dateless past, "Love drew salvation's plan," and in "the fulness of time" Jesus came as the foreordained sacrificial Lamb (Galatians 4:4).

We now come to the Old Testament preparation for the coming of God's eternal Son, who did appear as the goal of Old Testament revelation. The prophecies and promises of the manifestation of Christ as the Redeemer—Messiah are interwoven in Old Testament Scriptures

from the first promise of Him given to Adam (Genesis 3:15), right on to the last promise of His ultimate glory as “the Sun of Righteousness” (Malachi 4:2). While in the flesh, Jesus could lay hold of all past predictions and relate them to Himself (John 5:39; Luke 24:27, 44, 45; Hebrews 10:7).

Then in the centuries before Christ, the Jewish mind was prepared for the manifestation of Him as the One who would come from “the tribe of Judah,” in all God’s revelations to, and dealings with His chosen people. In the provision of prophet, priest and king there was the foregleam of the Coming One who would combine all three offices in His life and labors as we shall presently see. The forecast of a Messianic kingdom, breaking the bounds of Jewish nationalism, and extending through the whole earth and embracing all peoples likewise prepared the way for the appearance of God’s King (Psalms 2; 87; Isaiah 60; Daniel 2:44; 7:27).

The most striking Old Testament preparation for Christ’s Advent, however, were those wonderful *theophanic appearances*. These pre-incarnate manifestations of His were designed to prepare the world for Christ’s more permanent abode in human flesh. Biblical scholars identify “The angel of the Lord”—“The angel of his presence”—“The angel of the Covenant” (Genesis 22:14; 31:11, 13; Exodus 14:19; Isaiah 63:9; Malachi 3:1), as Christ, the Son of God, in pre-incarnate manifestation. “His Incarnation is the center by reference to which all angelic ministrations are best understood.”

These are the *theophanies* in order—

His manifestation in Eden (Genesis 3:15). The preexistent Christ as God, spoke of Himself as the coming Seed of the woman. As God He was the *promised*; as the God-Man, He became the *Promise*, (see Genesis 3:22–24; Exodus 6:3, 5; Jude 14, 15; 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8).

His manifestation to Hagar (Genesis 16:7–14). This is the first time *the angel* is named. Four times over we have the title, “The angel of the Lord,” or “Jehovah.” Here we have Him seeking the miserable outcast—a prophecy of His coming redemptive mission (see John 4:14).

His manifestation to Moses (Exodus 3:2, 6, 14; 23:20, 21; Acts 7:38). Typical deliverances were wrought by “the angel of his presence,” who was no ordinary angel because of His exercise of divine prerogatives, the manifestation of divine perfections, and the claiming of homage due to Deity alone.

His manifestation to Abraham (Genesis 18:1; 22:11–13; 26:2, 5, 24, 25). One of the three heavenly visitants entertained by Abraham repeatedly assumed, and received, the name of *Jehovah* with honor due only to Him. Both Abraham, and his son, Isaac, were the recipients of promises from the Lord of Glory.

His manifestation to Jacob (Genesis 28; 32:24–32; 48:15, 16; Hosea 12:4, 5). The angel, who redeemed Jacob from all evil was no common celestial messenger, but “the angel of the covenant” Himself who, at different periods of the patriarch’s life, visited him with words of assurance.

His manifestation to Joshua (5:13–15). As Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel, the same mysterious Personage appeared, this time as “the captain of the host of the Lord.” Joshua had to learn that he was subordinate to another Leader worthy of adoration and worship.

His manifestation to Manoah (Judges 14:15–20; Isaiah 9:6). As the Omniscient One, the angel appeared to Manoah foretelling the birth and character of an extraordinary son, Samson. Here we have a visible revelation of divine majesty and a foregleam of the character of the coming Messiah.

His manifestation to Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–13; John 12:39–41; see Ezekiel 1:1–28). In His pre-Incarnation appearances to prophets, Christ came as the Revealer of God. The *words* and *burdens* communicated to Isaiah, and others, came from “The angel of his presence,” Israel’s Saviour (Isaiah 63:8–10).

His manifestation to Zechariah (1:8–13; 2:8–11; 3:1–10; 6:12–15). The prophet Zechariah describes a glorious Person, intimately acquainted with the counsels of the Most High, and as presiding over world affairs, directing, vindicating and interceding as no ordinary angel could do. This Person exhibited the attributes of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. God’s name was *in* Him (Exodus 23:21). Other evidences of Christ’s pre-existence are hinted at in Daniel 3:25 Revised Version; John 1:15; 6:22; 1 Peter 1:10, 11; Psalm 110:1; Judges 6:12; 1 Corinthians 10:4, 9; Exodus 14:19; Colossians 1:16).

The promise was that the intermittent appearance of Christ in human form were to give way to a more permanent sojourn in man’s flesh, so His tabernacle among men naturally follows His pre-existence. We thus come to His fuller manifestation in the New Testament. The angel of the Redeemer is now—

Arrayed in mortal flesh,
He like an Angel stands,
And holds the promises
And pardon in His hands;
Commissioned from the Father’s Throne,
To make His grace to mortals known.

His Wondrous Birth

After over four millenniums, the first promise given to man is fulfilled, and Jesus was born as “the seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15; Matthew 1:1). Paul was very careful to state that when God sent forth His Son that He was “made of a woman” (Galatians 4:4)—not of *a man and a woman*, but only of a woman. Christ is the only babe the world has ever known who did not have a human father. He was divinely conceived. In this aspect of our meditation we are not principally concerned with the *fact*, *time* or *place* of Christ’s birth, but with the *manner* of it. As the doctrine of the virgin birth is one of the most vital of the great doctrines of the Christian faith, it is imperative to consider it somewhat fully. *The Incarnation* is the most stupendous miracle comprehending and involving all other miracles, and because it is a theme both deep and delicate, infinite and incomprehensible, how necessary it is to follow Solomon’s advice about “finding out acceptable words” (Ecclesiastes 12:10). The ground we approach is holy calling for the putting off of our shoes (Exodus 3:5).

In the presence of such a holy miracle “there can be no fitting attitude,” says G. Campbell Morgan, “of the human intellect save that of acceptance of the truth without any attempt to explain the mystery.” God manifest in flesh is one of the great mysteries of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16). One writer expressed it—

I will seek to believe rather than to reason, to adore rather than to explain; to give thanks rather than to penetrate; to love rather than to know; to humble myself rather than to speak.

Who is there with all his innate and acquired wisdom able to explain the mystery of—

The Ancient of Days becoming a babe at Bethlehem—
Him who thunders in the heavens crying in a cradle—
Him who gives to all their meat in due season, sucking at a mother's breast—
Him who made all flesh now made of flesh—
Him who could summon legions of angels, while wrapped in infant's clothes—
The mighty God now a helpless child—

God and man becoming one Person. No wonder one of the old divines said, "I can scarce get past His cradle in my wondering to wonder at His cross. The infant Jesus is in some views a greater marvel than Jesus with the purple robe and the crown of thorns."

Human reason rejects the virgin birth as being impossible and as contrary to the natural order of things. But Job could confess, "I know that Thou canst do everything" (42:2). Mary accepted the angel's announcement that apart from natural generation she was to become the mother of our Lord and said, "With God nothing shall be impossible ... Be it ... according to Thy Word" (Luke 1:37, 38). If we try to explain the virgin birth we lose our reason—If we discredit altogether this initial miracle of Christianity we lose our soul, for no one can be a Christian after the New Testament order who totally rejects Christ's birth of a virgin.

The superb structure of the life and character of our Lord, has, as its immovable and only foundation, His virgin birth. In his great work on *The Virgin Birth of Our Lord*, Dr. James Orr remarks—

Doctrinally it must be repeated that the belief in the virgin birth of Christ is of the highest value for the right apprehension of Christ's unique and sinless personality. Here is One, as Paul brings out in Romans 5:12, who, free from sin Himself, and not involved in the Adamic liabilities of the race, reverses the curse of sin and death brought in by the first Adam, and establishes the reign of righteousness and life. Had Christ been naturally born, not one of these things could be affirmed of Him. As one of Adam's race, not an entrant from a higher sphere, He would have shared in Adam's corruption and doom—would Himself have required to be redeemed. Through God's infinite mercy, He came from above, inherited no guilt, needed no regeneration or sanctification, but became Himself the Redeemer, Regenerator, Sanctifier for all who receive Him.

What, exactly, is meant by a *virgin* birth? It does not mean *immaculate conception* such as the Roman Catholic Church teaches when it affirms that Mary herself was conceived and born without original sin; thus Christ was sinless—nor does it mean a *miraculous birth*, for there is no evidence that the process of Christ's birth itself was in any way exceptional—nor was it a supernatural birth merely, for that was true of Isaac and of John the Baptist. By the virgin birth we are to understand that, contrary to the course of nature, Jesus was divinely conceived in the womb of Mary, the Holy Spirit becoming the love-knot between our Lord's two natures. In such a conception, deity and humanity were fused together and Jesus came forth as the God-Man.

In order to earnestly contend for the fact of the virgin birth, which is a most vital part of the faith once delivered unto the saints, it is absolutely necessary to have a clear grasp of the definite

teaching of Scripture regarding it. So—"to the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word (and here *is* the cause of modern unbelief) it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). We purpose summarizing the witness of the Scriptures thus—

1. *The Prophetic Witness*

This aspect of the testimony of Scripture is so strong that as Dr. Pierson remarks—

Take a man of intelligence, a stranger to the Christian religion; place before him the Jewish Scriptures, calling attention to the portrait which they furnish of one whom they call "God's Servant" or "Anointed." Then ask him to note that the Old Testament writers lived more than three centuries before the Christian era, and that we have historic proof that these Jewish Scriptures, in their complete form, were in the hands of the Jews for three hundred years before that era began. Then place before him a copy of the Christian Scriptures and ask him to read the Gospels, and note that they were never in existence till at least four hundred years after the last Old Testament writer laid down his pen. And, without suggesting any divine or supernatural element, either in the writings, or in the person of Christ, leave him to compare the two. With what amazement would he find all the main facts recorded in these Gospel narratives long before anticipated in these writings.

In coming to the prophecies and promises regarding Christ in the Old Testament, there seems to be a gradual revelation, that is, the truth is unfolded by degrees. For example—

(a) The Seed of the Woman.

This oldest of all evangelical promises found in Genesis 3:15 predicts in a wonderful way the virgin birth of our Lord. Let us mark the specific language used—"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and *her* seed." *Her* seed! "Such a thought," says A. T. Scofield, "as a woman's seed, as stated here, is not found elsewhere. Over a hundred times or more, when we read of the seed and seeds, of Abraham's seed, and so forth, it is always the seed of the man. But the seed of the woman is a unique concept, and can only be interpreted as a foreshadowing of the virgin birth, and most remarkable it is that it should be found here. I submit that if our Lord had not been born of a virgin, it would be Adam who would be addressed, and *his* that would be referred to (Matthew 1:18)." See also Luke 1:55.

(b) The Seed of Abraham.

And then the great evangelical promises of Genesis 12:1–13 and 15:18 find their fulfillment in Christ, as one can prove by turning to passages like John 8:56–58; Galatians 3:16. Yes, and what is one of the purposes of Matthew but to prove that Christ is the One who will fulfill the Abrahamic covenant, and so he commences his genealogy with Abraham!

(c) The Tribe of Judah.

See how the revelation is progressive! Now Christ is to be limited to one particular tribe of Israel. Compare Genesis 49:10 with Hebrews 7:14; Revelation 5:5; Matthew 2:5, 6.

(d) The House of David.

Then our Lord is to spring from one family in that tribe. Compare 2 Samuel 7:12, 13 with Matthew 1:1; Romans 1:3.

(e) The Son of a Virgin.

Compare “the great Immanuel Prophecy” of Isaiah 7:14 and 9:7 with Matthew 1:22, 23, etc.

(f) The Place of His Birth.

Compare Micah 5:2 with Luke 2:4, 15.

(g) His Name.

Compare Isaiah 7:14 with Matthew 1:23.

(h) The Worship by Gentiles.

Compare Isaiah 60:6 with Matthew 2:11.

(i) His Forerunner.

Compare Isaiah 40:3 with Matthew 3:1–3.

And thus, as the time of fulfillment drew near, there were numerous quiet circles, little godly bands, who nourished their hearts on the promises, e.g. Luke 2:25–38. And it was in these faithful hearts that the stirrings of the prophetic spirits began to make themselves felt anew, preparing for the First Advent of our Lord—Luke 2:27–36.

2. The Angelic Witness

Coming now to the clearer testimony of the New Testament, we consider, first of all, the witness of the angels, who were the first heralds of our Lord’s virgin birth. There are three angelic appearances recorded in Matthew and Luke; or shall we say, three annunciations?

(a) To Zacharias.

While performing the priestly function of burning incense (Luke 1:9), this holy man (1:6) was visited by an angel (1:11) who not only gives him the assurance that a child is to be born to Elizabeth his wife (1:13), but also that their son will be the forerunner of the Messiah about to be born (1:16, 17).

(b) To Mary.

The angel Gabriel, who is possibly the same messenger each time, is sent to Mary with the news that she is to bear a son, and call His name Jesus. See—

1. The angel’s commission and benediction—Luke 1:26–28.

Notice that verse 28 is omitted in the Revised Version; therefore, there is no support for the Mariolatry of the Romish Church (Mary’s wonder and fear 1:29).

2. The angel’s announcement—Luke 1:30–33.

(Mary’s natural question—1:36.)

3. The angel’s explanation—Luke 1:35–37.

(Mary’s willing submission—1:38.)

(c) To Joseph.

Turning to Matthew’s gospel we discover that Joseph, the espoused husband of Mary, was also visited in dreams by an angel of the Lord. And such a medium of revelation was necessary owing to Joseph’s position and perplexity, for when he became aware of Mary’s condition, he was shocked as a just man would be (1:19); and so his first thought is to put Mary away and thus avoid scandal (1:19). With these thoughts in mind, follow the angelic announcements thus—

1. The angel’s revelation—1:20–23. (Joseph’s willing response—1:24, 25.)

2. The angel's directions—2:13; 2:19, 20. (Joseph's magnanimous response—2:14, 15; 2:21–23.)

3. *The Historic Witness*

By the historic witness we mean the evidence of the virgin birth as we have it from the lips of those who knew Joseph and Mary. Here we again turn to Matthew and Luke. What to find? Why, that there is abundant witness to the genuineness of our Lord's wonderful birth. Having touched upon the reliability of these narratives already, let us seek to view them in another light altogether.

How did Matthew and Luke come to know the facts of Mary's conception and Joseph's perplexity? Such facts were surely sacred and secret, and could only come from Mary and Joseph themselves.

Matthew received the account of the birth from Joseph, and this is why Matthew's gospel gives the birth from Joseph's standpoint.

Luke, on the other hand, received his facts from Mary, and being a beloved physician, who understands the extreme propriety of the question, we are not "surprised at the marvelous beauty, reticence and, at the same time, accuracy of description as he tells us every small detail that we need to know, and advancing nothing that does not concern us."

In fact, as Professor Sweet observes—"Both narratives exhibit a profound reverence, a chaste and gracious reserve in the presence of a holy mystery, a simplicity, dignity and self-contained nobility of expression which are the visible marks of truth, if such there are anywhere in human writing." Notice one or two minor points, viz.,

- a. The historic witness that our Lord was born of a virgin, and not in wedlock (Matthew 1:18–21, 24, 25; Luke 1:27–34).

- b. The guarded utterances of the biographers.

In studying the particular words in the gospel narratives, one is impressed with the guarded utterances of the writers.

1. Luke 1:13; 1:35

By comparing these two passages one gathers extra proof regarding the verity of the virgin birth. "Thy wife Elisabeth shall bear *thee* a son." Compare this "thee" of verse 13 with the "thee" of verse 35—"that holy thing which shall be born to *thee*." The phrase, "bear thee a son," which is a usual one of Scripture is omitted in verse 35.

2. Luke 3:23

Notice the parenthesis in this verse—"Jesus began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph." At this point it may be as well to state that "Jesus was customarily spoken of by the people of Nazareth, etc., as 'the son of Joseph.' So He was; and it could not be otherwise. To the people of Nazareth, who knew nothing of the circumstances of His origin, Jesus was simply a child of Joseph's home. Joseph from the first stood *in loco parentis* to Jesus." It is this that accounts for phrases like Luke 2:27—"The parents brought in the child Jesus"; Luke 2:41—"Now his parents" etc.; Luke 2:48—"Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing"; Matthew 13:55—"Is not this the carpenter's son?"

3. Matthew 1:16

In this reference we have “a roundabout way of describing the birth of Christ which is absolutely without meaning or sense unless Christ was born of a virgin.” “Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus.” The word “begat” is omitted from Mary’s genealogy, and the change is important; it is no longer “who begat,” but “Mary, of whom was born Jesus.” Jesus was not “begotten” of natural generation, but conceived by the Holy Ghost.

4. Matthew 2:11

In the homage paid by the wise men from the East, it will be noticed that Joseph is entirely absent—“They saw the young child with Mary, His mother,” etc.

5. Matthew 2:13

How specific this verse is—“Arise and take the young child and his mother,” etc. Why, if Christ was the son of both Mary and Joseph as some would affirm, how is it that an angel, above all, does not give Joseph any recognition as a parent?

c. The silence of Mark and John.

As these two disciples were contemporaries of Matthew and Luke, it may be found helpful to add a word under this historical point regarding their silence in connection with the virgin birth. This silence is a great stumbling block to the modern critics, and yet its explanation is very simple.

The subject was a very delicate one and all that could be said about it had been recorded by Matthew and Luke. And thus the sense of delicacy would naturally tend to reticence, at least during the lifetime of Mary. Repetition was therefore unnecessary for “at the mouth of two witnesses ... shall the matter be established.”

But there is another explanation for the supposed silence of Mark and John, an explanation that critics are often blind to, and that is the bearing in mind of the scope or design of such. Why, it is impossible to study any part of the Bible aright without understanding, first of all, the purpose of the Book before one.

What is the purpose of Mark’s gospel? Why, he sets out to relate the events of Christ’s public ministry, beginning at the baptism in His thirtieth year. Mark’s endeavor is to portray our Lord as “The Servant”—and who is concerned about the birth certificate of a servant, so long as the servant’s character is good, and his work of the best? Says W. Kelly—

A genealogy such as Matthew’s and Luke’s would be totally out of place here; and the reason is manifest. The subject of Mark is the testimony of Jesus as having taken, though a Son, the place of a servant on the earth. Now, in a servant, no matter from what noble lineage he comes, there is no genealogy requisite. What is wanted in a servant is that the work should be done well, no matter about the genealogy.

But although Mark does not recount the details regarding Christ’s birth, yet he is acquainted with all the facts respecting it. And so taking such for granted he begins his gospel abruptly—“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!” Why the very title, “The Son of God,” proves that Mark knew all about the divinity of our Lord’s conception!

The beloved disciple of our Lord’s also had a definite object in writing his gospel. He sets out to narrate the sublime truth that Christ is God as well as man. To the world at large his message is—“Behold your God!” And he goes back to the past eternity, and shows how the Lord existed, nay, was coequal and coexistent with the Father from the beginning. The genealogy is excluded from John because Christ is presented as being without all genealogy. “He is the source,” as W.

Kelly states, "of other people's genealogy yea, of the genesis of all things.... If we admit any genealogy it must be what is set forth in the preface of John ... which exhibit the divine, natural and eternal personality of His being."

But although he knew the account of Christ's earthly birth, he does not give any details such as Matthew and Luke do. And yet what can we make of a passage like John 1:14—"The Word was made (R.V. "became," and please mark the different rendering) flesh, and dwelt among us" if there was no such stupendous miracle as the virgin birth?

"And," says Professor Orr, "the whole type of his doctrine in gospel and epistle goes against the supposition that he believed Christ to be 'born of the flesh' as ordinary man, needing regeneration (cf. 3:3, 7)." In a footnote, the professor remarks that "an old reading actually applies to Him the language of John 1:13." 4. *The Apostolic Witness*

The apparent silence of the Apostle Paul regarding the virgin birth is sometimes used by the critics to disprove the truth of it. We are told that he did not base his preaching of his gospel upon private, interior matters, such as the virgin birth narratives give, but upon the broad, public facts of Christ's ministry, death and Resurrection. And yet it must be evident to all honest readers that Paul was fully acquainted with the mystery of our Lord's birth. For example—

(a) He was Luke's Companion

When we remember the loving companionship that existed between Paul and Luke, and that Luke was one of the chief witnesses to the virgin birth, we may be assured that whatever Luke knew regarding our Lord he would communicate to Paul.

(b) His Doctrine

Why, by the truths that the apostle declares, he shows how he not only knew the story of the virgin birth but that he received it as a part of the divine revelation. What do passages like Philippians 2:5–28; Colossians 1:18; 2:9; Galatians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:14 mean if there was no miracle in the constitution of the Redeemer's Person? Why, to Paul the virgin birth would be the most reasonable and credible of events!

(c) His Peculiar Expressions

One of the most singular facts about Paul's language when describing Christ's earthly origin is that he invariably uses some unusual or roundabout expression, implying thereby something exceptional about our Lord's birth. For example, in using the word "born" in passages like Romans 1:3; Galatians 4:4, he does not use the ordinary word *gennetos* that is used, for instance, of John the Baptist who was also "born of a woman" (Matthew 11:11) but he adopts the other word *genomenos* signifying "becoming" or "became." The Revised Version margin for Philippians 2:7 gives us the same word "becoming" or the words in the text "being made." In Galatians 4 Paul uses the first word three times in speaking of others, but in writing of Christ in verse 4 he selects the wider and more appropriate term. 5. *The Authentic Witness*

Although strictly speaking the authentic witness, which is the testimony of the Early Church, does not belong to the Scriptural testimony, yet as it arises out of it, we purpose including it here. And it is very necessary to consider this point because the critics sometimes affirm that the virgin birth does not belong to the earliest tradition, that is, to the period when the facts of the gospels commenced to be preached or published. Of this we are certain:

(a) That the general body of Jewish Christians, save the Ebionites or Gnostics referred to, accepted the virgin birth, and that they defended it as a truth of cardinal importance. "John is

attested," for instance, "by his disciple Polycarp (through Irenaeus) to have been the keen antagonist at Ephesus of Cerinthus, the earliest known impugner of the virgin birth."

(b) The virgin birth is a fundamental article in the original form of the *Apostles' Creed* which is the oldest form of Christian creed that exists—"Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary" is what it declares.

(c) The virgin birth is also attested to by all the early Fathers such as Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tatian, etc.

(d) The virgin birth is also indirectly believed in because "it is vouched for as belief of the Church by the attacks made on it by pagans and Jews."

(e) And to come nearer still, what more authentic witness to the virgin birth can you have, when you remember the growth of Christianity, its beneficent influence in the world, the testimony of millions—confirmed by their deeds—that Christ because of His entrance into, and death in, the world had transformed their lives?

This may be a fitting point to discuss what is known as Kenosis theory. The first to use the term *Kenosis* in a theological sense was Theodotion of the second century, in his translation of Isaiah's word for "emptiness" (34:11). When Paul spoke of Christ emptying Himself he used the word *kenoō* (Philippians 2:7). Much controversy has raged over the kenotic theory of the person of Christ. When, at His birth, He took upon Himself the form of a servant, of what did He empty Himself?

Professor Wayne E. Ward asks,

Exactly *who* is the subject of the verb *emptied*? Is it the preexistent Son of God who by sovereign choice divested Himself of some of the prerogatives of Deity in order to become incarnate: or is it the incarnate Son, who, in the days of His flesh, was involved in a kind of repeated or continual emptying of Himself in order to fulfil His mission as the Servant of God and submit even to death?

Some of the early Fathers felt that Christ emptied Himself of "the being equal with God." Later on, theologians affirmed that His emptying involved the surrender of some divine attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. Others felt that although He possessed all divine powers, they were kept under a conscious restraint. Yet others affirmed that Jesus was "unaware of the extent of these powers and therefore lived His incarnate life within the limits imposed upon any creature."

Dealing with Paul's reference to Christ's self-humbling Bishop Lightfoot in his commentary on *Philippians* says, "He emptied, stripped Himself of the insignia of Majesty." Professor E. Moorehead has said, "When occasion demanded He exercised His divine attributes." As the Eternal Word, He could not empty Himself either of His deity or His attributes. What He divested Himself of was the constant, outward and visible manifestation of His Godhead. Christ did not surrender deity—He gained *humanity*. Paul deals, not so much with what the Son gave up, but what He gained, namely, exaltation for humiliation. Assuming the role and name of a servant, He came to possess a name above every name. Dr. Ward quotes the Greek scholar, Dr. William Hersey Davis who suggested that "the word *kenoō* should be understood in the sense of emptying one vessel into another vessel so that it was a matter of pouring the same content into another form: Christ emptied Himself, that is, poured Himself into the form of a servant."

When Jesus left the bosom of the Father, He voluntarily chose the path of humiliation. The sovereign choice of love, as well as man's need of a Saviour, led Him to turn His back upon heaven's glory for a cross of shame. Throughout His life there was the conscious restraint of many of His divine powers, that He might be seen as a true "Man of Sorrows." Although rich, for our sakes He became poor, that through His self-imposed poverty we might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). This Pauline passage has been described as "the best commentary" on the doctrine of Kenosis (Philippians 2:5-11). May grace be ours to emulate the supreme example of humility!

His Silent Years

Although legends abound as to our Lord's early life in Egypt and Nazareth, Scripture veils the first thirty years of His life on earth. Only once is the veil lifted, namely, when He was twelve years of age and rebuked His mother for failing to understand the significance of His mission among men: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

In connection with Christ's first visit to Jerusalem, when He was found among the doctors, Dr. James Stalker says—

Only one flower of anecdote has been thrown over the wall of the hidden garden, and it is so exquisite as to fill us with intense longing to see the garden itself.

What we do know is that there was nothing abnormal or grotesque about His growth from childhood to manhood. Legends of His childhood are fanciful and futile. He was no prodigy of nature, but developed normally and healthily. Luke tells us of His *physical* development—"He grew, and waxed strong"; of His *mental* development—"filled with wisdom"; and of His *spiritual* development—"the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40-51). His was a childhood in its fairest and finest manifestation. "The incarnation was a true acceptance of humanity, with all its sinless limitations of growth and development." Of those obscure, thirty years during which God was preparing His Son for a brief ministry lasting for just over three years, Jesus would go to a Jewish school as any ordinary village child did. He could read and write (Luke 4:17; John 8:6-8). Leaving school around the age of fifteen; He followed the trade of the home and became a carpenter (Mark 6:3). In Joseph's carpenter shop we have the toil of divinity revealing the divinity of toil. Strange that He should work with wood and nails—He had them when He died!

Scripture also bears witness to the fact that the gentleness and grace of character of Jesus endeared Him to all who knew Him. His fragrance, like that of a rose, could not be hid (Luke 2:52). As Dr. James Orr so beautifully expresses it—

No stain of sin clouded His vision of divine things. His after-history shows that His mind was nourished on the Scriptures; nor, as He pondered psalms and prophets, could His soul remain unvisited by presentiments, growing to convictions, that He was the One in whom their predictions were destined to be realized.

His Two Natures

The great mystery of godliness which Paul reminds us of is “God manifested in flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16), and throughout the Bible, Christ is represented as a Person having two natures, one divine—the other human. In His incarnation He became the possessor of a true humanity in union with His eternal deity. As God, He did not enter a human body or join Himself to man. He *became* Man, that is, He belonged to the stock of humanity when, as the Word, He became flesh (John 1:14). Of the unity of two natures in one Person, Dr. Louis Berkhof writes—

Christ has a human nature, but He is not a human person. The Person of the Mediator is the unchangeable Son of God. In the Incarnation He did not change into a human person; neither did He adopt a human person. He simply assumed, in addition to His divine nature, a human nature, which did not develop into an independent personality, but became personal in the Person of the Son of God.

Dr. W. J. Townsend develops a similar thought when he says that—

The Son of God took to Himself a human nature and gave it subsistence in the divine nature. The divine nature of Christ has a personal existence from all eternity and exists still, and the human nature subsists in it for the accomplishment of the purposes of eternal love. The assumption of human nature involved no change as to the Person of the eternal Son, it added nothing to it: the difference is that the second Person in the Godhead who always possessed divinity took also into Himself humanity.

At His incarnation Christ added to His already existing divine nature a human nature, and became the God-Man. At our regeneration, there was added to our already existing human nature, a divine nature and we thus became partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Thus, like Christ, every true Christian is *divine-human*. Part of the mystery we cannot fathom is that He has both a divine and a human consciousness, as well as a human and a divine will. Both are unified in His Person, and it is always “the same Person who speaks, whether the mind that finds utterance be human or divine” (John 10:30; 17:5, as compared with Matthew 27:46; John 19:28). Human attributes and actions are sometimes ascribed to the Person designated by a divine title (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 2:8; Colossians 1:13, 14) and divine attributes and actions are sometimes ascribed to the Person designated by a human title (John 3:13; 6:62; Romans 9:5).

His Humanity. The human nature Christ assumed was not absorbed by or fused into the divine, and that the divine alone remained. In so many ways His full and perfect humanity is manifested. He was born a babe, and needed infant’s clothing and a mother’s nursing and care. He spoke of Himself as a man, and was so called by others (Acts 2:22; Romans 5:15; 1 Corinthians 15:21; John 8:40). Then He had the essential elements of human nature—a body and a soul (Matthew 26:26, 38; Luke 24:39; Hebrews 2:14). Further, He was subject to the ordinary laws of human development, and to human wants, emotions and sufferings (Matthew 4:2; 8:24; Luke 2:40, 52; 22:44; John 4:6; 11:35; 12:27; Hebrews 2:10, 18; 5:7, 8).

O Saviour Christ, Thou too art Man!
Thou hast been troubled, tempted tried;
Thy kind but searching glance can scan
The very wounds that shame would hide.

His Deity. Both Old and New Testaments offer convincing proof of Christ as “the Mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6; Jeremiah 23:6; Matthew 11:27; John 1:1; Hebrews 1:1–3; Revelation 19:16). The Ebionites of the Early Church, and the Unitarians and Modernists of our time, deny the deity of our Lord. To them, He is only a man—a good, holy, exemplary man, but only a man. Thus, the crown of deity is snatched from His brow. But His deity is proven by all He is in Himself, and is able to accomplish—

There is His self-existence (John 1:4; 5:26; 10:30; 14:10; Philippians 2:6)
His eternal existence (John 1:1–3; 8:58; Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 1:8–12; 7:3; 13:8; Revelation 1:8–18)
His immutability (Hebrews 1:10–12; 13:8)
His omnipresence (Matthew 28:20; John 1:48; 3:13).
His omniscience (Matthew 9:4; 12:25; Luke 6:8; 9:47; 11:17; Colossians 2:3)
His omnipotence (Mark 1:27; John 5:19–21; 1 Peter 3:21, 22)

His manifold works. Did He not declare that as the God-Man, *all* power was His? And such power was manifested in different ways—

As the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28; cf. Genesis 2:2, 3; Luke 6:5).
As the Commissioner and Controller of angels (Matthew 13:41; Revelation 1:1; 22:6).
As the Forgiver of sin (Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5–7, 10; Luke 5:20–24; 7:48).
As the Commander of death and Hades (Matthew 9:24; Luke 7:14; John 11:43, 44; Revelation 1:18).
As the Creator and Preserver of all things (John 1:3, 10; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16–18; Hebrews 1:2).
As the Judge of all men (Matthew 13:39–43; 16:27; 25:31–33; John 5:22, 23; Acts 10:42; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

A remarkable feature of this twin nature of our Lord is that wherever His deity is mentioned, His humanity lingers in the shadows, and *vice versa*. For instance, as the man He needed sleep, and in the boat slept soundly. But when the storm arose, He arose and as God calmed the angry deep. As the man, He wept with the sorrowing friends of Lazarus because He, too, had lost a companion He loved. But as God, He was able to call Lazarus back from the grave. As man, He knows all about our human needs, and as God He is able to satisfy them all.

Further, in connection with our Lord’s dual nature, there are two designations which must be considered. His titles are manifold and meaningful but here are two conspicuous ones—

1. The Son of God. This pre-eminent title, given to Jesus by Nathanael, carrying with it the transcendental associations of John’s prologue (1:1, 14, 18), conveys “the idea of superhuman dignity and unique relationship.” All the truths of pre-existence, deity and Messiahship are contained in this name (Matthew 11:27; 24:36; 26:63; Luke 1:35; John 5:18; 9:35–37; 10:33, 36). It is the name expressing Christ’s relationship to God (Matthew 26:24).

2. The Son of Man. This further title indicative of Christ’s character as Leader and Representative of the race is ascribed to Him upwards of eighty times. As the true, real typical man, He used this title “The Son of Man” of Himself 55 times in the gospels. How definitely was He related to our humanity! Such an expression, however, was not new to the gospels. It is one

occurring frequently in the Old Testament (Psalm 8; Ezekiel 2:1; Daniel 7:9–14; 8:17), and in the majority of cases describes humans with a particular work to do for God. The marvel and magnificence of the Gospel is that the Son of God became the Son of Man, that He might make the sons of men, the Sons of God (1 John 3:1–3).

His Baptism

After thirty years of obscurity, Jesus now prepares for His brief but dynamic ministry of some three years. John, His forerunner had declared that the kingdom, in the Person of the King Himself, was at hand. As a voice in the wilderness, John preached *repentance* and that the coming kingdom could be entered only through moral preparation. All those accepting the message of the Baptist were baptized of John at Jordan (Matthew 3:6; John 1:28; 3:23). John's stirring words made a profound impression upon all classes, even upon the Pharisees and Sadducees who attended his baptismal ceremony (Matthew 3:7). One day, Jesus appeared upon the scene and John knew his task was finished. "He must increase, I must decrease" (John 3:30). The forerunner had to give way to the *Fulfiller*. Although Jesus had gathered with others at Jordan on that historic day, John intuitively recognized Jesus as different from the rest. As His herald, John had received a sign by which the Messiah should be recognized (John 1:33), so when Jesus presented Himself, asking *baptism* at John's hands, he immediately knew that this was He who should come.

With true humility, John confessed that as a sinful man he had need to be baptized of One, divinely pure (Matthew 3:14). But Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now," and John baptized Him in Jordan's waters (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21, 23). The question troubling many sincere hearts is, if John's baptism was one of repentance, why did Jesus, who was sinless and therefore had no sin to repent of, seek such a baptism? Jesus Himself answered that question when He put His baptism on the ground of *meekness*. "It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." It was the most *becoming* thing for Him as the Head to enter by the same gateway as the members to His specific vocation in the service of the Kingdom. Dr. James Orr says that in submitting to baptism—

Jesus formally identified Himself with the expectation of the Kingdom and with its ethical demands; separated Himself from the evil of His nation, doubtless with confession of its sins: and devoted Himself to His life task in bringing in the Messianic salvation. The significance of the rite as marking His consecration to, and entrance upon, His Messianic career, is seen in what follows.

What a manifestation of the unity of the Godhead was displayed that day as God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit for His brief years of service (Acts 10:38)! Emerging from the water, while still "praying" (Luke 3:21), the heavens were opened and the Spirit like a dove came upon Him. Baptized in water, He is now baptized with the Spirit. With such a baptism there came the benediction of the Father, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16, 17). As Mary's son, He was misunderstood and His motives misconstrued, but as the Father's Son all His ways were pleasing. Whether others present saw the vision and heard the Father's voice we do not know. What transpired was primarily intended for Jesus and John (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; John 1:33). Jordan meant Christ's dedication of Himself to His calling for which He received

the spiritual equipment necessary for the accomplishment of a divine task and forward He went with the seal of heaven's acknowledgment upon Him. How tragic it is when men try to serve God without a similar dedication and spiritual dynamic!

His Temptation

We would have thought that after such a mighty unction received at Jordan, Jesus was now ready to launch right in and witness and work in Galilee and elsewhere. But no. After the *dove*, there came the *devil*—After the *benediction*, there came the *battle*. Jesus went from Jordan into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil (Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:13, 14; Luke 4:1–13). Ere He could deliver the multitudes from the power of the devil, He must experience the full weight and strength of the enemy Himself. It thus came about that He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

As Jesus was *alone* in the wilderness with the devil we find ourselves agreeing with Lange in his *Commentary on Matthew*, “The history of the temptation Jesus afterwards communicated to His disciples in the form of a real narrative, clothed in symbolical language.” The gospel narrative tells us that the period of intense struggle lasted for forty days, during which Jesus neither ate nor drank; that wild beasts surrounded Him; that the tempter and temptations were real; that there were three stages of satanic approach—“each on its own way a trial of the spirit of obedience” (Matthew 4:2, 4, 7; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2, 4, 12 See 6:16; 8:3; Psalm 91:11, 12). The threefold temptation typifies the whole round of satanic assault on man through body, mind and spirit (Luke 4:13 cf. 1 John 2:6). During the service that followed, Jesus was to be constantly tempted to—

Spare Himself
Gratify Jewish sign-seekers
Gain power by the sacrifice of the right.

In the wilderness, He triumphed gloriously over all three temptations, and went forth the Conqueror over all further hellish designs to thwart His mighty work. By faith, His triumph becomes ours.

An aspect of Christ's temptation that must not be forgotten, however, is the fact that in Him there was nothing the devil could appeal to. He was born *without* sin. We were “born in sin and shapen in iniquity,” and because of the possession of an evil nature as the result of original sin, the devil has a foothold in every one born into the world. When Christ enters a life, the devil quite naturally contests every inch of ground surrendered to the One who mastered Him in the wilderness and at Calvary.

His Sinlessness

What a positive declaration that is which the writer of the Hebrews associates with the manifold temptations of Christ—*Yet without sin!* Born holy, He remained holy. Before His birth, Gabriel could speak of Him to Mary as, “That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). If His *virgin birth* is rejected, then His *virgin life* cannot be accounted

for. Born holy, Christ remained holy because through divine unction He was able to successfully resist every enticement of the devil who had nothing *in* Him to fight out from (John 14:30). More than once He claimed sinless perfectness. "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" was His direct challenge (John 8:46). Always, and in all things, He pleased His Father (John 8:29). In order to redeem man from sin, He had to be free from any evil taint of humanity. Had He committed only one sin, He would have been disqualified as the Redeemer of sinful men. Perfect Himself, Christ professed the highest conceivable standard of character and conduct for His followers, "Be ye therefore perfect."

The Bible, then, is emphatic in its witness to the fact that Christ was perfect in thought and deed. In Him was *no* sin (1 John 3:5). He could do nothing amiss (Luke 23:41). Demons, as well as angels, called Him, "The Holy One" (Mark 1:24). Judas confessed to betraying "innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4; See Hebrews 7:26; 9:14; 1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Because His was "the white flower of a blameless life," His peerless teaching was the very soul of truth and such a halo of purity breathed through all His actions as to compel the confession:

"We stand in the presence of One so holy as to be pre-eminent among the sons of Adam."

Fierce controversy has raged around the subject, Did His deity render sin impossible, and consequently make His temptations unreal? If, to Him, sin was impossible then His temptation by Satan was a meaningless display, and His victory a mere delusion, and His coronation (Philippians 2:6) a shadow. One answer given to this thorny problem is—

"We may say it was impossible Jesus *would* sin. We dare not say it was impossible He *could* not sin."

To Christ, temptation was stronger and the conflict with sin was more intense than with any other of the human race. His knowledge of the human heart made it harder for Him to have the least sympathy with the least semblance of sin. Further, His unstained holiness gave saving efficacy to the blood He shed for sinners. Sinless, He can save from all sin. Only as the Sinless One could He atone for the sins of others (Psalms 40:7–10; 130:3).

Further, it is because Christ remained the highest embodiment of human character that He is our Great Example. Carlyle said of Him, "Our divinest symbol. Higher has the human thought not yet reached"—and never will, we might add. His own life, so passionately surrendered to the will of God, even although this involved the death of the cross, gives Him the right to make imperative spiritual and ethical demands on those who take up their crosses to follow Him.

His Matchless Words and Works

After the wilderness temptation, Jesus returned to Galilee and the fame of Him spread abroad (Luke 4:14). In the short space of just under three years, He lived and labored in such a way as to deeply impress not only those of His own generation, but succeeding generations. No certain dwelling place was His. Often, He had no place to lay His head. But this we know, He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Where He went can be briefly tabulated. After the first *thirty years of preparation*, we have—

1. The Opening Events of His Ministry, lasting for about three months, from January to April, covering the period from the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry to our Lord's first miracle at Cana.
2. The Early Judaeian Ministry, lasting about eight months from April to December, and covering Christ's first cleansing of the Temple and the beginning of His wonderful discourses.
3. The Samaritan Ministry, lasting only a few days in the December of the same year and taken up with what happened at Sychar.
4. The Galilean Ministry, the first period lasting from December to May of the next year. These five months or so bring us to Christ's return to Galilee, His choice of the Twelve, and the healing of the withered hand.
5. The Galilean Ministry, the second period stretching from May to April of the next year. During this one year we have all the events in our Lord's life and labor from the choosing of the Twelve to His withdrawal into northern Galilee—a period packed with parables and miracles.
6. The Galilean Ministry, the third period lasting about six months from May to October and bringing us to His final departure for Jerusalem. In this period we have further parables and miracles.
7. The Later Judaeian Ministry, lasting for about three months, from October to December. Finally departing from Galilee we have in Judea a wonderful record of discourses, parables and miracles.
8. The Peraean Ministry, lasting for about three and a half months covers the period from Christ's withdrawal to Bethany to His Parable of The Pounds. Here again are further discourses, parables and miracles.
9. The Closing Events of His Ministry, lasting for a week, known as *The Passion Week* and including the event from Christ's entry into Jerusalem until His body was laid in the tomb.
10. The Forty Days of Confirmation, lasting from April to May and covering all events and appearances from His resurrection to His ascension and to Pentecost.

For a detailed account of all that is associated with the foregoing periods, the reader is referred to a commendable *Harmony of the Gospels*, or to either of the succeeding events as itemized by Dr. James Orr in *The Inter-National Standard Encyclopedia*, or Dr. W. Graham Scroggie's *Guide to the Gospels*. During His manifestation to the world, Jesus revealed the Father in a fourfold way.

Firstly, there was the influence of His life upon those who came into contact with Him. His *life* was the light of men (John 1:4). His love, patience, unruffled calm, silence in suffering, majestic bearing, prayerfulness, humility and graciousness impelled others to follow His example. Sherwood Eddy in *A Portrait of Jesus*, says—

Jesus left no book, no tract or written page behind him. He bequeathed no system, no philosophy, no theology, no legislation. He raised no armies, organized no institutions, held no office, sought no influence. He was no scholar, and yet he is more quoted than any writer in all history. His sayings at times are on almost every tongue, and his words have literally gone out into all the world. No man ever laid down his life in Asia or in Africa to translate Plato or Aristotle, Kant or Hegel,

Shakespeare or Milton, but hundreds have died to carry Jesus' priceless words to the ends of the earth. Several hundred languages have been reduced to writing in order to transmit his life-giving message. Savage tribes have been uplifted, cannibals civilized, head-hunters converted, schools and colleges founded, and the character and culture of individuals and of peoples have been changed as the result of the influence of his words which are creative spirit and life.

Secondly, there were those remarkable *discourses* of His, almost fifty in all, recorded with considerable fullness and heavy with abiding instruction. From the *Sermon on the Mount* right on to the *Sermon on the Holy Spirit*, these utterances of Christ contain His teaching for the saints of all ages. The substance of His teaching covers a wide variety of themes.

Thirdly, there are His *parables*, distinct from discourses in that natural and local imagery was employed. This was Christ's chief method of instruction by which great moral truths were taught. For a complete study of His parables and parabolic instruction the reader is directed to the author's volume on *All the Parables of the Bible* which includes, not only Christ's parables, but parabolic material from Genesis to Revelation. His method, style and themes in teaching elicited the praise, "Never man spake like this Man." All of His teaching, delivered in all kinds of places, was characterized by simplicity, authority, brevity, vividness and picturesqueness. Two prominent features can be noticed, namely—

1. What Christ claimed for all of His utterances (Matthew 7:24–26; 24:35; Mark 4:21–25; Luke 8:15, 18, 21; John 8:51; 1:47–50).

2. What impressions were created by His utterance (Matthew 7:28; Mark 10:24; 12:37; Luke 4:22; 5:1, 15; 6:17; 15:1; 21:38; 24:19; John 3:2; 7:46).

Fourthly, we have Christ's *miracles*. With His own gathered around Him during His last days before the cross, He summarized the character of His mission in the question—

Believest thou not that I am in the Father? The *words* that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works (John 14:10).

Words and works. What a simple yet sublime coverage of a life lived in the center of God's will! Christ taught man by His *miracles* as well as His *parables*. "His parables were miracles in words, and His miracles were parables in deeds." All the miracles He performed are not detailed for us, but the thirty-five or so specified in the gospels reveal Him to be the Son of God with power. For a detailed exposition of His miracles, as well as the miraculous in the Bible as a whole, the reader is asked to consult the volume in our "All The" series on *All the Miracles of the Bible*.

His Death

How loaded with grief and suffering were our Lord's last days before His death at Calvary! The betrayal of Judas—the anguish and bloody sweat in Gethsemane—the denial by Peter—the injustice and indignities of His false accusation and trial—the desertion by His disciples. Such was a load heavy enough to break His heart. Then there came the shame, suffering and sacrifice of the cross itself.

None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Or how dark the night the Lord passed through Ere He found the sheep that was lost.

Among the many doctrines Christ enunciated, there was the doctrine of His death. While all men are born to live, they yet enter the world under the sentence of death. "It is appointed unto man once to die" (Hebrews 9:28). Christ, however, is the only One who came into the world for the purpose of dying. These facts are evident as we sift the teaching of Jesus concerning "His decease at Jerusalem."

He predicted the fact and manner of His death (Matthew 9:15; 16:21; 17:22, 23; 20:18, 19; 21:33–39; Luke 9:22; 18:31–33).

He taught that His death had a universal significance (John 3:16; 12:32, 33).

He affirmed that His death had a definite bearing upon the spirit-world (John 12:31).

He linked His Incarnation and Crucifixion together (John 12:27).

He declared that His death was vicarious and substitutionary (Matthew 26:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:20).

He died by His own volition. His life was not *taken*, but given (Matthew 27:50; John 10:18).

He prayed that His death would glorify God (John 12:27, 28; 13:31; 17:1).

It has been pointed out that the space given in the four gospels to the death of Christ is most striking. Two of the gospels, namely, Mark and John, do not record the birth of Jesus, and one does not relate His temptation, namely, John: two of them have no mention of the Sermon on the Mount, Mark and John: two of them have no account of His Ascension into heaven. But *all* the gospels describe with fullness of detail the fact of His crucifixion. "One-third of Matthew, one-third of Mark, and one-fourth of Luke is devoted to the account of His death, and one-half of John's gospel to the last twenty-four hours of Christ's life. One-third of the material in the four gospels has to do with the events of the last week of His life." The amount of space these four writers allot to the cross is an evidence that all Christ taught regarding it made a deep impression on their minds. The prediction of the part a traitor among the disciples would play in His death must have arrested them (Matthew 17:22, 23).

Once the cross became a reality and a stark tragedy to Christ's followers, it appeared as if they had buried all their Messianic hopes in a grave. Their lack of belief in His power to conquer death can be found in the sorrowful conversation on the Emmaus Road. Two of the disciples were homeward bound after seeing Him die. Accosted by the risen Lord whom they took to be a stranger, they replied in answer to His enquiry about their sadness—

"We thought it had been he who would have redeemed Israel" (Luke 24:21).

They pictured His body reposing in Joseph's new tomb where they had helped to place it. Before long, however, they were to learn that He had been dead but was now alive forever more (Revelation 1).

While we may not all agree that "the heart of Britain is London, and the heart of London is Westminster," it is certainly true that the heart of Christianity is the Bible, the heart of the Bible the cross, and the heart of the cross, the very heart of God Himself. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The good news of Easter is that the divine heart was full of tenderest compassion for a sinning, erring humanity; and that that heart was bruised and broken as it atoned for man's guilt. Dr. James Denny, in his monumental volume, *The Death of Christ*, says, "The forfeiting of His free life has freed our forfeited lives."

The writings of Paul, the greatest exponent of Calvary's evangel, drip with the ruby blood of the Redeemer. Take away Paul's contribution to the death and Resurrection of Christ, and the New Testament remains an incomplete, partial revelation. Glorifying in the cross, Paul made it his preeminent theme. To the churches he founded, the apostle expounded the full and inescapable implications of Christ's finished work.

To the church at Corinth he wrote—

"I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

To the church at Galatia he sent a letter pulsating with the truth of Calvary—

"Who gave himself for our sins" (1:4).

"The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (2:20).

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14).

To the church at Rome he affirmed that—

"In due time Christ died for the ungodly (5:6).

To the church at Thessalonica he affirmed—

"We believe that Jesus died and rose again" (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

To the church at Philippi he urged the reminder—

"Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (2:13).

To the church at Philippi he urged the saints there to—

"Know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings" (3:10).

To the church at Colosse he proclaimed the evangel—

"In whom we have redemption through his blood (1:14).

At all times, then, the silver trumpet was pressed to Paul's lips, and unashamedly he echoed forth the Gospel of Easter. His constant message was, "Who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6). To the apostle, the constitute elements of the Gospel were the death, burial and Resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). While there have been a million martyr deaths, there was only one cross of Christ; only One good enough to pay the price of sin.

The Revelation of the Cross

Paul was not the author, but merely the recipient of the Easter Evangel he was so fond of declaring. "That which also I received" (1 Corinthians 15:3). The mystery and the meaning of the cross came to Paul as a distinct revelation from God (Galatians 1:11, 12). "By revelation He made known unto me the mystery" (Ephesians 3:3–5). In this, the Gospel differs from other gospels originating in the human mind. While the Gospel of Easter is for earth, it is not earthly in its conception.

The truth of the cross still remains a revelation, seeing all truth is revelation. Until the Holy Spirit reveals to the heart its need of Christ, all the significance and sufficiency of Christ's death and Resurrection remain a mystery. Thrice happy are those, who, in a moment of revelation, grasp the meaning of the cross and are transformed by such a vision.

The Foundation of the Cross

Although the great fundamental foundation of the Gospel of grace is the cross, there are three pillars supporting the structure making impossible its destruction.

1. Its Prophetic Witness

Twice over, Paul uses the phrase, "According to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4), and in it he, like his Master before him, sets his seal to Old Testament Scriptures. Christ treated and revered the Old Testament as the Word of God (Luke 24:27). Beyond the prophetic aspect there is, of course, the eternal purpose of God.

The blood-red highway of the cross can be traced in prophetic Scriptures like Psalms 16:10; 22; Isaiah 53—in prophetic symbols like the Red Sea (Deuteronomy 9:26, 27) and Israel's restoration (Hosea 6:2)—in prophetic types such as Moses (Hebrews 9:19) and Jonah (Matthew 12:41)—or prophetic ordinances such as the sacrifices and priesthood (Hebrews 9:12, 14).

2. Messianic Works

The first creed of Christendom is made up of three parts, forming a trinity in unity. To remove any part is to destroy the sum and substance of the Gospel.

Christ Died For Our Sins. First of all, there is the fact—"Christ died"—a fact directly mentioned some 175 times in the New Testament. It is an indisputable fact of history that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate was crucified, dead and buried."

Secondly, there is the purpose of such a death—"For our sins." There are those who accept the fact but dispute the purpose. They contend that Jesus died as a martyr, a model in sacrifice, a hero, or was crucified as the result of a blunder. The incontestable fact of Scripture, however, is that Christ died for one purpose, namely, to provide a perfect salvation for a sinning race (1 Timothy 1:15).

Christ Was Buried. "Low in the grave He lay," reveals the depth of Christ's humiliation on our behalf. The Highest in heaven buried in the heart of the earth. Willingly He "made His grave with

the wicked and with the rich in His death" (Isaiah 53:9), and "buried He carried my sins far away." Bunyan saw in his dream the burden *Christian* carried loosed from off his back and made to tumble into the sepulcher.

He Rose Again The Third Day. The Resurrection was an evidence that God was satisfied with the death of the cross. It was His seal upon the perfection of Christ's work. The Resurrection was also necessary for man's salvation, for had He remained in the tomb then there would have been no justification (Romans 10:9, 10). But Christ arose from the dead and is alive forevermore to make the cross actual in our lives. The declaration is in the perfect tense "He hath been raised"—risen to die no more (Luke 24:5, 6).

3. The Historic Witness

In his Corinthian letters, Paul is found combating false theories by adding the important link of the chronological order of Christ's appearances after His resurrection. Some 514 in all saw Him. If only one person had seen Him there might have been reason to doubt the reliability of the witness. But 514 could not have been wrong. Paul, the level-headed thinker could say, "He was seen of *me* also," and to him the risen Lord was a glorious reality.

The Description of the Cross

Paul calls it "The Gospel," a term meaning "a glad announcement, good news," (See Proverbs 25:25). *Gospel* has been given as "God's Spell," *spell* being the Saxon word for "story." The Gospel of Easter, then, is God's story, one that had birth in His own heart. It is a story about God's character, love and grace; and which the death of Christ makes so real.

The Proclamation of the Cross

Within the context, Paul uses different terms to describe the Gospel we must deliver "clear and plain."

1. It is a pre-eminent message—"First of all," Here was Paul's principal message. The cross was foremost in his preaching and evangelization and should be the primary doctrine of the church—primary because we stand or fall by it. Then is it not "first," seeing the first, indispensable experience of the soul is that of the forgiveness of sins the cross alone makes possible.

2. It is a proclaimed message. "I preached unto you," v. 1. The church at Corinth was founded by such preaching (Acts 18:1–11). To preach, means, "to tell the good news," and the preacher, one who announces glad tidings.

3. It is a persistent message. "I declare." The Calvary message is one that needs reiteration. The word Paul uses here implies an effort to remind and impress the memory—the delight and determination to tell the story o'er and o'er again.

4. It is a proved message. "I delivered what ... I received." The word *deliver* means "alongside of," and infers that Paul took the Evangel to others. Christ did not send salvation, He brought it (John 1:17). Paul only gave to others what he himself had proved. Having experienced the regenerating and transforming power of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:8, 9), he pressed the

acceptance of it upon others. Knowing whom he had believed (2 Timothy 1:12), Paul urges others to share his knowledge.

The Application of the Cross

A crucial point to emphasize is that the work of the cross is only effectual as it is received. Although Christ died and made salvation possible, it is only our faith that can make that salvation *actual*.

So we have the *reception*—"Ye have received," and our eternal welfare hinges upon a personal reception (John 1:11, 12). Then there is *foundation*—"Wherein ye stand." The cross is not only a starting point but a way of life—center and circumference. The cross is not only the fountain opened for uncleanness but a fortress in which to hide. Further, there is *sanctification*—"Ye are being saved." The present tense here implies salvation from the present government of sin as well as salvation from its past guilt. This is the truth we must "keep in memory" or "hold fast." Many, alas! "believe in vain." For them "grace is in vain." A mere belief in the historical Christ will not save. Our hope is built on His blood and righteousness, without which we are lost.

His wondrous cross—the focal point of Biblical history—presents many paradoxes, the most conspicuous being the climax of love and hate. At Calvary, the heart of God is revealed and at the same time man's hate is seen in all its heinous horror. Christ's cruel death was the world's *blackest* hour, yet also its *brightest* hour. "It was the blackest hour because human hate came to its fiercest focus. It was the brightest hour because divine love came to its fullest flower."

Love so amazing, so divine,
Shall have my life, my soul, my all.

His Resurrection

The importance of Christ's victory over death cannot be too strongly stressed. "Christianity is a religion of miracle," says one theologian, "and the miracle of Christ's Resurrection is the living center and object of Christian faith." The doctrine of the Resurrection is of primary value for on it all the doctrines of grace depend. If Christ did not rise again then we are still in our sins. (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). If all His body stayed in the grave there would have been no salvation for a sinning race. This is why it is only partially true to say that we are saved from the penalty and power of sin as the result of Christ's death. Paul makes this fact clear when he declares that it is only as we believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead that we can be saved (Romans 10:8, 9). The Resurrection was God's receipt for Calvary. Christ died to discharge our heavy debt of sin, and that all claims were fully met is evidenced by His triumph over man's last enemy.

This is one reason why the Resurrection occupied such a prominent place in the earliest apostolic preaching. A successor to Judas Iscariot had to be one who had witnessed the Resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:22). The first recorded sermon in the Acts was conspicuous for its emphasis upon the Resurrection (Acts 2:24–32; 3:15). The preaching of the Resurrection resulted in persecution (Acts 4:2; 5:20), but the apostles could not be silenced in their witness to such a dynamic doctrine. If only modern preaching was dominated by the triumphant message of the Resurrection, as apostolic preaching was, what mighty things would be accomplished. Alas, too

many preachers have forgotten—if ever they knew it—that the Resurrection is not only one of the main proofs of the deity of Christ (Romans 1:4), but a divine act providing the keystone of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:17, 18).

That the Resurrection is the best established fact in Bible history can be proved by the following aspects—

It was the subject of prophecy (Psalm 16:10, 11; Acts 13:31–37).

Christ repeatedly declared it (Matthew 16:21; 17:9–23; Mark 8:31).

John believed it as he saw the empty tomb (John 20:8).

The women at the grave reported it (Luke 24:11; John 20:13, 15).

Peter reported that Jesus appeared to Him (Luke 24:34).

Christ repeatedly appeared to His own (John 21; Acts 10:40, 41).

He was seen by Paul, and hundreds of others (1 Corinthians 15:5–8).

The existence of the Church confirms the Resurrection. If Christ had no resurrection body, then there is no mystical body formed by the Holy Spirit who came as the result of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. The fact and presence of the Church, then, demonstrates the proof of the Resurrection and every believer is a living proof of such a doctrine.

The Resurrection is not only a *fact*, but was a mighty *factor*. The *doctrine* became a *dynamic*, thus Paul speaks of “the power of His resurrection” (Philippians 3:10). Paul came to experience this divine power and was uplifted in its strength and made the most mighty witness in the Early Church. Risen with Christ, can we say that we are sharers of His risen power? If spiritual inertia is ours, then we need to open the avenues of our being to the tremendous forces liberated by Christ's victory over sin, death and hell.

By His Resurrection Jesus became “the first fruits of them that slept,” and “the firstborn of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20; Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). He is so called because His Resurrection was distinct from all those who had been raised before Him. Jesus arose with a *spiritual* body (1 Corinthians 15:44, 45). Body and soul were reunited and restored to their original beauty and strength and raised to the highest level. Louis Berkhof says that the Resurrection of Christ has a threefold significance—

1. It was a declaration of the Father that Christ met all the requirements of the law (Philippians 2:9).

2. It symbolized the justification, regeneration and final resurrection of believers (Romans 6:4, 5, 9; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:20–22).

3. It was the cause of our justification, regeneration and resurrection (Romans 4:25; 5:10; Ephesians 1:20; Philippians 2:10; 1 Peter 1:3).

His Ascension

The fifth book of the New Testament is sometimes spoken of as “The Fifth Gospel” or “The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles.” This dramatic book, however, is largely a record of two of the apostles—Peter, apostle to the Jews (1–12); and Paul, apostle to the Gentiles (13–28). The events of the book cover a period of about 34 years.

The Acts opens with the risen Lord giving commandments through the Spirit to His disciples, and the Resurrection itself is the strongest witness to the reality of the Ascension. His presence and ministry for 40 days proved that He was alive from the dead. Our Lord did not disappear with the Spirit, even in His risen form, but declared that He would continue to act and speak through the Spirit, as He had done previous to His death (Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:14–18; Acts 2).

While with His disciples Jesus spoke much of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. The disciples were eager for the promised restoration of the kingdom to Israel and asked for a date when restoration could be expected. Christ rebuked them, not for their desire to have the kingdom restored, but for wanting to know the time of restoration—a matter shut up in the counsels of God.

While the disciples were feasting upon the presence and ministry of the Lord they loved, suddenly as they lovingly looked at Him, He vanished from their sight. From that wonderful moment on, they lived and labored in the power of their risen, ascended and returning Lord. They not only accepted the Ascension as an historic fact but as a mighty dynamic for service (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; 4:8; 1 Timothy 3:10; Hebrews 1:3; 4:14; 10:12). Fact and figure were combined and the Ascension made prediction of Christ's return in glory (Matthew 25:31; 26:64; Philippians 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 1:7).

The Expectation of the Ascension

Having lived with the Father from the dateless past, Jesus, as He dwelt among men, was so homesick for heaven. How He longed to be back again in the bosom of His Father. How eagerly He anticipated His Ascension! This is why many of His sayings breathe the air of expectancy. He predicted that His disciples would witness His departure to heaven (John 6:62). He could steadfastly set His face toward His cross, knowing that it would be followed by His coronation (Luke 9:51 R.V.M.). He was the Householder about to go into a far country from which He would return to reward His servants (Matthew 21:33). Did He not blend His Crucifixion with His Ascension? (John 12:32). Did He not promise His own that He would go to prepare a place for them in His Father's home? (John 14:3), With all authority, He could pronounce "I go unto My Father" (John 14:12, 28). He was only to be a little while with His own, then go back to the One that sent Him (John 7:33). Hear Him, as He says, "I leave the world and go to the Father" (John 16:27, 28). Did He not forbid Mary to touch Him seeing that He had not yet ascended? (John 20:17)

Two Old Testament saints knew what it was to ascend from earth to heaven in their human bodies, changed as they ascended, namely, Enoch and Elijah. They were spared the sting of death but Jesus died and in His glorified body, with which He rose from the grave and ascended on high, are the marks of the nails—perpetual witness to His anguish on our behalf.

The Transfiguration of Christ anticipated His glorious Ascension (Luke 9:28–36). Had He wished He could have gone right into heaven from the Mount, for "perfect in creation, perfect in probation, He was now ready to be perfected in glory." But His was the great renunciation. Had He ascended from the Mount in His glorified form, He would have gone alone. Back down the Mount He came and endured the cross so that the joy might be His of having multitudes of the redeemed share His bliss above (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

The Event of the Ascension

It is somewhat surprising what little stress there is on the fact of the Ascension in the gospels. Matthew and John do not mention it. Yet, although the treatment is scant, it is sufficient for faith. After the event, the testimony to the Ascension was strong (Acts 2:33; 3:21; Ephesians 1:20; 1 Timothy 3:16).

The event happened at the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12), a place so prominent in Christ's life. It was the place of His solitude (Luke 21:37), but will yet be the seat of His sovereignty (Zechariah 14:4). Here, it is the scene of His Ascension glory.

The event also transpired while Jesus was in the act of blessing His disciples on their return from Jerusalem (Luke 24:50, 52). As His hands were lifted up in priestly benediction, even as they were on the mount (Acts 3:26), Jesus vanished out of their sight. As His last words fell with all their celestial melody and significance on the ears of His own, the miracle happened and Jesus was uplifted in bodily form from earth to heaven. How those men of Gallilee must have gazed upon Him in rapt attention as He was taken up from them!

What impressed those disciples was the fact that Jesus ascended in His actual form. *He* was taken up. It was not some shadowy form or apparition but Himself, their veritable Redeemer Lord and Friend. The One who had become dear to their hearts through the three years they had spent together, and the heavenly messengers assured the amazed beholders that this *same* Jesus would return in like manner as He went (Acts 1:10, 11).

Further, the disciples gazed spellbound at the ascending Lord, for such an event was most unexpected, even though Christ had told them of it. The language used implies that they were struck with surprise. In a moment they saw His mysterious form ascend and heard the two men from heaven say that His return would be just as sudden.

He also ascended in a mysterious grandeur. "The cloud received Him out of their sight." "He was carried up." What kind of a cloud received Him, and who carried Him up to heaven? True, the ethereal clouds became His chariot, but are not the clouds emblems of grandeur and of the angels of God, who carried Elijah to heaven, and who also convey dying saints to heaven? (Psalm 68:17, 18; Luke 16:22). Can it be that myriads of angels bore Jesus triumphantly back to heaven? It was a mystic cloud that guided and guarded Israel through the wilderness pilgrimage. Of the angels, Gregg wrote

They brought His chariot from above,
To bear Him to His throne;
Spread their triumphant wings, and sang,
"The glorious work is done."

The Expediency of the Ascension

Is it not hard to credit the surprising truth that Christ's absence is our great gain? "It is expedient for you that I go away" (John 16:7). What are the advantages accruing to us through His ascension? What blessedness is ours because of His departure?

The evangelical *Heidelberg Catechism* assures us of these three advantages of Christ's Ascension:

1. That He Is My Advocate, in the Presence of His Father

Christ's last act was that of lifting up His hands in priestly benediction upon His own, a symbol of the perpetual ministry He ascended on high to exercise. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Hebrews 7:26). This, then, is the first great gain as the result of Christ's entrance into heaven. He intercedes for *us*, for the efficacy of His intercession reaches no further than the efficacy of His blood. We now have a Friend in the court of the everlasting King, an Intercessor who ever lives, a Petitioner who never fails. He pleads our cause without fee.

Day and night our Jesus makes no pause,
Pleads His own fulfilment of all laws.
Veils with His perfections mortal flaws,
Clears the culprit, pleads the desperate cause.
Plucks the dead from death's devouring jaws,
And the worm that gnaws.

2. That I Have My Own Flesh in Heaven, As a Sure Pledge That He Who Is the Head Will Also Take Me, One of His Members, Up to Himself

This further good treasure and boon resulting from Christ's Ascension was one He promised ere He left the earth. "Where I am, there ye may be also." *My own flesh in heaven!* How true this is! One of the ceaseless wonders of heaven is the presence of humanity's dust, glorified, seated on a throne. Christ is now the only Person in the Trinity with a body.

Fausset comments that, "The transfiguration before His passion shows how His resurrection body could be the same body, yet altered so as it will be more or less recognizable to beholders. The process of His glorification probably began from His Resurrection and culminated in His Ascension." What a blessed hope awaits the child of God who, seeing Him will be fashioned into His likeness! (Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3).

3. That He Sends His Spirit, by Whose Power, I Seek Those Things Which Are Above

This is the third benediction, says the ancient Catechism, Christ's Ascension brings us. This supreme Gift of all He received for His own and shed Him down on them. The unction of the Spirit is part of the fruit of Christ's Ascension (John 7:39; 1 John 2:20).

Christ sent the Spirit as the Comforter (John 14:16), and a drop of His heavenly comfort is enough to sweeten a sea of worldly sorrow. The Spirit also came as "an earnest" (2 Corinthians 1:22). He it is who gives us an earnest of heaven in our land.

The Exaltation of the Ascension

As Jesus ascended to His Father, He was highly exalted by Him to a position “above all exaltation” (Philippians 2:9). The name of authority bestowed upon Him was the same one given to Him at His birth, namely, Jesus (Matthew 1:21). Calvary saw the Sun of Righteousness in eclipse, but as the result of the Ascension, He shines in full glory.

Christ was first humiliated, then exalted and we must enter glory as He did. “If we suffer, we shall reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:12). The only way up is down. First a cross, then a crown.

What was the nature of the Father’s exaltation of His beloved Son? True, there were the Resurrection, Ascension and position at God’s right hand, but Paul reminds us of two aspects we must not lose sight of. First, at His Ascension, he led captivity captive. What does this imply? Who were the captives He liberated and then bound to Himself with eternal chains and led them in the train of His triumph?

Were they not the saints in that part of paradise known as “Abraham’s Bosom”? (Luke 16:23). Before Christ’s Ascension, when a saint died, he did not go directly to heaven but to paradise, where all the saints were prisoners of hope. When Jesus ascended to heaven, He emptied this temporary abode of the righteous, and took them with Him to heaven. Absent from the body, he finds himself at home with his Lord.

Secondly, Paul reminds us, the ascended Lord “gave gifts unto men,” chiefest among which was the gift of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:8). The variety of gifts mentioned indicate Christ’s provision for the enlightenment and edification of His Church.

Christ was also exalted in the titles bestowed upon Him. “The name of the Lord was manifest.” He was exalted as the Lord. All power became His over angels and men. To Him, every knee is to bow (Matthew 28:18; Acts 19:17; Philippians 2:10). In His sovereignty He has the authority to use three keys—

- The key of the grave with which to open the graves of the redeemed.
- The key of heaven with which to open the blest abode to whom He will.
- The key of hell with which to imprison the condemned (Revelation 1:18).

He was exalted to be a Prince (Revelation 1:5). The princes of earth hold their crowns by tenure of Him who has the power to set one up and cast down another. He was exalted in order to become a Saviour and Mediator. To save sinners is a star belonging only to His crown (Acts 4:12; 5:31). As He conquered sin and hell for everyone of us, His triumph can now be made ours by faith.

Christ is at God’s right hand, which implies the position of dignity and honor. It was the manner of kings in advancing favorites to set them at their right hand. Thus Solomon caused a seat to be set for the queen his mother at his right hand (1 Kings 2:19). At the Father’s right hand, Christ has the key of government on His shoulders and governs all the affairs of the world for the glory of His Father. *Sitting* at God’s right hand implies the finished task of redemption (Hebrews 1:3; 10:12).

Christ’s exaltation was our exaltation and our responsibility is to exalt Him in our lives. We must exalt Him in all our ways, making Him renowned among others. We must exalt His truth against error, and His liberty against bondage.

After His Ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy and from that moment the personal, literal, visible return of their Lord became their hope and to a large degree their theme. After the Ascension came a remarkable prayer meeting, when the hearts of about 120

were prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Saviour's ascension gift to His believing people. May our meditation of the Ascension, result in a fresh enduement of the Spirit and in a quickened desire for Christ's return in power and glory!

His Present Ministry

Christ is *active*, as well as *alive*, for ever more. When He left earth for heaven, His ministry did not cease. It ever continues although in a changed form. In fact, His present ministry is based upon His work on earth and is arriving at the completion of same. What are the offices He exercises in glory? Because of His perfect obedience to God while here below and also in virtue of His sacrificial death additional honors are Christ's (John 13:31, 32; Philippians 2:9, 10; Revelation 5:12–14).

After His glorious Ascension, there came the restoration of the glory He possessed before the world was (John 17:5). Seated at the right hand of God there came the resumption of the exercise of all His divine attributes. All the self-imposed limitations of humanity ceased when He sat down on high (Matthew 28:18, 20; Mark 16:20; Revelation 5:12–14). The expression, "right hand of God," (Hebrews 1:3) is figurative of a position of authority, power and glory.

Part of His present ministry is the preparation of an abode for His Church. "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Entering heaven, Jesus immediately redeemed His promise and sent the Holy Spirit to fashion the Church He said He would build (Matthew 16:18; John 16:7; Acts 1:4; 2:1–4). In Christ, we are already set in heavenly places and through His Ascension we have the assurance of a place in heaven with Him (John 17:24; Ephesians 2:6). It is His express wish that we should share His glory. Now, by the Spirit, the Church is the habitation of God. Soon she is to have an habitation in the divine abode.

Further, Christ not only rules and protects His Church, governing the universe on her behalf, He also intercedes for her on the basis of His completed sacrifice. In Him, the Church has her great Intercessor at the throne (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 4:14; 6:20; 7:25; 9:24). While on earth, He offered up prayers saturated with tears (Hebrews 5:14) and in heaven He continues this effective ministry—but without the tears. It is, therefore, Biblical to sing—

"I have a Saviour, who's pleading in glory"

Christ's state and office in heaven brings us to a consideration of His threefold ministry as Prophet, Priest and King—the three Old Testament offices reaching their perfection in Christ (1 Samuel 16:3; 1 Kings 19:16; Psalm 105:15). In His manhood were imparted without measure all the gifts of the Holy Spirit: and so He possesses in the highest degree the *knowledge* of a Prophet; the *holiness* of a High Priest; and the *power* of a King. This threefold division of Christ's mediatorial work proclaims not only His uniqueness but also His prerogatives (1 Timothy 2:5).

1. Christ As Prophet

Of old, a *prophet* spoke to men about God: a *priest* spoke to God about men. Prophets of old declared the whole counsel of God, and Christ, as the perfect Prophet not only expounded the

Word of God—He was the Embodiment of that Word. In Him, it became *flesh* (John 1:16). The New Testament reveals these facts—

- a. He calls Himself a Prophet (Luke 13:33).
- b. He claimed to bring a message from God. He was the inspired Interpreter of the Word and will of God (John 8:26–28; 14:10–24; 17:8, 26).
- c. He elicited praise as a true Prophet, or Teacher from God. He ever spoke with authority (Matthew 21:11, 46; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 3:2; 4:19).
- d. He continues the eternal revelation of God to the saints in glory (John 16:12–14; 1 Corinthians 13:12). He will ever remain the divine Expositor of truth (Luke 24:27, 44, 45).

2. Christ As Priest

The Aaronic priesthood, which typified Christ's priestly ministry, represented a *priest* as one called to represent man before God, by offering sacrifices and making intercession. The analogies and contrasts between Aaron and Christ provide one of the prominent themes of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "As the prophetic word is the word of righteousness, Christ's priestly act is the fulfillment of righteousness under judgment, for the world's salvation."

As the Priest, Jesus suffered in man's stead and satisfied divine holiness and opened the way for God to pardon and restore the guilty. One of the most profound mysteries of Christianity is that He became Priest and Lamb and both Punisher and Punished (Romans 3:25, 26; Hebrews 9:12; John 1:25).

As Priest, Jesus was, and is, sinless. Aaron had to offer sacrifices for his own sin, as well as for the sins of others (Hebrews 7:9, 10). In heaven, He pleads His efficacious blood on our behalf (Hebrews 2:17; 3:1).

As the Priest, He secures, on the basis of Atonement, all of our temporal and spiritual blessings (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 22:31, 32; 23:34; John 14:16).

As the Priest, He continues His intercessory ministry for the Church on earth (Hebrews 4:15; 9:11–15; 9:24–28; 10:19–22).

As the Priest, He is a kingly one robed with the full splendor of the throne of God, having the distinctive glory of a finished saving work (Hebrews 10:10–14; Revelation 1:13; 5:6, 9, 12). The marvel is that He has condescended to call us *priests*. What a neglected truth the priesthood of all believers is!

3. Christ As King

Kingship is one of Christ's eternal prerogatives. As "the King Eternal," He was born a King. During His earthly sojourn He asserted His Kingship and men recognized His claim (Matthew 2:2; Acts 17:7). As the "King," He died, and in His Resurrection proved His sovereignty. In heaven, He rules as King for the glory of God and for the fulfillment of His purposes (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 1:3). As King, He exercises power in upholding and controlling the world (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:15–19).

Messianic kingship foreshadowed the One who would come as God's perfect King (Psalm 2:6). The prediction is that He is to return in regal power and splendor as the King of the Kings, and

Lord of all Lords (Revelation 11:15; 19:16). What a glorious coronation will be His, when many crowns diadem His brow! What glory will be His when His kingdom comes as He reigns supreme over the earth! The wonder is that we are to reign with Him, assisting Him as *kings* in His governmental control of all things. The question is, Do we honor and obey Him as King of our lives? Have we brought forth the royal diadem and crowned Him Lord of all? Does He reign on the throne of the heart?

His Prospective Majesty

Honor and majesty have ever been ascribed to Him who now sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Psalm 96:6; Hebrews 1:3). From the dateless past, Christ has been clothed with majesty (Psalms 93:1; 104:1). When in the bosom of the Father, the angelic host sang of His majesty (John 1:18; Isaiah 24:16; 26:10). At His Incarnation, He did not surrender such august dignity and grandeur but brought them with Him. This is why the three disciples who witnessed His transfiguration on the Mount afterward confessed that they had been “eye-witnesses of His majesty” (Matthew 17:1–8; 2 Peter 1:16). Such *majesty* was the out-flashing of His inherent glory.

It is to His coming majesty, however, that our attention is directed in this concluding section on *The Doctrine of Christ*. In our last chapter dealing with *The Doctrine of Last Things*, more detailed reference to the glory of Christ’s Second Advent and millennial reign can be found. When He returns for His true Church, He is to be “glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe” (2 Thessalonians 1:10). Then they will behold His majesty (Isaiah 26:10), and be clothed with it.

During the great Tribulation, Christ, as the Lamb, will gird His sword upon His thigh and in His majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness (Psalm 45:3, 4). Then the earth will know that “with God is terrible majesty” (Job 37:22). None will be able to gainsay Christ’s judicial majesty as His righteous judgment overtakes a guilty earth. No wonder the godless multitudes will cry to be hidden from the face of Him that sitteth on His judicial throne! (Revelation 6:16, 17; Isaiah 2:10).

But the full meridian of splendor will not be His until He ushers in His reign as “the prince of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5). Then His voice as He rules the earth, will be full of majesty (Psalm 29:4). What royal grandeur, glory and dominion will be the Saviour’s when the crown of glory and honor rests upon the brow once scarred by the crown of thorns! (Hebrews 2:7–10). Then Jude’s doxology will be universally sung—

“To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen! (Jude 25).

The practical aspect of the doctrine of Christ must not be forgotten. All that He is, and has, are at our disposal. The Holy Spirit is not only with us to take of the things of Christ and reveal them unto us. He is within us in order to conform us to the image of God’s dear Son (Ephesians 4:15–17). Because God was in Christ, and He is now at God’s right hand, He is able to solve all our problems, meet all our needs and banish all our tears. In *The Death of the Desert*, Browning imagines the death and last words of John, and makes John to say:

I say, the acknowledgement of God in Christ

Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee,
All questions in the earth and out of it.

If He is ours, and we are His then we need no other source of supply and satisfaction, He is our sufficiency in all things.

Be Thou supreme, Lord Jesus Christ,
Thy life transfigure mine;
And through this veil of mortal flesh,
Here may Thy glory shine.¹

¹ Herbert Lockyer, [*All the Doctrines of the Bible*](#), The All Series (Zondervan, 2013), 36–59.