

THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

By the Word that was made flesh, we are to understand one of the Three who bear record in heaven, "The Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost" I John 5:7. By comparing this latter text with John 1:1, we see the propriety of the expression, "The Word was with God," as the Word is one of the three who distinctly bear record. We are also taught by thus comparing these texts that the Three are not merely three manifestations of God, nor three parts of God, or three distinct persons, or beings comprising the Godhead; for it is positively said that "The Word was God." Hence it is evident, though we can not comprehend the how, that God exists as Three, and so exists, that the Three are One, and that each of the Three in this peculiar relation is the One God. Hence also that the Word who was made flesh, was God, not in part, but in all the fullness of the Godhead. Thus it is said "God was manifested in the flesh," I Tim. 3:16; and of Christ it is said, "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" Col.2:9. And; "There is none other God but one" I Cor.8:4.

We will now notice the declaration, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." 1st. The Word was made flesh: Not that there was a transmutation of Spirit into flesh, or of the eternal Godhead into the babe of Bethlehem. We must understand the expression made flesh as explained by other texts; as the one from I Tim. 3:16 - "God was manifested in the flesh," and Phil.2:6-7, "Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Thus the being made flesh was a being manifested in the flesh; a taking upon Him the form of a servant; a having a body prepared Him Heb. 10:5. Again we are taught from Gal.4:4, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law," &c., that this being made flesh was not a mere assuming of a fleshly body, but that the term flesh is here used as in several other places (see Gen.6:3, John 3:6) for the whole of manhood or Adamic nature, in distinction both from angelic nature, and the spirit of the new man. Thus the being made of a woman, was a being made under the law. But the law has dominion over man as a living soul, not as a mere body formed of the dust of the ground. So Christ speaks repeatedly of His soul in a sense in which He could not have intended merely animal life. It may be asked, Why is the strong expression used "The Word was made flesh," if it intended only the assuming of mankind? I answer, we are not to understand that it was merely assumed as an outward form; but that the Word was so made flesh, that the manhood was personally one with the Word, with God, and the Man, Christ Jesus, whether viewed as the babe in Bethlehem, as growing in stature, or on the cross, was personally the Word, was God, was the Jehovah. Thus Watts sings:

"Aaron must lay his robes away,
His mitre and his vest;
When God Himself comes down to be,
The offering and the priest."

The Word was made flesh, that He might accomplish the work of redemption and meet the demands of the law which stood against His church and which His relation to her as her Head and Husband required Him to meet. The law could not have dominion over the Godhead as such, either to demand and receive obedience, nor to inflict its penalty of suffering and death. Hence the word's being made

flesh or made of a woman, was that, He might be made under the law. And being thus made it was no other than the Word, the God of Abraham, the Almighty God, who yielded obedience to the law in His own flesh or manhood which He was made, or which was made in personal union with Himself in behalf of His people. In His manhood He bore their sins, was made a curse for them, and thus by His infinitely perfect offering, and obedience, He brought in everlasting righteousness, took the curse out of the way, expiated their sins, and made an end of them, and finished transgression. For though it was only through and in His manhood of which He was born of Mary that He would be in subjection to the law, or endure its penalty. As the Godhead in itself could neither suffer, nor be in subjection as before shown, but the Word in being made flesh, was so God and man in one person, that the Godhead in all His fullness of attributes carried all its powers and excellency, &c., into all that the man Christ Jesus did and suffered, and thus perfect redemption from under the law was accomplished for His people and death was conquered.

2nd. And dwelt among us: This embraces the whole of Christ's humiliation. His birth, His growth in stature, His susceptibility to hunger, thirst, weariness and being grieved and angered; in a word, having all the original appetites and passions of man without being disordered with depravity, being in all things made like unto His brethren; that He might be tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, and be a merciful and faithful High Priest. It includes also His ministering in common with His brethren as a servant under the law, and sharing with them in all the evils, sorrows, enmity, &c., consequent upon sin, even to the condemnation of the law, though in Himself without sin. Thus, in all the debasement of His people, He owned them as His brethren, His bride, sharing with them in this debasement, that He might raise them to share with Him in glory. As His oneness with His people was manifested in His sharing with them in the consequences of sin, so their oneness with Him shall be manifested in their sharing with Him, in His being appointed heir of all things and in the glory He had with the Father before the world was. Surely, this is love and condescension immeasurable! Well might Paul desire to know the fellowship of His sufferings, that is, the participation His people have in what He suffered for sins; and the power of His resurrection, in His being declared to be the Son of God with power and their being quickened together with Him, and raised up and made to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

3rd. "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." John may have reference to what he and Peter and James beheld, the transfiguration of Christ; and to which Peter somewhat similarly refers, II Pet. 1:16-18. This, however, was but a view given to these disciples beforehand of the glory that should follow His sufferings. Hence I think this text has a further reference to that full manifestation of Christ in His kingdom. Not even the disciples in this sense beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father whilst He was a minister of the circumcision and served under the law; for then He was seen in the form of a servant, and in the likeness of man, Phil.2:7. The Jews seem never to have beheld this glory in the Messiah, but have supposed that His kingdom would be set up like David's under the dominion of the law of Moses. None of the conditionalists see this glory of our incarnate Lord. They view Him as like the servant Moses, and as proposing salvation as it were by the works of the law - not by the works of the law - but as it were by them; that is, by creaturely activity, and mortifications, &c., "For they stumble at that stumbling stone" as did the Jews. See Rom.9:32.

But what is this glory, "The glory as of the only begotten of the Father?" 1st. How the only begotten of the Father? In Psa .2:7 it is said of Him when God had set a King upon His holy hill Zion, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." By turning to Acts 13:33 and Heb. 1:3-5 we see that this relates, not to His being born of Mary, but to His being the "First begotten of the dead" (Rev. 1:5), or to His being "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). I do not understand by this that Christ did not exist as the Son of God before His resurrection, or before His being made flesh. He existed as such from everlasting; hence it is

said of Him who is to be Ruler in Israel (and therefore the same, and spoken of in the same relation as in the 2nd Psalm, the King on the holy hill Zion), that His "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" Micah 5:2. It is also said in Heb.5:8, "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered," which shows that He was a Son before He learned obedience, &c. Hence also whilst He is said to be "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead," Col. 1:18, He is also said to be "the first born of every creature," and that "He is before all things and by Him all things consist" Col. 1:15-17. Hence I understand the text, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee," as referring to Christ being manifested in His resurrection to His church, as the beloved and only begotten Son of God, in whom God is well pleased, and to His establishing that new dispensation, the spirit of which is the spirit of sonship and which is distinct from the former dispensation, the spirit of which is that of bondage. As Christ was born of Mary, He was born as made under the law, as He had been manifested in types, &c., to the fathers, He had been only manifested through the law; but now in His resurrection He was manifested in His glory as freed from the law, having canceled all its demands against Him as the Husband and Surety of His church, and His church in Him; and therefore no longer does His relation to His people impose on Him the form of a servant, but He is declared the Son of God; and His people as no longer servants, but sons and heirs of God in Him. Now the Sonship of Christ, as declared by the resurrection, was in His relation to His church as the Head, for as such He was raised from the dead, and if this was the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (and that was the glory with which He prayed the Father to glorify Him), then His glory as Son before the world was must have been in His relation to His church and body as its Head. See John 17:5. Whether, therefore, we consider Him in His being begotten from the dead, or in His being the first born of every creature, He is the only begotten of the Father, as Adam was of the human family, the only direct creation of God, though Eve and all his posterity were created in him, and have, therefore, proceeded from him, and formed in their distinct manifestations according to God's arrangement and are, therefore, creatures of God. So Christ was the only begotten of the Father, though in His being begotten, His seed or posterity were begotten in Him, and are, therefore, spoken of as His seed, being, though born of God, directly begotten of the Son as the Everlasting Father Isa.9:6. Hence it was that they were predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son, "That He might be the firstborn among many brethren" Rom.8:29. Hence also it is said: "Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" Heb.2: 11. All of one lump, of one original production. So also whilst they are the children which God hath given Him, He recognizes them as brethren, saying unto Mary, "Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God" Heb.2: 13; Isa.8: 18; John 20:17. Thus it is also that whilst He as Son is "appointed heir of all things," His people are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Him Heb. 1:2 & Rom.8: 17. This relation of Christ's people to Him alike applies, in their manifestation as sons, to His manifestation as the Son of God by His resurrection; and in their original predestination to the adoption of children, to His goings forth from of old, from everlasting. It appears to me that I tread on safe ground, being sustained by the declarations of Scripture, in going thus far in reference to the sonship of Christ as being in relation with His people, but I do not feel safe in going into the Athanasian view of the sonship of Christ with nothing but human speculation and theological dogmatism to support it.

2nd. What is His glory and how beheld. His glory is that which He had with the Father before the world was. In this He is the brightness of God's glory; not the essential glory of the Godhead, for that shines as bright in the Father as in the Word, but the manifested glory of God, this centers in the manifested sonship of Christ, and outshines all the glory of the heavens. This glory is only seen by faith. Even the quickened souls see nothing of it whilst under the law; they look to God then only through the law, and therefore see nothing but wrath reflected upon them. But when faith is given them to behold God in Christ, then the glory of God's way of salvation, as contrasted with their formed legal

notions, and of the peculiar liberty and privilege of sonship, as contrasted with the bondage of the law, bursts with heavenly splendor upon their vision; and though filled with wonder and admiration at the glorious scene before them, reflected through the gospel, yet they have no disposition, like Peter, James and John, to make tabernacles for Moses and Elias with Christ - but rather are they disposed to hear only Him as God's beloved Son in whom they see God well pleased. But, though the children of God may have, from time to time, glimpses of His glory while in this dark vale, yet the fullness of this glory will not be seen by us until that prayer of our Lord has its accomplishment: "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me" John 17:24. Thus we see that this glory of the Son is not His essential glory as God, for it is given Him of the Father.

3rd. "Full of grace and truth." According to the parenthesis in which the preceding sentence is included, this clause should belong to the former sentence, thus, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth." And surely there was nothing but grace in the errand on which He came and dwelt among us. Grace was the moving cause; and redemption from the law, and the establishing of the reign of grace unto salvation was the result. Hence His people receive grace - not for their works - but for grace given them in Him before the foundation of the world. And truth. His sacrifice and blood and righteousness are not shadows like the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law; but real substance, where is no deception in trusting by faith in His blood and righteousness for pardon and acceptance with God, as there is in trusting to human efforts. Or if the meaning is that "we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth," how full of grace did the whole gospel plan of salvation, and the whole Scripture testimony concerning it appear when we beheld Christ by faith, as contrasted with what the Scriptures and what we heard appeared to us before, all denouncing the curse against us. Now all is refulgent with love and favor, and all is beheld in beholding Christ. How full of truth did this sure foundation now appear as contrasted with all the foundations we had before been trying to find rest upon? The promises of God as viewed in Him are a revelation wholly of grace, and are in Him yea and Amen. None of those ifs in them which marred the excellency of the promises of the Sinai covenant and changed them in consequence of disobedience to curses. May we be enabled to keep Christ in view as the only begotten of the Father, and beholding His glory be changed into the same image from glory to glory.

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