

Chapter Three
The Son of God
in Glory

To understand the magnitude and majesty of the coming of the Son of God, we must first consider both His divine nature and eternal glory. In this chapter, we will learn that the Son of God did not begin with the birth of Jesus, but has existed throughout eternity, sharing equality with God the Father in both nature and glory. It was not a mere man, or even an archangel that was delivered up for our redemption, but it was the eternal Son of God - the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign Lord of all. Only to the degree that we have a proper view of the Son will we have a high view of the Gospel and a right appreciation of it. This truth is best explained in the following words of Charles Spurgeon:

“Before we can ever get a right idea of the love of Jesus, we must understand His previous glory in its height of majesty, and His incarnation upon the earth in all its depths of shame. Now, who can tell us the majesty of Christ? When He was enthroned in the highest heavens He was very God of very God; by Him were the heavens made, and all the hosts thereof, by His power He hanged the earth upon nothing; His own almighty arm upheld the spheres; the pillars of the heavens rested upon Him; the praises of angels, arch-angels, cherubim and seraphim, perpetually surrounded Him; the full chorus of the Hallelujahs of the universe unceasingly flowed to the foot of His throne: He reigned supreme above all His creatures, God over all, blessed for ever. Who can tell His height, then? And yet this must be attained before we can measure the length of that mighty stoop which He took when He came to earth to redeem our souls. And who, on the other hand, can tell how low He descended? To be a man was something, but to be a man of sorrows was far more; to bleed, and die, and suffer, these were much for Him who was the Son of God; but to suffer as he did — such unparalleled agony — to endure, as He did, a death of shame and a death of desertion of His God, this is a lower depth of condescending love which the most inspired mind must utterly fail to fathom. And yet must we first understand infinite height, and then, infinite depth; we must measure, in fact, the whole infinite that is between heaven and hell, before we can understand the love of Jesus Christ” (The New Park Street Pulpit, Vol.5, p.69).

The Son's Deity

The Scriptures testify that the one true God exists as a Trinity [from the Latin word *trinitas*, meaning “threefold” or “three in one”]: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are three distinct persons who are distinguishable from one another, and yet share the same divine nature or *essence* and relate to one another in eternal and unbroken fellowship. The Son who became man and died upon the cross of Calvary is the eternal God, equal to the Father and the Spirit in every way, and sharing in their incomprehensible glory.

Thomas Boston writes, “Hence it is clear, that He had a being before He was born of a virgin, yea from eternity; and that He is the true God, and the most high God, equal with the Father” (Works, Vol.1, p.384).

Again Thomas Boston writes, “This gift of God is God” (Works, Vol.10, p.189).

It is absolutely essential that we comprehend the importance of the teaching before us. The deity of the Son of God is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. Any view that sees Him as inferior to the Father or as a “god of lesser glory” is simply not Christian. The Son is not a created being, He is not an angel, and He is not a demigod to be ranked somewhere between God and creation. To borrow a phrase from John Gill: “He is God in the highest sense of the word” (EONT, Vol.7, p.738-739). The assurance of our salvation and the fidelity of our Gospel depends upon our reverent and wholehearted acceptance of this truth.

Andrew Fuller writes, "The Deity and atonement of Christ have always, among thinking people, stood or fallen together; and with them almost every other important doctrine of the Gospel. The person of Christ is the foundation-stone on which the church is built. An error, therefore, on this subject affects the whole of our preaching, and the whole of our religion" (Complete Works, Vol.3, p.695).

John Newton writes, "If we affirm that He who was born in a stable, and suffered as a malefactor upon mount Golgotha, is the true God and eternal life, many will think it a hard saying. But it is the doctrine of Scripture, the very pillar and gound of truth; the only foundation of hope for an awakened conscience, the only standard by which we can properly estimate the evil of sin, the worth of the soul, and the love of God" (Works, Vol.4, p.63).

1. In John 1:1-4, is found one of clearest declarations of both the deity and eternity of the Son of God. Read the text until you are familiar with its contents and then write your thoughts on each of the following phrases.
 - a. *In the beginning was the Word (v.1).*

Study Notes

John 1:1-4 - (a) The Word. The "Word" which was "in the beginning" is the Son of God. In verse 14, we read: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us". The "Word" is translated from the Greek word *lógos* which denotes "word" or "reason." The Jews often used this term in reference to God Himself. To the Greeks, it denoted the divine reason, logic, or rational principle that governed the universe. When applied to the Son, it communicates that He is deity (fully and truly God) and the perfect revelation of God to man (Hebrews 1:1-3). Verse 18, gives us insight into why the Son is called the Word: "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." Christ is the true word or explanation about God's nature and will. It is for this reason that God commands us to "listen to Him" (Matthew 17:5). An important truth to consider here is that only God can reveal God. No one else is up to the task or so uniquely qualified. The Son is the one true Word of God to man because He is God - "the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Hebrews 1:3). Not only this, but He is God's Final Word and the standard by which all other words must be judged (Hebrews 1:1-2). *In the beginning was.* This is a clear reference to Genesis 1:1 and the eternal nature of God: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In the book of Psalms, we find a similar phraseology employed to express the eternity of God: "Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2). John's uses this powerful phrase is to defeat any false notion that the Son had a beginning or that there was time when He was not. The Son was "in the beginning" with God before creation, therefore He is uncreated, eternal, and divine. Matthew Henry writes, "The Word had a being before the world had a beginning. He that was in the beginning never began, and therefore was ever" (MHC, Vol.5, p.848). It is important to note that the word "was" is translated from the imperfect tense in the Greek which denotes continual existence in past time. B.F. Wescott writes, "The tense suggests, as far as human language can do so, the notion of absolute, supra-temporal, existence" (The Gospel of John, p.2). The Word was always existing. B.B. Warfield writes, "Absolute eternity of being is asserted for the Word in as precise and as strong language as absolute

b. *And the Word was with God (v.1)*

c. *And the Word was God (v.1).*

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eternity of being can be asserted. The Word antedates the beginning of things... The Word already was before God thus began to speak things into existence” (Faith and Life, p.81-92). **(b) *And the Word was with God.*** This is a reference to two very important aspects of the relationship which existed between the the Father and the Son throughout all of eternity (1) Their unity - the Father and the Son existed in perfect fellowship. The fact that the Son was always “with” the Father denotes both equality and intimacy. It would be proper to translate the phrase, “And the Word was face to face with God”, denoting the intimate and personal fellowship, communion and delight which existed between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (2) Their distinction - the Father and the Son are not the same person. They are of the same divine essence, but they are two real and distinct persons who exist in perfect communion or fellowship together with the Holy Spirit. John Trapp writes, “A distinct person, yet co-essential and co-eternal” (CONT, Vol.5, p.345). B.B. Warfield writes, “Eternally subsisting alongside of and in communion with God, the Word is yet not a separate Being over against God. In some deep sense distinct from God, He is at the same time in some high sense identical with God” (Faith and Life, p.81-92). Although the phrase - “the Word was with God” - is shrouded and full of mystery, it does reveal some of the most remarkable truths in Scripture. For all eternity, before any worlds were made, God “was” in a perfect state of blessedness, contentment, and joyful fellowship - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They communed in a co-eternal and co-equal relationship, and were each other’s delight, joy, and satisfaction. They had no need of heavens, worlds, angels, or men. Such things were not created because of divine need, but to be recipients unto which the superabundance of God might flow. **(c) *And the Word was God.*** This is an undeniable declaration of the Word’s deity. In the original Greek, the phrase is literally, “and God was the Word” (*kai theós en ho lógos*). The predicate (God) precedes the subject (the Word) in order to emphasize the fact that the Word was really and truly God. The Son of God is God the Son. The fullness of deity dwells in Him (Colossians 2:9). John Gill writes, “[The Son was] not made a God, as He is said hereafter to be made flesh; nor constituted or appointed a God, or a God by office; but truly and properly God, in the highest sense of the word” (EONT, Vol.7, p.738-739). Albert Barnes writes, “There is no more unequivocal declaration in the Bible than this, and there could be no stronger proof that the sacred writer meant to affirm that the Son of God was equal with the Father... There is no evidence that John intended to use the word “God” in an inferior sense. It is not ‘the Word was a god,’ or ‘the Word was like God,’ but the Word was God. He had just used the word ‘God’ as evidently applicable to Jehovah, the true God; and it is absurd to suppose that He would in the same verse, and without any indication that He was using

d. *He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being (v.2-3).*

e. *In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men (v.4).*

Study Notes

the word in an inferior sense, employ it to denote a being altogether inferior to the true God” (BN, John, p.174). This truth is absolutely essential to the Christian faith and our understanding of the Gospel. It is only when we realize the fullness of the Son’s deity that we can begin to appreciate the value of His incarnation and death. It was not a creature, but the Creator who came down and died upon a tree. **(d)** *He was in the beginning with God.* This is an important restatement of the two truths found in verse one: (1) The eternal nature of the Son. He was before the creation of all things and therefore uncreated. (2) The unity and distinction of the Father and the Son - Two distinct and real persons of the same divine essence dwelling together in perfect unity. *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.* Positively, all things were created through the Son. He was the co-agent of creation along with the Father and the Spirit. Negatively, nothing exists that did not come into being through Him. The same truth is found in Colossians 1:16: “For by Him [the Son] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him.” The Son was not only in the beginning with God, but He was doing the works of God as God. Matthew Henry writes, “God made the world by a word (Psalm 33:6) and Christ was that Word. By Him, not as a subordinate instrument, but as a co-ordinate agent” (MHC, Vol.5, p.848). Albert Barnes writes, “Christ was not merely called God, but He did the works of God, and therefore the name is used in its proper sense as implying supreme divinity” (BN, John, p.175). William Gouge writes, “Compared with the Creator He is no whit inferior to Him, but equal... He is the very Creator Himself, eternal, infinite, incomprehensible” (Domestic Duties, p.423). **(e)** *In Him was life.* David Clarkson explains that the Son is the great Frontal Principle of all life. Life finds its essential and original existence in Him (The Gospels, p.346). The text does not say “through Him, but “in Him.” Whatever life and light is found in God is found in the Word. Whatever life and light of God that is communicated to men has always and will always come through the Word. John’s words find their Old Testament counterpart in Psalm 36:9, “For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.” It is remarkable that what the Psalmist ascribes to God, the Apostle John ascribes to the Son. Everything that has ever lived and moved has done so by the grace of the Son of God. The elect and fallen among angels and demons, the most pious and most irreverent among men, owe their very existence to Him. In light of such truth, our reverence is rational, but rebellion is both arrogant and insane. Furthermore, it is an incomprehensible marvel that the Fountain of all life would lay down His life for those who had none. *And the life was the Light of men.* The Son is the fountain of

Lessons from John 1:1-5

by J.C. Ryle

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” John 1:1-5

“The five verses now before us contain a statement of matchless sublimity concerning the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. He it is, beyond all question, whom St. John means, when he speaks of ‘the Word.’ No doubt there are heights and depths in that statement which are far beyond man’s understanding. And yet there are plain lessons in it, which every Christian would do well to treasure up in his mind.

We learn, firstly, that our Lord Jesus Christ is eternal. St. John tells us that ‘in the beginning was the Word.’ He did not begin to exist when the heavens and the earth were made. Much less did He begin to exist when the Gospel was brought into the world. He had glory with the Father ‘before the world was’ (John 17:5). He was existing when matter was first created, and before time began. He was ‘before all things’ (Colossians 1:17). He was from all eternity.

We learn, secondly, that our Lord Jesus Christ is a Person distinct from God the Father, and yet one with Him. St. John tells us that ‘the Word was with God.’ The Father and the Word, though two persons, are joined by an ineffable* union. Where God the Father was from all eternity, there also was the Word, even God the Son, - their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal, and yet their Godhead one. This is a great mystery! Happy is he who can receive it as a little child, without attempting to explain it.

We learn, thirdly, that the Lord Jesus Christ is very God. St. John tells us that ‘the Word was God.’ He is not merely a created angel, or a being inferior to God the Father, and invested by Him with power to redeem sinners. He is nothing less than perfect God, - equal to the Father as touching His Godhead - God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds.

We learn, fourthly, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things. St. John tells us that ‘by Him were all things made, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.’ So far from being a creature of God, as some heretics have falsely asserted, He is the Being who made the worlds and all that they contain. ‘He commanded and they were created’ (Psalm 148:5).

We learn, lastly, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all spiritual life and light. St. John tells us, that ‘in Him was life, and the life was the light of men.’ He is the eternal fountain, from which alone the sons of men have ever derived life. Whatever spiritual life and light Adam and Eve possessed before the fall, was from Christ. Whatever deliverance from sin and spiritual death any child of Adam has ever enjoyed since the fall, whatever light of conscience or understanding any one has obtained, all has flowed from Christ. The vast majority of mankind in every age have refused to know Him, have forgotten the fall, and their own need of a Saviour. The light has been constantly shining ‘in darkness.’ The most have ‘not comprehended the light.’ But if any men and women out of the countless millions of mankind have ever had spiritual life and light, they have owed all to Christ.

Such is a brief summary of the leading lessons which these wonderful verses appear to contain. There is much in them, without controversy, which is above our reason but there is nothing contrary to it. There is much that we cannot explain, and must be content humbly to believe” (Expository Thoughts, John, Vol. 1, p.2-3).

* ineffable - unspeakable, unutterable; that cannot be expressed in words (Webster).

The Son is True God

by Archibald A. Hodge (*Commentary on the Confession of Faith, p.85-86*)

“That the Son is the true God is proved by the following considerations:

- (1) Christ existed before He was born of the Virgin. (a) He was with the Father before the world was (John 8:58; John 17:5). (b) ‘He came into the world’ and ‘He came down from heaven’ (John 3:13; John 16:28).
- (2) All the names and titles of God are constantly applied to Christ, and to none others except to the Father and the Spirit: as Jehovah (Jeremiah 23:6); mighty God, everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6); God (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8); God over all (Romans 9:5); the true God, and everlasting life (I John 5:20); the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 22:13).
- (3) All divine attributes are predicated of Him: Eternity (John 8:58; John 17:5; Revelation 22:13); immutability (Hebrews 1:10-11; 13:8); omnipresence (Matthew 18:20; John 3:13); omniscience (Matthew 11:27; John 2:24-25; Revelation 2:23); omnipotence (John 5:17; Hebrews 1:3).
- (4) The Scriptures attribute all divine works to Christ: Creation (John 1:3-10; Colossians 1:16-17); preservation and providential government (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17; Matthew 28:18); the final judgment (John 5:22; Matthew 25:31-32; II Corinthians 5:10); giving eternal life (John 10:28); sending the Holy Ghost (John 16:7); sanctification (Ephesians 5:25-27).
- (5) The Scriptures declare that divine worship should be paid to Him (Hebrews 1:6; Revelations 1:5-6; 5:11-12; I Corinthians 1:2; John 5:23). Men are to be baptized into the name of Jesus, as well as into the name of the Father and the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:18-20). The grace of Jesus is invoked in the apostolical benediction (Romans 1:1; Ephesians 1:2; I Timothy 1:1).”

2. In Philippians 2:6, the apostle Paul makes two remarkable declarations about both the deity and eternity of the Son of God. Write your thoughts regarding these two truths. How do they magnify the wonder and glory of the Son’s advent (i.e. coming) and death on our behalf?
 - a. *The Son existed in the form of God.*

Study Notes

all life and light. Any true knowledge or revelation of God that men have ever possessed, did not originate with them, but came as a gracious endowment from the Son. Apart from Him there is be only darkness and death. It is important to note that the revelation of God through the Son is not confined to the incarnation. From the beginning of creation, the Son has always been the Mediator through which God has revealed Himself to the world. For this reason, He is worthy to be called the Word, and to be heard as such.

Philippians 2:5-8 - (a) *Although He existed.* This is a reference to the preexistence of the Son. He did not begin to exist at His incarnation, but is eternal, without beginning or end. *In the form of God.* The word “form” comes from the Greek word *morphé* which not only refers to the outward or external appearance of someone, but their essential character or underlying reality. The Son did not only “seem” to be God in appearance, but “was” God in essence or nature. A.T. Robertson writes, “*Morphé* means the essential attributes as shown in the form. In

The Son's Eternal Dignity

by John Murray (Collected Writings, Vol.3, p.237)

“In reference to the dignity [which the Son] possessed there are two aspects - the dignity of being and the dignity of station. The former is announced in the words ‘who being in the form of God’, the latter in the words ‘equal with God’.

“‘The form of God’ does not mean anything less than Godhood. We are not to be misled by the meaning we today attach to the word ‘form’. In the Greek language and in the English language three hundred years ago, the word points to the essence of a thing and means in this case the reality and fulness of Godhood, the sum of those perfection and attributes which belong to God and by reason of which He is God. So when it is said of Christ Jesus that He was in the form of God, this has richer meaning than to say simply that He was God. The accent falls upon the fulness of His Godhood, upon His being originally, natively, essentially God in the full possession of all that is distinctive of God in His majesty and glory. This is the dignity of His divine identity, the dignity of unabridged Deity...

“There is also the dignity of His station, ‘equal with God’. He was on an equality with God. This equality is not an accession (i.e. something He acquired) either by robbery or attainment. He did not consider His being on an equality with God something He had gained or was to gain. It was not something of precarious tenure; it was the consequence of His being and continuing to be in the form of God and, therefore, His natively, essentially, and immutably. The thought of the clauses may be paraphrased thus: being in the form of God and, therefore, not considering His being on an equality with God a prize or booty but an inalienable possession, He made Himself of no reputation.”

b. *The Son was equal with God.*

Study Notes

His preincarnate state Christ possessed the attributes of God and so appeared to those in heaven who saw Him. Here is a clear statement by Paul of the deity of Christ” (Word Pictures, Vol.4, p.444). Charles Hodge writes, “The form of a thing is the mode in which it reveals itself; and that is determined by its nature... No one can appear, or exist in view of others in the form of God, i.e., manifesting all divine perfections, who is not God. Hence it is asserted that the person spoken of was equal to God. (Systematic Theology, Vol.2, p.386). John Gill writes, “The ‘form of God’ is to be understood of the nature and essence of God, and describes Christ as He was from all eternity; just as the form of a servant signifies that He was really a servant, and the fashion of a man in which He was found means that He was truly and really man; so His being in the form of God intends that He was really and truly God” (EONT, Vol.9, p.133). Thomas Manton writes, “By the form of God is meant not only the divine majesty and glory, but also the divine essence itself” (Works, Vol.1, p.479). John Calvin writes, “Prior to His assuming our flesh, there was nothing mean or contemptible, but on the contrary a magnificence worthy of God” (CC, Vol.21, p.55). B.B. Warfield writes, “When our Lord is said to be in ‘the form of God,’ therefore, He is declared, in the most express manner possible, to be all that God is, to possess the whole fulness of attributes which make God God (Works, Vol.2, p.177). **(b)** *He did not regard equality with God.* This is still another undeniable reference to the deity of Christ. He existed throughout all eternity, bearing the form of God, and

The Son's Glory

Having affirmed the eternal existence and deity of the Son of God, we will now concern ourselves with the glory that was His before the incarnation, before the foundation of the world, even from all eternity. Although the Scriptures give us only glimpses of eternity past, it is enough to prove that the Son was "God" in the highest and most exalted sense of the word, and that He bore the glory of God as God. He was with the Father and shared His Father's glory. He was His Father's supreme and unending delight, and it was the Father's good pleasure that He be the instrument and epicenter of creation, the source of its joy, the object of its worship, and the great purpose or end of its existence. Since the dawn of creation, all of heaven and every sublime being that dwells there has had only one great desire - to gaze upon the glory of God in the face of His exalted Son!

It is only when we understand something of these truths that we can have a proper view and appreciation of the Gospel. It was not a mere man or even an angel that robed Himself in flesh and died for us on that day. It was the God of Glory, the Lord of the universe, the Object of all worship, the One through whom all things were made and for whom all things exist! Regarding the glory of the Son, J.C. Ryle writes,

"Can we ever give too much honour to Christ? Can we ever think too highly of Him? Let us banish the unworthy thought from our minds for ever. Let us learn to exalt Him more in our hearts, and to rest more confidently the whole weight of our souls in His hands. Men may easily fall into error about the three Persons in the holy Trinity if they do not carefully adhere to the teaching of Scripture. But no man ever errs on the side of giving too much honour to God the Son" (Expository Thoughts, p.42)

Charles Spurgeon writes,

"The subject I have to speak about is the honor and glory of the second Person of the blessed Trinity, even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and it is so vast a theme that the preacher, at the outset, confesses that the task is too great for him to accomplish, he staggers beneath the weight of his theme, which seems to him too great for the human mind to compass or for human lips adequately to express. All I can hope to do is to be lost in my subject that Jesus Christ may be All-in-all" (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.56, p.25-26).

Study Notes

being equal with God in every way. The word "equal" comes from the Greek word *isos* which means to be equal in quantity or quality. In the Son, all the fullness (quantity) of deity (quality) dwelled (Colossians 2:9). He lacked nothing in respect to deity, but was equal in every way to the fullest meaning of the term. James Montgomery Boice gives several excellent illustrations of the meaning of the Greek word *isos*, "An *isomer* is a molecule having a slightly different structure from another molecule (as, for example, being a mirror image of it), but identical to it in chemical composition. An *isomorph* is something that has the same form as something else. Isometric means 'in equal measure.' An *isosceles* triangle has two equal sides. Paul's use of the word in reference to Jesus teaches that Jesus is God's equal" (Foundations of the Christian Faith, p.269). *A thing to be grasped*. The phrase is derived from the Greek word *harpagmós* which can refer to robbery, any unauthorized seizing, or any act of grasping or holding. Two truths can be gleaned from the Apostle's words: (1) The Son willingly laid aside His divine privileges to become incarnate and complete God's great work of redemption. (2) The Son is fully and completely God. For who can claim equality with God except He who is God. John Calvin writes, "For where can there be equality with God without robbery, excepting only where there is the essence of God; for God always remains the same, who cries by Isaiah, 'I live; I will not give my glory to another (Isaiah 48:11)'" (CC, Vol.21, p.56). Matthew Henry writes, "He did not think Himself guilty of any invasion of what did not belong to Him, or assuming another's right. It is the highest degree of robbery for any mere man or mere creature to pretend to be equal with God, or profess Himself one with the Father. This is for a man to rob God, not in tithes and offerings, but of the rights of His Godhead (MHC, Vol.6, p.732). John Gill writes, "He [the Son] did Him [the Father] no injury, nor deprived Him of any glory, or assumed that to Himself which did not belong to Him" (EONT, Vol.9, p.133). All these things said about the Son are true only because He is God and the fullness of deity dwells in Him! No one except God can exist in the form of God or be equal with God.

The Radiance of God's Glory

Charles Spurgeon writes, "Now go a little further, and see what Christ is next called: 'the brightness of the Father's glory'. Shade your eyes, for you cannot look upon this wondrous sight without being dazzled by it. The Revised Version renders it, 'the effulgence of His glory'; but I do not see much more in that expression than in the word 'brightness'. Some commentators say - and it is not an ill figure, yet we must not push any figure too far, - that, as light is to the sun, so is Jesus to the glory of God. He is the brightness of that glory; that is to say, there is not any glory in God but what is also in Christ: and when that glory reaches its climax, when God the Ever-glorious is most glorious, that greatest glory is in Christ. Oh, this wondrous Word of God, - the very climax of the Godhead, - the gathering up of every blessed attribute in all its infinity of glory!" (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.45, p.389).

William Gouge writes, "This much amplifieth the point in hand, and sheweth that the Son was in His Father's greatest excellency no whit inferior to Him, but everyway equal. He was brightness, the brightness of His Father, yea, also the brightness of His Father's glory. What excellency soever was in the Father, the same was likewise in the Son, and that in the most transplendent manner. Glory sets out excellency; brightness of glory, the excellency of excellency" (Hebrews, p.16).

Again Spurgeon writes,

"Then press forward and seek to know much of the Son of God who is the brightness of His Father's glory (Hebrews 1:3), and yet in unspeakable condescension of grace became man for our sakes; know Him in the singular complexity of His nature: eternal God, and yet suffering, finite man; follow Him as He walks the waters with the tread of deity (Matthew 14:25), and as He sits upon the well in the weariness of humanity (John 4:6)" (Morning and Evening, p.259).

1. In Hebrews 1:3 is found one of the clearest expressions of the Son's deity and one of the most majestic declarations of the glory that was His before the foundation of the world. Mediate upon the text until you are familiar with its contents and then follow the directives.
 - a. *Describe the Son's eternal glory.*

Study Notes

Hebrews 1:3 - This text not only refers to the Son during and after His incarnation, but also allows us a glimpse into His rank and glory prior to the incarnation. As He has always upheld creation by the word of His power, so He has always been the radiance of His Father's glory, the exact representation of His nature. We must have this view in mind, before we can understand anything of the greatness of His incarnation and His death on Calvary. Regarding this text, Matthew Henry writes, "This is a high and lofty description...; an account of His personal excellency" (MHC, Vol.6, p.889). Albert Barnes writes, "This verse is designed to state the dignity and exalted rank of the Son of God, and is exceedingly important with reference to a correct view of the Redeemer" (BN, Hebrews, p.25-26). **(a)** *And He is the radiance of His glory.* The phrase "He is" is a present active participle indicating in "absolute and timeless existence" (Robertson, WP, Vol.5, p.335). Both He and His divine glory are

- b. *Describe the Son's eternal power and explain how it demonstrates His supremacy above all creation.*

Study Notes

eternal and immutable. This can be said of no one except He who is absolute deity. The word "radiance" comes from the Greek word *apaúgasma* which is derived from the verb *apaugázo*, meaning to emit brightness. It denotes brightness, effulgence, or a shining forth. The word "glory" comes from the Greek word *dóxa* which denotes splendor or magnificence. In this context, it is the very splendor and magnificence of God. The Son does not merely reflect the splendor and majesty of God, but emits it. Being God, He is the origin of the divine glory that radiates from Him. William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker write, "The word radiance is to be preferred to variations of the word 'reflection', which many translations provide. The moon receives its light from the sun and simply reflects these light beams to the earth. The moon itself does not possess nor emanate light, because it does not produce light. The sun as a heavenly body radiates its light in all its brightness and power to the earth. By way of comparison, we may see Christ as the radiant light coming from the Father as sunlight emanates from the sun" (NTC, Hebrews, p.29). *And the exact representation of His nature.* The phrase "exact representation" comes from the Greek word *charaktér*. It is derived from the verb *charásson* meaning to scratch or mark. William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker write, "The word translated as 'exact representation' refers to minted coins that bear the image of a sovereign or president. It refers to a precise reproduction of the original. The Son, then, is completely the same in His being as the Father. Nevertheless, even though an imprint is the same as the stamp that makes the impression, both exist separately" (NTC, Hebrews, p.30). The word "nature" comes from the Greek word *hupóstasis*. It literally refers to the "sediment or foundation set under a building" (WP, Vol.5, p.336). Figuratively and in this context, it may properly be translated "substance", "nature", or "being." Albert Barnes writes, "Here it properly refers to the essential nature of God - that which distinguishes Him from all other beings" (BN, Hebrews, p.27). John MacArthur writes, "Christ not only was God manifest, He was God in substance" (Hebrews, p.16). Charles Spurgeon writes, "Whatever God is, Christ is; the very likeness of God, the very Godhead of Godhead, the very Deity of Deity, is in Christ Jesus" (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.45, p.389). **(b) And upholds all things by the word of His power.** The word "upholds" comes from the Greek word *phéro* meaning to carry, bear, or uphold. The idea conveyed is not merely static, but dynamic. Joseph Thayer writes, "It suggests force or speed, as of persons borne in a ship over the sea, or of a gust of wind (GELNT, p.650). The Son not only upheld and upholds the universe, but is carrying creation to His desired end. He is absolute Lord over the universe He created and sustains. The phrase "by the word of His power" is important. The word *rhema* refers to the spoken word or that which is or has been uttered. The Son created all things by His word (1:2; 11:3), and by the same word He sustains it. William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker write, "The Son carries 'all things' to bring them to their destined end. And He does this by a mere utterance. Christ, the ruler of the universe, utters a word, and all things listen in obedience to His voice. No other motions are necessary, for the spoken word is sufficient" (NTC, Hebrews, p.30). Thomas Manton writes, "It is *dictum factum* with God [Latin: *dictum* = something said; a word + *factum* = that which is done; a deed]; if He speak but the word, it is all done" (Works, Vol.1, p.273). John Calvin goes even further to show the power of Christ when he writes, "Hence the 'word' here means simply a nod; and the sense is, that Christ who preserves the whole world by a nod only, did not yet refuse the office of effecting our purgation" (CC, Vol.22, p.37-38). Matthew Poole agrees with Calvin and writes, "Not by an articulate voice, but His beck, will, or powerful command, whereby He doth whatsoever He pleaseth; His absolute, powerful, irresistible word; He acts as easily as others speak" (MPC, Vol.3, p.810). Thomas Boston writes, "Thus the Son of God holds up all

By the Word of His Power

Albert Barnes writes, "The phrase 'word of His power' is a Hebraism, and means His efficient command. There could not be a more distinct ascription of divinity to the Son of God than this. He upholds or sustains all things - i.e. the universe. It is not merely the earth; not only its rocks, mountains, seas, animals, and men, but it is the universe - all distant worlds. How can He do this who is not God? He does it by His word - His command. What a conception! That a simple command should do all this: So the world was made when God 'spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast' (Psalm 33:9)... I know not how men can explain away this ascription of infinite power to the Redeemer. There can be no higher idea of omnipotence than to say, that He upholds all things by His word; and assuredly He who can hold up this vast universe, so that it does not sink into anarchy or into nothing, must be God (BN, Hebrews, p.29).

Charles Spurgeon writes, "Just think of it. This great world of ours is upheld by Christ's word. If He did not speak it into continued existence, it would go back into the nothingness from whence it sprang. There exists not a being who is independent of the Mediator, save only the ever-blessed Father and the Spirit... Only think of it; those innumerable worlds of light that make illimitable space to look as though it were sprinkled over with golden dust, would all die out, like so many expiring sparks, and cease to be, if the Christ who died on Calvary did not will that they should continue to exist. I cannot bring out of my text all the wondrous truths that it contains, I only wish I could" (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.45, p.390).

2. In the Colossians 1:15-17, is found still another powerful declaration of the Son's eternal nature and the glory which He shared with the Father from before His incarnation. Write your thoughts on following truths gleaned from the text. What do they tell us about the deity and eternal glory of the one who died on Calvary?
 - a. *The Son is the image of God (v.15).*

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in their being by His power, that they may not fall down into that abyss of nothing, from which the same power raised them up at first" (Works, Vol.6, p.227). There are two important truths revealed here. First, He sustains all things by His own power and not that borrowed from another. This is a great proof of His deity. Secondly, the universe exists in continuous dependance upon the Son. There is not even one "independent moment." Whether properly acknowledged or not, the universe owes everything to the Son. This is the same Son who died on Calvary!

Colossians 1:15-17 - Many scholars believe that this text was adapted from a first century hymn written in Christ's honor. It is important to note that this text focuses primarily on the Son's glorification after the incarnation. Nevertheless, it also reveals many truths about His glory even before the worlds were made. It gives us insight into the divine nature and supremacy of the One who "came in the "likeness of human flesh" (Romans 8:3), and died for the sake of His people. ***(a) He is the image of the invisible God.*** With regard to the majestic nature of this simple phrase, John Eadie writes, "The clause dazzles by its brightness, and awes by its mystery. We feel the warning - "Draw not nigh hither, for the place is holy ground." One trembles to subject

b. *The Son is the firstborn of all creation (v.15).*

c. *The Son is before all things (v.17).*

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such a declaration to the scrutiny of human reason, and feels as if he were rudely profaning it by the appliances of earthly erudition.”The word “image” comes from the Greek word *eikón* which is properly translated “image” or “likeness”. Albert Barnes writes, “It properly denotes that which is a copy or delineation of a thing; which accurately and fully represents it, in contradistinction from a rough sketch, or outline... The meaning here is, that the being and perfections of God are accurately and fully represented by Christ... This cannot refer to Him merely as incarnate, for some of the things affirmed of Him pertained to Him before His incarnation; and the idea is, that in all things Christ fairly represents to us the Divine nature and perfections” (BN, Colossians, p.246). A.T. Robertson writes, “Jesus was the very stamp of God the Father as He was before the incarnation (John 17:5) and is now (Philippians 2:5-11)” (WP, Vol.4, p.477). Again John Eadie writes, “Can any creature bear upon him the full impress of Divinity, and shine out in God’s stead to the universe without contraction of person or diminution of splendour? Could the Infinite dwarf itself into the finite, or the Eternal shrink into a limited cycle? May we not, therefore, anticipate a medium in harmony with the original? The lunar reflection is but a feeble resemblance of the solar glory. So that the image of God must be Divine as well as visible - of the same essence with the original. A visible God can alone be the image of God, possessing all the elements and attributes of His nature. The Divine can be fully pictured only in the Divine” (Colossians, p.44). **(b) *The firstborn of all creation.*** The word “firstborn” comes from the Greek word *protótokos* [*protos* = first + *tikto* = to bring forth], and has often be used erroneously to deny the full deity of Christ. However, the apostle did not use this term to show, as Arius wrongly argued, that the Son was a creature, but rather to prove that He held a rank far above all creation and was distinct from it. Any interpretation that would seek to make the Son a creature leads to absurdities. The Scriptures affirm that the Son is equal with God, the image of God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and the Reason or End for which all things were created. Can a creature be equal with God and bear His image? Can all of creation be created and sustained by a creature? Would God share His glory and allow a creature to be the great “End” of all things? Each question must be answered negatively. If the Scriptures teach that the Son is a creature, then He cannot properly hold the titles and honors given to Him in Scripture. The true meaning of “firstborn” with regard to the Son is clearly illustrated in Psalm 89:27, where the term is used to show rank rather than origin or birth. In reference to David, God declares, “I also shall make Him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” It is clear that David was the “firstborn” of God only in the sense that he was ranked above all other kings. In a similar, and yet more far-reaching manner, the Son of God is “firstborn” in the sense that He is over all creation. **(c) *He is before all things (v.17).*** Although the primary truth communicated

First Born but Not Created

Albert Barnes writes, “The first-born, or the eldest son, among the Hebrews as elsewhere, had peculiar privileges. He was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance. It has been, also, and especially in Oriental countries, a common thing for the eldest son to succeed to the estate and the title of his father. In early times, the firstborn son was the officiating priest in the family, in the absence or on the death of the father. There can be no doubt that the apostle here has reference to the usual distinctions and honours conferred on the firstborn, and means to say, that, among all the creatures of God, Christ occupied a pre-eminence similar to that. He does not say, that in all respects, He resembled the firstborn in a family; nor does he say that He Himself was a creature, for the point of His comparison does not turn on these things, and what he proceeds to affirm respecting Him is inconsistent with the idea of His being a created Being Himself. He that ‘created all things that are in heaven and that are in earth’ was not Himself created. That the apostle did not mean to represent Him as a creature is also manifest from the reason which he assigns why He is called the firstborn. ‘He is the image of God, and the firstborn of every creature, for by Him were all things created.’ That is, He sustains the elevated rank of the firstborn, or a high eminence over the creation, because by Him ‘all things were created in heaven and in earth.’ The language here used, also, does not fairly imply that He was a creature, or that He was, in nature and rank, one of those in relation to whom it is said He was the firstborn... The meaning then is, that Christ sustains the most exalted rank in the universe; He is pre-eminent above all others” (Colossians, p.246-247).

John Eadie writes, “The first-born was his father’s representative, and acted in his father’s name. Christ stands out as the First-born, all transactions are with Him, and they are equivalent to transactions with the Sovereign Father... [The universe’s] existence and arrangements are His, and the supervision of it belongs to Him. He is the God who busies Himself in its affairs, and with whom it has to do. He is its First-born, its chief and governor. As the first-born of the house is he to whom its management is entrusted, so the First-born of the whole creation is He who is its governor and Lord, and whose prerogative it is to exhibit to the universe the image and attributes of the unseen Jehovah. He is manifested Deity, appearing, speaking, working, ruling, as in patriarchal times when He descended in a temporary humanity, and held familiar discourse with the world’s ‘grey fathers,’ and as under the Mosaic economy, of whose theocracy He was the head, of whose temple He was the God, and of whose oracles He was the inspirer. Now He is exalted to unbounded sovereignty, as ‘Lord of all,’ rolling onwards the mighty and mysterious wheels of a universal providence, without halting or confusion; seated as His Father’s deputy on a throne of unbounded dominion, which to this world is its tribunal of judgment - wearing the name at which every knee bows, ‘of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth’ - the acting President of the universe, and, therefore, ‘the First-born of every creature.’ His Father’s love to Him has given Him this pre-eminence, this ‘double portion’... It is plainly implied at the same time that He existed before all creatures, for He has never stood in any other or secondary relation to the universe” (Colossians p.51-52).

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here is that the Son existed prior to any work of creation, His supremacy and preeminence over creation are also suggested. F.F. Bruce writes, “The words not only declare His temporal priority to the universe, but also suggest His primacy over it” (NICNT, Colossians, p.200). Richard Melick writes, “Since for the ancients priority in time often meant priority of person, this argument not only stresses Jesus’ role in creation, but also gives Him a preeminent position with respect to creation” (American Commentary, Vol.32, p.220). John Gill writes, “And He is before all things... in dignity, being preferable to angels and men in His nature, names, offices, and works, and worthy of more honour than all creatures” (EONT, Vol.9, p.173). John Eadie writes, “He who made all, necessarily existed before all. Prior to His creative work, He had filled the unmeasured periods of an unbeginning eternity. Matter is not eternal - is not the dark and necessary circumference of His bright Essence. He pre-existed it, and called it into being. Everything is posterior to Him, and nothing coeval with Him. And the present tense is employed - ‘He is,’ not ‘He was’ (John 8:58). His is unchanging being. At every point of His existence

d. *The Son is the Creator of all things (v.16)*

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it may be said of Him, He is. He is all that He was, and all that He will be - and comprises in Him the birth and end of time” (Colossians, p.58). The Son has always held first place over all things in preeminence, honor, and glory. He was never one among many, but was always the unique Son of God, having existed before all things and holding the “highest rank” above all things. When compared to the eternal Son of God, the most ancient creature in heaven is a babe, the most splendid is dressed in rags, and the highest ranking is a servant. **(d) For by Him all things were created (v.16)**. The phrase “by Him” is derived from the Greek phrase *en auto* which may also be translated “in Him”. If the meaning is “by Him”, it indicates that the Son was the agent or instrument of creation. The more probable meaning is “in Him”, and indicates that the Son was the sphere in which creation took place. Everything in heaven and earth has to do with Him; they are directly related to Him and stand in relation to Him. A. T. Robertson writes, “The whole of creative activity is summed up in Christ including the angels in heaven and everything on earth... It is a Christo-centric universe” (Word Pictures, Vol.4, p.478). William Hendriksen writes, “All things were created in Him, that is, with reference to the Son, the firstborn. As two walls and the bricks in these walls are arranged in relation to the cornerstone, from which they derive their angle of direction, so it was in relation to Christ that all things were originally created. He is their Point of Reference” (NTC, Colossians, p.73). **All things have been created through Him (v.16)**. The writer of Hebrews explains this text when he writes, that the Son was the agent or instrument through whom God the Father made the world (Hebrews 1:3). However, it is important to understand that the Son was not an inferior agent, but a co-equal agent with the Father in creation. This is proven by the Apostle John when he writes, “All things came into being through Him [i.e. the Son], and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3). Charles Spurgeon writes, “How can anyone ever read this passage, and yet say that Christ Jesus is only a man? By what twisting of words can such language as this be applied to the most eminent prophet or apostle who ever lived? Surely He must be God by whom all things were created, and by whom all things consist” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Vol.56, p.35). **Both in the heavens and on earth**. John Eadie writes, “Christ’s creative work was no local or limited operation; it was not bounded by this little orb; its sweep surrounds the universe... Every form and kind of matter, simple or complex - the atom and the star, the sun and the cloud - every grade of life from the worm to the angel - every order of intellect and being around and above us, the splendours of heaven and the nearer phenomena of earth, are the product of the First-born” (Colossians, p.53). **Visible and invisible**. All creation owes its existence to the Son. The material/physical realm of men and the immaterial/spiritual realm of angels. **Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities**. This is a reference to heaven’s angelic hierarchy. The highest ruling angels and the most splendid creatures owe their very existence to the eternal Son of God. He is their Maker, Sustainer, and absolute Sovereign. John Eadie writes, “The object of the apostle is to show that Jesus is the Creator, not simply of lower modes of being, but the higher essences of the Universe. Yes, those beings, so illustrious as to be seated on ‘thrones;’ so noble as to be styled ‘dominions;’ so elevated as to be greeted with the title of ‘principalities;’ and so mighty as to merit the appellation of ‘powers;’ these, so like God as to be called ‘gods’ themselves (Psalm 97:7), bow to the Son of God as the one author of their existence, position, and prerogative. As no atom is too minute, so no creature is

The Glory of the Son in Creation

by John Eadie (Colossians, p.57)

“Had the Divine Being remained alone, His glory would have been unseen and His praises unsung. But He longed to impart of His own happiness to creatures fitted to possess it - to fill so many vessels out of that ‘foundation of life’ which wells out from His bosom. Therefore Christ fitted up these ‘all things’ ‘for Himself,’ in order that He might exhibit His glory while He diffused happiness through creatures of innumerable worlds, and enabled them to behold His mirrored brightness and reflect it; that He might occupy a throne of supreme and unapproachable sovereignty; and show to the universe His indescribable grace, which, in stooping to save one of its worlds, has thrown a new luster over the Divine holiness, and proved the unshaken harmony and stability of the Divine administration.”

e. *The Son is the Sustainer of all things (v.17).*

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too gigantic for His plastic [i.e. creative] hand” (Colossians, p.54-55). (*e*) *In Him all things hold together (v.17)*. The phrase, “hold together” is derived from the Greek word *sunístano* which means to place together, to cohere, or to hold together. All creation is held together by the Son. He is the great Creator and the great Conserver. His importance to the universe was not momentary, but constant. He is the “moment by moment” Sustainer (Geneva Study Bible, p.1886). All creation exists in utter and total dependence upon the Son. It will never wean itself away from Him. The writer of Hebrews tells us that He “upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). The power and glory of the Son of God is such that He upheld and upholds the existence of all things by one command from His mouth. He is not like the mythological Atlas who grows under the weight of single world, but the Son upholds countless worlds and all their inhabitants with the ease of a single word. He created all things with a word and sustains all things with the same. Albert Barnes writes, “The meaning is, that they are kept in the present state; their existence, order, and arrangement are continued by His power. If unsupported by Him, they would fall into disorder, or sink back to nothing. If this be the proper interpretation, then it is the ascription to Christ of infinite power—for nothing less could be sufficient to uphold the universe; and of infinite wisdom—for this is needed to preserve the harmonious action of the suns and systems of which it is composed. None could do this but one who is Divine; and hence we see the reason why He is represented as the image of the invisible God. He is the great and glorious and ever-active Agent by whom the perfections of God are made known” (BN, Colossians, p.249-250). Thomas Manton writes, “He is not the bare instrument of God in sustaining the creature, but as a co-equal agent. As He made the world, and with the Father created all things, so He doth support and order all things. It is as well the work of the Son as of the Father, for He is God, equal with Him in glory and power: ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work’ (John 5:17). And He hath a command of all the creatures, that they can do nothing without Him, how much oserver they attempt to do against Him” (Works, Vol.1, p.450).

The Great Sustainer of the Universe

John Eadie writes, “All things were brought together, and are still held together in Him. The energy which created is alone competent to sustain, every successive moment of providence being, as it were, a successive of creation. In Him this sustentation of all things reposes. He is the condition of their primary and prolonged being. What a vast view of Christ’s dignity! His arm upholds the universe, and if it were withdrawn, all things would fade into their original non-existence. His great empire depends upon Him in all its provinces - life, mind, sensation, and matter; atoms beneath us to which geology has not descended, and stars beyond us to which astronomy has never penetrated. He feeds the sun with fuel, and veils the moon in beauty. He guides the planets on their journey, and keeps them from collisions and disorder... Thus that universal balance is preserved, the derangement of which would throw around the globe the pall of death. Order is never violated, the tree yields fruit ‘after its kind,’ and according to the original edict. Evening and morning alternate in sure and swift succession. The mighty and minute are alike to Him whose supervision embraces the extinction of a world and the fall of the sparrow. The ‘creeping things innumerable in the great and wide sea’ look up to Him, and He opens His hand and ‘they are filled with good;’ as well the leviathan who is ‘made to play therein,’ as the insect that builds its coral cell - first its dwelling and then its tomb. Every pulsation of our hearts depends on His sovereign beneficence who feeds us and clothes us. The intellect of the cherub reflects His light, and the fire of the seraph is but the glow of His love. All things which He has evoked into being have their continued subsistence in Him” (Colossians, p.59-60).

Matthew Poole writes, “Then follows this further argument of Christ’s excellency and perfection, that He is not only the Creator or Founder, but likewise the Supporter or Upholder, of all things whatsoever are created, yea, even of the most excellent and useful of them, who in Him do live and move (Acts 17:28 Hebrews 1:3). He being the conservant as well as procreant cause of the heavens and earth, with all things therein (MPC, Vol.3 p.709).

John Gill writes, “He upholds all things by the word of His power; the heavens have their stability and continuance from Him; the pillars of the earth are bore up by Him, otherwise that and the inhabitants of it would be dissolved; the angels in heaven are confirmed in their estate by Him, and have their standing and security in Him; the elect of God are in His hands, and are His peculiar care and charge, and therefore shall never perish; yea, all mankind live and move, and have their being in Him; the whole frame of nature would burst asunder and break in pieces, was it not held together by Him; every created being has its support from Him, and its consistence in Him; and all the affairs of Providence relating to all creatures are governed, directed, and managed by Him, in conjunction with the Father and the blessed Spirit” (EONT, Vol.9, p.173).

J.L. Dagg writes, “An architect may build a house, which, when once completed, may stand, independent of his labor and skill, a monument of both, when he has fallen by the hand of death; and we are prone to conceive that the work of God might equally stand, if left to itself, without His constant care and support. But the cases are widely different. The human architect finds the materials which he uses already in existence; and his whole work consists in changing their form, and combining them in a new order. The substances used did not receive their existence from him; and the independent being which they possessed before the architect touched them, they retain after his hand has been withdrawn. But the very substance, as well as the form, of all created things, came from the hand of God; and the withdrawal of that hand would leave their being unsupported, or the expression, ‘upholding all things’ has no appropriate meaning” (Manual of Theology, p.116).

f. *The Son is the Great End or Purpose of all things (v.16).*

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(f) All things have been created through Him and for Him (v.16). The eternal glory of the Son is seen in the fact that all things were made *through* Him and *for* His glory and good pleasure. His preeminence was such that entire worlds were made for His delight and all things found their legitimate end or purpose in Him? He was first, and all things came after Him; He had preeminence, and all things were subordinate to Him. He was both the author or instrument of creation, and creation's goal. He was, is, and will always be the Cause and Reason of all things. Matthew Henry writes, "Being created by Him, they were created for Him; being made by His power, they were made according to His pleasure and for His praise" (MHC, Vol.6, p.753). John Gill writes, "For His pleasure, that He may take delight and complacency in them, and in His own perfections displayed by them; and for His service and use" (EONT, Vol.9, p.173). Edward Payson writes, "The assertion, that all things were created by Him, is sufficient to prove His divinity; for He who built all things, must be God. But when in addition to this, we are assured that all things were created for Him, we have a proof of His divinity, which is if possible still more convincing; for supposing for a moment that God could and would employ a creature to perform the work of creation, can we suppose that He would permit that creature to create all things for himself, for his own pleasure and glory? Surely not. God has said, I am Jehovah, that is my name, and my glory I will not give to another. But if Christ be not God, all the divine glory is given to another. The glory of creating all things, of upholding all things, of governing all things, of redeeming and judging the world, is all given to Christ. Nay more, all things were created on purpose that the glory resulting from all might be given to Christ. If then Christ be not Jehovah, Jehovah's glory is all given to another, and nothing remains to Himself" (Works, Vol.2, p.49). Thomas Manton writes, "Now these expressions do imply His eternal power and Godhead. He hath been before all things were made, and shall be when all things in the world are ended. He is the first being from whom all things are, and the last end to whom all things are to be referred. He is the efficient and final cause of all the creatures" (Works, Vol.1, p.436). Thus is the glory of the Son of God. Such truths make the incarnation and humiliation of the Son on Calvary that much greater. It is a divine work that far exceeds the comprehension of men and angels, that the Son who bore such glory should become a man and die for those of such minute glory and worth in comparison to Him.

All Things for the Son

by Charles Spurgeon (The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Vol.56, p.28-31)

Angels Created for the Son

“Angels were created by Christ, and for Him, not merely to admire and adore Him, but actually to serve Him. Truly did the psalmist write, ‘who maketh His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire;’As for the fallen angels, who rebelled against God, and who have sunk for ever into hopeless alienation from Him, even these were created by Christ, and for Him; and though they hate Him, they shall be compelled to obey Him, and to own that He is Lord over all. Even their malice against the people of God shall only draw out His love toward them, and manifest His vigilance, and wisdom and power on their behalf.”

The World Created for the Son

“The eternal *Logos* was the Creator of this lower world as well as of the realms on high. There is neither hill nor valley, sparkling fountain nor foaming sea which He hath not made. ‘The sea is His, and He made it: and His hands formed the dry land.’ Truly is He the Creator of this earth, and it was formed for Him as well as by Him. It was specially made to be the place of residence for His people, the place on which they would fall through sin, and the place on which they would be restored through the redemption accomplished there by Christ Jesus on the cross of Calvary. This world was created by Christ as the place where He Himself would live and labor, and suffer, and die. He would be laid as a baby in an earthly manger, as a boy and a man He would walk through the streets and lanes of this world, He would fare as human beings fared, and suffer as the dwellers upon the earth suffered, though never through any sin of His own. I might truly say that the whole world was created for Calvary. ‘Why leap ye, ye high hills?’ That little mound outside Jerusalem’s gate, explains your very existence. The world itself was created that Christ might die on Calvary. This earth was to be a sort of stage upon which Christ was to take the principal part in the greatest drama that the whole universe has ever witnessed. The world was made by Him, and for Him, and it will remain until His great purpose of love and mercy is fully accomplished.”

Men Created for the Son

“And to come to ourselves, men were created by Christ, and for Him. Perhaps the Creator resolved to manifest His power and skill in a new order of created beings. He had made pure spirits, and He had made material substances; He had created various forms of life, rising from the vegetable to the animal; but He resolved that there should be a spirit created that should be affiliated with materialism, and that this spirit should, in the end, when it had passed through all its graduations, become the most wonderful creature in the whole universe, a creature that should know evil, not merely by report, but by actual personal experience; — a creature that should, after that, be delivered from the power of evil, and so should be bound to God by ties of gratitude so strong that it should never revolt from Him again. This creature, knowing evil and knowing good, strengthened by divine grace, should, of its own free will, cling to the good and eschew the evil, and should be for ever God’s best ally against all revolt in His dominions; for this creature, though it had known evil, was to become a child of God, and to be a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. These creatures, partly spiritual and partly material, were to have at their head Christ Jesus, who was to be the model of them all, and they were to be like Him, and to be His companions for ever; and to be to Him more than companions, to be His friends, with whom, He might hold familiar intercourse; and to be to Him even more than friends, to be united to Him in conjugal relationship, to be so completely one with Him that they should be “members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones,” that His life should be their life, and that their life should be derived from Him.”

3. In Isaiah 6:1-10 is recorded one of Scripture's most graphic and majestic portrayals of God and His glory, yet with further investigation we discover that Isaiah's vision of God was a vision of the Son! Read through Isaiah 6:1-5, until you are familiar with its contents and then answer the following questions. In doing so, you will gain further insight into the eternal glory of the One who became flesh and died for His people.

a. *According to Isaiah 6:1, whom did the prophet Isaiah see?*

b. *According to John 12:41, whom did Isaiah see? Explain your answer.*

Study Notes

Isaiah 6:1-5 - (a) *I saw the Lord... (v.1)*. Here the title "Lord" is translated from the Hebrew word *adonay*, but in verse 3, it is translated from the Hebrew word *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. The one Isaiah sees is God. This statement does not contradict the many Scriptures which declare that no man has seen or can see God (Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 4:24; I Timothy 6:16). Isaiah does not record that he saw the divine essence of God in all His glory, but as Albert Barnes writes, "a manifestation or vision of Jehovah, a striking symbolic representation of Him, a symbol of His presence" (BN, Isaiah, Vol.1, p.137, 141). Stephen Charnock agrees that the prophets of old "saw not the essence of God, but some images and figures of Him proportioned to their sense or imagination. The essence of God no man ever saw, nor can see" (Attributes of God, Vol.1, p.185). John Calvin writes, "We ought to be aware that, when God exhibited Himself to the view of the Fathers, He never appeared such as He actually is, but such as the capacity of men could receive. Though men may be said to creep on the ground, or at least dwell far below the heavens, there is no absurdity in supposing that God comes down to them in such a manner as to cause some kind of mirror to reflect the rays of His glory. There was, therefore, exhibited to Isaiah such a form as enabled him, according to his capacity, to perceive the inconceivable majesty of God; and thus he attributes to God a throne, a robe, and a bodily appearance" (CC, Vol.7, p.200). Again Barnes writes, "It is remarkable that Isaiah attempts no representation of Jehovah Himself. He mentions His robes; the throne; the seraphim; but mentions no form or appearance of God Himself. In this there is great sublimity. There is enough mentioned to fill the mind with awe; there is enough concealed to impress as deeply with a sense of the Divine majesty" (BN, Isaiah, Vol.1, p.137). **(b)** *These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him*. Albert Barnes writes, "John affirms that it was the glory of the Messiah that Isaiah saw, and yet Isaiah affirms that it was JEHOVAH; and from this the inference is irresistible that John regarded Jesus as the Jehovah whom

c. According to Isaiah 6:1, how is the Son of God described? What does this tell us of His glory?

d. According to Isaiah 6:2, what is the response of the Seraphims (possibly the highest ranking beings in creation) to the Son of God? What does this teach us about His glory and preeminence?

Study Notes

Isaiah saw. The name Jehovah is never, in the Scriptures, applied to a man, or an angel, or to any creature. It is the peculiar, incommunicable name of God... This passage is therefore conclusive proof that Christ is equal with the Father” (BN, John, p.314). James Montgomery Boice writes, “What Isaiah saw was the closest thing in all Jewish writings or tradition to an actual ‘portrait’ of the living and holy God. Yet that vision with all its breathtaking splendor John applies to Jesus. Without questioning, it would seem, John takes the most exalted vision of God in the Old Testament and says that it was a portrait of a carpenter from Nazareth who was about to be crucified - so great is John’s opinion of Him” (Foundations of the Christian Faith, p.273). **(c) Sitting on a throne.** These words communicate the settled, undisturbed sovereignty of Him who “does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth” (Daniel 4:35); “who works all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). **Lofty and exalted.** The Son is seen above all authority and power in heaven and on earth. Matthew Henry writes, “This throne is high, and lifted up above all competition and contradiction” (MHC, Vol.4, p.38). **With the train of His robe filling the temple.** The robe which filled the temple seems to portray the expanse of the Son’s majesty and the extent of His sovereignty - they reached everywhere and filled everything. F. Delitzsch writes, “He saw the Lord, and what more he saw was the all-filling robe of the indescribable One. As far as the eye of the seer could look at first, the ground was covered by this splendid robe. There was consequently no room for any one to stand” (COT, Vol.7, p.190). Matthew Poole writes, “His glorious robes reached down to the bottom of the temple, and were spread abroad in the temple, which was an evidence of a more than ordinary majesty” (COHB, Vol.2, p.337). **(d) Seraphim.** This is the only passage of Scriptures where a reference to the seraphim is found. Seraphim means “burning or fiery ones.” Stanley Horton writes, “Their purity was indicated as they reflected the dazzling brilliance of the glory of God to such a high degree that they seemed to be on fire” (Complete Biblical Library, Isaiah, p.55). Due to their proximity to the throne of God it may be deduced that they are the grandest and holiest of created beings. Charles Spurgeon

All Creatures Compared to the Son

by George Swinnock (*Works, Vol.4, p.502-503*)

“He is so excellent that even angels veil their faces in His presence. The excellent cherubims and seraphims, who are spotless in their natures, and faultless in their lives, who are the highest and honourablest, and ancientest house of the creation, who, as His special friends and favourites, are allowed to wait on Him continually, to behold Him face to face, and to enjoy Him fully and perfectly, yet these angels veil their faces before Him, as it were, ashamed of their starlight in the presence of the sun, and their drops in the presence of the ocean... To cover the face is a sign or fruit of bashfulness, as in Rebekah (Genesis 24:65). The face of an angel is void of all spots and wrinkles, it is full of beauty and brightness, a most excellent face... Yet this face, as excellent as it is, they cover, as it were, ashamed of it before that God who alone is excellent.”

Study Notes

writes, “You ask me to tell you something about these seraphim; how can I? They have covered their faces, and covered their feet. Since nothing is to be seen, what can I tell you? Neither would it be right for us to speak concerning them, for manifestly it is their desire to be hidden. Who will violate their wish to be concealed? They covered their faces, they covered their feet, and therein they did as good as say, ‘Look not on us, but look on Him who sits upon the throne, whose attendants we are’” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.31, p.317). *Stood above Him*. A possible translation is “stood above it [*i.e.* the robe].” F. Delitzsch writes, “The seraphim should not indeed tower above the head of Him that sat upon the throne, but they hovered above the robe belonging to Him with which the hall was filled” (COT, Vol.7, p.191). *Each having six wings*. G. Rawlinson writes, “The general idea of the six wings was probably rapid flight, the carrying out of God’s behests ‘with speed swiftly’. But in the divine presence, the wings were applied to a different use. One pair veiled the seraph’s head from the intolerable effulgence of Divine glory; another concealed the feet, soiled in their various ministrations, and unmeet for the all-pure presence; the third pair alone sustained the seraph in mid-air, as he hovered in readiness to depart on any errand on which Jehovah might send him” (Pulpit Commentary, Vol.10, p.107). *With two he covered his face*. To cover one’s face was a common symbol of both reverence and humility. Matthew Poole writes, “Covered his face, out of profound reverence, as being so sensible of the infinite distance between God and him, that he durst not presume to look directly upon Him, and judged himself neither able nor worthy to behold the brightness of His glory” (COHB, Vol.2, p.337). John Gill writes that they were “unable to look upon the dazzling glory and infinite perfections of His being,” and so they did as Elijah who “wrapped his face in a mantle, when he heard the still small voice of the Lord (I Kings 19:12-13) and as Moses before Him did, being afraid to look upon God (Exodus 3:6)” (EONT, Vol.5, p.35). John Calvin writes, “Even angels cannot endure God’s brightness, and that they are dazzled by it in the same manner as when we attempt to gaze upon the radiance of the sun” (CC, Vol.7, p.203). Matthew Henry writes, “Though angels’ faces, doubtless, are much fairer than those of the children of men (Acts 6:15), yet, in the presence of God, they cover them, because they cannot bear the dazzling lustre of the divine glory, and because, being conscious of an infinite distance from the divine perfection, they are ashamed to show their faces before the holy God” (MHC, Vol.4, p.39). *And with two he covered his feet*. Another gesture of reverence toward God. It is believed by some that in covering the feet, the seraphim were recognizing that they were creatures and not gods. Thomas Boston writes, “Even the confirmed angels cover their feet with their wings, as if they would tell us that perfect created holiness is but a dark and smoky light before uncreated holiness” (Works, Vol.10, p.113). *And with two he flew*. The greatest angels in glory were at the beck and call of the Son of God. John Calvin writes, “The two wings with which the angels fly mean nothing else than their ready and cheerful performance of the commandments of God” (CC, Vol.7, p.203).

- e. According to Isaiah 6:3-4, what is the Seraphims great declaration concerning the Son of God? What does this teach us about His glory and preeminence?

Study Notes

(e) *And one called out to another and said.* The idea of continuation is communicated here. One “kept calling out to another,” as in Revelation 4:8 where we read, “...and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy.’” F. Delitzsch writes, “Whilst these seraphim hovered above on both sides of Him that sat upon the throne, and therefore formed two opposite choirs, each arranged in a semicircle, they presented antiphonal worship to Him that sat upon the throne... The meaning is not that they all lifted up their voice in concert at one and the same time, but that there was a continuous and unbroken antiphonal song. One commenced, and the others responded” (COT, Vol.7, p.192). “*Holy, Holy, Holy.* The word “holy” comes from the Hebrew word *qadosh* which communicates “separation.” It refers to that which is set apart, separate, or unique, in contrast to the common or profane. In the Scriptures, the holiness of God refers to His uniqueness, transcendence, and separation. In the midst of creation, He stands alone. No one is like Him and no one can be compared to Him (Isaiah 40:18). To compare the Son with even the most splendid created being would be infinitely more absurd than comparing a miniscule spark to the midday sun. He is incomparable! The three-fold declaration of the Son’s holiness (often called the *trisagion*) is the strongest form of the superlative in the Hebrew language. It serves to exalt this one attribute above them all. Of all things that may rightly be said about God and His Son, the most essential and foundational is that they are holy. Charles Spurgeon writes, “Being pure in heart they [the seraphim] gazed on the Lord with opened eye and adored His holiness. Their whole souls were filled with the contemplation of that one all-embracing attribute; and in responsive song they said each one to his fellow, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts’... This is the supreme glory of Christ, that in Him is seen the holiness of God.” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.31, p.317). Charles Hodge writes, “Seraphim round about the throne who cry day and night, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts’, give expression to the feelings of all unfallen rational creatures... They are the representatives of the whole universe, in offering this perpetual homage to the divine holiness” (Systematic Theology, Vol.1, p.413). *Is the LORD of hosts.* The title “Lord” is translated from the proper Hebrew name for God - *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. This is a powerful reference to the deity of the Son. Isaiah testifies that He beheld a vision of Yahweh and the apostle John testifies that Isaiah beheld the Son. Two inspired writings from the Old and New Testaments join together to testify of the Son’s deity. The word “hosts” comes from the Hebrew word *tsaba* which may refer to a host or army of men, angels, planets, or stars. It may even refer to the whole of creation. In any case, it speaks of the Son’s universal lordship and absolute sovereignty. Every created thing is under His dominion, and the combined power of all created things is under His rule. If all creation in heaven and earth came together as one mighty host and arrayed the full force of its might against the Son’s rule, it would have no more affect than if the weakest among them stood alone. They would not have the strength of a mite beating itself against a world of granite. *The whole earth is full of His glory.* As the temple was filled with His robe, the earth is filled with His glory. There is no place beyond the reach of His omniscience and sovereignty. There is no place where His glory is not manifest. Albert Barnes

A Correct View of the Holiness of God

The word holy comes from the Hebrew word *qadosh* which means, “separated”, “marked off”, “placed apart”, “withdrawn from common use”. When applied to God, it primarily refers to His “separateness” or “transcendence”.

The word “transcendence” comes from the Latin verb *transcendere* (*trans*, over + *scandere*, to climb) which means to go beyond, rise above, or exceed. It means that God is above all His creation and totally distinct from every created being. This distinction is not merely quantitative (the same, but greater), but qualitative (The Son is a completely different being - He is God). Regardless of their splendor, all other beings in heaven and on earth are mere creatures, but the Lord is God - separate, transcendent, and unapproachable. The most splendid seraph is no more like God than the smallest worm that crawls upon the earth. He is incomparable! It is for this reason, the Scriptures declare:

“Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? - Exodus 15:11

“There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God. - I Samuel 2:2

“To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?” - Isaiah 40:18

It is important to understand that although the holiness of God often refers to His moral excellence or purity, it is not to be limited to such. He is holy, separate, or transcendent in *everything* that He is. The triune nature of God is an expression of His holiness. There is no other being so incomprehensible, mysterious, and wonderful as He. To say that God is Spirit is an expression of His holiness. There is no other being so free and unhindered. The truth of God’s perfection, eternal nature, self-existence, immutability, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience are all expressions of His holiness. There is no other being so great and worthy of reverence. God is holy in all that He is! This truth is especially brought to light in Isaiah’s vision. Robert Reymond writes,

“Now when Isaiah saw this awesome scene and heard these four creatures singing, he was immediately struck with his moral impurity. But what is often overlooked is that the seraphs are sinless creatures, and yet in the presence of God the Son they feel it necessary continually to cover themselves all over by their wings. Clearly, for them His ‘holiness’ was His ‘separateness’ from them, ...His transcendence over against their creatureliness” (New Systematic Theology, p.194).

What should be the first thing that enters into our minds when we hear or read of the holiness of God? We should have great and overwhelming thoughts of Him as infinitely beyond all others in every virtue, strength, and beauty. In all that He is there is none Holy like the Lord, none who is like Him among the gods, and none to whom He may be compared!

*Holy, holy, holy!
Tho’ the darkness hide Thee,
Tho’ the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;
Only Thou art holy;
There is none beside Thee,
Perfect in pow’r, in love, and purity.*

Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

- f. *According to Isaiah 6:5 what was Isaiah's response to presence of the one who sat on the throne? What does his response communicate to us about the person and majesty of the Son of God?*

Study Notes

writes, "All things which He has made on the earth express His glory. His wisdom and goodness, His power and holiness, are seen everywhere. The whole earth, with all its mountains, seas, streams, trees, animals, and men, lay the foundation of His praise" (BN, Isaiah, Vol.1, p.140). *And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out.* The trembling was caused either by the power of the proclamation or the truth of it. Not even the heavens can bear with or contain the glory of the Son. F. Delitzsch writes, "The building was filled with reverential awe throughout its whole extent, and in its deepest foundation" (COT, Vol.7, p.194). *While the temple was filling with smoke.* This is another visible manifestation of the Son's awesome presence. A similar manifestation of God's glory was seen when Solomon dedicated the temple and the priests were unable to minister because "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord (I Kings 8:10-11). (f) *Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined!* This is the cry of a man filled with an overwhelming sense of despair. The phrase "I am ruined" is translated from the Hebrew word *dama* which means to cease, cut off, destroy, or perish. In the presence of the Son, the prophet Isaiah is reduced to nothing, as one who ceases to exist, who is cut off or destroyed. He is broken into pieces by a glimpse of the glory of God in the person of the Son. In light of the seraphim's response, Isaiah's reaction is not extreme. If the Son's glorious presence has such an effect on the greatest of heavenly creatures, why would it not crush those made of clay? John Calvin writes, "There was no feeling in him which was not overpowered by the presence of God, so that, like one who had lost his senses, he willingly plunged himself in darkness, or rather, like one who despaired of life, he of his own accord chose to die" (CC, Vol.7, p.198). John Trapp writes, "Infinite is the distance and disproportion between the high and holy God and me, a loathsome leper, a sordid wretch. The nearer a man draweth to God, the more doth rottenness enter into his bones (Habakkuk 3:16). 'Now mine eyes have seen thee,' saith Job, 'therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes' (Job 42:6). 'Depart from me, Lord,' saith Peter, 'for I am a sinful man' (Luke 5:8)... Who art Thou, Lord? and what am I? Thou art an abyss of essence, truth, and glory, and I an abyss of nothing, of sin, and of misery" (CONT, Vol.3, p.310). F. Delitzsch writes "To stand here in front of Jehovah of hosts, the exalted King, to whom everything does homage, and to be obliged to remain mute in the consciousness of deep uncleanness, excited within him the annihilating anguish of self-condemnation" (COT, Vol.7, p.196). *Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.* Octavius Winslow writes, "What prostrated his soul so low in the dust? What filled him with such humility? What overwhelmed him with this keen sense of his sin? It was the unclouded view he had of the essential glory of the Son of God. And it will always be thus" (Evening Thoughts, p.501).

Christ in Proverbs 8:22-31

W.J. Deane and S.T. Taylor write, "It is impossible to decide what was the exact view of the writer with regard to the wisdom of which he speaks so eloquently; but there can be no doubt that he was guided in his diction so as to give expression to the idea of Him whom St. John calls the Word of God. The language used is not applicable to an impersonal quality, an abstract faculty of God. It describes the nature and office of a Person; and who that Person is we learn from the later Scriptures, which speak of Christ as the 'Wisdom of God' (Luke 11:49) and 'the Power of God and the Wisdom of God' (I Corinthians 1:24). If we confine our inquiry to the question - What was in the mind of the author when he edited this wonderful section concerning Wisdom? We shall fail to apprehend its true significance, and shall be disowning the influence of the Holy Spirit, which inspires all Scripture, which prompted the holy men who spake to utter words of which they knew not the full spiritual significance, and which could only be understood by subsequent revelation. There is, then, nothing forced or incongruous in seeing in this episode a portraiture of the Second Person of the blessed Trinity, the essential Wisdom of God personified, the Logos of later books, and of the Gospel. This interpretation obtained universally in the Church in the earliest times, and has commended itself to the most learned and reverent of modern commentators. That much which was contained in their own utterances was unknown to the prophets of old, that they did not fully perceive the mysteries which they darkly enunciated, we learn from St. Peter, who tells us that they who prophesied of the grace of Christ sought and searched diligently what the Spirit of God that was in them did point unto, and were shown that not unto themselves, but unto us, they ministered those things, secrets which angels themselves desire to look into - I Peter 1:10" (Pulpit Commentary, Vol.9, p.164-165).

Edward Payson writes, "No attentive reader of the New Testament need be reminded how striking this language corresponds with what is revealed respecting the Word, who was in the beginning with God; who is in the bosom of the Father; of whom the Father said, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, and who was made flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ. Expositors are therefore doubtless right in saying, as they generally have done, that it is the eternal Word, or the divine nature of Christ, who speaks in this chapter, in the character of Wisdom. In the passage selected for our text, this divine personage gives us an interesting account of His feelings and employments previous to His appearance in the flesh... This, my hearers, is a very remarkable passage" (Works, Vol.3, p.72-73).

Charles Bridges writes, "So glorious are the rays of eternal supreme Deity, distinct personality, and essential unity, that the mysterious, every-blessed Being - 'the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God' (John 1:1-2) - now undoubtedly stands before us" (Geneva Series, Proverbs, p.79).

Alexander Maclaren writes, "One cannot feel how in all this most striking disclosure of the depths of God, a deeper mystery is on the verge of revelation. There is here, as we have said, a personification, but there seems to be a Person shining through, or dimly discerned moving behind the curtain... The personified Wisdom of Proverbs is the personal Word of John's prologue. John almost quotes the former when he says 'the same was in the beginning with God,' for his word recalls the grand declaration, 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way... I was set up in the beginning or ever the earth was'" (Expositions, Vol.3, p.139-140).

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by whom the Father resolved to do all His works, first to create, and then to uphold, and govern, and judge, and afterwards to redeem and save the world; all which works are particularly ascribed to the Son of God" (MPC, Vol.2, p.228).

c. *Then I was beside Him, as a master workman (v.30).*

d. *And I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him (v.30).*

Study Notes

(c) *Then I was beside Him, as a master workman.* The phrase “master workman” comes from the Hebrew word *'amown* which may be translated architect, skilled workman, or master workman. All of these designations find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Charles Bridges writes, “The Son was there in the beginning of creation, yet unlike the angels, He was not an interested spectator (Job 38:4-7), but an efficient cause (Geneva Series, Proverbs, p.80-81). John Gill writes, “Christ was a co-worker, a worker with God in the making of all things, the heavens, earth, and sea, and all in there; not as an instrument, but as a co-efficient cause of them; which is a proof of His proper deity, and equality with God” (EONT, Vol.4, p.384). Matthew Henry writes, “He not only had a being before the world, but He was present, not as a spectator, but as the architect, when the world was made. God silenced and humbled Job by asking him, ‘Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who hath laid the measures thereof?’ (Job 38:4). But here the Son of God, referring, as it should seem, to the discourse God had with Job, declares Himself to have been engaged in that which Job could not pretend to be a witness of and a worker in, the creation of the world (MHC, Vol.3, p.836). **(d)** *And I was daily His delight.* This phrase opens the door to God’s inner chamber and allows us to witness the eternal and uninterrupted intimacy between the Father and the Son. The Son was the Father’s delight and the Father was the Son’s all consuming joy. Charles Bridges writes, “Here He describes His unspeakable blessedness in communion with His Father... He was embosomed in Him as the object of daily delight; rejoicing before Him as the Fountain and Center of infinite joy... Here it was that the Father once and again proclaimed Him to be His delight: ‘His elect, in whom His soul delighted; His beloved Son, in who He was well pleased’ (Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 3:17). John Favel writes, “The condition and state of Jesus Christ before His incarnation, was a state of the highest and most unspeakable delight and pleasure, in the enjoyment of His Father... These delights of the Father and the Son one in another, knew not a moment’s interruption, or diminution: thus did these great and glorious persons mutually let forth their fullest pleasure and delight, each into the heart of the other; they lay as it were embosomed one in another, entertaining themselves with delights and pleasures ineffable, and unconceivable” (Works, Vol.1, p.44). John Gill writes, “The Father loved the Son from all eternity, with a love of complacency and delight (John 17:24; Matthew 3:17); this delight was founded in relation to Him, in sonship; and in likeness, He being the express image of His person; in sameness of nature, He being of the same nature and perfections with His

- e. *Rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men (v.31).*

Study Notes

Father: and He delighted in Him as a workman, in the works which He did, being the same He saw Him do” (EONT, Vol.4, p.385). *Rejoicing always before Him*. The word “rejoicing” comes from the Hebrew word *sachaq* which may be translated “to sport or play”, and even includes such things as singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. John Favel writes, “The condition and state of Jesus Christ before His incarnation, was a state of the highest and most unspeakable delight and pleasure, in the enjoyment of the Father” (Works, Vol.1, p.44). Again Favel writes, “As parents delight to see their children sporting before them, so did the Father delight in beholding this darling of His bosom” (Works, Vol.1, p.43). *(e) Rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men*. Charles Bridges writes, “Wonder of wonders yet remains - that He, who was His Father's infinite delight, and infinitely delighting in Him, should find His delights from all eternity in the sons of men; that He should, as it were, long to be with us; that He should solace His heart with the prospect; that He should anticipate the moment with joyous readiness (Psalm 90:6-8; Hebrews 10:7); that He should pass by the far nobler nature of angels ‘to take hold of man’ (Hebrews 2:16), to embrace man as one with His All-perfect self! But though He foresaw how they would despise, reject, and put Him to shame; yet they were the objects of His everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3.), the purchase and satisfaction of the ‘travail of His soul’ (Isaiah 53:10-11), the eternal monuments to His praise (Isaiah 55:13). Yet for their sakes did He make humanity a temple of the Deity, for them did He exchange the throne of glory for the accursed cross (Philippians 2:6-8) - the worship of the Seraphim for the scorn and buffeting of men (Isaiah 6:1-2; Matthew 27:22-31) - inexpressible joy for unknown sorrow (John 17:5; Matthew 26:38; 27:46) Yes - thou adorable Redeemer, nothing but the strength of Thine own love could have brought Thee out from the bosom of ineffable delight to suffer such things for such sinners! But this was ‘the joy set before Thee’, for which -unfathomable love! - Thou wast content ‘to endure the cross, despising the shame’ (Hebrews 12:2). For this love dost Thou inherit Thy Father's justly proportioned reward (Philippians 2:8-11). On this foundation is Thy people's confidence, rest, and security” (Geneva Series, Proverbs, p.81-82). Matthew Henry writes, “A remnant of the sons of men were given Him to be brought, through His grace, to His glory, and these were those in whom His delights were. His church was the habitable part of His earth, made habitable for Him, that the Lord God might dwell even among those that had been rebellious; and this He rejoiced in, in the prospect of seeing His seed. Though He foresaw all the difficulties He was to meet with in His work, the services and sufferings He was to go through, yet, because it would issue in the glory of His Father and the salvation of those sons of men that were given Him, He looked forward upon it with the greatest satisfaction imaginable, in which we have all the encouragement we can desire to come to Him and rely upon Him for all the benefits designed us by His glorious undertaking” (MHC, Vol.3, p.837).

The Motive for the Son's Delight in the Earth

by Edward Payson (Works, Vol.3, p.73-77)

“But had He not a heaven in which He might rejoice? Had He not myriads of holy angels in whose society and praises He might delight? He had; and yet it appears that He rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, rather than in heaven; that His chief delights were with men, rather than angels.

This, surely, is not a little surprising; and what renders it more so, is, that He knew the world in which He thus rejoiced would be wet with His tears, and stained with His blood. He knew that the fallen race in which He thus delighted, were enemies to His Father and to Himself; and that they would requite His love with the basest ingratitude, put Him to a cruel and ignominious death, and persecute His friends with fire and sword. Why then should He rejoice in our earth, and delight in its human inhabitants? It could not be simply because He created them, for He also created heaven and the angelic spirits. It could not be on account of man's intellectual worth and dignity; for in those respects the angels are greatly our superiors. Still less can we ascribe it to any moral excellence possessed by men; for, as has already been observed, they are fallen, sinful creatures. We must, therefore, look elsewhere for the reasons of the feelings and conduct here described; and we shall find them in the plan of redemption. In the world, that plan was to be executed, and men were the objects of it.

This, generally speaking, was the reason why the eternal Word rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and why His chief delights were with the sons of men. To be more particular, He rejoiced in the world, rather than in heaven:

- I. Because it was destined to be the place in which He should perform the most wonderful of His works, obtain the greatest victory, make the most glorious display of His moral perfections, especially of His love, which is the essence of them all; and in the most signal manner glorify His Father. All this He was to do, all this He since has done, in effecting the work of redemption.
- II. Our divine Redeemer rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, because they were the destined residence of His then future church. Christ loved the church, says an apostle, and gave Himself for it. He gave Himself for it because He loved it; loved it before it had a being. He calls the things which are not, we are told, as though they were. He could love the church before it was created, no less easily than He can love it now. Agreeably, He says to it, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, that is with a love that has existed from eternity; therefore with loving kindness will I gather thee.
- III. While our divine Redeemer thus rejoiced in our world, rather than in heaven, His chief delights and pleasures were with men, rather than with angels. They were so:
 1. Because He intended, in the fullness of time, to assume our nature, and become Himself a man.
 2. To great numbers of our race the divine Redeemer was destined to become still more nearly related. They had even then been given to Him by His Father, and were appointed to compose His church, to be united to Him in the most intimate and indissoluble of relations; for the church is styled His body, a body of which He was the constituted head, of which His Spirit is the animating soul.
 3. Another reason why His chief delights were with the sons of men, may be found in the disposition which prompted Him to say, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’. In heaven, He could receive the praises of angels, but on earth He could give gifts to men. He could here exercise pardoning mercy, and dispense spiritual blessings to His people.”

3. In chapter 8 of the book of Proverbs we discovered that the Son was not only the agent of creation, but that He was the consummate delight of His Father. In the following passages from the Gospel of John, we will see something of the same. The Son not only shared His Father's glory, but He was the Father's beloved in ways and degrees that go infinitely beyond all creaturely comprehension. This endearment may be the greatest proof and manifestation of the Son's glory. Read and meditate upon the following texts until you are familiar with their contents, and then write your thoughts. What do they teach us about the eternal and preincarnate glory of the Son of God?
 - a. *He was the Beloved of the Father (John 1:18).*

Study Notes

(a) John 1:18 - The Only Begotten God. Enemies of the Gospel have often argued that if the Son is begotten there must be a time when He was not, and therefore He is inferior to the Father. This is not the intention of the text. John has already told us in no uncertain terms that the Son was and is God (1:1). The phrase "only begotten" is derived from the Greek word *monogenés* and denotes that something is unique in kind or the only example in its category. The word only distantly relates to the idea of being begotten (TDNT, Vol.2, p.735; Gingrich and Danker, p.527). In referring to the Son as the "Only Begotten God", John is simply making reference to the unique and wonderful relationship which has always existed between the first and second persons of the Trinity - that of Father and Son. As there has always been a Father, there has always been a Son, who is the radiance of the Father's glory, and the exact representation of His nature (Hebrews 1:3). Being God, the Son is uniquely qualified to reveal or explain the Him. *Who is in the bosom of the Father.* These words are descriptive of the intimate relationship that has always existed between the Father and the Son. He has always been the "beloved" of the Father and the "most privy" to His counsel. John Gill writes, "[The phrase] denotes unity of nature, and essence, in the Father and Son; their distinct personality; strong love, and affection between them; the Son's acquaintance with His Father's secrets" (EONT, Vol.7, p.746). Matthew Poole writes, "He who is the only begotten and beloved Son, hath such an intimate communion with Him in His nature, and such a free communication of all His counsels, as it may be said, He is continually in His bosom" (John 1:18). Matthew Henry writes, "He had lain in His bosom from eternity... In the bosom of His special love, dear to Him, in whom He was well pleased, always His delight... one in nature and essence, and therefore in the highest degree one in love" (MHC, Vol.5, p.857). John Favel writes, "It is an expression of the greatest dearness and intimacy in the world; as if He should say, wrapt up in the very soul of His Father, embosomed in God" (Works, Vol.1, p.43). Again Favel writes, "To lie in the bosom is the posture of dearest love: 'Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of the His disciples whom Jesus loved' (John 13:23)... But Christ did not lean upon the Father's bosom, as that disciple did in His, but lay in it..." (Works, Vol.1, p.44). Jonathan Edwards writes, "Christ from eternity is, as it were, in the bosom of the Father, as the object of His infinite complacency. In Him is the Father's eternal happiness" (Works, Vol.2, p.29).

The Son in the Father's Bosom

by John Favel (Works, Vol.1, p.45-47)

Considered Negatively

“In the Father's bosom, the Son was not liable to any of those sorrowful consequents and attendants of that frail and feeble state of humanity, which He afterwards assumed:

- (1) He was unacquainted with griefs; there was not sorrowing or sighing in that bosom where He lay.
- (2) He was never pinched with poverty and wants, while He continued in that bosom.
- (3) He never underwent reproach and shame in that bosom, there was nothing but glory and honour reflected upon Him by His Father.
- (4) His holy heart was never offended with an impure suggestion or temptation of the devil; all the while He lay in that bosom of peace and love, He never knew what it was to be assaulted with temptations, or be besieged and battered upon by unclean spirits.
- (5) He was never sensible of pains and tortures in soul or body, there were no such things in that blessed bosom where He lay.
- (6) There were no hidings or withdrawings of His Father from Him; there was not a cloud from eternity upon the face of God, till Jesus Christ had left that bosom.
- (7) There were never any impressions of His Father's wrath upon Him, as there were afterwards.
- (8) There was no death, to which He was subject, in that bosom. All these things were new things to Christ: He was above them all, till for our sakes He voluntarily subjected Himself unto them.”

Considered Positively

“Let us consider Christ's condition and state, what it was, and guess by some particular considerations (for indeed we can but guess) at the glory of it:

- (1) We cannot but conceive it to be a state of matchless happiness, if we consider the persons enjoying and delighting in each other: He was with God (John 1:1). God, you know, is the fountain, ocean and center of all delights and joys: ‘In Thy presence is fulness of joy’ (Psalm 16:11). To be wrapped up in the soul and bosom of all delights, as Christ was, must needs be a state transcending apprehension; to have the fountain of love and delight letting out itself so immediately, and fully, and everlastingly, upon this only begotten darling of His soul, so as it never did communicate itself to any; judge what a state of transcendent felicity this must be. Great persons have great delights.
- (2) Let us consider the intimacy, dearness, yea, oneness of those great persons one with another: the nearer the union, the sweeter the communion. Now Jesus Christ was not only near and dear to God, but one with Him; ‘I and my Father are one,’ (John 10:30). One in nature, will, love and delight. There is indeed a moral union of souls among men by love, but this was a natural oneness; no child is so one with His father, no husband so one with the wife of his bosom, no friend so one with his friend, no soul so one with its body, as Jesus Christ and His Father were one. O what matchless delights must necessarily flow from such a blessed union!
- (3) Consider again the purity of that delight with which the blessed Father and Son embraced each other; the best creature-delights one in another, are mixed, debased, and allayed; if there be something ravishing and engaging, there is also something cloying and distasting. The purer any delight is, the more excellent. Now, there are no chrystal streams flowing so purely from the fountain, no beams of light so unmixed from the sun, as the loves and delights of

these holy and glorious persons were: the holy, holy, holy Father embraced the thrice holy Son with a most holy delight and love.

- (4) Consider the constancy of this delight; it was from everlasting and from eternity; it never suffered one moment's interruption. The overflowing fountain of God's delight and love never stopped its course, never ebbed; but as He speaks in the text, 'I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him' (Proverbs 8:30). Once more, consider the fulness of that delight, the perfection of that pleasure."

What Wonderous Love Inferred?

by John Favel (Works, Vol.1, p.48-49)

The Father's Love

"What an astonishing act of love was this then, for the Father to give the delight, the darling, of His soul, out of His very bosom, for poor sinners! All tongues must needs pause and falter, that attempt the expressions of His grace, expressions being here swallowed up: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son' (John 3: 16)... Which of us would deliver a child, the child of our delights, an only child, to death for the greatest inheritance in the world? What tender parent can endure a parting pull with such a child? When Hagar was taking her last leave (as she thought) of her Ishmael, the text saith, 'She went and sat over against him, a good way off. For she said, 'Let me not see the death of the child.' And she sat over-against him, and lift up her voice, and wept' (Genesis 21:16). Though she were none of the best of mothers, nor he the best of children, yet she could not give up the child. O it was hard to part! What an outcry did David make, even for an Absalom! wishing he had died for him. What a hole (as I may say) has the death of some children made in the hearts of some parents, which will never be closed up in this world! Yet surely, never did any child lie so close to a parent's heart, as Christ did to His Father's; and yet He willingly parts with Him, though His only one, the Son of His delights, and that to death, a cursed death, for sinners, for the worst of sinners. O *miranda Dei philanthropic!* O the admirable love of God to men! Matchless love! A love past finding out! Let all men, therefore, in the business of their redemption, give equal glory to the Father with the Son (John 5: 23). If the Father had not loved thee, He had never parted with such a Son for thee.

The Son's Love

"From one wonder let our souls turn to another, for they are now in the midst of wonders: adore, and be forever astonished at the love of Jesus Christ to poor sinners; that ever He should consent to leave such a bosom, and the ineffable delights that were there, for such poor worms as we are. O the heights, depths, lengths, and breadths of unmeasurable love! O see, Romans 5:6-8. Read, and wonder; how is the love of Christ commended in ravishing circumstances to poor sinners! You would be loth to leave a creature's bosom, a comfortable dwelling, a fair estate for the best friend in the world; your souls are loth to leave their bodies, though they have no such great content there; but which of you, if ever you found by experience what it is to be in the bosom of God by divine communion, would be persuaded to leave such a bosom for all the good that is in the world? And yet Jesus Christ who was embraced in that bosom after another manner than ever you were acquainted with, freely left it, and laid down the glory and riches He enjoyed there, for your sakes; and as the Father loved Him; even so (believers) has He loved you (John 17: 22). What manner of love is this! Who ever loved as Christ loves? Who ever denied himself for Christ, as Christ denied Himself for us?"

b. *He shared the same Glory with God the Father (John 17:5).*

5. To conclude our study on the eternal glories of the Son of God, we will consider one of the most beautiful texts in all of Scripture. In II Corinthians 8:9, the Apostle Paul tells us that throughout eternity and prior to His incarnation, Christ “was rich”. Meditate upon this simple declaration and the commentaries that follow. In light of what we have learned thus far, what does it communicate to us about the eternal and preincarnate glory of the Son of God?

Study Notes

(b) John 17:5 - *Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.* This is a strong proof of the Son’s preexistence and deity. From everlasting, He was God, bearing all the emblems of divine glory and freely exercising every measure of divine sovereignty and power. John Trapp writes, “Our Saviour then is no upstart God” (CONT, Vol.5, p.404). What was this glory that belonged to the Son before the foundation of the world? We can only guess that it may have consisted in: (1) A full revelation of His majesty. This was shrouded in the incarnation, but fully revealed in heaven. The glory of the most splendid creature paled to nothing in His presence. Isaiah saw only a glimpse of it and it was too much to bear (6:1-5). On earth, He had “no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him” (Isaiah 53:2), but in heaven His majesty was so great that the most glorious of angelic beings could not bear to turn their eyes toward Him or from Him. They found difficulty in turning their eyes toward Him because His supremacy overpowered them and His beauty was too much to bear. They found difficulty in turning their eyes from Him for the abyss of emptiness they felt when He was not in their sight. All was ugly and vain in comparison to Him. (2) His preeminence. Prior to His incarnation, the Son sat in the seat of greatest preeminence at the right hand of His Father in glory, and by the Father’s decree, He had first place in everything. All was made *by* Him and *for* Him, and every eye was upon Him for loving adoration and joyful service. On earth, He took the form and last place of a bond-servant (Philippians 2:7), but in heaven He bore the form and first place of God. Thomas Manton writes, “He existed in the form of God, that is, was clothed with divine majesty, and in all things equal with God the Father” (Works, Vol.1, p.446).

II Corinthians 8:9 - *Though He was rich.* The word “rich” is translated from the Greek word *plousios* which commonly refers to material wealth or resources. The riches of Christ may be placed in four general categories: (1) The riches of His person. He was by very nature God and shared equality with God - Philippians 2:6. John

On the Eternal Glory and Riches of the Son

by Charles Spurgeon

“Jesus was rich in possession. As God over all, having made all things, all things were His. He could have said, “The cattle on a thousand hills are mine; mine, the mines of gold and the secret treasuries of silver; mine, the places where the diamonds sparkle, and where the pearl emits its gentle ray; all things are mine; a thousand stars glisten as my lamps, and all the width of space, so full of the wonders of creation — all this is mine!” *He was rich in service.* A thousand angels waited at His gates. He had but to will it, and the strong-winged messengers flew upon His errands. They adored Him ceaselessly. Day without night they circled His throne, rejoicing. Even when on earth, He said He could pray to His Father, and He would send Him twelve legions of angels. How much more was this the case when He sat in the state of heaven, and all these were the courtiers that waited before His throne? *He was rich in honor.* No pompous courts of Solomon could ever compare with the courts of the Son of God. All glory centred in Him. He was “God over all blessed for ever,” co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. To Him the perpetual song; to Him the never ceasing incense; to Him the golden harps; to Him the swell of heaven’s highest symphonies, for He was adored of all, and exalted high above principalities and powers, and every name that is named. *And He was rich in love,* which is the best of all wealth. His Father loved Him. “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Eternally was that the truth, and, besides that, there were pure spirits of His own creating, who loved Him with all the force of their being. He wanted not our love to make Him rich. There was love enough in God for Him, and if He had willed it, He could have made a thousand races of nobler creatures than ourselves, all of whom would have loved Him with the deepest love. *He was rich, too, in happiness.* We cannot conceive of the Savior knowing any sorrow, or grief, or want, in heaven. He had all that even He could wish for, if such language can be used towards the infinite God: He was essentially and ineffably happiness itself. Just as we believe, concerning the Most High God, that His bosom is unruffled by a care, and His soul undisturbed by a pang, so was it with the glorious One, who afterwards condescended to be crowned with thorns, and to be pierced with the spear for our sakes. “He was rich!” Oh! the word, as I have said before, is a poor miserable word. It is the best that Paul could find, but there is such a grandeur about Christ that if we say He was rich in all respects, rich in all conception, and rich beyond imaginations utmost stretch, rich beyond everything you and I will ever be able to conceive of, even when we got into the celestial state — so rich, so infinite, so glorious, so divine — this is what He was! “He was rich.” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.59, p.543-544).

Again Spurgeon writes, “Jesus was rich in possessions. Lift up thine eye believer, and for a moment review the riches of my Lord Jesus, before He condescended to become poor for thee. Behold Him, sitting upon His throne and declaring His own all sufficiency. ‘If I were hungry, I would not tell thee, for the cattle on a thousand hills are Mine. Mine are the hidden treasures of gold; Mine are the pearls that the diver cannot reach, Mine every precious thing that earth hath seen.’ The Lord Jesus might have said, ‘I can stretch My scepter from the east even to the west, and all is Mine, the whole of this world, and yon worlds that glitter in far off space, all are Mine. The illimitable expanse of unmeasured space, filled as it is with worlds that I have made all this is Mine. Fly upward, and thou canst not reach the summit of the hill of My dominions; dive downwards, and thou canst not enter into the innermost depths of My sway. From the highest throne in glory to the lowest pit of hell, all, all is Mine without exception. I can put the broad arrow of My kingdom upon everything that I have made.

“But He had besides that which makes men richer still. We have heard of kings in olden times who were fabulously rich, and when their riches were summed up we read in the old romances, ‘And this man was possessed of the philosopher’s stone, whereby he turned all things into gold.’ Surely all the treasures that he had before were as nothing compared with this precious stone that brought up the rear. Now, whatever might be the wealth of Christ in things created, He had the *power of creation*, and therein, lay His boundless wealth. If He had pleased He could have spoken worlds into existence; He had but to lift His finger, and a new universe as boundless as the present would have leaped into existence. At the will of His mind, millions of angels would have stood before Him, legions of bright

spirits would have flashed into being. He spake, and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast. He who said "Light, be," and light was had power to say to all things, "Be," and they should be. Herein, then, lay His riches; this creating power was one of the brightest jewels of His crown.

"We call men rich, too, who have *honor*, and though men have never so much wealth, yet it they be in disgrace and shame, they must not reckon themselves amongst the rich. But our Lord Jesus had honor, honor such as none but a divine being could receive. When He sat upon His throne, before He relinquished the glorious mantle of His sovereignty to become a man, all earth was filled with His glory. He could look both beneath and all around Him, and the inscription 'Glory be unto God,' was written over all space, day and night the smoking incense of praise ascended before Him from golden viols held by spirits who bowed in reverence; the harps of myriads of cherubim and seraphim continually thrilled with His praise, and the voices of all those mighty hosts were ever eloquent in adoration. It may be, that on set days the princes from the far off realms, the kings, the mighty ones of His boundless realms, came to the court of Christ, and brought each His annual revenue. Oh, who can tell but that in the vast eternity at certain grand eras, the great bell was rung, and all the mighty hosts that were created gathered together in solemn review before His throne. Who can tell the high holiday that was kept in the court of heaven when these bright spirits bowed before His throne in joy and gladness, and, all united, raised their voices in shouts and hallelujahs such as mortal ear hath never heard. Oh, can ye tell the depths of the rivers of praise that flowed hard by the city of God? Can ye imagine to yourselves the sweetness of that harmony that perpetually poured into the ear of Jesus, Messiah, King, Eternal, equal with God His Father? No; at the thought of the glory of His kingdom, and the riches and majesty of His power our souls are spent within us, our words fail, we cannot utter the tithe of His glories.

"Nor was He poor in any other sense. He that hath wealth on earth, and honor too, is poor if He hath not *love*. I would rather be the pauper, dependent upon charity, and have love, than I would be the prince, despised and hated, whose death is looked for as a boon. Without love, man is poor — give him all the diamonds and pearls, and gold that mortal hath conceived. But Jesus was not poor in love. When He came to earth, He did not come to get our love because His soul was solitary. Oh no, His Father had a full delight in Him from all eternity. The heart of Jehovah, the first person of the Sacred Trinity, was divinely, immutably linked to Him, He was beloved of the Father and of the Holy Spirit; the three persons took a sacred complacency and delight in each other. And besides that, how was He loved by those bright spirits who had not fallen. I cannot tell what countless orders and creatures there are created who still stand fast in obedience to God. It is not possible for us to know whether there are, or not, as many races of created beings as we know there are created men on earth. We cannot tell but that in the boundless regions of space, there are worlds inhabited by beings infinitely superior to us: but certain it is, there were the holy angels, and they loved our Savior; they stood day and night with wings outstretched, waiting for His commands, hearkening to the voice of His word, and when He bade them fly, there was love in their countenance, and joy in their hearts. They loved to serve Him, and it is not all fiction that when there was war in heaven, and when God cast out the devil and his legions, then the elect angels showed their love to Him, being valiant in fight and strong in power. He wanted not our love to make Him happy, He was rich enough in love without us.

"Now, though a spirit from the upper world should come to tell you of the riches of Jesus He could not do it. Gabriel, in thy flights thou hast mounted higher than my imagination dares to follow thee, but thou hast never gained the summit of the throne of God.

"Dark with insufferable light thy skirts appear."

"Jesus, who is he that could look upon the brow of Thy Majesty, who is he that could comprehend the strength of the arm of Thy might? Thou art God, Thou art infinite, and we poor finite things, are lost in Thee. The insect of an hour cannot comprehend Thyself. We bow before Thee, we adore Thee; Thou art God over all, blessed for ever. But as for the comprehension of Thy boundless riches, as for being able to tell Thy treasures, or to reckon up Thy wealth, that were impossible. All we know is, that the wealth of God, that the treasures of the infinite, that the riches of eternity, were all Thine own: thou wast rich beyond all thought" (The New Park Street Pulpit, Vol.3, p.349-351).

The Son's Inconceivable Riches

by John Murray (Collected Writings, Vol.3, p.230)

“Can human thought conceive of riches more abundant than the riches of divine being, of divine relations and of divine possession? Of course, it cannot. For there is nothing more ultimate, nothing more transcendent in terms of which human thought can frame conceptions. God is the Lord and there is none else besides Him. But not only is it true that human thought cannot conceive of riches more abundant, not even divine thought can. The riches of the Lord Jesus Christ are the riches of God Himself. There are no riches that can exceed. The riches of the Lord Jesus are riches ultimate, absolute, infinite and eternal, to which there is no addition and from which there can be no subtraction.”

The Riches of the Son's Divine Relations

by John Murray (Collected Writings, Vol.3, p.228-229)

“The Lord Jesus Christ is not only Himself God but He is God in eternal association and fellowship with the Father and Spirit. He is God, not in eternal aloneness and isolation, but God in the ineffable riches of intra-divine communion, a communion that must be perfect because it is divine.

“Communion rests on knowledge and love, and since this communion is perfect it must rest on perfect knowledge and perfect love. Jesus said on one occasion: ‘No man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father, and who the Father is, but the Son’ (Luke 10:22). And Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as knowing all things, yea, the deep things of God (I Corinthians 2:10). The import of such teaching is that the Father has a unique, exclusive, all-comprehensive, all-penetrating knowledge of the Son, the Son of the Father, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and the Father and the Son of the Spirit. If we may use the language of human accommodation, they know one another through and through. As respects the Son, there is nothing in the persons, relations, mind, will and purpose of the Father and of the Spirit that the Son does not know. It is infinity surveying infinity. And He is thus known of both the Father and the Spirit. He knows and is known with perfect and infinite knowledge.

“It affords us the greatest delight to contemplate the self-revealed glory of God. To know and love God is eternal life. But the more we know of God, the greater the raptures of holy delight we derive from this knowledge, the more we are overwhelmed with a sense of our own ignorance. The more we extend the circumference of our knowledge the more we become conscious of the incomprehensible vistas of unrevealed mystery. But the knowledge of the Son of God is a knowledge of which there are no obscurities, no inscrutable mysteries. It is a knowledge that penetrates the very being of God, that comprehends the totality of the divine glory and that searches the deepest mysteries of the divine will. What tides of ineffable delight, without beginning or end, without ebb or flow, must eternally ravish the heart and mind of the eternal Son! It baffles our understanding as we try to contemplate the inexhaustible riches of this mutually interpenetrating infinite knowledge that exists in the realm of the triune and eternal Godhead.

“Sadly enough, it sometimes happens with us that our love to persons is in inverse ratio to our knowledge of them. Happily enough, in other cases, love grows with knowledge and knowledge with love. This latter experience of ours provides us with some dim analogy of what obtains in the realm of the divine. But, after all, it is rather dim and remote. For in the transcendent realm of the intradivine relations growth in knowledge or of love is inconceivable. What obtains, rather, is all-embracing knowledge and perfect immutable love. The persons of the Trinity know one another fully and they love one another perfectly. Each knows the other in His person, relations, perfections, mind, will and purpose, and in this realm of infinitude there is nothing that elicits from the other the most infinitesimal disapprobation or displeasure. Everything constrains love that corresponds in its magnitude to the infinitude known. It is the love of all-comprehending intelligence and agreement.

Study Notes

Murray writes, “He was rich, as the Father and Spirit are equally rich, in the eternal and immutable possession of all the fulness of Godhood (Collected Writings, Vol.3, p.228). (2) The riches of His divine relationships. He was not only Himself God but He is God in eternal association and fellowship with the Father and Spirit. He is God, not in eternal lonesome and isolation, but God in the ineffable riches of intra-divine communion, a communion that must be perfect because it is divine” (Collected Writings, Vol.3, p.228). (3) The riches of His glory. Prior to the incarnation, the glory and majesty of the Son was not in any way shrouded or concealed. The riches of His person were manifested to all. The glory which He shared with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid out in plain view - John 17:5. Even the manifested glory of the Son in Isaiah 6:1-4, is but a glimpse of a greater reality. His was an incomprehensible and unspeakable glory! (4) The riches of His possessions. He held the title of ownership to everything He created. All was made by Him and for Him - from the most majestic star to the smallest particle, from the most splendid creature to the tiniest microbe. John Murray writes, “There is nothing in this universe, nothing in its grand immensity, nothing in its most infinitesimal minuteness, that He has not made and that He does not exhaustively comprehend. All things are by Him and they are for Him. He is the possessor of heaven and earth” (Collected Writings, Vol.3, p.230). Matthew Poole writes, “[He was] the Heir of all things, the Lord of the whole creation, all things were put under His feet” (II Corinthians 8:9). Albert Barnes writes, “He was the Creator of all (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), and as Creator He had a right to all things, and the disposal of all things. The most absolute right which can exist is that acquired by the act of creation; and this right the Son of God possessed over all gold, and silver, and diamonds, and pearls; over all earth and lands; over all the treasures of the ocean, and over all worlds. The extent and amount of His riches, therefore, is to be measured by the extent of His dominion over the universe; and to estimate His riches, therefore, we are to conceive of the sceptre which He sways over the distant worlds. What wealth has man that can compare with the riches of the Creator and Proprietor of all? How poor and worthless appears all the gold that man can accumulate compared with the wealth of Him whose are the silver, and the gold, and the cattle upon a thousand hills?” (BN, II Corinthians, p.182).

Chapter Four

The Old Testament Witness to the Incarnation

Having considered the eternal glory of the Son of God, we will now turn our attention toward His *incarnation*. The word *incarnate* comes from the Latin verb *incarnare* [*in* = in + *caro* = flesh] which mean to “make flesh” or “to become flesh.” In the Scriptures, the incarnation refers to the great truth that approximately two thousand years ago the eternal Son of God was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, and was born Jesus of Nazareth - the God Man. He was the fullness of deity in bodily form (Colossians 2:9) and yet like us in every way except without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He lived a perfectly righteous life under the Law and then offered Himself up as a sacrifice for the sins of His people.

The coming of the Son of God into the world of men is, beyond all doubt, the most significant event in the history of mankind and stands at the very center of biblical Christianity. It is therefore necessary that we give serious consideration to the doctrine of the incarnation.

Although the incarnation occurred barely two thousand years ago, it is important to understand that there were prior glimpses of this “greatest of all events” in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. It will be both helpful and encouraging for us to consider some of these Old Testament prophecies. The fact that they were written hundreds of years prior to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth gives strong support to the New Testament claims regarding both His incarnation and His deity. Loraine Boettner writes,

“In all the history of the world Jesus emerges as the only “expected” person. No one was looking for such a person as Julius Caesar, or Napoleon, or Washington, or Lincoln to appear at the time and place that they did appear. No other person has had his course foretold or his work laid out for him centuries before he was born. But the coming of the Messiah had been predicted for centuries. In fact, the first promise of His coming was given to Adam and Eve soon after their fall into sin. As time went on various details concerning His Person and work were revealed through the prophets; and at the time Jesus was born there was a general expectation through the Jewish world that the Messiah was soon to appear, even the manner of His birth and the town in which it would occur having been clearly indicated” (Studies in Theology, p.160).

1. In Micah 5:2, is found a brief, yet powerful prophecy regarding the Messiah. Consider the text until you are familiar with its contents and then answer the following questions.
 - a. *How does this prophecy communicate that the Messiah would be more than a man - that He would bear the fulness of deity?*

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Micah 5:2 - It is beyond question that this prophecy refers to the Messiah. It was a well established belief even among the chief priests and scribes at the time of Christ (see Matthew 2:3-6). **(a)** *His goings forth are from long*

- b. *Does this prophecy communicate anything to us about the Messiah's humanity? Is there any glimpse of the incarnation in the words of Micah?*
2. In Isaiah 7:14 is found a prophecy which is quoted by Matthew as referring to both the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the virgin birth (Matthew 1:22-23). Consider the text until you are familiar with its contents and then answer the following questions:
- a. *According to Isaiah 7:14-16 and Isaiah 8:3-4, did this prophecy have an immediate fulfillment in the time of Isaiah? Explain your answer.*

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ago, from the days of eternity. This is a clear indication that the Messiah or Christ would be more than a man. The statement does not simply mean that His coming was predicted long ago, but that He existed prior to His birth, even from eternity. Such a thing can only be said of God, and therefore this description is also a clear reference to the Messiah's deity. If He is eternal, He is also God, for no one other than God bears this attribute. Loraine Boettner writes, "Moreover, even the Old Testament predictions in regard to the Messiah who was to come set Him forth not merely as one who would be 'born' like other men, but as One who existed before He came to earth, in fact, as One whose existence extends back into eternity" (Studies in Theology, p.160). C. F. Keil writes, "The announcement of the origin of this Ruler as being before all worlds unquestionably presupposes His divine nature" (COT, Vol.10, p.480-481). **(b)** *From you [i.e. Bethlehem] One will go forth for Me.* What a great truth and unfathomable mystery is stored in these few words! Stephen Charnock writes, "There are two goings forth of Christ described, one from Bethlehem, in the days of His incarnation, and another from eternity" (Attributes, p.294). No one among those born in Bethlehem, or even among all the descendants of Adam would ever be qualified to "go forth" for God and carry out His work of redemption in the world. David, the greatest of those born in Bethlehem, fought the battles of the Lord, but had unnumbered failings and stood in need of a redeemer. God's work of salvation required a son of David who was infinitely greater than David. Therefore, the Son of God whose "goings forth was from the days of eternity", would be conceived in the womb of a virgin of the tribe of Judah and the house of David. He would be born in Bethlehem and "go forth" in the power of God to do the works of God and accomplish His will.

Isaiah 7:14 - It is important to note that this is probably one of the most disputed Messianic prophecies in all of Scripture. Among Christians, the debate lies in whether the prophecy has an immediate fulfillment in the time of Isaiah or whether it refers exclusively to the Messiah. We hold to the opinion that although it has a partial fulfillment in Isaiah's day, it looks far into the future and finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Jesus Christ of Nazareth. **(a)** In the immediate context, the nation of Judah was being threatened by an alliance between Israel (the apostate northern kingdom) and Syria. God sent a message to Ahaz King of Judah through the prophet Isaiah. The king was told to "ask a sign" from the Lord as a demonstration that He would surely intervene and

- b. *If the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 pointed to events that were fulfilled in Isaiah's day, how can we apply the same prophecy to the incarnation of the Son of God? Explain your answer.*
- c. *The word "virgin" is translated from the Hebrew word "almah". Is this a correct translation? What is significant about the Hebrew word which Isaiah employs?*

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deliver Judah. When Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, God rebuked him and declared that He Himself would give a sign to the "House of David" - a woman who was at that time a virgin would soon conceive and bear a child, and before the child was old enough to distinguish evil from good, the alliance between Judah's enemies would come to an end (v.14-16). The birth of the child would be a sign that it was God who had delivered His people and not the fleshly strategies of king Ahaz. This prophecy most likely had its initial fulfillment in the birth of Isaiah's son to the prophetess (8:3), for it is said of the boy that before he would know how to cry out "My father" or "My mother", Judah's enemies would have already begun to fall (8:4). Albert Barnes writes that, "Such an interpretation is the obvious interpretation. It is that which would strike the great mass of men accustomed to interpret language on the principles of common sense" (BN, Isaiah, Vol.1, p.163). **(b)** Although Isaiah's prophecy had an immediate fulfillment in the time of Isaiah, it looks forward to a greater fulfillment in the person of the Messiah. The following reasons are given for this view: (1) Although Isaiah used language that was appropriate for the immediate context, his prophecy is obviously impregnated with meaning that goes far beyond any possible complete fulfillment in Isaiah's time or in Isaiah's son. (2) Isaiah's language has striking similarities to other Old Testament prophecies that apply exclusively to the Messiah and stands in agreement with them. Two excellent examples are Isaiah 9:6 and Micah 5:2. Both bear witness to the fact that the One born of woman would also be God. This demands a virgin birth. How else could the Messiah be both God and man except that He be born of a human mother who conceived by the Spirit of God? (3) For the Christian, the greatest proof that this prophecy points forward to the Messiah is that the Apostle Matthew, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares it to be so (Matthew 1:23). To deny that Isaiah's prophecy has anything to do with the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary is to deny the testimony of the New Testament and the truth of its inspiration. John Newton writes, "I shall not take up your time with attempting to clear the difficulties which have been observed in the context. It may suffice for my purpose to affirm, that this passage expressly and exclusively refers to Messiah; for which my warrant is, the authority of the evangelists Matthew and Luke, who directly apply it to Him, and assure us that it was accomplished in Him (Works, Vol.4, p.56-57). **(c)** There are two Hebrew words that may be translated "virgin". They are *almah* which may denote a virgin or a young

- d. *What is the significance of the name “immanuel” as it is applied to Jesus Christ.*

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woman of marriageable age, and the less ambiguous *bethulah* which has no other meaning except “virgin”. It has often been speculated why Isaiah used *almah* in stead of *bethula*, but the reason seems clear. The wisdom of the Holy Spirit chose the Hebrew word which would be perfectly appropriate for both the partial fulfilment in Isaiah’s time and the greater fulfillment in the Messiah. In Isaiah’s time, it was a “maiden” who conceived by the natural means of intercourse and brought forth a son, but in the greater fulfillment, it was a “virgin” who conceived by the Holy Spirit and brought forth a Son who was both God and man. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown writes, “Language is selected such as, while partially applicable to the immediate event, receives its fullest, most appropriate, and exhaustive accomplishment in Messianic events” (JFB, p.437). It is important to note that when Jewish scribes translated Isaiah 7:14 into the Greek language (the Septuagint LXX), they chose the Greek phrase *he parthénos* (i.e. the virgin) as a proper translation for the Hebrew word *almah*. John Oswalt writes, “Unless *almah* had overtones of virginity about it, the LXX translation is inexplicable” (NICOT, Isaiah, Vol.1, p.210). Matthew quotes from the Greek Septuagint in Matthew 1:22-23, employing the phrase *he parthénos*, and giving testimony to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Those who would deny the supernatural conception of the Messiah in the womb of the virgin Mary cannot use the New Testament for their support. The Gospel writers were unambiguous - Christ was born of a virgin! (**d**) In Matthew 1:23, the writer gives us the proper translation of the name “Immanuel” - “God with us.” In the immediate context of Isaiah 7:14, the name denotes simply that the child’s birth would be God’s pledge and proof that He was with Judah and would deliver them from the hands of their enemies - Israel and Syria. In reference to the Messiah, and according to Matthew’s understanding, the name meant nothing less than “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). J. Stafford Wright writes, “Both births signify God’s presence with His people through a child. But whereas the earlier event in Isaiah’s day was regarded at the time as having decisive significance, in the light of the coming of Jesus it proves to be merely the anticipation of the really decisive saving act and presence of God (NIDNTT, Vol.2, p.87). John Calvin writes, “This name was unquestionably bestowed on Christ on account of the actual fact; for the only-begotten Son of God clothed Himself with our flesh, and united Himself to us by partaking of our nature. He is, therefore, called God with us, or united to us; which cannot apply to a man who is not God... It is therefore evident that it denotes not only the power of God, such as He usually displays by His Servant, but a union of person, by which Christ became God-man. Hence it is also evident that Isaiah here relates no common event, but points out that unparalleled mystery which the Jews labor in vain to conceal” (CC, Isaiah, Vol.7-1, p.248-249). Charles Spurgeon writes, “I am not aware that anywhere in the New Testament our Lord is afterwards called Emmanuel. I do not find His apostles, or any of His disciples, calling Him by that name literally; but we find them all doing so in effect, for they speak of Him as ‘God manifest in the flesh’, and they say, ‘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.’ They do not use the actual word, but they again interpret and give us free and instructive renderings, while they proclaim the sense of the august title and inform us in divers ways what is meant by God being with us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a glorious fact, of the highest importance, that since Christ was born into the world God is with us” (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.21, p.710).

The Significance of “Immanuel”

John Newton writes, “Behold then the character of Messiah in this prophecy! a man! a God! a divine person in the human nature. ‘God manifested in the flesh! Immanuel, God with us’” (Works, Vol.4, p.64).

Richard Sibbes writes, “You have diverse articles of our faith in these few words... You have here the human nature of Christ, ‘A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.’ And the divine nature of Christ, ‘His name shall be called Emmanuel.’ ...So you have divers points of divinity couched in the words...” (Works, Vol.7, p.109).

John Gill writes, “Whence it appears that the Messiah is truly God, as well as truly man: the name is expressive of the union of the two natures, human and divine, in Him; of His office as Mediator, who, being both God and man, is a middle person between both...” (EONT, Vol.5, p.42-43).

Matthew Henry writes, “The Messiah shall be introduced on a glorious errand, wrapped up in His glorious name: They shall call His name Immanuel - God with us, God in our nature, God at peace with us, in covenant with us. This was fulfilled in their calling Him Jesus - a Savior (Matthew 1:21-25), for, if He had not been Immanuel - God with us, He could not have been Jesus - a Savior” (MHC, Vol.4, p.47-48).

Again Matthew Henry writes, “Immanuel signifies God with us; a mysterious name, but very precious; God incarnate among us, and so God reconcilable to us, at peace with us, and taking us into covenant and communion with Himself... What a happy step is hereby taken toward the settling of a peace and correspondence between God and man, that the two natures are thus brought together in the person of the Mediator! By this He became an unexceptionable referee, a daysman, fit to lay His hand upon them both, since He partakes of the nature of both. Behold, in this, the deepest mystery, and the richest mercy, that ever was. By the light of nature, we see God as a God above us; by the light of the law, we see Him as a God against us; but by the light of the gospel, we see Him as Immanuel, God with us, in our own nature, and (which is more) in our interest” (MHC, Vol.5, p.8-9).

J.C. Philpot writes, “The Deity of the Son of God shines all through the sacred page. It is the grand cardinal point, on which all the doctrines of grace turn; and he that is unsound there, is unsound everywhere. The Godhead of Christ does not rest upon a few texts of Scripture, but it shines all through the Scripture; it is the light of the Scripture, and it is the life of the Scripture. Take away the Deity of Jesus out of the Scripture, and you would do the same thing spiritually as though you blotted the sun out of the sky naturally; the sacred page would be one black darkness. But the Person of Jesus is not Deity only. No man can see God and live; we could not bear to look upon pure Deity. And therefore the Son of God has taken into union with Himself our nature; He has “taken upon Him the seed of Abraham”—that “holy thing” which was begotten by the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and there united to the second Person of the glorious Trinity, that Godhead and manhood might form one glorious Person, Immanuel, God with us. Now to the eye of faith there is the greatest beauty and glory in Christ’s humanity. The enlightened soul views Deity shining through the manhood; and when it sees Jesus “going about, doing good,” when it hears the words that dropped from His gracious lips, when it views Him by the eye of faith, bleeding, suffering, agonising, and dying, it sees the Godhead in all these acts, upholding and shining through the manhood. And it is this union of the two natures in one glorious Person, that fills the heart that receives it in the faith of it and in the love of it with a measure of pure affection. Here, then, the Church has a view of the glorious Person of Jesus; and she falls in love with Him. There is something in supernatural beauty which kindles spiritual affection, as there is something in natural beauty which kindles natural affection. When the quickened soul sees supernatural beauty, it immediately falls in love with it. The spiritual affections centre in spiritual beauty. And thus, when the redeemed and regenerated soul sees the glorious Person of Christ, God-man, Immanuel, God with us, and has a taste and sense of His love, the blessed Spirit thereby kindles in it spiritual affection, and attracts it with these “cords of love and bands of a man.”” (Through Bacus Vale, p.139-140).

3. The prophet Micah foretold that the One born in Bethlehem would be “from everlasting”. The prophet Isaiah tells us that He would be born of a virgin and would be “God with us”. In the following prophecy, found in Isaiah 9:6, the prophet will speak once more and give us one of the greatest Old Testament glimpses into the sheer wonder and mystery of the coming Messiah. Read the text until you are familiar with its contents, and then write your thoughts on the following questions. How does this prophecy communicate the truth of the incarnation - that the Messiah would be more than a man, that He would bear the fulness of deity?
- a. *What is significant about the phrase: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us”?*
- b. *And the government will rest upon His shoulders.*

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Isaiah 9:6 - Edward Payson writes, “That the wonderful child, whose birth is announced and celebrated in these triumphant strains, was no other than Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, it is needless to remark” (Works, Vol.3, p.62). **(a)** *For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us.* Here we see behind the veil into the Holy of holies of the Messiah’s person, and we discover that He is both human and divine. The view from earth sees a child born, but from heaven’s perspective a Son is given! James Montgomery Boice writes, “Here two important verbs are used of Christ’s coming: ‘is born’ and ‘is given.’ As a child He is born, but as a Son He is given” (Foundations of the Christian Faith, p.278). Charles Spurgeon writes, “The person spoken of in our text, is undoubtedly the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a child born, with reference to His human nature; He is born of the virgin, a child. But He is a Son given, with reference to His divine nature; being given as well as born” (The New Park Street Pulpit, Vol.4, p.594). *For a child will be born to us.* The prophecy speaks of a real and natural human birth. Though conceived supernaturally of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, the Messiah would be born as any other human life entering into the world. Apart from some divine revelation, no one would have recognized the infant in the manger to be the eternal and incomprehensible Son of God. *A son will be given to us.* The baby born in time was the eternal Son of God, given by the Father, and sent from heaven. The infant of a span long was in reality the Ancients of Days whose presence the heavens cannot contain (Matthew Henry, MHC, Vol.4, p.59). It is prophecy so far-fetched and yet fulfilled in every way in the person of Jesus Christ. There is enough glory in this text to carry us along through an eternity of worship! **(b)** *And the government will rest upon His shoulders.* The mystery continues to unfold. The child would take upon Himself the totality of creation’s government. By His own power and wisdom, He would rule the universe with absolute sovereignty. The responsibility of every realm would rest upon His shoulders, and yet it would be to Him as a feather upon a rock of granite. The requirements of such a government would be infinitely beyond the powers of men or

Unto Us A Son Is Given

Edward Payson writes, "For whom He was born - My friends, it was for mankind, for us. Unto us this child is born, unto us this Son is given. It has been observed, that when angels announced His birth to men, they said, 'Unto you is born a Saviour.' But when prophets, when men speak of this event, they say unto us a child is born; for Christ took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Works, Vol.3, p.67-68).

Thomas Boston writes,

"To whom is Christ presented? ...He is not presented to the fallen angels; He was not born for them, they are none of His relations: 'For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham' (Hebrews 2:16). Their house was originally more honourable than the house of Adam; but Christ has put an honour on the house of Adam, above the house of angels. The holy angels are His servants, the evil angels His executioners; but holy men are His brethren" (Works, Vol. 10, p.184).

"The Father has made a free gift to us poor sinners of His own Son for the remedy of our misery. As our misery was great, so the gift is fully proportioned to it, being the greatest that heaven had to afford, or the world could receive" (Works, Vol. 10, p.189).

"The expression may be observed to be full of holy exultation. The prophet expresseth himself in a triumphant manner on this subject. In his days Christ was not come; but he saw Him in the promise, by faith; and he speaks of Him with as great certainty as if He had been come. He saw the need the world had of Him; he felt the need he himself had of Him; he believed Him to be given to lost sinners for a Saviour, a Saviour in whose hand no one's case could miscarry; and that He was given to himself among others; therefore he cries out as in a rapture, 'To us a Child is born, to us a Son is given!' O my lost brethren, sons of Adam, to us a Child is born, to us a Son in given" (Works, Vol. 10, p.180).

- c. *What is communicated in the Hebrew concept of a "name"? Are the names which follow simply superficial titles or do they tell us something about the Messiah's character? Explain your answer.*

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angels, but it would be nothing for the one who created all things and upheld them by the word of His mouth (Hebrews 1:3). In all this, we have great proof that the Messiah would be God incarnate. A work of such magnitude can only be accomplished by the fulness of deity. Thomas Boston writes about the need of such a divine governor, "[Mankind's] first prince was gone, to manage their affairs no more. Adam, their natural head, mismanaged the government quite, sunk their interest, rendered himself incapable of the government, betrayed his trust, and deserted them; their matters being brought to such a pass that it was quite beyond his reach to retrieve them... For such a time as this came Jesus to the kingdom, when none other could or would take the burden of it. When the whole earth could not afford one. Heaven gave sinners a Prince, of shoulders sufficient for the burden" (Works, Vol. 10, p.204). **(c)** *And His Name will be called...* In the Hebrew mind, a name communicates great truths about the one who bears it. The following names or titles which are applied to the Messiah tell us who He really is - the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. Thomas Boston writes, "God gives no empty titles... As His name, so is His nature; the name

The Excellency of Christ's Name

by Thomas Boston (*Works*, Vol. 10, p.180)

“The incomparable excellency of this our relative: He is a Child, a Son, a Governor, quite extraordinary. Hear His name shewing His nature and perfections. We cannot comprehend His glorious excellencies; He is ‘Wonderful;’ we may see and wonder at them, but can never fully reach them. For wisdom, He is the ‘Counsellor,’ with whom the Father took counsel, and whom He has appointed the Counsellor of poor sinners in their most perplexed cases. For power, He is ‘The Mighty God,’ to whom nothing is too hard to do. For continuance, He is ‘The Everlasting Father,’ abiding for ever and ever; so that through the whole of time, and through eternity, His wisdom and power shall be forthcoming. And then for meekness, and accessibleness to poor rebel sinners, though He be a ‘Prince,’ He is ‘the Prince of Peace;’ speaking, working, granting peace, yea, He died for peace. A wonderful one!”

- d. *What are the names ascribed to the Messiah. What important truths do they communicate to us about Him?*
- (i) *Wonderful*

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truly expresses what He is” (*Works*, Vol.10, p.214). Matthew Henry writes, “His people shall know Him and worship Him by these names; and, as one that fully answers them, they shall submit to Him and depend upon Him” (*MHC*, Vol.4, p.59). Albert Barnes writes, “His attributes shall be such as to make all these applications [*i.e.* names] appropriate descriptions of His power and work” (*BN*, Isaiah, Vol.1, p.192). We might ask ourselves, why is the Messiah given so many variety of names? As one thousand tongues are not enough to praise Him, so one name, however superlative, is not enough to describe Him. His character is so deep and His excellencies so broad that not all the good names in all the earth are able to paint a proper picture of Him. Therefore, He is properly called wonderful. Not to be so much explained as worshiped. **(d-i) Wonderful.** Such an attribute can only be attributed to deity. F. Delitzsch writes, “Just as the angel of Jehovah, when asked by Manoah what was His name (Judges 13:18), replied *pil’iy* [*i.e.* wonderful], and indicated thereby His divine nature - a nature incomprehensible to mortal men; so here the God-given ruler is also *pele’* [*i.e.* wonderful], a phenomenon lying altogether beyond human conception or natural occurrence. Not only is this or that wonderful in Him; but He Himself is throughout a wonder” (*COT*, Vol.7, p.252). John Calvin writes, “By the first title he arouses the minds of the godly to earnest attention, that they may expect from Christ something more excellent than what we see in the ordinary course of God’s works, as if he had said, that in Christ are hidden the invaluable treasures of wonderful things - Colossians 2:3” (*CC*, Vol.7, p.309). Matthew Henry writes, “Justly, is He called wonderful, for He is both God and man. In His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, He was wonderful. A constant series of wonders attended Him, and, without controversy, great was the mystery of godliness concerning Him” (*MHC*, Vol.4, p.59-60). Charles Spurgeon writes, “God the Father never gave His Son a name which He did not deserve. There is no flattery here... They that know Him best will say that the word doth not overstrain His merits, but rather falleth infinitely short of His glorious deserving” (*The New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol.4, p.594).

His Name Shall be Called Wonderful

by Charles Spurgeon (*The New Parkstreet Pulpit, Vol. 4, p. 395-396*)

“Consider, again, the incarnation of Christ, and you will rightly say, that His name deserveth to be called “Wonderful.” Oh! what is that I see? Oh! world of wonders, what is that I see? The Eternal of ages, whose hair is white like wool, as white as snow, becomes an infant. Can it be? Ye angels, are ye not astonished? He becomes an infant, hangs at a virgin’s breast, draws His nourishment from the breast of woman. Oh wonder of wonders! Manger of Bethlehem, thou hast miracles poured into thee. This is a sight that surpasses all others. Talk ye of the sun, moon, and stars; consider ye the heavens, the work of God’s fingers, the moon and the stars that He hath ordained; but all the wonders of the universe shrink into nothing, when we come to the mystery of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a marvellous thing when Joshua bade the sun to stand still, but more marvellous when God seemed to stand still, and no longer to move forward, but rather, like the sun upon the dial of Ahaz, did go back ten degrees, and veil His splendor in a cloud. There have been sights matchless and wonderful, at which we might look for years, and yet turn away and say, ‘I cannot understand this; here is a deep into which I dare not dive; my thoughts are drowned; this is a steep without a summit; I cannot climb it; it is high, I cannot attain it!’ But all these things are as nothing, compared with the incarnation of the Son of God. I do believe that the very angels have never wondered but once and that has been incessantly ever since they first beheld it. They never cease to tell the astonishing story, and to tell it with increasing astonishment too, that Jesus Christ the Son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary, and became a man. Is He not rightly called Wonderful? Infinite, and an infant — eternal, and yet born of a woman — Almighty, and yet hanging on a woman’s breast — supporting the universe, and yet needing to be carried in a mother’s arms — king of angels, and yet the reputed son of Joseph — heir of all things and yet the carpenter’s despised son. Wonderful art Thou O Jesus, and that shall be Thy name for ever.”

(ii) *Counselor*

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Albert Barnes writes, “Anything which is fitted to excite wonder and amazement, from any cause, will correspond with the sense of the Hebrew word. It is a word which expresses with surprizing accuracy everything in relation to the Redeemer. For the Messiah was wonderful in all things. It was wonderful love by which He came; the manner of His birth was wonderful; His humility, His self-denial, His sorrows were wonderful; His mighty works were wonderful; His dying agonies were wonderful; and His resurrection, His ascension, were all fitted to excite admiration and wonder” (BN, Isaiah, Vol. 1, p. 192). **(d-ii) Counselor.** In Isaiah 28:29, Jehovah is said to be “wonderful in counsel”. Therefore, to give the same title to the Messiah is to make an undeniable declaration of His deity. The apostle Paul refers to Christ as the “wisdom of God” (I Corinthians 1:24) in whom are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossian 2:3). Such things cannot be said of the wisest of men or angels. Thomas Boston writes, “He is a member of the cabinet-council of Heaven, to which the most favorite angel is not admitted. He has access to the sealed book of the divine decrees (Revelation 5:5); and there is nothing transacted there, nor has been from eternity, but what He is acquainted with: ‘For the Father loveth the

Christ The Counselor

John Newton writes, “Another of His names is ‘Counselor.’ The great councils of redemption, in which every concern respecting the glory of God and the salvation of sinners was adjusted, were established with Him, and in Him, before the foundation of the world. And He is our Counselor or Advocate with the Father, who pleads our cause, and manages all our affairs in perfect righteousness, and with infallible success; so that no suit can possibly miscarry which He is pleased to undertake. To Him likewise we must apply (and we shall not apply in vain) for wisdom and direction, in all that belongs to our duty, and the honour of our profession in the present life. In all our difficulties, dangers, and cares, we must look to Him for guidance and support. This is to be wise unto salvation” (Works, Vol.4, p. 107-108).

Edward Payson writes, “He is a counselor, with respect both to God and to men. In the first place, He is a counselor with respect to God. He is called the word and the wisdom of God; and with Him the Father takes sweet counsel in reference to all His works... In the second place, Christ is a counselor with respect to men. He is the great teacher, guide and counselor of His people; the light of the world, the Sun of righteousness. ‘He that believeth in me,’ says He, ‘shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life; for I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light, and crooked things straight, before them; these things will I do, and not forsake them’” (Works, Vol.3, p.65).

(iii) *Mighty God*

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Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth’ (John 5:20). He is of the council with His Father and the Spirit” (Works, Vol.10, p.231-232). It is said that the Queen of the Sheba came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon (Matthew 12:42); and behold, something greater than Solomon lay in Bethlehem’s manger whose person and counsel the word “wonderful” barely begins to describe. **(d-iii) *Mighty God***. This designation is translated from the Hebrew words *El gibbor*, a traditional name of God found in Deuteronomy 10:17, Jeremiah 32:18, Nehemiah 9:32, and Psalm 24:8. This Old Testament proof of the Messiah’s deity agrees with the New Testament witness of the same. Christ is “God” (John 1:1), “the great God” (Titus 2:13) and the “God above all to be blessed for ever” (Romans 9:5). John Calvin writes, “If Christ had not been God, it would have been unlawful to glory in Him... We must, therefore, meet with the majesty of God in Him, so that there truly dwells in Him that which cannot without sacrilege be attributed to a creature. He is, therefore, called the mighty God, for the same reason that He was formerly called Immanuel - Isaiah 7:14” (CC, Vol.7, p.310). Loraine Boettner writes, “Here the term ‘Mighty God’ is applied directly to the Messiah; and the fact that this same term is used again in Isaiah 10:21 where it means Jehovah shows clearly that the Messiah is declared to be God in the very same sense in which Jehovah is God. To apply those great titles to a merely human representative of Jehovah would involve the Old Testament revelation in self-contradiction; and by no manner of treatment, however ingenious, could that self-contradiction be resolved, without doing violence to all linguistic propriety. It is resolved, however, by the New Testament miracle of the Incarnation of the Son of God, so that the Messiah is at one and the same time Divine and human, the God-man. That this prophecy relates to the Messiah was not

Christ The Mighty God

John Newton writes, “He is the Mighty God.’ Though in the office of Mediator, He acts in the character of a servant, His perfections and attributes are truly divine. Only the Mighty God could make a provision capable of answering the demands of the holy law, which we had transgressed. Only the Mighty God could be a suitable Shepherd to lead millions of weak helpless creatures to glory, through the many difficulties, dangers, and enemies they are exposed to in their passage. Add to this, the honour, dependence, and obedience, which this great Shepherd claims from His sheep, are absolute and supreme; and they would be guilty of idolatry, if they did not know that He is the ‘Mighty God’” (Works, Vol.4, p.108).

Edward Payson writes, “The prophet informs us that the child whose birth he predicts, shall be called the Mighty God. On this awful name, my hearers, it is needless to insist. You are already acquainted with its import. It represents Christ, not only as God, but the mighty God... He also informs us that He is mighty, or able to save, even to the uttermost. Whether therefore you believe or not, that Christ is the mighty God, you must allow that He is called so, by divinely inspired prophets and apostles, who were commissioned to communicate to us every thing necessary to make us wise unto salvation, and who neither would, nor could deceive us” (Works, Vol.3, p.66).

(iv) *Eternal Father*

Study Notes

disputed even by the Jews until the violence and bitterness of the anti-Christian controversy drove them from the ground which their own progenitors had steadfastly maintained” (Studies in Theology, p.222). Thomas Boston writes, “Both, as He is God, He is the true God; as He is man, He is the mighty one; the greatest heroes are but weaklings to Him” (Works, Vol. 10, p.250). **(d-iv) Eternal.** This child who was born in time was before time began. When the Christ was questioned regarding His relationship to Abraham, He openly declared, “Before Abraham was born, I am”. The Jews, rightly understood that a claim to eternity was a claim to deity and sought to stone Him for blasphemy (John 8:58-59). Charles Spurgeon writes, “For a moment remember that He who became an infant of a span long, was no less than the King of ages, the everlasting Father, who was from eternity, and is to be to all eternity” (The New Parkstreet Pulpit, Vol.4, p.394). **Father.** This designation is not intended to confuse the persons of the Trinity, but to emphasize two important aspects of this One who would become incarnate: (1) From all eternity, He has been the origin, source and sustainer of all things (John 1:3-4); and (2) From the beginning, He has been the provider and protector of His people. Matthew Poole writes, “Having called Him a Child, and a Son in respect of His human nature, lest this should be misinterpreted to His disparagement, he adds that He is a Father also... As we render it, the everlasting Father, who, though as man He was then unborn, yet was and is from everlasting to everlasting” (COTB, Vol.2, p.347-348). Zacharias Ursinus, in answer to the objection that Christ is our brother and therefore He is not our Father, writes, “He is our brother in as far as He is man; and our Father in as far as He is God, our Creator and Redeemer” (Heidelberg Catechism Commentary, p.627). John Newton writes, “‘He [i.e. the Messiah] is not ashamed to call them brethren,’ having condescended to assume their human nature. But they are also His children. They are born

Christ The Everlasting Father

by Edward Payson (*Works, Vol.3, p.66-67*)

“This wonderful child shall be called the Everlasting Father, or the Father of eternity. Here again human reason will be ready to cry, we have already had enough, and more than enough of absurdity and contradictions. How can a child just born, be a Father, or everlasting Father, the Father of eternity? My friends, if you cannot answer this question, I suspect you would have been equally embarrassed with the question which our Saviour proposed to the Pharisees: How can David’s son, be David’s Lord? This question they could not answer; nor can any answer it, at the present day, in a satisfactory manner, who do not believe that Jesus Christ was God and man united. But those who believe this, can answer it with ease. They can reply, as God, Christ was David’s Lord. As man, He was David’s son. In another place Christ says, I am the root and the offspring or branch of David; the root whence David sprung, and the branch which sprung from David. So in our text. As man, He was a child born; as God, He was the Father of eternity.”

(v) *Prince of Peace*

Study Notes

into His family by the efficacy of His own word and Spirit. From His they derive their spiritual life, being united to Him by faith, and receiving from first to last out of His fullness” (*Works, Vol.4, p. 109*). **(d-v) Prince of Peace.** The Messiah and His reign would bring peace, not merely political peace, but most importantly, peace between God and man. Here is another great proof of the Messiah’s deity. The peace-maker must lay His hand upon man and God to bring them together, but who would dare stretch for his hand to touch the living God, except He who bears the very nature of God? This was Job’s great dilemma: “For He [i.e. God] is not a man as I am that I may answer Him, that we may go to court together. There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both” (Job 9:32-33). Here Isaiah prophesies that Job’s dilemma and ours would be forever resolved in the Messiah. He would bear all the necessary qualifications of a peace maker or mediator. As God, He would extend His hand toward God; and as man, He would extend His hand toward men. The apostle Paul writes, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Matthew Poole writes that this title, “agrees exactly to Christ, who is called our peace (Micah 5:5; Ephesians 2:14), and is the only purchaser and procurer of peace between God and men (Isaiah 53:5), and of peace between men and men, Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:15), and of the peace of our own consciences, and leaves peace as His legacy to His disciples (John 14:27; 16:33)” (*COTB, Vol.2, p.348*). John Trapp writes that the Messiah is, “the Prince of peace, of all kinds of peace, outward, inward, temporal, of country, and of conscience. Of all these He is the Prince, as having full power to bestow them; for He is Son to the ‘God of peace’ (Romans 16:20); He was brought from heaven with that song of peace (Luke 2:14); He Himself purged our sins, and made our peace (Hebrews 1:3; Ephesians 2:14); returned up to heaven with that farewell of peace (John 14:27); left to the world the gospel of peace (Ephesians 2:17); whose ministers are messengers of peace (Romans 10:15); whose followers are the children of peace (Luke 10:6-9)” (*Commentary, Vol.3, p.320-321*). John Newton writes, “Lastly, He shall be called ‘the Prince of Peace,’ whose sovereign prerogative it is, to ‘speak peace to His people;’ and there is not peace deserving the name, but that which He bestows” (*Works, Vol.4, p.109*).

Christ The Prince of Peace

Edward Payson writes, “The last title here given to this mysterious child, is the Prince of Peace. That our Saviour is a prince or king, the Scriptures every where inform us. Why He is called the Prince of Peace, it is easy to conceive. He is the author of reconciliation, and consequently of peace, between an offended God, and offending man. His kingdom, as established in the heart, consists in righteousness, and peace, and holy joy. His atoning blood speaks peace to the guilty, terrified conscience. He dispenses peace to His people in a sovereign way; His commands enjoin perfect peace and love between man and man, and His religion restores peace and rest to the tumultuous, agitated, distracted soul, by uniting its jarring powers and faculties to fear His name. Well, therefore, may He be called the Prince of Peace” (Works, Vol.3, p.67).

Thomas Boston writes, “He is the peaceful Prince:

- (1) In respect of disposition. He is a prince of the most peaceful disposition; ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart’ (Mathew 11:29). Peace is woven into His nature. Though He is the mighty One, who is of such power as to frown a sinner to destruction; yet His great power is tempered with the greatest meekness and peacefulness. The prince of this world is the roaring lion; the Prince of heaven, the Lamb (John 1:29), even on His throne (Revelation 5:6).
- (2) In respect of action and operation. Peace is His work He pursued all along, and doth still pursue: ‘For He is our peace’ (Ephesians 2:14). He is the great peace-maker. Adam’s sin and the sin of his posterity set all at red war, and kept them so: but Christ the second Adam travels for peace. ‘Blessed are the peace-makers,’ and He is blessed for ever on His peace-making (Philippians 2:8-9).
- (3) In respect of the state of His kingdom: ‘The kingdom of God is peace’ (Romans 14:17). Peace in the language of the Holy Ghost in the Old Testament is prosperity; so a peaceful prince is a prosperous one. Thus Solomon was a type of Him, who had a reign of the greatest peace and prosperity. His subjects may enjoy peace whoever want it - Psalm 72:7” (Works, Vol. 10, p.259).

Again, Thomas Boston writes, “What peace is effected by this Prince of peace:

- (1) Peace with God: ‘The chastisement of our peace was upon Him’ (Isaiah 53:5). Sinners were at war with God, and God with them; and there could be no peace betwixt the parties, till the Prince of peace turned to be Mediator of the peace. The war went on, sinners doing as they could against God, and God in a state of war with the sinner, blocking up all commerce with heaven of a saving sort. But He steps in, lays hands on both, and makes up the peace.
- (2) Peace among men: Men’s peace with God being lost, the peace among themselves was broken too. See the case of mankind by nature in this point: ‘For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another’ (Titus 3:3). But Christ brings them together in Him again, to love and charity one to another (Isaiah 11: 6). And wherever He makes peace with God for a man, He implants love to men in that man’s heart. Particularly, He made peace between Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14).
- (3) Peace within men, peace of conscience: ‘The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost’ (Romans 14:17). Sin by itself breaks the peace within one’s own breast. The guilt of it is like a thorn in the flesh, that till it be pinched out ceases not to gall; the reign of it is like a tyrant in the house, that enslaves, and keeps in disturbance all therein. Christ the Prince of peace, by His blood and Spirit, only can restore the true peace within” (Works, Vol. 10, p.261).

A Fitting Conclusion

Edward Payson writes, “Is it true, that unto our sinful race a child is born, to whom belong the wonderful names mentioned in our text, and to whom the salvation and the government of the world is committed? Surely then, my friends, it becomes us to rejoice, and to commemorate this all-important event with the most lively emotions of thankfulness and praise. In this offering all mankind are called upon to join, since the gift is to the whole race of men; for all people, and nations, and tongues, and languages, may cry, ‘Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God. the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.’ And the song commenced in one part of the earth at the dawn of this day, ought to be echoed round the world as the same day dawns successively on its different climes” (Works, Vol.3, p.70).

Thomas Boston writes, “What unaccountable stupidity is it in men, not to consider, admire, and be swallowed up in contemplation of this miracle; and not to be in deepest love with this miraculous personage given to them! Ah ! have we not all been careless, unmoved spectators of this miracle? How many have never spent a few minutes in the consideration and admiration of Him? Have ye not gazed on and wondered at some trifle, more than at this greatest of the works of God? Have ye not been more deeply in love with some person or thing for its shadowy excellencies, than with this miraculous person? Cease to wonder at the Jews’ obstinacy, in not being moved to believe by all His miracles; for a greater than them all is here, to wit, His miraculous self; and yet we are unmoved” (Works, Vol. 10, p.217).

Again Thomas Boston writes, “‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee’ (Psalm 73:25). His match is not to be found among all the ranks of created beings. Among created persons, the like to Him is not to be found. Consider them in all their excellencies:

- (1) What are men to this miracle of men? Great men are contemptible, wise men fools, good men’s goodness disappears, in comparison with Him.
- (2) Consider devils in their knowledge and might, the only excellencies remaining with them; and their knowledge is but ignorance in comparison of His (Revelation 5:3, 5); their power weakness (Matthew 12:29). He can bind them as easily as a giant a little child.
- (3) What are glorified saints, but so many bright stars shining with His borrowed light, wonders of His mercy, monuments of His free love (Revelation 4:10)?
- (4) What are angels that never sinned? They are all His servants (Hebrews 1:14), to worship Him (v.6). He is the son of the house, they are but servants of it. He is the Lord of angels. Moses was not content with the offer of an angel, but would have Himself: ‘If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence’ - Exodus 33:15” (Works, Vol. 10, p.218).

John Newton writes, “Such is the character of Messiah! This is the God whom we adore; our almighty unchangeable Friend! His greatness and goodness, His glory and His grace, when once known, fix the heart, no more to rove, and fill it with admiration, gratitude, and desire” (Works, Vol.4, p.112).

Chapter Five
The Historicity of
the Incarnation

In the Fullness of Time

The coming of the Son of God into the world of men is, beyond all doubt, the most significant event in the history of mankind. It was clearly foretold in Old Testament Scripture, and occurred at the precise moment ordained by the will of God. He did not come at random, but according to God's sovereign plan. This truth is especially revealed in Galatians 4:4-5:

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

This is a remarkable passage, and the phrase "the fullness of time" is replete with meaning. Some may question the divine wisdom behind the great delay in sending the Savior. They may argue against the long wait that fell between the first promise of His coming and His actual advent. However, the Scriptures teach that Christ came at the precise moment ordained by God, and at the very moment in human history when mankind was in greatest need.

Robert L. Reymond writes, "When the time had fully come,' that is to say, 'at God's appointed time' - when the Jewish diaspora had spread throughout the Roman Empire and the Old Testament had been translated into Greek, opening the eyes of the Greek world to its theological power and beauty; when the *pax Romana* [i.e. Roman peace] extended over most of the known world with great roads and the Greek language linking the empire of the Caesars and making travel and commerce possible on a scale formerly impossible; when Greek philosophical thought had atrophied into skepticism, offering no hope in human wisdom to improve the ancient world (I Corinthians 1:19-21); when the so-called civilized world as a result had sunk so low morally (Romans 1:21-32) that even pagans were crying out for relief from the rampant immorality all around them - in keeping with the Old Testament 'promises, prophecies, sacrifices... and other types and ordinances ... , all foreshadowing Christ to come' (Westminster Confession of Faith, VII/v); 'God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law'" (A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, p.545).

Archibald Alexander writes, "By this delay [i.e. God's delay in sending His Son] it clearly appeared how deep was the depravity of fallen man, as all nations, the Israelites only excepted, departed from God, and lost the knowledge of His true character. And having apostatized from the worship and service of their Creator, they universally, with the exception already mentioned, addicted themselves to the most abominable idolatries, and to every species of degrading vice... This apostasy was not owing to any defect of external light, for, as Paul teaches, 'that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them' (Romans 1:19)... It was proper that the world should have the opportunity of making trial of their own wisdom before the device of infinite wisdom should be manifested. Opportunity had also been thus afforded to prepare the way for the advent of the Mediator, by a system of types and prophecies, which clearly designated His person and offices, and thus furnished indubitable evidence of His being indeed the Christ of God. The time selected for the advent of the Saviour was also suitable, because the world was then full of inhabitants; the human mind had been highly cultivated, and the intellectual faculties had attained their utmost vigour, and all the civilized world were subject to one government; and the Latin and Greek languages were understood through the whole extent of the Roman empire. And

The Only Expected Person

by Loraine Boettner (Studies in Theology, p.160)

“In all the history of the world Jesus emerges as the only "expected" person. No one was looking for such a person as Julius Caesar, or Napoleon, or Washington, or Lincoln to appear at the time and place that they did appear. No other person has had his course foretold or his work laid out for him centuries before he was born. But the coming of the Messiah had been predicted for centuries. In fact, the first promise of His coming was given to Adam and Eve soon after their fall into sin. As time went on various details concerning His Person and work were revealed through the prophets; and at the time Jesus was born there was a general expectation through the Jewish world that the Messiah was soon to appear, even the manner of His birth and the town in which it would occur having been clearly indicated.”

although in the previous age civil discord and desolating wars disturbed the empire, all was now reduced to peace under Augustus Caesar, so that a favourable opportunity was afforded for propagating the gospel among the nations. Besides, the time of Messiah's advent had been fixed in the distinct enunciations of prophecy. Shiloh was to come before the sceptre had entirely departed from Judah, which was now far on the wane. He was to fill the temple of Zerubbabel with His glory, which was soon after this destroyed. And the specified weeks of Daniel, when the Messiah should be cut off, were drawing to a close. The 'fulness of time' was therefore come, when 'God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law' (Galatians 4:4)" (Bible Truth, p.104-106).

Francis Turretin writes, "We take for granted here that in which all agree: First, that the Messiah was promised immediately after the fall from the very beginning of the world as the only means of salvation; Second, that although promised from the beginning, He was not to be sent immediately, but only after a long interval of time, for which most wise dispensation a multiple of reason can be rendered:

- (1) With respect to Christ, this conduced to His dignity, that before He came into the world, various heralds should announce beforehand His coming as a supreme ruler - 'The greater the judge approaching, the longer the line of heralds preceded' (Augustine, *Tractate 31, On the Gospel of John [NPNF1 7:190; PL 35.1638]*). Thus faith might rest beforehand upon Him and the way be prepared not only by various types, but also by concordant testimonies of prophets.
- (2) With respect to men, the magnitude of evil required this, that the conscience (convicted of the multitude and heinousness of sins and of the inability of nature and the uselessness of all human means which could be devised), the necessity of a remedy might appear and the patient, feeling his weakness, might cry out to the physician and seek the aid of grace, as Augustine expresses it. God left men to a long expectation of himself that he might see whether he would fall by his own fault or could raise himself by his own strength. On this account, God, during the whole time of His forbearance, suffered sin to increase and in a measure to about that the abundance of grace might thus be more illustrious" (Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol.2, p.271-272).

It is important to note that the "fulness of time" not only indicates that Christ came at the time of humanity's greatest need, but that He also came in the time predicted by the Old Testament Scripture and its prophecies concerning the Messiah. It can be clearly proved that the time of the Messiah's coming is now past. If Jesus of Nazareth was not the Messiah, then the Scriptures have not and cannot be fulfilled. Consider the following remarkable truths:

- * According to Genesis 49:10, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until *Shiloh* [a reference to the Messiah as ancient Jewish

writings acknowledge] comes.” This promises that a descendant of Judah would reign until the coming of the Messiah. In 70 A.D. the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, the political dominion and authority of the Jews was taken away, and the nation was scattered. For nearly two millenium there has been no ruler from the tribe of Judah. If Jesus is not the Christ then God’s promise in Genesis 49:10 has failed, for the time is past and the promise can no longer be fulfilled.

- * According to Daniel 9:24-27, the city of Jerusalem was to be rebuilt seven weeks of years [*i.e.* forty-nine years] after the end of the captivity; and the Messiah would appear sixty-two weeks of years [*i.e.* four hundred and thirty-four years] after the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This prophecy coincides perfectly with the life of Jesus. If Jesus is not the Christ, then God’s promise in Daniel 9:24-27 has failed, for the time is past, and there is no longer any possibility for fulfillment.
- * Both Malachi 3:1-3 and Haggai 2:6-7 teach that the Messiah was to come while the second temple was still standing. The second temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. If Jesus is not the Christ then the prophecy has failed and there is no longer any possibility for fulfillment.
- * The Messiah was to be a son or descendant of David and He was to come at a time when the house of David was in low estate and held in contempt like a tree that has been cut off to its very roots. In Isaiah 11:1, the Scriptures declare, “Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.” Jesus appeared as the Messiah in such a time. If He is not the Messiah then the Scriptures cannot be fulfilled for even the root of Jesse was “pulled up” at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. At that time, all geneological evidence was destroy and it would now be impossible to prove the geneology of any proposed messiah.
- * According to Daniel 9:27, the Messiah would confirm the the New Covenant and put an end to the sacrificial system under the Old Covenant. The sacrifice system ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. If Jesus is not the Christ, then the Old Testament sacrificial system has ended without the coming of the Messiah.
- * According to the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah’s coming was to be marked by the ingathering of the nations or Gentiles (Genesis 17:5; 49:10; Psalm 2:8; 22:27, 30; Isaiah 2:2-3; 11:10; 42:1-6; 49:6; 60:3). For nearly two-thousand years (since the death and resurrection of Jesus), a countless multitude of Gentiles from every nation have identified themselves with the God of Israel and their Scriptures. This has no parallel in prior history.

The Historicity of the Gospel and the Incarnation

Before we consider the virgin birth and incarnation as revealed in the Gospel, it necessary that we recognize the historicity of the apostolic writings. Webster defines *historicity* as “the quality of being historic, especially as distinct from the mythological or legendary.” The account of the incarnation of the Son of God recorded in the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament differs greatly from mythology in the sense that it is reported as an event that occurred in the context of human history. The Son of God actually came into our world at a specific time and in a specific place. He was a real historical person and the account of His life is written by those who both knew Him and witnessed the words and works of His life. The story of the Jesus Christ the Son of God is *real* history. Regarding the historicity of the apostolic writings and their portrayal of Jesus of Nazareth, Phillip Schaff writes,

“A character so original, so complete, so uniformly consistent, so perfect, so human and yet so high above all human greatenes, can be neither a fraud nor a fiction. The poet, as has been well said, would in this case be greater than the hero. It would take more than a Jesus to invent a Jesus” (History of the Christian Church, p.109).

(iii) And touched with our hands...

Study Notes

writes, “The added words ‘with our eyes’ underline that what they observed was no phantom, nor merely an inward or spiritual vision” (Epistles of John, p.39). Albert Barnes writes that it is as if John were saying, “I have seen Him; seen what He was as a man; how He appeared on earth; and I have seen whatever there was in His works to indicate His character and origin” (BN, I John, p.279). *What we have looked at.* This is more than a mere repetition of the preceding declaration. The phrase comes from the Greek word *theáomai* which means to behold, to look upon attentively, or to contemplate. The apostles did not catch a mere glance, but were long standing observers of the Son’s life on earth. Matthew Henry writes, “What we have well discerned, contemplated, and viewed, what we have well known of this Word of life, we report to you” (MHC, Vol.6, p.1061). Hugh Binning writes, “Our senses did bring in such strange and marvelous objects to our minds, that we stood gazing, and beheld it over and over again, looked upon it with reason concluding what it might be. We gave entertainment to our minds, to consider it wisely and deliberately, and fastened our eyes, that we might detain our hearts, in the consideration of such a glorious person” (Works, p.281). **(a-iii) And touched with our hands.** The word “touched” comes from the Greek word *pselapháo* which means to handle, touch or feel. D. Edmond Heibert writes that the verb, “brings in the sense of touch as the culminating evidence for the reality of the incarnation” (Epistles of John, p.39). The apostles could not be accused of following a phantom. They had touched the physical body of the incarnate Son of God, both before and after the resurrection. The same word is used in Luke 24:39 where Jesus spoke to His frightened disciples after the resurrection: “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch (*pselapháo*) Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” Many scholars believe that John was making specific reference to this post-resurrection event. Similar instances of the disciples handling the Lord Jesus are found in John 20:17 and John 20:25-28. Hugh Binning writes, “There is a gradation [i.e. progression] of certainty here. Hearing Himself speak, is more than hearing by report; but an eye-witness is better than ten ear-witnesses, and handling adds a third assurance, for the sense of touching gives the last and greatest evidence of truth” (Works, p.281). Albert Barnes writes, “It was not merely that He had been seen by the eye, for then it might be pretended that this was a mere appearance assumed without reality; or that what occurred might have been a mere optical illusion; but the evidence that He appeared in the flesh was subjected to more senses than one; to the fact that His voice was heard; that He was seen with the eyes; that the most intense scrutiny had been employed; and, lastly, that He had been actually touched and handled, showing that it could not have been a mere appearance, an assumed form, but that it was a reality. This kind of proof that the Son of God had appeared in the flesh, or that He was truly and properly a man, is repeatedly referred to in the New Testament” (BN, I John, p.279-280).

A Sure Witness

by J.C. Philpot (*Sermons, Vol.9, p.9-11*)

“You will observe the positive certainty wherewith John speaks; and you may perhaps ask yourself the question, ‘Whence arose this positive certainty in John’s breast?’ John himself shall tell us. ‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you’ (1 John 1:1-4.). He was not speaking at a peradventure; there were no perhapses, or ifs, or buts in his knowledge, as there are none in his declaration of it. He had seen with his eyes the Person of Jesus; he had heard with his ears the voice of Jesus; he had handled with his hands Jesus as the Word of life; and therefore knew by the witness of his eye, the witness of his ear, the witness of his hands, and the witness of his heart what he speaks of to us, and what he has by divine inspiration recorded in the word of truth, that we may have fellowship with him and all the saints of God... It was necessary that the apostles should have the fullest amount of certainty, and especially those of them who were inspired to write the Scriptures, to be the food of faith to the Church through all ages. They believed what they saw with their eyes and heard with their ears with the fullest certainty; and having given a testimony of this certain knowledge to us in the word of truth, we believe their testimony. Having thus a measure of the same divine teaching, divine witness, and divine revelation, we are made able to say, not perhaps to the amount of their full confidence, but still with a measure of it, according to the strength of our faith, ‘We know that the Son of God is come.’”

- b. *In verse 2, the apostle John makes three important statements using the same logical sequence that is employed whenever credible legal testimony is presented. Explain how each statement gives credence to the incarnation as an actual event in history as opposed to a religious myth.*
- (i) *The Event is Occurs in History - “The life was manifested, ... the eternal life, which was with the Father.”*

Study Notes

(b-i) *And the life...the eternal life.* This is a reference to the Son of God. He is life, life eternal, and the Word in which all life resides. D. Edmond Heibert writes, “For John ‘the life’ was no abstract principle but a real person” (Epistles of John, p.42). *Was manifested.* John, as well as the other apostles and early Christians viewed the incarnation as an actual event in history. The word “manifested” comes from the Greek word *phaneróo* which means to make manifest or visible what has been hidden or unknown. In the incarnation, the Son of God was plainly manifested to men, not through some mystical or highly subjective religious experience that might have been misinterpreted, but through being made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7) and entering into the context of human history. Matthew Henry writes, “The life was clothed with flesh, put on the state and habit of abased human nature, and as such gave sensible proof of its existence and transactions here” (MHC, Vol.6,

The Life Manifested

by Robert. Murray M'Cheyne (*Memoir and Remains*, p.373-374)

“Manifested, - O beloved, if Jesus had not been manifested, you had never been saved! It would have been quite righteous in God to have kept His Son in His own bosom, - to have kept that jewel in His own place upon the throne-of heaven. God would have been the same lovely God; but we would have lain down in a burning hell. If that Eternal Life which was with the Father - if He had remained in His glory as the Living One, then you and I would have borne our own curse. But He was manifested: ‘God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory.’ John saw Him; he saw His lovely countenance; he beheld His glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. He saw that better Sun veiled with flesh that could not keep the beams of His Godhead from shining through. He saw Him on the mount, when His face shone like the sun. He saw Him in the garden, when He lay upon the ground. He saw Him on the cross, when He hung between earth and heaven. He looked upon Him, - many a time he looked up on His heavenly countenance, - his eye met His eye. He heard Him, - heard the voice that said, ‘Let there be light!’ He heard the voice like the sound of many waters. He heard all His gracious words, - His words concerning God and the way of peace. He heard Him say to a sinner: ‘Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.’ He handled Him, - he put his hands in His hands, his arms around His arms, and his head upon His bosom. Perhaps he handled His body when it was taken from the cross, - touched the cold clay of Immanuel. O beloved, it is a manifested Christ we declare unto you. It is not the Son in the bosom of the Father; that would never have saved you. It is Jesus manifested in flesh, - the Son of God living and dying as man in the stead of sinners; Him we declare unto you.”

(ii) The Event is Witnessed - *We have seen*

Study Notes

p.1160). *Which was with the Father*. A reference to the preexistence or eternity of the Son of God and to His intimate “face to face” relationship with the Father. A similar reference is found in John 1:1, “The Word was with God.” **(b-ii)** *And we have seen*. The importance of such an eye-witness account is revealed in the repetition. Having stated in verse one that he and the other apostles had heard, seen, contemplated, and even touched the incarnate Son of God, John now repeats the matter to further advance his credibility to his hearers. The apostles’ witness of the incarnation of the Son of God was not based upon hearsay, fables, or myths, but upon their personal “eyewitness” accounts. They proclaimed only what they had seen with their own eyes. Here also, the multitude of witnesses is important. By his consistent use of the plural, John insists that he is not alone in His witness. He was standing with the other apostles and writing in their name. Standing behind them were the more than five hundred eye-witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the greater part of whom were still alive during the writing of most of the New Testament (I Corinthians 15:6). R.E.O. White writes, “More than one man’s personal memories lay behind the apostolic testimony” (Commentary on the Epistle of John, p.29).

(iii) The Eyewitnesses Testify - “*We testify and proclaim to you.*”

- c. *The validity of a person’s testimony is often weighed by their motive. According to verse 3, what was John’s and the other apostles’ motive for proclaiming the incarnation and saving work of the Son of God? How does their motivation add even more credibility to their message?*

Study Notes

(b-iii) *And testify and proclaim to you.* The word “testify” comes from the Greek word *marturéo* which means to bear witness or to affirm something to be true. The word “proclaim” comes from the Greek word *apaggéllō* which means to report or openly declare. John’s public “proclamation” of the incarnate Christ was based upon his own personal “testimony” of having seen Him, heard His teaching, and lived with Him over a course of three years. John was not drawing on secondary sources, but upon his own personal experience. He was an eyewitness and companion of the Son of God when He dwelled upon the earth and lived among men. D. Edmond Heibert writes, “Unshakably convinced of the authenticity of their message, and having been commissioned by the risen Christ to make that message known to the ends of the world, they now actively ‘shew’ or ‘proclaim’ that message ‘unto you’, the reader of this epistle. The writing of this letter is only a part of their standing assignment to spread abroad the truth of the incarnation. ‘We,’ as the subject of both of these verbs, expresses John’s deep sense of solidarity with the apostolic testimony” (Epistles of John, p.43). Matthew Henry writes, “Wisdom and integrity obliged them [i.e. the apostles] to demonstrate that it was not either private fancy or cunningly-devised fables that they presented to the world. Evident truth would open their mouths, and force a public profession” (MHC, Vol.6, p.1061). **(c)** *What we have seen and heard we proclaim.* The repetition of the same truth stated in the previous verses is designed to emphasize the certainty of it. *To you also.* D. Edmond Heibert writes, “The words ‘ye also’ suggest that although the readers did not have the same personal experiences with the incarnate Christ that the apostles had, yet by personally accepting the reality of Christ proclaimed they can share a common spiritual fellowship” (Epistles of John, p.46). *So that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.* The apostle’s motivation was not self-seeking, but sprang from the sincere desire to bring others into fellowship with the Father and the Son. Thomas Brooks writes, “Man’s *summum bonum* [i.e. greatest good] stands in his communion with God, as Scripture and experience evidences - Psalm 144:15” (Works, Vol.2, p.136). The Psalmist testifies, “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside” (Psalm 84:10). The apostle’s desire for other men to share this fellowship does not flow from fanatical zeal, but from love and a sincere concern to bring men to their greatest good - fellowship with God. Robert Candlish writes, “Evidently the desire and aim of the writer of

- d. *In verse four, the apostle John communicates a very important truth that has special significance to us today - what he had seen, heard, handled, and proclaimed, he was now putting down in writing. What is the significance of this statement?*

Study Notes

this Epistle is to place all to whom it comes in the same advantageous position which he himself and his fellow-apostles enjoyed, as regards the knowledge of God in Christ, and the full enjoyment of the holy and divine fellowship which that knowledge implies. That is his great design throughout; and this is his announcement of it at the very beginning of his treatise” (Geneva Series, I John, p.1). The lives of the apostles and other early Christians bear witness to the sincerity of John’s words. Not one of them gained any earthly profit from their proclamation, but rather suffered great hardships and even martyrdom because of it. Men do not die for fables, myths, or private inventions. Like the resurrection, if the incarnation was only an invention of the apostles, we should be able to discover a motive for the deception. What did they hope to achieve by perpetrating the lie? As already stated, the majority of the disciples died poor, defamed, persecuted, and hated. As the apostle Paul declared, “We have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things” (I Corinthians 4:13), and if Christ has not risen “we are of all men most to be pitied” (I Corinthians 15:19). If they had invented the Gospel story for wealth, fame, power, ease of life, etc. then they would have recanted or denounced the story when they saw that it was not achieving their desired goal. The only explanation for such tenacity and persistence in the face of such suffering and death is that the whole thing is true! *His Son Jesus Christ*. D. Edmond Hiebert writes, “Here for the first time in the epistle, John gives the historical identity of the one whose incarnation he has been talking about” (Epistles of John, p.47). **(d) *These things we write.*** John does not limit apostolic authority to proclamation alone, but extends it to the written text. He now writes, what He and the other apostles had proclaimed. We are assured that in the Scriptures, we have the inspired record of the Son of God from “the beginning” of His incarnation until His resurrection and ascension into glory. D. Edmond Hiebert writes, “John with his emphatic ‘we are writing’ unites himself with the other apostolic witnesses as he composes this letter to portray and defend the reality of the incarnation. The writing of this letter is in keeping with his apostolic commission” (Epistles of John, p.50). J.C. Philpot writes, “He had seen with his eyes the Person of Jesus; he had heard with his ears the voice of Jesus; he had handled with his hands Jesus as the Word of life; and therefore knew by the witness of his eye, the witness of his ear, the witness of his hands, and the witness of his heart what he speaks of to us, and what he has by divine inspiration recorded in the word of truth” (Sermons, Vol.9, p.10). Thomas Manton writes, “For in the word of God delivered by Christ and His apostles, there is sure direction to walk by, and sure promises to build upon. For whatever they made known of Christ was not a fable but a certain truth; for they had the testimony of sense (II Peter 1:16-17; 1 John 1:2-4), and so could plead both the authority of His command and the certainty of His promise, and that with uncontrollable evidence; and without this relation there can be neither faith nor obedience, nor sure expectation of happiness” (Works, Vol.3, p.128). Again Thomas Manton writes, “The apostles, beginning to leave the world, did know the slipperiness of man’s memory, and the danger of corrupting Christian doctrine, if there were not a sure authentic record left; therefore they wrote, and so fully, that nothing is wanting to complete our joy and happiness” (Works, Vol.3, p.129-130).

2. In Luke 1:1-4, is found another important text which demonstrates that the Gospel writers were fully convinced that they were not relating myth or legend, but historical fact based upon either the personal witness of the writer himself or the carefully investigated testimony of others. Consider Luke 1:1-4 until you are familiar with its contents. Afterwards, write your comments on the important truths found in each verse. What do they teach us about the historicity of the Gospel account?
 - a. *In as much as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us (v.1).*

Study Notes

Luke 1:1-4 - A.T. Robertson writes, “This Preface by Luke is in splendid literary Koine (*i.e.* common Greek) and is not surpassed by those in any Greek writer (Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius). It is entirely possible that Luke was familiar with this habit of Greek historians to write prefaces since he was a man of culture” (Word Pictures, Vol.2, p.7). Robert H. Stein writes, “Luke’s Gospel begins with a literary prologue or ‘period’ that ranks among the best Greek literature of the first century. Numerous parallels of such a prologue exist in the Jewish and Hellenistic literature of that day. In this period, Luke manifested his skill as a writer and his conscious intention to follow the conventional introductory form of contemporary literature. In so doing he clearly revealed literary as well as historical pretensions” (NAC, Luke, p.62). **(a)** *In as much as many have undertaken.* The word “undertaken” is from the Greek word *epexeiréo*. Marvin R. Vincent writes, “Hippocrates begins one of his medical treatises very much as Luke begins his gospel. ‘As many as have taken in hand (*epexeiresan*) to speak or to write concerning the healing art’” (Word Studies, Vol.1, p.252). It is evident that Luke is using the language of a technician and not that of a myth maker or storyteller. The fact that many had undertaken the same work clearly points to the great importance of the matter. “Many” were rightly convinced that the history of Christ’s incarnation and redemptive work had to be recorded. *To compile an account of the things accomplished among us.* The word “compile” comes from the Greek word *anatássomai* which means to “put together in order” or “to arrange”. Luke had taken it upon himself to write an orderly and historically accurate account of the incarnation of the Son of God and His work. The word “account” comes from the Greek word *diégesis* which denotes an account or narrative. Ancient historians and writer such as Aristotle, Philo, and Josephus frequently employed the term to describe historical works (Gingrich and Danker, Greek-English Lexicon, p.195). The word “accomplished” comes from the Greek word *plerophoréo* which means to accomplish or fulfill. It was Luke’s purpose to write an historically accurate account of the things that were accomplished or fulfilled among the great body of eyewitnesses. Luke uses the pronoun “us” to demonstrate the unity and continuity between those who were eyewitnesses and those who did not see but believed their testimony (John 17:20), obtained a common faith (Jude 1:3), and personally experience the transforming power of Jesus through conversion (I Thessalonians 1:8-10). Noval Geldenhuys writes, “For its simplicity, modesty and terseness, this is a model preface for a historical work” (NICNT, Luke, p.51). Whether one accepts their testimony or not, it cannot be denied that the writers of the four Gospels believed with the strongest certainty that they were recording actual facts of history when they penned their works.

The Historicity of Christianity and Luke's Gospel

Noval Goldenhuys writes, "It is indeed the unique characteristic of the Christian religion that it is based on definite historical facts and not on speculations or theories. Spiritually we cannot live on uncertainties or half-truths. All other religions and philosophic systems rest on human speculations and figments. That is why they contradict each other so radically in practically every important matter and afford no true satisfaction for the deepest yearning of the human heart. In Christianity, however, we see how God throughout many centuries has dealt effectively with man and has spoken to him - at first to prepare him for the coming of Christ and finally in and through the Lord Jesus Himself. While all other religions are thus only a manifestation of the struggle of humanity in its deep longing to know and enjoy divinity, we find in the Word of God the history of how the living God in His saving grace entered into the life of mankind, seeking to save those that are lost. Luke, therefore, justly emphasizes the historical trustworthiness of the data of the Gospel narrative" (NICNT, Luke, p.55).

J.C. Ryle writes, "The short preface which we have now read is a peculiar feature of St. Luke's Gospel. But we shall find, on examination, that it is full of most useful instruction. In the first place, St. Luke gives us a short, but valuable, sketch of the nature of a Gospel. He calls it, 'a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us.' It is a narrative of facts about Jesus Christ. Christianity is a religion built upon facts. Let us never lose sight of this. It came before mankind at first in this shape. The first preachers did not go up and down the world, proclaiming an elaborate, artificial system of abstruse (*i.e.* concealed or hidden) doctrines and deep principles. They made it their first business to tell men great plain facts. They went about telling a sin-laden world, that the Son of God had come down to earth, and lived for us, and died for us, and risen again. The Gospel, at its first publication, was far more simple than many make it now. It was neither more nor less than the history of Christ. Let us aim at greater simplicity in our own personal religion. Let Christ and His Person be the sun of our system, and let the main desire of our souls be to live the life of faith in Him, and daily know Him better" (Expository Thoughts, Luke, Vol.1, p.1-2).

- b. *Just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word (v.2).*

Study Notes

(b) *Just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.* Noval Goldenhuys writes, "Originally the Christians had clung to the living word as communicated to them by the apostles and other hearers and eyewitnesses of the Gospel story. But as the church extended further and the apostles passed away one by one, there arose a more and more urgent need of authoritative written renderings of the facts on which the Christian faith was based. As an educated and farseeing man, Luke had a strong sense of this need. That was his reason for undertaking the great task" (NICNT, Luke, p.51-52). *Just as they were handed down to us.* The phrase "handed down" comes from the Greek word *paradidomi* which means to commit or commend something to someone. The apostles who were with Christ "from the

c. *It seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning (v.3)*

Study Notes

beginning,” were faithful to “hand down” to others what they knew to be true about His person and works. A.T. Robertson writes, “[Luke] was not one of the “eyewitnesses.” He was a secondary, not a primary, witness of the events. Tradition has come to have a meaning of unreliability with us, but that is not the idea here. Luke means to say that the handing down was dependable, not mere wives’ fables” (Word Pictures, Vol.2, p.5). *By those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants* The word “eyewitnessess” comes from the Greek word *autóptes* and refers to one who sees with his own eyes. The medical term “autopsy” is derived from this word and refers to a detailed examination. Marvin R. Vincent writes that the term is frequently found in medical writers in reference to a personal examination of disease or of the parts of the body (Word Studies, Vol. 1, p.252). These “eyewitnesses” and “servants of the word” are probable references to the apostles. Robert H. Stein writes, “The use of a single Greek article before ‘eyewitnesses and servants’ indicates that Luke was referring to a single group” (NAC, Luke, p.64). The same structure is found Acts 16:16, where the two terms refer to the same group. *Of the word.* This small phrase is extremely important. These eyewitnesses and ministers were submissive servants to the word of the Gospel. What they did and taught came under the dictates of the Gospel and was for its advancement. Noval Geldenhuys writes, “[Luke] lays special emphasis on the fact that those writings [*i.e.* those of Luke and others] are by no means the collecting of legends or mere human gossip, but the written rendering of what had really happened and had been communicated by authoritative witnesses. Here, therefore, we have to deal not with fabricated fables but with the written reproduction of the tradition of the apostles” (NICNT, Luke, p.52). Matthew Henry writes, “The truth of the things he had to write was confirmed by the concurring testimony of those who were competent and unexceptionable (*i.e.* not open to criticism or reproach) witnesses of them” (MHC, Vol.5, p.574). *(c)* Luke now begins to set forth his credentials for writing such a history - a careful investigation of the facts from the very beginning of the incarnation event. *It seemed fitting for me as well.* Luke was moved by the Holy Spirit to write His Gospel, and yet he was not an automaton or robot. As a reasonable creature, he saw the necessity to write. Matthew Henry writes, “It is certain that he [*i.e.* Luke] was moved by the Holy Ghost, not only to the writing, but in the writing of it; but in both he was moved as a reasonable creature, and not as a mere machine” (MHC, Vol.5, p.574). *Having investigated everything carefully from the beginning.* The word “investigated” comes from the Greek word *parakolouthéo* which means to follow after or to attend one wherever he goes. Metaphorically it means to follow after a matter, to trace its course, or to examine it thoroughly. Luke had carefully followed after the facts and they led him to the truths about which he wrote in his Gospel. The word “carefully” comes from the Greek word *akribos* which may be translated “diligently”, “circumspectly”, “exactly”, or “accurately”. The term demonstrates that Luke’s investigation was both exhaustive and diligent. He had examined all the available data and had left no stone unturned. His goal was truth - historical and without embellishments. He did not pick and chose only those facts which would most advance some personal opinion. He weighed everything carefully and impartially. A.T. Robertson writes, “Luke here claims fulness of knowledge before he began to write his book. He had the traditions of the eyewitnesses and ministers of the word and the narratives previously drawn up... Luke got himself ready to write before he began by full and accurate knowledge of the subject” (Word Pictures, Vol.2, p.6). Based on Luke’s painstaking labor for accuracy, Thomas Boston rightly concludes, “In these and other historical relations which we have in the word of God, there is no lie nor mistake at all” (Works, Vol.1, p.124).

d. *To write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus (v.3).*

e. *So that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (v.4).*

Study Notes

(d) *To write it out for you in consecutive order.* The phrase “in consecutive order” comes from the Greek word *kathexes* which denotes both succession and order. It does not necessarily refer to “chronological order”, but to a logical and systematic coordination of the facts. Luke was as careful and accurate in his writing as he was in his investigation. To use contemporary idioms, Luke’s “journalistic integrity” and “accuracy in reporting” are unparalleled. He gives his readers no reason to doubt him. Those who reject his report must do so on the basis of their own biased presuppositions. Robert H. Stein writes, “The term ‘orderly’ was used throughout Greek literature by writers who sought to convince their hearers of the meticulous research and careful organization of their material” (NAC, Luke, p.65). *Most excellent Theophilus.* The name “Theophilus” is a contraction of two Greek words *theós* [god] and *philos* [friend] meaning a “friend of God”. He was probably a Gentile and may have been a believer. The title “most excellent” is translated from the Greek word *kratistos* which can also be translated “most noble”, or “most illustrious”. It is used in addressing men of prominent rank or office. In Acts 23:26 and 26:25, Felix and Festus are given this title. **(e)** *So that.* Luke now reveals his primary purpose for the writing the account. *You may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.* A.T. Robertson quotes Plummer as saying, “Theophilus shall know that the faith which he has embraced has an impregnable historical foundation” (Word Pictures, Vol.2, p.7). The word “exact” comes from the Greek word *aspháleia* which denotes firmness, stability, or certainty. Luke sought to discover the exact truth about Jesus of Nazareth through careful investigation, and to communicate that truth with the most careful and accurate reporting. The word “things” comes from the Greek word *lógos* which is literally translated “words”. Marvin R. Vincent writes, “If the word can mean ‘thing’ at all, it is only in the sense of the the thing spoken of; the subject or matter of discourse, in which sense it occurs often classical Greek. Some render it accounts, histories; others, doctrines of the faith. Godet translates it ‘instruction’, and claims that not only the facts of the gospel, but the exposition of the facts with a view to show their evangelical meaning and to their appropriation by faith, are included in the word” (Word Studies, Vol.1, p.253-254). The word “taught” come from the Greek word *katechéo* which mean to teach orally, to instruct; to inform by word of mouth; to be orally informed. It is from this term that the word “catechised” is derived. Theophilus had been orally instructed in the Gospel, but in Luke’s Gospel he had a written record. Like John and the other apostles, Luke’s motives were beyond reproach. His great passion and reason for writing this Gospel was that Theophilus and others might “know the exact truth” about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Since first-century Christianity was considered to be nothing more than a persecuted sect, any ulterior motive on Luke’s part would have been absurd. As it has already been mentioned, men do not risk life and limb for fables, myths, or private inventions.

The Once for all Nature of the Gospels

by Roy Mohon (Scripture, Vol.2, p.2)

“Luke writes in order to the establishment of the Church. He wants his readers to understand that he has written his Gospel for ‘the establishment’ of God’s people. A written record makes this ‘more sure’ than what would be attained by reliance upon memory and oral accounts. He has written so that Theophilus and others might know the certainty of those things in which they had been instructed. The time would come when eyewitness testimony would be no longer available, although it was by such oral witness that the truth was initially delivered to the church. The things most surely believed were delivered by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word. The Apostle John also used written communication to ensure that believers would have a joyous assurance:

‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full’ (I John 1:1-4).

Such witness on the basis of eyewitness evidence was to be an unrepeatable experience. There could be no future oral eyewitness testimony to the life, teaching, prayers, miracles, sufferings and death of Jesus Christ once the generation of the ‘days of his flesh’ (Heb 5:7) had passed away. Such witness cannot be repeated. Christ lived in the first century and only those alive then could witness to what they had seen.

“Therefore, in his infinite wisdom and mercy, God inspired men like John and Luke to write concerning the Saviour so that there might be a New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament witness to the Messiah in the Jewish Scriptures. Luke refers to previous writings emphasizing that the basis of the written records was the eyewitness testimony (Luke 1:2). Scriptures of this quality of evidence could in the nature of the case be delivered only once, and in the first century, before the eyewitnesses died. All of the books of the New Testament issued from this eyewitness context. This was true of Paul who had not only seen the risen Lord, but who laboured among those who were eyewitnesses and apostles and to whom Paul’s doctrine and writings were familiar. (Acts 9:1-7, Acts 15, Galatians 1:15-2:16, and II Peter 3:15-16). Never again could these conditions for an authoritative written record witnessing to the life, death and resurrection of Christ be fulfilled. Luke might have said to himself: ‘It is now or never!’ Never again could any supposed revelation claim to have such an eyewitness context concerning Christ in his life, death and resurrection like that of the authentic New Testament Scriptures. The circumstances will never be reproduced. Revelation such as exists in the New Testament is unique. Luke’s Gospel partakes of this uniqueness and Luke himself tells us that he pursued his work with thoroughness and care to write an orderly and connected narrative providing a reasonably comprehensive and utterly reliable record. The Greek translated ‘in order’ includes logical order as well as chronological order. Luke is not limiting himself to time sequence but he is being systematic. Theophilus had apparently already received some instruction in the truth but Luke writes for him and others like him so that they might have a sure knowledge of the unshakeable historical facts upon which the Christian Faith rests and the spiritual significance of those facts. Spirit-wrought faith thus founded results in an establishment in the truth that is invincible against the world, the flesh and the Devil.”

Chapter Six

The New Testament Witness to the Incarnation

The incarnation of the Son of God through the virgin birth is an absolutely essential doctrine of the Christian faith and the Gospel. It is impossible to deny this doctrine without denying the clear testimony of the Scriptures and the long standing witness of the Church. If Christ's conception was not supernatural, then He was not God incarnate, the Gospel is a lie, and the Cross has no power to save! For this reason it is necessary for us to give close attention to this foundational doctrine and to hold to it with absolute certainty!

What does it mean to say that Jesus Christ is *God Incarnate* or *God in the flesh*? It is extremely important that we understand that in the incarnation, the Son of God did not cease to be God, nor did He take upon Himself something of an intermediate nature somewhere between true deity and true humanity. Rather, the Son of God became something He had never been before. He added humanity to His deity and became the God-Man, one person with two distinct, yet indivisible natures - divine and human. He did not give up any of His divine attributes, but willingly submitted the use of them to the Father's will. He did not merely take the outward form of a man, or simply appear as a man, but He became a real man, like us in all ways except without sin.

The Council of Chalcedon states, "In agreement, then, with the holy Fathers, we all unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in deity and the same perfect in manness, truly God and truly man, ... being made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinction of the natures being by no means removed because of the union but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person and one substance, not parted or divided into two persons but one and the same Son and Only-begotten, God, Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Westminster Confession states, "The Son of God, the Second Person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man" (VIII, ii).

1. In Matthew 1:18-25 is found the first account of the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ in the womb of His mother Mary. What truth is declared in verse 20? What is its significance?

Study Notes

Matthew 1:20 - *For the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.* It is the testimony of the Scriptures that Jesus had no earthly father, but was conceived supernaturally of the Holy Spirit. Benjamin B. Warfield writes, "I can only say that I have myself no doubt whatever of the fact of the supernatural birth of

The Uniqueness of the Virgin Birth

by William Hendriksen (NTC, Matthew, p.142-143)

“The truth with reference to Christ’s virgin birth having now been expounded, the question arises, ‘Where did that idea originate?’ The unlikelihood that, apart from special revelation, it arose among the Jews has already been pointed out. It may be asked, ‘Was it derived from pagan mythology perhaps?’ We are being told that in the days of the prophets and the apostles the air was full of virgin birth stories, so that the inclusion of one such legend in Holy Writ should not be considered surprising. However, as has been proved by many a writer, from Tertullian and Origen down to the present day, between the foul tales of the heathen and the pure narratives written by Matthew and Luke there is no essential similarity. The former are characterized by gross indecency, squalid inelegancy, and gaudy embroidery; the latter by faultless dignity, charming delicacy, and exquisite simplicity; by reserve and not by the reverse. When a god, inflamed by lust, rapes a girl or commits adultery with a married woman, the result, if conception takes place, is certainly no virgin birth. If the female was a virgin before, she is no longer a virgin when it occurs. To refer once more to that legend of the so-called virgin birth of Alexander the Great: We are told that a serpent was once seen sharing the couch of Olympias, the wife of Philip of Macedonia. (It must be understood that Zeus, the chief offender in such cases of cohabitation, and other gods also, were able to assume the shapes of reptiles, birds, or even of the foam of the sea)... Hence, the product of the strange union, namely, Alexander, was a son not of Philip but of Zeus. At this point the legend splits. According to one version, Olympias, when she sent her son forth upon his great expedition, revealed to him the secret of his begetting, and bade him to be inspired by purposes worthy of his birth. According to another version, she was ashamed of the dirty story and in repudiating it said, ‘Alexander must cease slandering me to Hera [the lawful wife of Zeus].’ Can anyone in his right mind believe that the clean and beautiful story of Christ’s virgin birth was derived from - or even suggested by - anything as filthy as this silly tale? Moreover, to top it all, even if the story were true, Olympias was not at all a ‘virgin’ before she conceived Alexander and could not have become one afterward. The analogy breaks down completely.

“What, then, is the real origin of the narrative? There is only one answer: Matthew and Luke tell the story because it actually happened. From Mary, either directly or indirectly but in the latter case from a source very close to Mary, the evangelists received the correct information. The Holy Spirit saw to it that it was infallibly conveyed to them, infallibly recorded by them in two completely harmonious accounts (Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-38), and that also in the rest of the New Testament there is nothing that conflicts with it. Mark introduces Jesus Christ as ‘the Son of God’ (1:1); John, as ‘the Word who became flesh’ (assumed the human nature), ‘the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth’ (1:14); and Paul, as ‘the second man from heaven’ (I Corinthians 15:47). Cf. also Romans 8:3; Philippians 2:7.”

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Jesus, as that fact is recorded in the opening chapters of the gospels of Matthew and Luke” (Works, Vol.3, p.447). Matthew Henry writes, “The Holy Spirit, who produced the world, now produced the Saviour of the world, and prepared Him a body, as was promised Him” (MHC, Vol.1, p.7). The word “conceived” is translated from the Greek word *gennáo* which means “to beget” or “engender”. It is the common term used to describe the conception of life in the womb. One may deny the validity of the Gospels, but one cannot deny that the Gospels teach the virgin birth! It is important to note that both the humanity and deity of Christ are revealed in the angel’s words. His humanness is revealed in that He was a “child” conceived in the womb of a woman. His divinity is revealed in the fact that He was conceived by the Spirit of God. J. Gresham Machen writes, “It is perfectly clear that the New Testament teaches the virgin birth of Christ; about that there can be no manner of doubt. There is no serious question as to the interpretation of the Bible at this point” (The Virgin Birth of Christ - New York: Harper & Row, 1930, p.382). Again Machen writes, “Only one Jesus is presented in the Word of God; and that Jesus did not come into the world by ordinary generation, but was conceived in the womb of the virgin by the Holy Ghost” (The Virgin Birth of Christ, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930, p.397). Augustine

The Mystery of the Virgin Birth

by J.C. Ryle (*Expository Thoughts, Luke, Vol.1, p.26-27*)

“Let us mark, in these verses, the reverent and discreet manner in which the angel Gabriel speaks of the great mystery of Christ’s incarnation. In reply to the question of the Virgin “How shall this be?” he uses these remarkable words: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.” We shall do well to follow the example of the angel in all our reflections on this deep subject. Let us ever regard it with holy reverence, and abstain from those unseemly and unprofitable speculations upon it, in which some have unhappily indulged. Enough for us to know that “the Word was made flesh,” and that when the Son of God came into the world, a real “body was prepared for Him,” so that He “took part of our flesh and blood,” and was “made of a woman.” (John 1:14; Heb 10:5; Heb 2:14; Gal 4:4.) Here we must stop. The manner in which all this was effected is wisely hidden from us. If we attempt to pry beyond this point, we shall but darken counsel by words without knowledge, and rush in where angels fear to tread. In a religion which really comes down from heaven there must needs be mysteries. Of such mysteries in Christianity, the incarnation is one.”

- c. *In verse 32, two very important truths are revealed about the One that would be conceived in the womb of Mary. What are these two truths and how do they prove that the Christ would be both divine and human?*

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creation of the world (Genesis 1:2). If we acknowledge the creative power of the Holy Spirit in the creation of the universe, there should be no difficulty in acknowledging His power to bring about the conception of life in the womb of a virgin. William Hendriksen writes, “The overshadowing or covering of which Luke speaks here is not static but active. It is creative, productive. It causes Mary to conceive a child. Our thoughts are therefore also - and perhaps especially - directed to the Spirit of God creatively hovering over the waters at the time of creation - Genesis 1:2” (NTC, Luke, p.88). Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest write, “To imply that the Holy Spirit could not supernaturally supply the male contribution to the conception of the child is unjustifiable, since the Spirit was involved in the creation of human life in the beginning. Because He is Spirit, no physical process is appropriately imagined in the Holy Spirit’s “overshadowing” of Mary. The chaste biblical narrative differs greatly from pagan myths of ‘gods’ having intercourse with women” (Integrative Theology, Vol.2, p.273-274). John Calvin writes, “This would be an extraordinary work, in which natural means have no place” (CC, Vol.16, Luke, p.41-42). (c) *He will be called the Son of the Most High (v.32)*. This is an undeniable declaration of the Messiah’s deity. He was not the son of Joseph, or merely some “unique work of creation”, but He is the eternal and unique Son of God, equal with the Father in essence and attributes. John Calvin writes, “Christ is not confounded either with angels or with men, so as to be one of the multitude of the sons of God; but what is given to Him no other has a right to claim” (CC, Vol.16, Luke, p.37). John Gill writes that Christ was the Son of the Most High, “not by creation, as angels and men, nor by adoption, as saints, nor by office, as magistrates, are called “the children of the Most High” (Psalm 82:6), but by nature, being the eternal Son of God; of the same nature with Him, and equal to Him” (EONT, Vol.7, p.508). *He will possess the throne of His father David (v.32)*.

Nothing Impossible with God

Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, “‘How shall this be?’ asks Mary, when she is informed by the angel of the promise. ‘The thing is impossible’, she says. Here is the answer, ‘With God nothing shall be impossible’; as if the angel turned to her and said, ‘Ah! Mary, you are still thinking in the old terms and in the old human way. What I am announcing to you is quite different. God is going to act now. Humanly speaking you are right, but this is not to be human, it is to be divine. God is going to break into the world. The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.’ No, no! the story of salvation is not the story of God waiting for us to do something, waiting for us to repent and to turn to Him and to do good works; neither is it just the story of God responding to what we have done and rewarding us by pardoning us and forgiving us. All that would be wonderful, but it is as nothing in comparison with the story which the Bible reveals. For here we find not a passive God but an active God, not a God who is merely ready to receive us, but a God who actually goes out after us and seeks for us; not a God who can be persuaded by our lives and actions into forgiving us but a God whose love is actually so great that He not only forgives but also persuades us to be forgiven; whose mercy is so boundless that He is not only ready to be reconciled to us but actually Himself so deals with us as to reconcile us to Himself! ‘With God nothing shall be impossible.’ It is God who does everything” (Evangelistic Sermons, p.195-196).

Thomas Watson writes, “Christ born of a virgin, a thing not only strange in nature, but impossible, learn, that there are no impossibilities with God. God can bring about things which are not within the sphere of nature to produce; as the iron should swim, that the rock should gush out water, and that the fire should lick up the water in the trenches (I Kings 18:38). It is natural for water to quench fire, but for fire to consume water is impossible in the course of nature; but God can bring about all this. ‘There is nothing too hard for thee’ (Jeremiah 32:27). ‘If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it be marvellous in my eyes? saith the Lord’ (Zechariah 8:6). How should God be united to our flesh? It is impossible to us, but not with God; He can do what transcends reason, and exceeds faith. He would not be our God if He could not do more than we can think - Ephesians 3:20” (A Body of Divinity, p.198).

- d. *Why do you suppose that Gabriel’s statement made in verse 37 is foundational to one’s belief in the miraculous conception of the Messiah?*

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This is an undeniable declaration of the Messiah’s humanity. The Son of the Most High God was born of a woman from the royal line of David according to the flesh (Romans 1:3). Therefore, the Christ could properly claim both God and David as His Father. It is significant that the designations “Son of God” and “Son of David” were both well-known Messianic titles among the Jews of Jesus’ day. Several Old Testament prophecies point to the fact that the Messiah would be a descendant of David, and reign on his throne (II Samuel 7:13, 16; Psalm 2:6-7; 89:26-27; Isaiah 9:6-7). However, such language does not limit the reign of Messiah to that of David’s, for His reign would be universal, cosmic, and eternal. All authority would be given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:20). All creatures would bow before Him and acknowledge His Lordship (Philippians 2:10). **(d)** *For nothing will be impossible with God.* Once faith in an omnipotent God is established, it is not difficult to believe in the miraculous conception of Christ in the womb of a virgin. Deity demands omnipotence, therefore

3. Having briefly considered the Gospel accounts of the virgin birth of Christ, we will now turn our attention towards some of the most important New Testament texts regarding the incarnation. In John 1:14, is found one of the most powerful and beautiful. Meditate upon the text until you are familiar with its meaning, then write your thoughts on each of the following phrases:
 - a. *And the Word became flesh.*

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the moment one concedes the existence of God, impossibility flies out the window. God can do all things except that which contradicts His most holy, righteous, and loving nature. Therefore, it is logically inconsistent to embrace the existence of an omnipotent God while denying the virgin birth as a possibility. John Gill writes, “[All] that is consistent with His nature and perfections, with His counsels, purposes, and promises: every thing that He has said, purposed, or promised, He is able to do, and will” (EONT, Vol.7, p.509). Matthew Henry writes, “No word of God must be incredible to us, as long as no work of God is impossible to Him” (MHC, Vol.5, p.585). Francis Turretin quotes Augustine, “Let us grant that God can do something which we confess our inability to investigate; in such things the whole reason of the deed is the power of the doer (*Letter 137*, “To Volusian” 2.8 [FC 20:24; PL 33.519])” (Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol.2, p.345).

John 1:14 - (a) *And the Word became flesh.* Gerald Borchert writes, “Now here as the Prologue reaches its climactic assertion the Logos is announced as fully participating in the realm of creation” (NAC, John, p.119). John Owen writes, “‘God was manifest in the flesh.’ A mystery it is, and that of those dimensions as no creature can comprehend” (Works, Vol.1, p.46). John Favel writes, “The proposition contains one of the deepest mysteries of godliness (I Timothy 3:16). A mystery, by which apprehension is dazzled, invention astonished, and all expression swallowed up. If ever the tongues of angels were desirable to explicate any word of God, they are so here” (Works, Vol.1, p.74). The “Word” is a reference to the divine logos or eternal Son of God (1:1). The Word “became” indicates change or transition. The eternal Son of God was not always flesh, but “became” flesh when conceived in the womb of the virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit. On “becoming flesh”, He did not stop being God nor was His deity diminished, rather He added humanity to His deity and became the God-man. It is interesting to note that I John 4:2 declares that “He *came* in the flesh”, while John 1:14 declares that “He *became* flesh”. B.F Wescott writes, “The former marks the unchanged continuity of the Lord’s Personality, and the latter the complete reality of His Manhood” (John, p.10). Augustine writes that the Son of God became flesh, “*Non mutando quod erat, sed assumendo, quod non erat*” - “Not by changing what He was, but by assuming what He was not.” John MacArthur writes, “This reality is surely the most profound ever because it indicates that the Infinite became finite; the Eternal was conformed to time; the Invisible became visible; the supernatural One reduced Himself to the natural. In the incarnation, however the Word did not cease to be God but became God in human flesh, i.e., undiminished deity in human form as a man” (MSB, p.1574). The word “flesh” comes from the Greek word *sarx*, which according to John Calvin “is not taken here for corrupt nature, (as it is often used by Paul), but for mortal man” (CC, Vol.17, p.45). Leon Morris writes, “‘Flesh’ is a strong, almost crude way of referring to human nature. John does not say, ‘the Word became man’, nor ‘the Word took a body’. He chooses that form of expression which puts what he wants to say most bluntly” (NICNT, John, p.102). Again Calvin writes, “The word ‘flesh’ expresses the meaning of the Evangelist more forcibly than if He had said that ‘he was made man.’ He intended to show to what a mean and despicable condition the Son of God,

The Word Becomes Flesh

J.C. Ryle writes, “The plain meaning of these words is, that our divine Saviour really took human nature upon Him, in order to save sinners. He really became a man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted” (Expository Thoughts, John, Vol.1, p.24).

Charles Spurgeon writes, “Note that word ‘flesh’. It doth not say, ‘The Word was made man’: it means that, but the use of the word ‘flesh’ brings the Lord Jesus still closer to us, and shows that He took on Him the very nature and substance of manhood: He did not merely assume the name and notion, and appearance, of manhood, but the reality: the weakness, the suffering, the mortality of our manhood He actually took into union with Himself. He was no phantom, or apparition, but He had a human body and a human soul... When the Lord became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, His incarnation in a human body brought Him far nearer to man than when He only abode within curtains, and occupied a tent in the midst of Israel” (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.31, p.530).

Gerald Borchert writes, “The confession of a genuine incarnation is one of the basic theological affirmations of Christianity. Although Christians may differ on a number of theological issues, the incarnation has been one of the few boundary doctrines that applies to all who are legitimately called by the name of Christ. In the polemical context of I John 4:1-3 the incarnation is defined as the test for determining whether the presence of the Spirit of God or the spirit of antichrist is in the community” (NAC, John, p.119).

b. *And dwelt among us*

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on our account, descended from the height of His heavenly glory” (CC, Vol.17, p.45). John Favel writes, “The word ‘flesh’ is rather used here, than ‘man’, on purpose to enhance the admirable condescension and abasement of Christ; there being more of vileness, weakness, and opposition to spirit in this word” (Works, Vol.1, p.73). Francis Turretin writes, “And thus is more clearly insinuated the greatness of the divine mercy and love towards men, since God condescended to such a degree as to be willing not only to associate with Himself the soul (which is the nobler part of man), but assumed what is the meanest and most weak in us - to wit, this fragile and mortal flesh” (Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol.2, p.299). **(b)** *And dwelt among us.* The word “dwelt” comes from the Greek word *skēnoō* which means to dwell in a tabernacle or tent. As God dwelt in the tabernacle during Israel’s wanderings (Exodus 40:34-35), so He “tabernacled” among men in the human body of Jesus of Nazareth. In the incarnation, God literally “pitched His tent” among men. As men are said to dwell in “earthly tents” of flesh (II Corinthians 5:1), so God took upon Himself an earthly tabernacle of flesh. Matthew Henry writes, “Having taken upon Him the nature of man, He put Himself into the place and condition of other men. He dwelt among us, us worms of the earth, us that He had no need of, us that He got nothing by, us that were corrupt and depraved, and revolted from God” (MHC, Vol.5, p.853). Charles Spurgeon writes, “The greatest glory of the tabernacle itself was the most holy place. In the most holy place there stood the ark of the covenant, bearing its golden lid called the mercy-seat. Over the mercy-seat stood the cherubim, whose wings met each other, and beneath the wings of the cherubim there was a bright light, known to the Hebrew believer by the

The Marvelous and Astonishing Incarnation

Octavius Winslow writes, “Before this vessel of grace let us pause in adoring admiration of its greatness and beauty. It is the ‘great mystery of godliness.’ Angels are summoned to adore it: ‘When He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith, and let all the angels of God worship Him’ (Hebrews 1:6). It was the profoundest idea from God’s wisdom, the masterpiece of His power and worthy of their deepest homage. They had never seen such an unveiling of the glory of God before. In the countless glories with which He had enriched and garnished the universe, there was nothing like it. All other wonders cease to astonish and all other beauty fades in comparison with this, the grandest, peerless of all. As if fathoming the utmost depth of infinity and collecting all its hidden treasures of wisdom and power, of grace and truth, God would seem to have concentrated, illustrated, and displayed them all in the person of His Incarnate Son, ‘God manifest in the flesh’ (I Timothy 3:16)” (Evening Thoughts, p.617-618).

Jonathan Edwards writes, “The next thing that I would observe concerning the incarnation of Christ, is the greatness of this event. Christ’s incarnation was a greater and more wonderful thing than ever had yet come to pass. The creation of the world was a very great thing, but not so great as the incarnation of Christ. It was a great thing for God to make the creature, but not so great as for the Creator Himself to become a creature. We have spoken of many great things that were accomplished between the fall of man and the incarnation of Christ: but God becoming man was greater than all. Then the greatest person was born that ever was or ever will be” (Works, Vol.1, p.573).

Thomas Boston writes, “So He is God and man in one person. Here is a wonderful person indeed, whom we cannot comprehend; true God, yet man; true man, yet God; a mysterious person, undiscerned by most that saw Him with their eyes, perceived only by the enlightened eye. The uniting of a soul to an earthly body, forming one person called man, was a work of wonder; but what is the potting together of two pieces of clay, in comparison of the Potter’s uniting with His own clay? ...Here eternity and a being of yesterday meet together in one person, a child, and yet the Everlasting Father; here infinite and finite meet in one; God and His own creature!” (Works, Vol. 10, p.222-223).

Thomas Watson writes, “Surely the angels would have disdained to have taken our flesh; it would have been a disparagement to them. What king would be willing to wear sackcloth over his cloth of gold? but Christ did not disdain to take our flesh. Oh the love of Christ!” (A Body of Divinity, p.195).

John Owen writes, “This fire placed itself in a bush, where it burned; but the bush was not consumed... And this is so spoken, because the being of the fire in the bush for a season was a type of Him in whom ‘the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily’ -of Him who was ‘made flesh, and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14). The eternal fire of the divine nature dwells in the bush of our frail nature, yet is it not consumed thereby... Moses looked on this sight as a marvelous and wondrous thing. And if it were so in the type, what is it in the truth, substance, and reality of it? And by direction given unto him to ‘put off his shoes,’ we are taught to cast away all fleshly imaginations and carnal affections, that by pure acts of faith we may behold this glory - the glory of the only begotten of the Father... Let us get it fixed on our souls and in our minds, that this glory of Christ in the divine constitution of His person is the best, the most noble, useful, beneficial object that we can be conversant about in our thoughts, or cleave unto in our affections. What are all other things in comparison of the ‘knowledge of Christ?’ In the judgment of the great apostle, they are but ‘loss and dung’ (Philippians 3:8-10). So they were to him; and if they are not so to us we are carnal. (Works, Vol.1, p.311-312).

Jonathan Edwards writes, “The incarnation of Christ was a thing that was brought to pass in this world, and the sufferings and death of Christ were also accomplished on earth. Shall heaven be filled with praises for what was done on earth, and shall there be no praises on earth where it was done?” (Works, Vol.2, p.916).

c. *And we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.*

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name of the Shekinah. That light represented the presence of God... Jesus Christ was God's tabernacle, and 'we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father'; [He] was a temple in which God Himself dwelt after a special manner; 'for in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily'" (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol. 1861, p.530). (c) *And we saw*. The word "saw" comes from the Greek word *theáomai*. Leon Morris writes that it is invariably used in John (as, for that matter, in the whole New Testament) of seeing with the bodily eye. It is not used of visions. John is speaking of the glory that was seen in the literal, physical Jesus of Nazareth" (NICNT, John, p. 104). B.F. Westcott writes, "The abode of the Word among men was only for a brief space, but yet such that those near Him could contemplate His glory at leisure and calmly. His historical Presence was real if transitory. And while the appearance of the Lord was in humility, yet even under the limitation of His human form, those who looked patiently could see the tokens of the divine revelation made through Him... The Son of Man had a glory which corresponded with His filial relation to the Father, even when He had laid aside His divine glory" (John, p. 12). *His glory*. The word "glory" comes from the Greek word *dóxa* which, in this context, refers to the unmistakable divine majesty and splendor of the Son of God. Matthew Henry writes, "The beams of His divine glory that darted through this veil of flesh. The sun is still the fountain of light, though eclipsed or clouded; so Christ was still the brightness of His Father's glory, even when He dwelt among us in this lower world" (MHC, Vol.5, p.854). Thomas Case writes, "The flesh of Christ was but, as it were, a veil, through which men might look upon the Sun of righteousness; which, open and naked, would have been too vehement and strong for mortal eyes. We saw His glory; there did beam forth, at times, such rays of glory through the body of Jesus Christ, that whoever had not wilfully shut his eyes, might have discovered Him to be more than man, and been constrained, with the centurion, to cry out, 'Surely this was the Son of God'" (Prospect of Heaven, p.142). Thomas Boston writes, "As he who gifts a sword, sends it in a scabbard, and not naked, lest it should harm the receiver; so God giving His Son to sinners, gave Him wrapped up in the veil of human flesh. The Son of God in His unveiled glory would have no more been an object for our eyes to have looked on than the shining sun to the eyes of an owl. A few rays of His glory, breaking out from under the veil, made His enemies fall to the ground; what would have come of us then, if there had been no veil at all?" (Works, Vol. 10, p.191). *Glory as of the only begotten*. The phrase "only begotten" is a somewhat misleading translation of the Greek word *monogenés*, which would be better translated "the one and only" (NIV). When the Scriptures speak of the Son as "begotten" from the Father, it does not mean that He was created by the Father or that there was a time when He was not begotten or did not exist. The word refers to the uniqueness of the Son's relationship to the Father from all eternity. Although there are many "sons" by adoption, He alone is the eternal Son by nature and right. John MacArthur writes, "By this word, John emphasized the exclusive character of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Godhead (3:16, 18; I John 4:9). It does not connote origin but rather unique prominence. It was used of Isaac (Hebrews 11:17) who was Abraham's second Son (Ishmael being the first; cf. Genesis 16:15 with Genesis 21:2-3)" (MSB, p.1574). B.F. Westcott writes, "Christian writers from early times have called attention to the connexion of the two words applied in the New Testament to Christ 'the only Son' (*monogenés*) and 'the first-born' (*protótokos* - Colossians 1:15), which present the idea of His Sonship under complementary aspects. The first marks His relation to God as absolutely without parallel, the other His relation to creation as preexistent and sovereign" (John, p. 12). Gerald Borchert writes, "This uniqueness of the Son makes it impossible for Christianity to be a syncretistic religion. In our mission to the world we

Full of Grace and Truth

by Charles Spurgeon (*Metropolitan Tabernacle, Vol. 31, p.532*)

“The apostle says that the only begotten is ‘full of grace and truth.’ He did not come to tell us about grace, but actually to bring us grace. He is not full of the news of grace and truth, but of grace and truth themselves. Others had been messengers of gracious tidings, but He came to bring grace. Others teach us truth, but Jesus is the truth. He is that grace and truth whereof others spake. Jesus is not merely a teacher, an exhorter, a worker of grace and truth; but these heavenly things are in Him. He is full of them. I want you to note this. It raises such a difference between Christ and others: you go to others to hear of grace and truth, but you must go to Christ to see them. There may be, there is, grace in other men; but not as it is in Christ: they have it as water flowing through a pipe, but He has it as water in its fountain and source.”

d. *Full of grace and truth.*

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cannot say ‘Jesus and Caesar’ or ‘Jesus and Buddha,’ and so forth. Our confession is Jesus, the one and only! The early Christians suffered and died because they refused to recognize any other pattern than that which was revealed in Jesus Christ” (NAC, John, p.121). *From the Father*. This phrase describes the one and only Son as having been sent by the Father to accomplish the mission of redemption. B.F. Westcott writes, “The idea conveyed is not that of sonship only, but of mission also. Christ was a Son, and a Son sent to execute a special work” (John, p.12). **(d)** *Full of grace and truth*. The word “full” comes from the Greek word *pléres* which means “to be filled up,” “permeated,” “perfect,” “complete,” or “lacking in nothing.” To say that Christ was full of grace and truth is an undeniable declaration of His deity, because it ascribes to Him the fullness of two characteristics that are commonly ascribed only to God. Who but God could claim to be full of grace and truth except the One in whom “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9)? The word “grace” comes from the Greek word *cháris* and refers to God’s kindness or unmerited favor. It is closely related to the Hebrew term *chesed* which denotes the lovingkindness and tender mercies of God. The word “truth” comes from the Greek word *alétheia* and refers all that is real, factual, and according to reality. It is also closely related to the Hebrew term *emet* which denotes faithfulness and steadfastness. The phrase “full of grace and truth” should be understood in light of verse 1:17: “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.” The Law of Moses provided only a shadow or incomplete revelation of the divine grace and truth which were later realized in the incarnation (Colossians 2:17). Matthew Poole writes, “Grace signifieth love and good will, out of which it was that He delivered us from the curse and rigour of the law (to which grace is opposed). He was also full of truth, both as truth is opposed to falsehood, and to the shadows and figures of the law; and Christ was full of truth as He was the antitype to all the ceremonies, and all the promises had and have their completion and reality in Him” (MPC, Vol.3, p.280). Charles Spurgeon writes, “The tabernacle of old was not full of truth, but full of image, and shadow, and symbol, and picture; but Christ is full of substance; He is not the picture, but the reality; He is not the shadow, but the substance” (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.7, p.530). Octavius Winslow writes, “All that He said and did, each word and action, betrayed the fullness of grace that dwelt within Him! The expressions that came from His lips were gracious words; the truths He taught were the doctrines of grace; the works He performed were the miracles of grace; the

3. Like no other in text in either the Old or New Testament, Philippians 2:6-8 takes us from the eternal existence of the Son of God in glory, through the incarnation, and to the cross of Calvary where He died for the sins of His people. Read the text several times until you are familiar with its contents and then explain what the following phrases teach us about the incarnation:

a. *Although He existed in the form of God (v.6).*

b. *He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (v.6)*

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invitations He breathed were the promises of grace; the blessings He pronounced were the gifts of grace - in a word, the blood He shed, the righteousness He worked, the redemption He accomplished, the salvation He proclaimed, the souls He rescued, and the kingdom He promised were the overflowing achievements, triumphs, and rewards of grace" (Evening Thoughts, p.619).

Philippians 2:6-8 - (a) *Although He existed in the form of God.* Literally, "who in form of God being..." The word "existed" is translated from the present active Greek participle *hupárchon*, which denotes continuance. It is the broad testimony of Scripture that the Son of God existed in the form of God (i.e. as God) before and throughout His incarnation, and that He continues in the form of God in His glorified incarnate state. *In the form of God.* The word "form" comes from the Greek word *morphé* which not only refers to the outward or external appearance of someone, but their essential character or underlying reality. The Son did not only "seem" to be God in appearance, but "was" God in reality. A.T. Robertson writes, "In His preincarnate state Christ possessed the attributes of God and so appeared to those in heaven who saw Him" (Word Pictures, Vol.4, p.444). Charles Hodge writes, "The form of a thing is the mode in which it reveals itself; and that is determined by its nature... No one can, appear, or exist in view of others in the form of God, i.e., manifesting all divine perfections, who is not God. Hence it is asserted that the person spoken of was equal to God. (Systematic Theology, Vol.2, p.386). John Gill writes, "The 'form of God' is to be understood of the nature and essence of God, and describes Christ as He was from all eternity; just as the form of a servant signifies that He was really a servant, and the fashion of a man in which He was found means that He was truly and really man; so His being in the form of God intends that He was really and truly God" (EONT, Vol.9, p.133). Thomas Manton writes, "By the form of God is meant not only the divine majesty and glory, but also the divine essence itself" (Works, Vol.1, p.479). John Calvin writes, "Prior to His assuming our flesh, there was nothing mean or contemptible, but on the contrary a magnificence worthy of God" (CC, Vol.21, p.55). **(b) *He did not regard equality with God.*** This is an unmistakable reference to the deity of Christ. He existed throughout all eternity, bearing the form of God and being equal with God in every way. The word "equal" comes from the Greek word *ísos* which means to be equal in quantity or quality.

c. *But emptied Himself...* (v.6-7)

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James Montgomery Boice gives several excellent illustrations of the meaning of this Greek word, “An *isomer* is a molecule having a slightly different structure from another molecule (as, for example, being a mirror image of it), but identical to it in chemical composition. An *isomorph* is something that has the same form as something else. *Isometric* means ‘in equal measure.’ An *isosceles* triangle has two equal sides. Paul’s use of the word in reference to Jesus teaches that Jesus is God’s equal” (Foundations of the Christian Faith, p.269). *A thing to be grasped*. The phrase “to be grasped” comes from the Greek word *harpagmós* which can refer to robbery, any unauthorized seizing, or anything that is prized or grasped. The main ideas communicated here is that in the incarnation, the Son of God demonstrated His willingness to let go of the privileges of deity to do the will of the Father. He did not grasp the rights of His deity or refuse to let them go. J.B. Lightfoot writes, “Though He preexisted in the form of God, yet He did not look upon equality with God as a prize which must not slip from His grasp” (Philippians, p.111). John MacArthur writes, “Although He continued to fully exist as God, during His incarnation He refused to hold on to His divine rights and prerogatives” (MNTC, Philippians, p.124). Another truth communicated here is that the Son did not wrongfully take to Himself the title of deity. It was not a wrong thing for Christ to consider Himself equal to God, simply because He was God. This stands in great contrast to both Adam and Satan, for they both wrongfully desired to take for themselves the title of God. John Calvin writes, “For where can there be equality with God without robbery, excepting only where there is the essence of God; for God always remains the same, who cries by Isaiah, ‘I live; I will not give my glory to another’ (Isaiah 48:11)” (CC, Vol.21, p.56). Matthew Henry writes, “He did not think Himself guilty of any invasion of what did not belong to Him, or assuming another’s right. It is the highest degree of robbery for any mere man or mere creature to pretend to be equal with God, or profess Himself one with the Father. This is for a man to rob God, not in tithes and offerings, but of the rights of His Godhead (MHC, Vol.6, p.732). John Gill writes, “He [Christ] did Him [the Father] no injury, nor deprived Him of any glory, or assumed that to Himself which did not belong to Him” (EONT, Vol.9, p.133). Again John Calvin writes, “Moreover, how could such equality exist, if He were not that God whose name is JAH and Jehovah, who rides upon the cherubim, is King of all the earth, and King of ages? Let them clamour as they may, Christ cannot be robbed of the honour described by Isaiah, ‘Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him’ (Isaiah 25:9)” (Institutes, Vol.1, p.133). **(c) But emptied Himself.** The word “emptied” comes from the Greek word *kenóo* from which is derived the theological term “kenosis”. The term refers to the truth that in His incarnation, the eternal Son of God, who is equal with the Father, layed aside the glory and privileges of His deity and became a man. The emptying of the Son is explained and defined by the statements which follow - He took the form of a bond-servant and was made in the likeness of men. It is extremely important to note that the emptying of Christ does not mean that gave up His deity or became something less than God, but that He laid aside the glory and privileges that were rightfully His as God (John 17:5). A.T. Robertson writes, “Undoubtedly Christ gave up His environment of glory” (Word Pictures, Vol.4, p.444). J.B. Lightfoot writes, “[He] stripped Himself of the insignia of majesty” (Philippians, p.112). Jonathan Edwards writes, “So when the apostle says Christ, ‘emptied Himself,’ he means that He appeared in the world without His former glory and joy - John 17:5” (Works, Vol.2, p.805). John Calvin writes, “Christ, indeed, could not divest Himself of Godhead; but He kept it concealed for a time, that it might not be seen, under the weakness

Deity Incarnate

John MacArthur writes, “During His earthly ministry, Jesus never denied or minimized His deity. He was unambiguous in acknowledging His divine sonship and oneness with the Father (John 5:17-18; 10:30, 38; 14:9; 17:1, 21-22; 20:28), His ‘authority over all flesh’ and power to ‘give eternal life’ (John 17:2), and His divine ‘glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5, 24). Ye He never used His power or authority for personal advantage, because such prerogatives of His divinity were not a thing to be grasped. That was the choice that set the Incarnation into motion. He willingly suffered the worst possible humiliation rather than demand the honor, privilege, and glory that were rightly His. Nor did He use the powers of His undiminished sovereign deity to oppose the purpose of His Father because the price was too high” (MNTC, Philippians, p.125).

Stephen Charnock writes, “There was no change in the Divine nature of the Son, when He assumed human nature. There was an union of the two natures, but no change of the Deity into the humanity, or of the humanity into the Deity: both preserved their peculiar properties. The humanity was changed by a communication of excellent gifts from the divine nature, not by being brought into an equality with it, for that was impossible that a creature should become equal to the Creator. He took the ‘form of a servant,’ but He lost not the form of God; He despoiled not Himself of the perfections of the Deity. He was indeed emptied, ‘and became of no reputation’ (Philippians 2:7); but He did not cease to be God, though He was reputed to be only a man, and a very mean one too. The glory of His divinity was not extinguished nor diminished, though it was obscured and darkened, under the veil of our infirmities; but there was no more change in the hiding of it, than there is in the body of the sun when it is shadowed by the interposition of a cloud. His blood while it was pouring out from His veins was the ‘blood of God’ (Acts 20:28); and, therefore, when He was bowing the head of His humanity upon the cross, He had the nature and perfections of God; for had He ceased to be God, He had been a mere creature, and His sufferings would have been of as little value and satisfaction as the sufferings of a creature. He could not have been a sufficient Mediator, had He ceased to be God” (Attributes of God, Vol.1, p.339-340).

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of the flesh. Hence He laid aside His glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by concealing it” (CC, Vol.21, p.57). Albert Barnes writes, “This supposes no change in the divine nature, or in the essential glory of the divine perfections. When the sun is obscured by a cloud, or in an eclipse, there is no real change of its glory, nor are its beams extinguished, nor is the sun itself in any measure changed. Its lustre is only for a time obscured. So it might have been in regard to the manifestation of the glory of the Son of God” (BN, Philippians, p.172). John Gill writes, “Though He took that which He had not before [i.e. human flesh], He lost nothing of what He had [i.e. deity]; the glory of His divine nature was covered, and out of sight; and though some rays and beams of it broke out through His works and miracles, yet His glory, as the only-begotten of the Father, was beheld only by a few (EONT, Vol.9, p.133). Francis Turretin writes, “He was made what He was not before by partaking of flesh and blood, according to that well-known phrase - ‘I am what I was’ (i.e. God); ‘I was not what I am’ (i.e. man); ‘now I am called both’ (i.e. God and man)” (Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol.2, p.313). Robert L. Reymond writes, “The incarnation should be viewed as an act of addition and not an act of subtraction” (A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, p.546). The reflexive pronoun “Himself” (Gk: *eaútón*) points to the fact that His humiliation was voluntary and self-imposed, as opposed to merely demanded or coerced. This is an extremely important truth. The Father asked nothing of the Son that He did not happily and voluntarily surrender. A. T. Robertson writes, “It is a voluntary humiliation on the part of Christ” (Word Pictures, Vol.4, p.445). John Flavel writes, “It is not said He was humbled, but He humbled Himself; He was willing to stoop to this low and abject state for us. And, indeed, the voluntariness of His humiliation made it most acceptable to God, and singularly commends the love of Christ to us, that He would choose to stoop to all this ignominy, suffering, and abasement for us” (Works, Vol.1, p.225). Thomas Boston writes, “He was sent from the regions of bliss to this lower world, and refused not the journey; He was sent from the hallelujahs of angels, to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself” (Works, Vol.9, p.524). John Calvin writes, “When He might have justly

Christ's Voluntary Undertaking

by John Murray, Collected Writings, Vol. 3, p.238-239

“What was the voluntary undertaking? There are three observations.

- (1) He became man - ‘found in fashion as a man’; ‘made in the likeness of men’. That was humiliation. It would have been humiliation under the most ideal of human and earthly conditions, humiliation because of the distance between Creator and creature. It was not, however, into an ideal world that Jesus came. It was into a world of sin, of misery, and of death. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh, in the likeness of sin-cursed humanity, though Himself without sin.
- (2) He took the form of a servant. Again the word ‘form’ points to the reality and fulness of His servanthood. It was not merely that He became a servant; He became a servant with all the subservience and obligation that subjection to the will of another entails. It is true that Jesus devoted Himself to the service of men. This is reflected on in the preceding statement that He made no account of Himself; He became preoccupied with the interests of others. And it was He Himself who said, ‘I am among you as He that serveth’ (Luke 22:27). But it is not His service of men that defines ‘the form of a servant’. Jesus did not subject Himself to the will of men. To have taken the form of a servant in reference to any human will or authority would have contradicted His dignity and mission. It was to God the Father that He assumed this relation and it was to the will of the Father that He surrendered Himself in the fulness of subjection and obligation. He came down from heaven not to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him (John 6:38). It is to the Old Testament predictions that this office of servant attaches itself (Isaiah 42:1; 49:3, 6; 52:13; 53:11). It was this office of unreserved commitment to the Father’s will that He voluntarily undertook. Because it was the Father He served, there was humiliation but no degradation.
- (3) ‘He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.’ This is the extent of Jesus’ humiliation. Death for our Lord was an act of obedience and it was the grand climax of His commission as Servant. It was not mere death; it was the accursed death of the cross. It was death in the unspeakable anguish of damnation vicariously borne, death in the experience reflected in the most mysterious cry that ever ascended from earth to heaven, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ It would have violated all divine propriety, it would have shaken the foundation of God’s throne, justice and judgment, if this were not damnation vicariously borne. For Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and in the very ordeal of laying down His life on the accursed tree He was rendering the supreme act of obedience to the Father, an obedience that has no parallel and will never be duplicated.

These are the lowest depths of humiliation conceivable. God Himself could not conceive or devise a humiliation surpassing the shame of Calvary. He who humbled Himself was in the form of God and on an equality with God. This bespeaks the highest dignity. He humbled Himself to the accursed death of the cross. There were no lower depths possible, for the cross bespeaks the whole curse of God upon sin. It is humiliation inimitable, unrepeated, unrepeatable. And again, let it be noted, it was self-humiliation. Christ Jesus undertook not only to be humbled; humiliation was action in His capacity as Servant. Here is convergence with no similitude, the will of the Father that the Servant be humbled, the will of Christ Jesus to humble Himself.”

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asserted His divinity, He was pleased to exhibit nothing but the attributes of a mean and despised man... When He might have displayed to the world the brightness of His glory, He gave up His right, and voluntarily emptied Himself” (Institutes, Vol.1, p.410).

d. *Taking the form of a bond-servant (v.7).*

e. *And being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man... (v.7-8)*

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(d) Taking the form of a bond-servant. The word “form” comes from the Greek word *morphé* which not only refers to the outward or external appearance of someone, but to their essential character. Christ did not only “seem” to be a bond-servant in appearance, but actually became such in everyway. William Hendriksen writes, “He was not play-acting... He, the sovereign Master of all, becomes servant of all. And yet, He remains Master. The text cannot mean that ‘He exchanged the form of God for the form of a servant,’ as is so often asserted. He took the form of servant while He retained the form of God! It is exactly that which makes our salvation possible and achieves it” (Philippians, p.109). The word “bond-servant” comes from the Greek word *doulos* which refers to a slave, bondman or anyone who serves in servile condition. Although Christ came to serve men (Matthew 20:28; Luke 22:27; John 13:4-15), He was first and foremost the Servant of God. All other service was secondary and in response to His Father’s will. Although the word *doulos* refers to one in a servile condition, we should not see Christ as God’s slave, but rather as His highly esteemed Servant. In fact, throughout all of human history, God has had only one true and faithful Servant who fulfilled His will to perfection. It was His Son, the man Christ Jesus! John Murray writes, “It was to God the Father that He assumed this relation and it was to the will of the Father that He surrendered Himself in the fulness of subjection and obligation. He came down from heaven not to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him (John 6:38). It is to the Old Testament predictions that this office of servant attaches itself (Isaiah 42:1; 49:3, 6; 52:13; 53:11). It was this office of unreserved commitment to the Father’s will that He voluntarily undertook. Because it was the Father He served, there was humiliation but no degradation” (Collected Writings, Vol. 3, p.238-239). William Hendriksen writes, “It was the form of a servant - and not that of a slave - which He took upon Himself. From the very beginning of His incarnation He was the thoroughly consecrated, wise and willing servant pictured by Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-9; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12), the spontaneously acting servant who resolutely fulfills His mission, so that with reference to Him Jehovah said: ‘Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delights’” (Philippians, p.109). Ashbel Green writes, “He suffered His ears to be bored; that is, engaged Himself as a voluntary servant to God, from love to His Lord the Father, and to His spouse the church, and His spiritual children - for the ears of such voluntary servants were bored - Exodus 21:5-6” (Shorter Catechism, Vol.1, p.295).

(e) And being made in the likeness of men. The word “likeness” comes from the Greek word *homoíoma* which may also be translated “resemblance” or “similitude”. Christ bore all the characteristics of true humanity. It was

To Whom? For Whom? Why?

by Thomas Boston (*Works, Vol.7, p.523-530*)

“Then, what unparalleled condescension, wonderful emptying was this! God’s equal becoming a servant, a bondservant, for poor sinners! Both these characters, the highest and the lowest, met together in Christ, in His state of humiliation. . . Our Lord Jesus Christ, continuing to be His Father’s equal, humbled Himself into a state of servitude, and became His servant, His bondservant, in man’s nature, for poor sinners of Adam’s race. This was a step lower than His becoming man; but the lower it was, the higher did His free love to man appear. Notice:

- I. *To whom He became a servant.* The Son of God, in our nature, became a servant to man’s great Lord and Master. He put himself in a state of servitude to His Father, who said unto Him, ‘Thou art my servant’ (Isaiah 49:3). It was with His Father He entered into the contract of service: He it was that bored His ears (Psalm 40:6). It was His Father’s business He was employed in (Luke 2:49), and to Him He behoved to work, ‘I must work the work of Him that sent Me’ (John 9:4). So, howbeit our Lord Jesus was and is, in respect of His divine nature, the Father’s equal; yet, in that respect, He acknowledgeth the Father greater than He, as the lord is greater than the servant, ‘My Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28).
- II. *For whom He became a servant.* Our blessed Lord Jesus took on the service for and instead of others, who were bound to it, but utterly unable for it. The cup is found in Benjamin’s sack; therefore poor Benjamin, his father’s darling, must be kept a bondman in Egypt: ‘Nay,’ says Judah, ‘Let me abide instead of the lad, a bondman to my lord, and let Benjamin go’ (Genesis 44:33). An elect world is found guilty before the Lord; they must therefore be bondmen for ever, as well as the rest of mankind: ‘Nay, Father,’ saith our Lord, who sprang out of Judah, ‘that yoke will be utterly insupportable to them, they will undoubtedly be ruined and perish for ever under it; I will take their state of servitude upon Me, let that yoke be laid on My neck, let Me be Thy bondman in their stead; and let them go free’. ‘So be it’, said God, who had set His electing love on them from eternity, ‘I am well pleased with the exchange: Thou then art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified’ (Isaiah 49:3). As to which words, it is evident from the context, that Christ is the party therein spoke to. . . As if the Father had said to Christ, ‘Son, these are utterly unable to make out their service; for, their work-arm being broken by the fall, I cannot expect a good turn of their hand: be it known then, that it is agreed, that I take Thee in their room and place, to perform the service due in virtue of the original contract; Thou in their stead art My servant, from whose hand I will look for that service’.
- III. *Why He became a Servant.* Love to His Father, and the love He had to His designed spouse, the captive daughter of Zion, and to His children the spiritual seed, engaged Him to undertake it; as in the case of the servant under the law (Exodus 21:5), ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free.’ He saw that His Father would entirely lose His service from all mankind, if He did not in their nature take the service on Himself; the whole tribe of Adam, from the least to the greatest, being utterly disabled for it. Wherefore, for His Father’s glory, the honour of His holy law, His justice and His mercy, He ‘took on Him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.’ The captive daughter of Zion, His Father’s choice, and His own choice, for a spouse to Him, He could not have, but, as Jacob had Rachel by serving for her, as unlovely and unsightly as she was. But He loved Her freely, He loved her infinitely; and, because He so loved, He took on the form of a servant for Her, and, as the true Israel, served for a wife, (Hosea 12:12). He loved His children, the spiritual seed, the elect given Him of His Father; notwithstanding of all the burden cleaving to them, He would not quit them: He saw they would be lost, if He should go out from them free; therefore He consented to the boring of His ears, to serve all the days of His life upon the earth.”

Made in the Likeness of Men

by William Hendriksen (*Philippians*, p.110-111)

“He assumed that human nature not in the condition in which Adam had it before the fall, nor in the condition in which Christ Himself now has it in heaven, nor in the condition in which He will reveal it on the day of His glorious return, but in its fallen and therefore weakened condition, burdened with the results of sin (Isaiah 53:2). Surely, that human nature was real, and in so far just like that of other human beings (Hebrews 2:17). But though it was real, it differed in two respects from that of other men: (1) His, and only His, human nature from its very conception was joined in personal union with the divine nature (John 1:1, 14); and (2) Though it was burdened with the results of sin (hence, subject to death), it was not sinful in itself...”

“When Jesus had come into the flesh, how did men regard Him? What did they find Him to be? The answer is: in their estimation He was a human being, just like themselves in ever so many respects: Had they come into this world through the natural process of birth? So had He (Luke 2:7). (The mystery of the virgin-birth they did not fathom). Had they been wrapped in swaddling clothes (Ezekiel 16:4)? So had He (Luke 2:7). Had they grown up? So had He (Luke 1:80). Did they have brothers and sisters? So did He (Matthew 13:56). Had they learned a trade? So had He (Mark 6:3). Were they at times hungry, thirsty, weary, asleep? So was He (Matthew 4:2; John 4:6-7; Mark 4:38). Were they ever grieved or angry? So was He (Mark 3:5). Did they weep at times? So did He (John 11:35). Did they rejoice, for example, at weddings? He too attended a wedding (John 2:1-2). Were they destined to die? So was He, though in His case that death was physical, eternal, voluntary, and vicarious (John 10:11), and this they did not understand. In His entire fashion, therefore He was recognized as a human being. He had the looks and outward bearing of men. His way of dress, customs and manners resembled those of His contemporaries. To a considerable extent they were right in so regarding Him.”

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not a mere illusion. He was a real man. A.T. Robertson writes, “His humanity was as real as His deity” (*Word Pictures*, Vol.4, p.445). *Being found in appearance as a man*. The word “appearance” comes from the Greek word *schema* which refers to one’s habit or manner of life. In His incarnation, Christ not only was a man in every sense of the term, but He appeared to be a man to those who knew Him and observed His behavior. John MacArthur writes, “It is important to understand that Jesus did not become the second, or last, Adam (I Corinthians 15:45), in the sense of being like pre-Fall mankind. Rather, in the Incarnation, He took upon Himself all the frailties, limitations, problems, and sufferings that were the heritage of the fall, enduring all its terrible earthly consequences” (MNTC, *Philippians*, p.130). Albert Barnes writes, “He took upon Himself all the attributes of a man. He assumed all the innocent infirmities of our nature. He appeared as other men do, was subjected to the necessity of food and raiment, like others, and was made liable to suffering, as other men are” (BN, *Philippians*, p.173). John Favel writes, “It was a marvellous humiliation to the Son of God, not only to become a creature, but an inferior creature, a man, and not an angel. Had He taken the angelical nature, though it would have been a wonderful abasement to Him, yet He would have stayed (if I may so speak) nearer His own home, and been somewhat more like God than He appeared when He dwelt with us: for angels are the highest, and most excellent of all created beings” (*Works*, Vol.1, p.227).

- f. *He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (v.8)*

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(f) *He humbled Himself.* The word “humbled” comes from the Greek word *tapeinóo* which refers to any act of humiliation - to bring into a humble condition; to reduce to meaner circumstances; to assign a lower rank or place; to behave in an unassuming manner. Christ’s “emptying” is seen in three steps, each one taking Him deeper into a state of humiliation - incarnation, servanthood, death on a cross. Charles Spurgeon writes, “My gracious Lord, Thou hast come far enough already; dost Thou not stop where thou art? In the form of God, Thou wast; in the form of man, Thou art. That is an unspeakable stoop. Wilt Thou still humble Thyself? Yes, says the text, ‘Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself.’” (Metropolitan Tabernacle, Vol. 38, p.530). When He first laid aside the manifested glories and privileges of His deity, the angels must have declared, “It is enough, go no further down!” On passing by the form of angels and taking to Himself the form of an inferior fallen creature, the angels must have repeated, “Surely, it is enough. Go no further down!” But it was only when He had died the cruel death of the cross bearing the sins of man and the wrath of God, did He say, “It is enough! It is finished!” John Gill writes, “O wondrous humility! astonishing condescension!” (EONT, Vol.9, p.133). John Calvin writes, “Christ’s humility consisted in His abasing Himself from the highest pinnacle of glory to the lowest ignominy” (CC, Vol.21, p.53). *By becoming obedient to the point of death.* There can be no greater proof of obedience. Even Satan realized that Job’s continued faithfulness after losing all He loved and possessed was not so great a sign of obedience as remaining faithful in the mist of personal physical suffering and the threat of his own death (Job 2:3-5). Jonathan Edwards writes, “Never was there such an instance of obedience in man or angel as this, though He was at the same time supreme Lord of both angels and men” (Works, Vol. 1, p.682). Thomas Boston writes, “His obedience ran with a cheerful and prevalent strain through the whole course of His life. He submitted to a body, fitted to receive all those strokes of wrath that we should have endured forever; a body made under the law, subject to the obedience and malediction of it.” (Works, Vol. 1, p.451). It is important to note that this statement not only speaks of Christ’s humiliation, but also of His deity and sinless perfection. First, it is not an act of humiliation for men or angels to obey God, rather it is a great privilege. However, for the Son to hide His glory, loose His septer, and become an obedient servant is a great condensation. Secondly, death is not an act of obedience for men. It is the result of their sin, and a condemnation to which they are unwillingly subjected. However, for the sinless Christ, death was a voluntary act of obedience to the will of the Father. It was not forced upon Him as a penalty, but given to Him as a task. Alexander Maclaren writes, “How comes it that to the man Jesus obedience to God was an act of humiliation? Surely there is but one explanation of such a statement [i.e. He is God]. For all men but this One to be God’s slaves is their highest honour, and to speak of obedience as humiliation is a sheer absurdity” (Expositions, Vol. 14, p.259). Ralph Martin writes, “His obedience is a sure token of His deity and authority, for... only a divine being can accept death as obedience; for ordinary men it is a necessity. He alone as the obedient Son of the His Father could choose death as His destiny; and He did so because of His love, a love which was directed both to His Father’s redeeming purpose and equally to the world into which He came. ‘I come to do thy will’ (Hebrews 10:7) was the motto-text of His entire life” (TNTC, Philippians, p.102). *Even death on a cross.* The cross is arguably the cruelest form of torture ever invent by man. That Christ died on such a cross reveals the depths of His humiliation and

The Son's Great Descent

Octavius Winslow writes, "In the person of the Son of God, the two extremes of being - the infinite and the finite - meet in strange and mysterious but close and eternal union. The divine came down to the human; Deity humbled itself to humanity. This was humiliation indeed! It was not the creature descending in the scale of creation, but it was the Creator stooping to the creature. 'God was manifest in the flesh' (I Timothy 3:16)... This is an amazing truth! He was so infinitely great, He could thus stoop without compromising His dignity or lessening His glory" (Evening Thoughts, p.554).

Thomas Watson writes, "See here the wonderful humility of Christ. Christ was made flesh. *O sancta humilitas, tu filium Dei descendere fecisti in uterum, Mariae Virginis* [O holy humility, you made the Son of God descend into the womb of the Virgin Mary] - Augustine. That Christ should clothe Himself with our flesh, a piece of that earth which we tread upon; Oh infinite humility! Christ's taking our flesh was one of the lowest steps of His humiliation. He humbled Himself more in lying in the virgin's womb than in hanging upon the cross. It was not so much for man to die, but for God to become man was the wonder of humility. 'He was made in the likeness of men' (Philippians 2:7). For Christ to be made flesh was more humility than for the angels to be made worms. Christ's flesh is called a veil in Hebrews 10:20. Christ's wearing our flesh veiled His glory. For Him to be made flesh, who was equal with God, oh what humility! 'Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God' (Philippians 2:6). He stood upon even ground with God, He was co-essential and con-substantial with the Father, as Augustine and Cyril, and the Council of Nice express it; yet for all that He takes flesh. He stripped Himself of the robes of His glory, and covered Himself with the rags of our humanity. If Solomon wondered that God should dwell in the temple which was enriched and hung with gold, how may we wonder that God should dwell in man's weak and frail nature!" (A Body of Divinity, p.197).

Charles Spurgeon writes, "'He humbled himself'? Was He not on earth always stripping off first one robe of honour and then another, till, naked, He was fastened to the cross, and there did He not empty out His inmost self, pouring out His lifeblood, giving up for all of us, till they laid Him penniless in a borrowed grave?" (Morning and Evening, p.311).

Again Spurgeon writes, "You and I can have no idea of how high an honor it is to be equal with God. How can we, therefore, measure the descent of Christ, when our highest thoughts cannot comprehend the height from which He came? The depth to which He descended is immeasurably below any point we have ever reached; and the height from which He came is inconceivably above our loftiest thought. Do not, however, forget the glory that Jesus laid aside for a while. Remember that He is very God of very God, and that He dwelt in the highest heaven with His Father; but yet, though He was thus infinitely rich, for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be rich" (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.38, p.529-530).

Albert Barnes writes, "If He was truly divine, then His consenting to become a man was the most remarkable of all possible acts of humiliation" (BN, Philippians, p.169).

The Deep Abasement of Christ

by John Favel (Works, Vol.1, p.226-229)

"For the sun to fall from its sphere, and be degraded into a wandering atom; for an angel to be turned out of heaven, and to be converted into a silly fly or worm, had been no such great abasement; for they were but creatures before, and so they would abide still, though in an inferior order or species of creatures. The distance betwixt the highest and lowest species of creatures, is but a finite distance. The angel and the worm dwell not so far asunder. But for the infinite glorious Creator of all things, to become a creature, is a mystery exceeding all human understanding. The distance betwixt God and the highest order of creatures, is an infinite distance. He is said to humble Himself, to behold the things that are done in heaven. What a humiliation then is it, to behold the things in the lower world! but to

be born into it, and become a man! Great indeed is the mystery of godliness. ‘Behold, (saith the prophet, Isaiah 40:15, 18) the nations are as the drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are accounted to Him less than nothing, and vanity.’ If, indeed, this great and incomprehensible Majesty will Himself stoop to the state and condition of a creature, we may easily believe, that being once a creature, He would expose Himself to hunger, thirst, shame, spitting, death, or any thing but sin. For that once being a man, He should endure any of these things, is not so wonderful, as that He should become a man. This was the low step, a deep abasement indeed!” (Works, Vol. 1, p.226-227).

“Moreover, Jesus Christ did not only neglect the angelical, and assume the human nature; but He also assumed the human nature, after sin had blotted the original glory of it, and withered up the beauty and excellency thereof. For He came not in our nature before the fall, whilst as yet its glory was fresh in it; but He came, as the apostle speaks, ‘In the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Romans 8:3), i.e. in flesh that had the marks, and miserable effects, and consequents of sin upon it. I say not that Christ assumed sinful flesh, or flesh really defiled by sin. That which was born of the Virgin was a holy thing. For by the power of the Highest (whether by the energetical command and ordination of the Holy Ghost, as some; or by His benediction and blessing, I here dispute not) that whereof the body of Christ was to be formed, was so sanctified, that no taint or spot of original pollution remained in it. But yet though it had not intrinsical native uncleanness in it, it had the effects of sin upon it; yea, it was attended with the whole troop of human infirmities, that sin at first let into our common nature, such as hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, mortality, and all these natural weaknesses and evils that clog our miserable natures, and make them groan from day to day under them” (Works, Vol. 1, p.227-228).

“By reason whereof, though He was not a sinner, yet He looked like one: and they that saw and conversed with Him, took Him for a sinner; seeing all these effects of sin upon Him. In these things He came as near to sin as His holiness could admit. O what a stoop was this! To be made in the likeness of flesh, though the innocent flesh of Adam, had been much; but to be made in the likeness of sinful flesh, the flesh of sinners, rebels; flesh, though not defiled, yet miserably defaced by sin! O what is this! And who can declare it!... But Oh the admirable condescensions of a Saviour, to take such a nature! To put on such a garment when so very mean and ragged! Did this become the Son of God to wear? O grace unsearchable!” (Works, Vol. 1, p.228).

“And yet more, by this His incarnation He was greatly humbled, inasmuch as this so veiled, clouded, and disguised Him, that during the time He lived here, He looked not like Himself as God; but as a poor, sorry, contemptible sinner, in the eyes of the world; they scorned Him. ‘This fellow said’ (Matthew 26:61). Hereby ‘He made Himself of no reputation’ (Philippians 2:6). It blotted His honour and reputation. By reason hereof He lost all esteem and honour from those that saw Him, ‘Is not this the carpenter’s son?’ (Matthew 13:55). To see a poor man travelling up and down the country, in hunger, thirst, weariness, attended with a company of poor men; one of His company bearing the bag, and that which was put therein (John 13:29). Who that had seen Him, would ever have thought this had been the Creator of the world, the Prince of the kings of the earth? ‘He was despised, and we esteemed Him not’” (Works, Vol. 1, p.228-229).

“Again, Christ was greatly humbled by His incarnation, inasmuch as thereby He was put at a distance from His Father, and that ineffable joy and pleasure He eternally had with Him. Think not, reader, but the Lord Jesus lived at a high and unimitable rate of communion with God while He walked here in the flesh: but yet to live by faith, as Christ here did, is one thing; and to be in the bosom of God, as He was before, in another. To have the ineffable delights of God perpetuated and continued to Him, without one moment’s interruption from eternity, is one thing; and to have His soul sometimes filled with joy of the Lord, and then all overcast with clouds of wrath again; to cry, and God not hear, as He complains (Psalm 22:2). Nay, to be reduced to such a low ebb of spiritual comforts, as to be forced to cry out so bitterly, as He did, ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ (Psalm 22:1). This was a thing Christ was very unacquainted with, till He was found in habit as a man” (Works, Vol. 1, p.229).

The Divine Wisdom in Christ's Humiliation

by Jonathan Edwards (*Works, Vol.2, p.150*)

“It shows wonderful wisdom that our good should be procured by such seemingly unlikely and opposite means, as the humiliation of the Son of God. When Christ was about to undertake that great work of redemption, He did not take that method that any creature-wisdom would have thought the most proper. Creature-wisdom would have determined that in order to His effectually and more gloriously accomplishing such a great work, He should rather have been exalted higher, if it had been possible, rather than humbled so low. Earthly kings and princes, when they are about to engage in any great and difficult work, will put on their strength, and will appear in all their majesty and power, that they may be successful. But when Christ was about to perform the great work of redeeming a lost world, the wisdom of God took an opposite method, and determined that He should be humbled and abased to a mean state, and appear in low circumstances. He did not deck Himself with glory, but laid it aside. He emptied Himself: ‘Being in the form of God, He made Himself of no reputation, and took on Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross’ (Philippians 2:6-8). Creature-wisdom would have thought that Christ, in order to perform this great work, should deck Himself with all His strength; but divine wisdom determined, that He should be made weak, or put on the infirmities of human nature.

“And why did divine wisdom determine that He should become thus weak? It was that He might be subject to want, and to suffering, and to the power and malice of His enemies. But then what advantage could it be to Him in this work, to be subject to the power and malice of His enemies? It was the very design on which He came into the world, to overcome His enemies. Who would have thought that this was the way to overthrow them, that He should become weak and feeble, and for that very end that He might be subject to their power and malice. But this is the very means by which God determined, that Christ should prevail against His enemies, even that He should be subject to their power, that they might prevail against Him, so as to put Him to disgrace, and pain, and death.

“What other but divine wisdom could ever have determined, that this was the way to be taken in order to being successful in the work of our redemption. This would have appeared to creature-wisdom the most direct course to be frustrated that could be devised. But it was indeed the way to glorious success, and the only way. ‘The foolishness of God is wiser than men’ (I Corinthians 1:25). God has brought strength out of weakness, glory out of ignominy and reproach. Christ’s shame and reproach are the only means by which a way is made to our eternal honour.

“The wisdom of God hath made Christ’s humiliation the means of our exaltation; His coming down from heaven is that which brings us to heaven. The wisdom of God hath made life the fruit of death. The death of Christ was the only means by which we could have eternal life. The death of a person who was God, was the only way by which we could come to have life in God. Here favour is made to arise out of wrath; our acceptance into God’s favour out of God’s wrath upon His Son. A blessing rises out of a curse; our everlasting blessedness, from Christ being made a curse for us. Our righteousness is made to rise out of Christ’s imputed guilt. He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God (II Corinthians 5:21). By such wonderful means hath the wisdom of God procured our salvation.”

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obedience. However, it must be understood that Christ did not die upon a mere cross, being afflicted by the hands of men. He died on a cross, being also “stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4). A.T. Robertson writes, “The bottom rung in the ladder from the Throne of God. Jesus came all the way down to the most despised death of all, a condemned criminal on the accursed cross” (*Word Pictures, Vol.4, p.445*). Albert Barnes writes, “Many a one might be willing to obey if the death that was suffered was regarded as glorious; but when it is ignominious, and of the most degrading character, and the most torturing that human ingenuity

4. Before we advance any further, it is extremely important to understand that in the incarnation, the Son of God did not take to Himself the nature and body of mankind prior to the fall, but He took to Himself a body that, though untainted by sin, was subject to all the terrible consequences of our fallen race. Such a truth adds to our understanding of the depths of the Son's humiliation. What does Romans 8:3 teach us regarding this truth?

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can invent, then the whole character of the obedience is changed. Yet this was the obedience the Lord Jesus evinced" (BN, Philippians, p.174). Charles Spurgeon writes, "He never seems to stop in His descent until He comes to the lowest point, obedience unto death, and that death the most shameful of all, 'even the death of the cross'. Said I not rightly, that, as you cannot reach the height from which He came, you cannot fathom the depth to which He descended? Here, in the immeasurable distance between the heaven of His glory and the shame of His death, is room for your gratitude" (Metropolitan Tabernacle, Vol. 38, p.530). Thomas Boston writes, "That the Lord of glory should stoop so low as to put Himself in the room of sinners, eclipsing the bright lustre and splendour of His glory, and shrouding under the disguise of our infirm flesh, submitting Himself to a harder piece of service, and to deeper degrees of humiliation, than ever any creature in heaven or earth was capable of; to descend from the throne of His inaccessible light, and to expose Himself to the rage and fury of devils and men, without murmuring or impatience, to submit Himself to an infamous death, endure the wrath of an offended God and Father, whom He infinitely loved, shed His precious blood, and descend into the grave; this was an inexpressible and inimitable act of humility, lower than which He could not stoop" (Works, Vol. 1, p.452).

Romans 8:3 - In the likeness of sinful flesh. Literally, "... in likeness of flesh of sin." As in John 1:14, the word "flesh" does not merely refer to a human body, but to "a human nature consisting of a body and soul" (Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p.334). The word "likeness" comes from the Greek word *homoíoma* which may denote mere resemblance and similitude, or actual identity. In Philippians 2:7, Paul describes Christ as "being made in the likeness of men". This does not mean that He merely "resembled" or was "similar to" a man, but that He was a man in the strictest sense of the term. In the same way, when Paul declares that Christ was "sent in the likeness of human flesh", He does not mean that Christ "merely resembled" sinful flesh, but that He really and truly assumed a human nature, undefiled and without sin, yet subject to the same limitations, frailties, afflictions, and anguish of fallen humanity. Thomas Schreiner writes, "The word *homoíoma* was inserted to stress the identity between Jesus and sinful flesh, yet at the same time it also suggests that He is unique. That is, His body was subject to the disease, death, and weakness of the old order, yet the Son Himself was not sinful, nor did He ever sin" (Romans, p.403). William Hendricksen explains it this way, "He took on that human nature not as it came originally from the hand of the Creator, but weakened by sin, though remaining itself without any sin" (NTC, Romans, p.247). Louis Berkhof writes, "It certainly was a humiliation that the Logos assumed 'flesh,' that is, human nature as it is since the fall, weakened and subject to suffering and death, though free from the taint of sin" (Systematic Theology, p.336). Jamieson, Fausset and Brown write, "He took our nature as it is in us, compassed with infirmities with nothing to distinguish Him as man from sinful men, save that He was without sin" (Commentary, p.240). John Trapp writes, "Christ condescended to our rags, *sordes nostras induit*, took our passions and infirmities natural, but not sinful. He was in all things like unto us, but in sin" (CONT, Vol.5,

In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh

Robert Haldane writes, “Christ, then, was not made in the likeness of the flesh of man before sin entered the world, but in the likeness of his fallen flesh. Though He had no corruption in His nature, yet He had all the sinless infirmities of our flesh. The person of man, in his present state, may be greatly different from what it was when Adam came from the hand of His Creator. Our bodies as they are present, are called ‘the bodies of our humiliation,’ (Philippians 3:21). Jesus Christ was made in man’s present likeness. Tradition speaks of the beauty of His person when on earth; but this is the wisdom of man. The Scriptures nowhere represent Christ in His manhood as distinguished by personal beauty. No observation of this kind, proceeding either from His friends or enemies, is recorded in the Gospels” (Geneva Series, Romans, p.323).

John Murray writes, “So the question is: why did Paul use the term ‘sinful flesh’ when it is necessary to guard so jealously the sinlessness of the Lord’s flesh? He is concerned to show that when the Father sent the Son into this world of sin, of misery, and of death, He sent Him in a manner that brought Him into the closest relation to sinful humanity that it was possible for Him to come without becoming Himself sinful. He Himself was holy and undefiled - the word ‘likeness’ guards this truth. But He came in the same human nature. And that is the purpose of saying ‘sinful flesh’. No other combination of terms could have fulfilled these purposes so perfectly. There is emblazoned on the apostle’s language the great truth that when the Father sent the Son He sent Him for the deepest humiliation conceivable for Him who was the Son of God and who, in His human nature was ‘holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners’ - Hebrews 7:26” (NICNT, Romans, p.280).

Charles Hodge writes, “As to the form in which He appeared, it was ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’. It was not simply ‘in the flesh’, clothed in our nature; for that might have been said, had He appeared in the glorious, impassive nature of Adam before the fall. Much less was it ‘in sinful flesh’, for that would imply that His human nature was defiled, contrary to Hebrews 4:15, and to all Scripture; but it was ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’, that is, in a nature like to our sinful nature, but not itself sinful. Christ took our physically dilapidated nature, subject to the infirmities which sin had brought into it. He was therefore susceptible of pain, and weariness, and sorrow. He could be touched with a sense of our infirmities. He was tempted in all points as we are. He is therefore a merciful and trustworthy High Priest” (Epistle to the Romans, p.252).

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p.502-503). Richard Sibbes writes, “When did He take upon Him our nature? He took it upon Him after it was fallen; when it was passible (i.e. capable of suffering), obnoxious (i.e. subject, liable) to suffering; not as it was in innocency, free from all misery and calamity, but when it was at the worst” (Works, Vol.4, p.498). It would have been an incomprehensible humiliation, if Christ had taken the nature of angels, yet it was the nature of an inferior creature, the nature of a man that He took to Himself. Again it would have been an incomprehensible humiliation if He had taken the nature of humanity before the fall when it was in its full glory and strength. However, He was sent in the “likeness of human flesh” and took upon Himself a nature that was exposed to all the terrible consequences of our fallenness, yet He Himself was without sin: “holy, innocent, and undefiled” (Hebrews 7:26).

Born of Woman

by John Owen (*Works Vol.1, p.198-199*)

“That part of human nature wherein or whereby this work was to be effected, as unto the essence or substance of it, was to be derived from the common root or stock of the same nature, in our first parents. It would not suffice hereunto that God should create a man, out of the dust of the earth or out of nothing, of the same nature in general with ourselves; for there would be no cognation or alliance between Him and us, so that we should be any way concerned in what He did or suffered: for this alliance depends solely hereon, that God ‘hath made of one blood all nations of men’ (Acts 17:26). Hence it is that the genealogy of Christ is given us in the Gospel—not only from Abraham, to declare the faithfulness of God in the promise that He should be of His seed, but from Adam also, to manifest His relation unto the common stock of our nature, and unto all mankind therein.

“The first discovery of the wisdom of God herein was in that primitive revelation, that the Deliverer should be of ‘the seed of the woman’ (Genesis 3:15). No other but He who was so could ‘break the serpent’s head,’ or ‘destroy the work of the devil,’ so as that we might be delivered and restored. He was not only to be partaker of our nature, but He was so to be, by being ‘the seed of the woman’ (Galatians 4:4). He was not to be created out of nothing, nor to be made of the dust of the earth, but so ‘made of a woman,’ as that thereby He might receive our nature from the common root and spring of it. Thus ‘He who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one’ (Hebrews 2:11) - of the same mass, of one nature and blood; ‘whence He is not ashamed to call them brethren. This also was to be brought forth from the treasures of infinite wisdom.”

c. *Born under the Law*

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to be made under the law, to redeem us from the curse of the law, that we might receive the adoption of children, and be re-admitted into His happy family, ‘He was made of a woman.’ Thus He became our *Goel*, our near kinsman, with whom the right of redemption lay” (Works, Vol.4, p.59). Thomas Watson writes, Christ, in taking His flesh from the woman, has honoured her sex; that as, at the first, the woman had made man a sinner; so now, to make him amends, she should bring him a Saviour” (A Body of Divinity, p.192-193). Finally, it is important to note that before He was the son of Mary, He was the Son. On becoming the son of Mary, there is no evidence from Scripture that He cease to be the Son of God, rather there is irrefutable proof to the contrary - “In Him all the fulness of deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). (c) *Born under the Law*. Though the Son was the Law-maker, Enforcer, and Judge, He became incarnate and submitted His life to the law in perfect obedience. It is an honor for men and angels to submit themselves to the Law of God, yet for Son to take flesh upon Himself and submit His life to the regulations and penalties of the Law is a act of incomprehensible humiliation. He did so, that He might redeem His people who were under the Law (4:5), enslaved by it (4:3), and under its curse (3:10, 13). Albert Barnes writes, “As one of the human race, partaking of human nature, He was subject to the law of God. As a man He was bound by its requirements, and subject to its control. He took His place under the law that He might accomplish an important purpose for those who were under it. He made Himself subject to it that

Born Under the Law

by Thomas Boston (*Works*, Vol.1, p.492-493)

“Our Redeemer was made under the law, though He be the Lord of all, and the Lawgiver unto His rational creatures. Rebellious man had shaken off the yoke of his obedience, and Christ therefore lays His neck under it. He submitted Himself to the ceremonial law, undergoing the painful operation of circumcision on the eighth day after His birth, as was therein enjoined; to the civil law paying tribute, etc.; and to the moral law, obeying the precepts thereof, and suffering the penal sanction of it, which was added in case of transgression by man, in whose room He substituted Himself.

1. He submitted to the preceptive part of the law as a covenant of works, which man had broken: and this He fulfilled, so that He was even subject to Joseph His supposed father, and to Mary His mother, according to the flesh (Luke 2:51), nay, to every branch of it, in fulfilling all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). By this His obedience the law was magnified and made honourable, and got its full due in respect of active obedience, which it could never have got from men, though all their pieces of obedience had been accumulated into one sum.
2. He submitted to the threatening or penal sanction of the law. Though there was no guile found in His mouth, and He owed the law nothing, as being the great Lawgiver, yet the law took Him by the throat, as the undertaker for sinners, saying, ‘Pay me what thou owest.’ The threatening was enacted, and He answered it to a tittle, bearing that death in His soul and body, which it had threatened on account of sin. And thus He took on the debt of elect sinners, and He paid it to the utmost farthing. O wonderful condescension in the Lord and Lawgiver, to yield obedience to His own law, that was made for creatures, in all its demands, the most rigorous not excepted! O blessed Undertaker, who hast paid all the debt of bankrupt men!”

6. In II Corinthians 8:9, we find one of the most beautiful texts in all of the Scriptures regarding the incarnation of the Son of God and His journey from heaven to earth. Read the text until you are familiar with its contents and then write your thoughts on each of the following phrases:
 - a. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

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He might become one of them, and secure their redemption” (BN, Galatians, p.361). Charles Spurgeon writes, “And now admire and wonder! The Son of God has come under the law. He was the Law-maker and the Law-giver, and He is both the Judge of the law and the Executioner of the law, and yet He Himself came under the law” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.30, p.690). John Favel writes, “I confess it was no disparagement to Adam in the state of innocency, to angels in their state of glory, to be under law to God; but it was an unconceivable abasement to the absolute independent Being to come under law: yea, not only under the obedience, but also under the malediction and curse of the law” (Works, Vol.1, p.45).

II Corinthians 8:9 - (a) For you know. Every true believer understands in varying degrees that the Lord’s coming to Earth for the salvation of His people was a work of infinite, immeasurable grace. Charles Hodge writes, “The highest mystery of the Gospel, viz., the incarnation of the Son of God, or the manifestation of God

b. *That though He was rich.*

c. *Yet for your sake...*

Study Notes

in the flesh, and the love therein manifested, is assumed to be known and acknowledged by all who called themselves Christians (I & II Corinthians, p.576). *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.* The word “grace” comes from the Greek word *cháris* which denotes favor, kindness, and benignity. In the context of fallen man, divine favor is always unmerited or undeserved. Christ’s incarnation was motivated by His spontaneous and unconditional love toward us apart from any merit or virtue in us. The grace of God in the incarnation and the cross climbs higher and shines more glorious than in all the others works of God combined. All other manifestations of grace are not only eclipsed, but made possible through the coming of the Son of God to dwell among men and die for them. What makes the incarnation such a work of grace is that the Son descended from such a height - He was the supreme sovereign of the universe who infinitely surpassed the combined glory and virtue of all creatures in every realm. Albert Barnes writes, “His coming in this manner was a proof of the highest benevolence” (BN, II Corinthians, p.181). **(b) *That though He was rich.*** The preexistence of the Son of God is clearly set forth in this simple phrase. The fact that He was rich in His pre-incarnate state implies that there was such a state. The word “rich” is translated from the Greek word *plousios* which commonly refers to material wealth or resources. The Son of God was rich in that He was the Creator and Owner of all He created. And yet, He was richer still in that He was rich in the glory which He shared with the Father even before the foundation of the world. He radiated the Father’s glory and was the exact representation of His nature (Hebrews 1:3). As Charles Hodge writes, “He was rich in plentitude of all the divine attributes and prerogatives” (I&II Corinthians, p.577). Thomas Watson writes, “He came from heaven, and from the richest place in heaven. His Father’s bosom, that hive of sweetness” (A Body of Divinity, p.195). Matthew Poole writes, “[He was] the Heir of all things, the Lord of the whole creation, all things were put under His feet” (II Corinthians 8:9). John Murray writes, “Paul does not say that Christ became rich. He does say that He became poor. His riches were not His by donation or investiture. They did not really become His. They were His. But His poverty did come to be. And it came to be because He impoverished Himself” (Collected Writings, Vol.3, p.230). See also the inset “The Eternal Glory and Riches of the Son” found on pages 34-36. **(c) *Yet for your sake.*** His was not a forced poverty, but a volutary one. It was “for us” that He laid aside His glory, took upon Himself the nature of a man, and walked as a poor man among the poor. Charles Spurgeon writes, “His poverty was all voluntary; there was a necessity laid upon Him, but the sole necessity was His own love. There was no need, as far as He was concerned, that He should ever be poor; the only need was because we were in need, and He loved us so that He would rescue us from poverty,

The Riches of the Son

Charles Spurgeon writes, "You cannot describe His riches, and you cannot describe His poverty. You have never had any idea of how high He was as God; and you can never imagine how low He stooped" (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.40, p.267).

Albert Barnes writes, "He was the Creator of all (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), and as Creator He had a right to all things, and the disposal of all things. The most absolute right which can exist is that acquired by the act of creation; and this right the Son of God possessed over all gold, and silver, and diamonds, and pearls; over all earth and lands; over all the treasures of the ocean, and over all worlds. The extent and amount of His riches, therefore, is to be measured by the extent of His dominion over the universe; and to estimate His riches, therefore, we are to conceive of the septre which He sways over the distant worlds. What wealth has man that can compare with the riches of the Creator and Proprietor of all? How poor and worthless appears all the gold that man can accumulate compared with the wealth of Him whose are the silver, and the gold, and the cattle upon a thousand hills?" (BN, II Corinthians, p.182).

On Christ's Becoming Poor for Our Sakes

by John Gill (EONT, Vol.8, p.809)

"Though He was rich - in the perfections of His divine nature, having the fulness of the Godhead in Him, all that the Father has, and so equal to Him; such as eternity, immutability, infinity and immensity, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, etc.. in the works of His hands, which reach to everything that is made, the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that in them are, things visible and invisible; in His universal empire and dominion over all creature; and in those large revenues of glory, which are due to Him from them all; which riches of His are underived from another, incommunicable to another, and cannot be lost.

"For your sakes He became poor - by assuming human nature, with all its weaknesses and imperfections excepting sin; He appeared in it not as a lord, but in the form of a servant; He endured in it a great deal of reproach and shame, and at last death itself; not that by becoming man He ceased to be God, or lost His divine perfections, thought these were much hid and covered from the view of man; and in His human nature He became the reverse of what He is in His divine nature, namely, finite and circumscribable, weak and infirm, ignorant of some things, and mortal; in which nature also He was exposed to much meanness and outward poverty; He was born of poor parents, had no liberal education, was brought up to a trade, had not where to lay His head, was ministered to by others of their substance, and had nothing to bequeath His mother at His death, but commits Her to the care of one of His disciples; all which fulfilled the prophecies of Him, that He should be "poor" and "low" (Psalm 41:1, Zechariah 9:9).

"That they through His poverty might be rich - not in temporals, but in spirituals; and by His obedience, sufferings, and death in His low estate, He has paid all their debts, wrought out a robe of righteousness, rich and adorned with jewels, with which He clothes them, and through His blood and sacrifice has made them kings and priests unto God. They are enriched by Him with the graces of His Spirit; with the truths of the Gospel, comparable to gold, silver, and precious stones; with Himself and all that He has; with the riches of grace here, and of glory hereafter. These are communicable from Him, though unsearchable, and are solid and substantial, satisfying, lasting, and for ever. Now if this grace of Christ will not engage to liberality with cheerfulness, nothing will."

d. *He became poor.*

Study Notes

and make us eternally rich” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.40, p.267). Again, Charles Spurgeon writes, “He gave Himself for us because He loved us with all the force and energy of His nature” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.47, p.98). **(d)** *He became poor.* It is important to remember that His self-imposed poverty is most manifest only in light of the riches He left behind. It is one thing for a rich man to take upon himself a vow of poverty and walk among the poor. It is quite another thing for the very God of the universe to take on flesh and live among the lowliest of men as one of them. There is a striking parallel between these words and the words of Paul in Philippians 2:6: “Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Richard Sibbes writes, “The poverty of Christ reacheth from His incarnation to His resurrection. All the state of His humiliation, it goes under the name of His poverty. The resurrection was the first step or degree of His exaltation. He wrought our salvation in the state of humiliation, but He applies it in the state of exaltation” (Works, Vol.4, p.498). Philip Hughes writes, “Grace, as Hodge says, is ‘unmerited, spontaneous love’; and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the very perfection of grace and the sum and source of all graces. None other has impoverished Himself as He did... From highest heaven He descended to Calvary and the grave. None was richer than He; none became poorer than He” (NICNT, II Corinthians, p.299). John Murray writes, “When the Son of man became poor, it was not by giving up His Godhood nor any of the attributes and prerogatives inseparable from Godhood. When He became man, He did not cease to be rich in His divine being, relations, and possession. He did not become poor by ceasing to be what He was, but He became poor by becoming what He was not. He became poor by addition, not by subtraction. He added manhood to His immutable and eternal Godhood. He added to His person real human nature with all its sinless properties and necessary infirmities. He was made in the likeness of men” (Collected Writings, Vol.3, p.231). Charles Hodge writes, “He so far laid aside the glory of His divine majesty, that He was to all appearance a man, and even a servant, so that men refused to recognise Him as God, but despised, persecuted, and at last crucified Him, as a man” (I&II Corinthians, p.577). Matthew Henry writes, “Not only did He become man for us, but He became poor also. He was born in poor circumstances, lived a poor life, and died in poverty” (MHC, Vol.6, p.630). Thomas Watson writes, “He came not in the majesty of a king attended with His life-guard, but He came poor; not like the heir of heaven, but like one of an inferior descent. The place He was born in was poor; not the royal city of Jerusalem, but Bethlehem, a poor obscure place He was born in an inn, and a manger was His cradle, the cobwebs His curtains, the beasts His companions; He descended of poor parents. One would have thought, if Christ would have come into the world, He would have made choice of some queen or personage of honour to have descended from; but He comes of mean obscure parents, for that they were poor appears by their offering ‘A pair of turtledoves’ (Luke 2:24), which was the usual offering of the poor (Leviticus 12:8. Christ was so poor, that when He wanted money He was fain to work a miracle for it (Matthew 17:27). When He died He made no will. He came into the world poor” (A Body of Divinity, p.196).

The Costliness of the Incarnation

by John Favel (*Works, Vol.1, p.81-82*)

“Adore the love of the Father, and the Son, who bid so high for your souls, and at this rate were contented you should be recovered.

“The love of the Father is herein admirably conspicuous, who so vehemently willed our salvation, that He was content to degrade the darling of His soul to so vile and contemptible a state, which was, upon the matter, an undoing to Him, in point of reputation; as the apostle intimates (Philippians 2:7). If two persons be at a variance, and the superior, who also is the wronged person, begins to stoop first, and say, you have deeply wronged me, yea, your blood is not able to repair the wrongs you have done me: however, such is my love to you, and willingness to be at peace with you, that I will part with what is most dear to me in all the world, for peace-sake; yea, though I stoop below myself, and seem, as it were, to forget such a breach betwixt me and you. ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son’.

“And how astonishing is the love of Christ, that would make such a stoop as this to exalt us! Oh, it is ravishing to think, He should pass by a more excellent and noble species of creatures, refusing the angelic nature (Hebrews 2:16) to take flesh; and not to solace and disport Himself in it neither, nor experience sensitive pleasures in the body; for, as He needed them not, being at the fountain-head of the highest joys, so it was not at all in His design, but the very contrary, even to make Himself a subject capable of sorrows, wounds, and tears. It was, as the apostle elegantly expresseth it in Hebrews 2:9: ‘that He might sensibly taste what relish death hath, and what bitterness is in those pangs and agonies.’ Now, Oh that you would get your hearts suitably impressed and affected with these high impressures of the love both of the Father and the Son! How is the courage of some noble romans celebrated in history, for the brave adventures they made for the commonwealth; but they could never stoop as Christ did, being so infinitely below Him in personal dignity.”

e. *So that you through His poverty might become rich.*

Study Notes

(e) So that you through His poverty might become rich. There was a definite and certain redemptive purpose in the Son self-imposed poverty. He left the glories of heaven so that we might enter in. John Calvin writes, “He resigned the possession of all blessings, that He might enrich us by His poverty” (CC, Vol.20, II Corinthians, p.290). Matthew Henry writes, “This was for our sakes, that we thereby might be made rich, rich in the love and favour of God, rich in the blessings and promises of the new covenant, rich in the hopes of eternal life, being heirs of the kingdom” (MHC, Vol.6, p.630). Albert Barnes identifies three ways in which Christ’s poverty has enriched His people: (1) The present possession of an interest in the Redeemer Himself. (2) The heirship of an eternal inheritance, the prospect of immortal glory - Romans 8:17. (3) Everlasting treasures in heaven Eternal and illimitable wealth is theirs in heaven - Matthew 6:20” (BN, II Corinthians, p.183). J.L. Dagg writes, “The glorious benefits resulting to us from the deep humiliation of Christ, are intimated in the words of Paul: ‘that ye through His poverty might be rich’ (II Corinthians 8:9). The extent of the riches which we shall acquire by His poverty, eternity must disclose” (Manual of Theology, p.206). John Murray writes, “Paul has, no doubt, the

The Son's Poverty and His People's Gain

Thomas Watson writes, "He was born of a virgin, that we might be born of God. He took our flesh, that He might give us His Spirit. He lay in the manger that we might lie in paradise. He came down from heaven, that He might bring us to heaven... If our hearts be not rocks, this love of Christ should affect us. Behold love that passeth knowledge (Ephesians 3:19)" (A Body of Divinity, p.196).

Charles Hodge writes, "Believers are made made rich in the possession of that glory which Christ laid aside, or concealed. They are made partakers of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4). That is, of the divine holiness, exaltation and blessedness. This is divine not only because of its source as coming from God, but because of its nature. So that our Lords says, 'The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them' (John 17:22). Hence believers are said to be glorified with Christ and to reign with Him (Romans 8:17). The price of this exaltation and everlasting blessedness of His people was His own poverty. It is by His poverty that we are made rich. Unless He had submitted to all the humiliation of His incarnation and death, we should forever have remained poor, destitute of all holiness, happiness and glory" (I&II Corinthians, p.577).

7. To bring this part of our study to a close, we will consider I Timothy 3:16. In this text is found one of the most concise and beautiful statements in all the Scriptures regarding the incarnation. Carefully consider each phrase and then write your thoughts.
 - a. *By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness.*

Study Notes

complete sum of redemptive blessing in mind. But surely the acme (i.e. highest point or height) of adoptive blessing looms up with particular prominence. 'And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ' (Romans 8:17). It is with nothing less than a divine inheritance that Christ endows His people. 'For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's' (I Corinthians 3:21-23). God Himself becomes the heritage of those who are the beneficiaries of Christ's impoverishment. They are filled with all the fullness of God, and their anthem is, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My heart and my flesh faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever' - Psalm 73:25-26" (Collected Writings, Vol.3, p.234).

I Timothy 3:16 - (a) By common confession. The phrase comes from the Greek word *homologouménos* which may be translated "confessedly", "by consent of all", or "without controversy or dispute". The Gospel, including the incarnation, is a matter to be boldly and publicly confessed without doubt or wavering. *Great is the mystery of godliness.* The word "mystery" comes from the Greek word *mustérion* which refers to that which is or has been hidden, unintelligible, or secret. The word "godliness" comes from the Greek word *eusébeia* which refers to all true devotion and piety towards God. This phrase is best understood as: "All Christians confess without controversy or dispute that great is the mystery which is the foundation and source of all true godliness and devotion to God." D. Edmond Hiebert writes, "[It is] the revelation of the truth which godliness

The Great Mystery of Godliness

Charles Spurgeon writes, “Every heathenish religion had its mystery, its secret doctrine revealed only to the initiated, which was held to be the essence of the faith. The mystery of some religions was mere froth, foolish if untrue, and if true of no consequence to any one; but even those who do not believe the facts of our religion can hold no controversy with us about the unspeakable greatness of them, if they be indeed true. Be a man what he may, if he be reasonable he will admit that Christianity does not deal in trifles. Like the eagle, it does not hawk for flies, it aspires to conquer the loftiest themes of thought. Right or wrong, the subjects with which we deal are not secondary, but wear about them an awful interest which none but the frivolous despise.” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.13, p.697).

Thomas Boston writes, “To see a king become a slave, and the order of angels degraded into crawling worms, would be matter of wonder; but a greater is here, viz. God not become an angel, though that would have been infinitely below Him, but a man, a son of Adam, taking the likeness of sinful flesh. Hence the apostle cries out with admiration, ‘Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh’. O deep humiliation! far greater than if all the creatures had been degraded to the lowest degree of existence” (Works, Vol.1, p.491).

J.C. Philpot writes, “A mystery indeed it is, a great, a deep, an unfathomable mystery; for who can rightly understand how the divine Word, the eternal Son of God, was made flesh, and dwelt among us? ... These are the things ‘which the angels desire to look into;’ which they cannot understand, but reverently adore. And well may we imitate their adoring admiration, not attempting to understand, but believe, love, and revere; for well has it been said, ‘Where reason fails, with all her powers, there faith believes, and love adores’” (Harvested Sheaves, p.351).

Octavius Winslow writes, “But we marvel at the fact (i.e. the incarnation) itself. It amazes us; its humility humbles us, its glory dazzles us, its tenderness subdues us, its love overpowers us. That the uncreated Son of God should become the created Son of man; that the Eternal Word should be made flesh and dwell with men; that He should assume a new title, entwining in the awful letters that compose His divine name other names denoting His inferior nature as man and so revealing Himself as Jehovah-Jesus-what a wondrous, surpassing thought!” (Evening Thoughts, p.705).

Study Notes

embraces and on which it rests” (EBC, I Timothy, p.73). George Swinnock writes, “For God to become man was an emptying Himself of His credit, and stripping Himself of His robes of glory, and is the first enigma in the apostle’s mystery of godliness” (Works, Vol.5, p.448). Matthew Henry writes, “Christianity is a mystery, a mystery that could not have been found out by reason or the light of nature, and which cannot be comprehended by reason, because it is above reason, though not contrary thereto. It is a mystery, not of philosophy or speculation; but of godliness, designed to promote godliness; and herein it exceeds all the mysteries of the Gentiles” (MHC, Vol.6, p.817-818). The pagan idolaters in Ephesus shouted out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19:28), but Paul’s response and rebuttal is, “Great is the mystery of godliness!” There is enough mystery in the Gospel to bring forth an eternity of worship from the wisest angel who dwells in the deepest counsel of God. How much more from the children of God, since it was all done for us! Charles Spurgeon writes, “It is called “the mystery of godliness,” because it most intimately concerns a godly life, because those who receive it in their hearts become thereby godly men; and because, moreover, it builds up its believers in godliness, and is to them a grand motive for the reverent love and holy fear of the Lord their God” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.18, p.712). J.C. Philpot writes, “All godliness is contained in it, and flows out of it. The whole of God’s grace, mercy, and truth is laid up in, is revealed through, is manifested by, the Son of His love; for ‘it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell;’ and this as Immanuel, God with us. Thus His sacred humanity, in union with His divine Person, is the channel of communication through which all the love and mercy of God flow down to poor guilty, miserable sinners, who believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God” (Harvested Sheaves, p.352).

b. *He who was revealed in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16).*

Study Notes

(b) *He who was revealed in the flesh.* The mystery that is the foundation and source of all true godliness is the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God and the saving work which He accomplished “in the flesh”. William Hendriksen writes, “Christ is called the mystery of our devotion, not only because had He not been revealed to us, we would not have known Him, but also because He transcends our comprehension (Ephesians 3:18-19). The more we know Him, the better will we be able to discern the mysterious, unfathomable character of His love and of all His attributes” (New Testament Commentary, I Timothy, p.137). Matthew Henry writes, “What is this mystery of godliness? It is Christ” (MHC, Vol.6, p.818). John Gill writes, ““God manifest in the flesh’. This is the basis of the Christian religion; a fundamental article of it; and without the belief of it no man can be a Christian: ‘Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God’; born of God, and belongs to Him, and is on the side of God and truth; ‘And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God’ - I John 4:2-3” (A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, p.379). The incarnation of the Son of God, through the virgin birth, and by the power of the Holy Spirit is an absolutely essential or fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. To waiver in the slightest degree about its certainty is to deny the faith and to cast the Gospel into the abyss of mythology. If Jesus was not conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb a virgin, He was not God incarnate. If He was not God incarnate, the Cross was a vain and futile martyrdom - justice remains without satisfaction, wrath continues unappeased, and the slaves of sin languish in chains of condemnation and death. Here we must be bold and stand our ground. The theologian who balks on the incarnation is not Christian and has nothing to say to the Church or to contribute to her doctrine.

The Mystery and the Glory of the Incarnation

Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest write, “However much Scripture reveals of the incarnation, no human mind will be able to fully comprehend it” (Integrative Theology, Vol.2, p.285).

Thomas Watson writes, “Behold here a sacred riddle or paradox - ‘God manifest in the flesh.’ That man should be made in God’s image was a wonder, but that God should be made in man’s image is a greater wonder. That the Ancient should cry in the cradle; that He who rules the stars should suck the breast; that a virgin should conceive; that Christ should be made a woman, and of that woman which Himself made; that the branch should bear the vine; that the mother should be younger than the child she bare, and that child in the womb bigger than the mother; that the human nature should not be God, yet one with God; this was not only *mirum* but *miraculum*. Christ taking flesh is a mystery we shall never fully understand til we come to heaven, when our light shall be clear, as well as our love perfect” (A Body of Divinity, p.198).

Thomas Boston writes, “The Son of God became man. To see a king become a slave, and the order of angels degraded into crawling worms, would be matter of wonder; but a greater is here, viz. God not become an angel, though that would have been infinitely below Him, but a man, a son of Adam, taking the likeness of sinful flesh. Hence the apostle cries out with admiration, ‘Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh.’ O deep humiliation! far greater than if all the creatures had been degraded to the lowest degree of existence” (Works, Vol.1, p.491).

Matthew Henry writes, “The mystery of Christ’s incarnation is to be adored, not pried into. If we know not the way of the Spirit in the formation of common persons, nor how the bones are formed in the womb of any one that is with child (Ecclesiastes 11:5), much less do we know how the blessed Jesus was formed in the womb of the blessed virgin. When David admires how he himself was made in secret, and curiously wrought (Ps. 139:13-16), perhaps he speaks in spirit of Christ’s incarnation” (MHC, Vol.5, p.5).

Hugh Binning writes, “Certainly the distance is infinitely greater between God and us; and He must needs behold greater vanity, folly, and darkness, in our clearest apprehensions of His majesty, than we could find in the reasonings and conceptions of beasts about our nature. ...When the generation (i.e. conception) of a poor creature hath so much depth of wisdom in it, how canst thou think to understand that everlasting wonder of angels, the birth and conception of that eternal wisdom of God?” (Works, p.274).

Charles Spurgeon writes, “Beloved, this is a mystery surpassing all comprehension. If any man should attempt to explain, or even to define the union of the divine and human in the Lord Jesus, he would soon prove his folly. The schoolmen of the dark ages were very fond of asking puzzling questions about what they called the hypostatical union of the deity and humanity of Christ. They could not cast so much as a ray of light upon the subject; they amused themselves with enigmas and lost themselves in labyrinths. It is enough for us to know that the incarnation is a glorious fact, and it suffices us to hold it in its simplicity. God was manifest in the flesh of Jesus Christ the incarnate Word” (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol.13, p.699).

Louis Berkhof writes, “The Church accepted the doctrine of the two natures in one person, not because it had a complete understanding of the mystery, but because it clearly saw in it a mystery revealed by the Word of God. It was and remained ever since for the Church an article of faith, far beyond human comprehension” (Systematic Theology, p.315).

Octavius Winslow writes, “Oh, wonderful mystery! What imagination can conceive it? What mind can fathom it? We can only stand on the shore of this vast ocean of wisdom and love and exclaim, ‘Oh the depth! Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh’” (Evening Thoughts, p.225).

Thomas Boston writes, “There are mysteries of God in nature; but the great mystery of God is in Christ; in whom there lies hid more of God than in a thousand worlds” (Works, Vol.10, p.431).

John Owen writes, “A mystery it is, and that of those dimensions as no creature can comprehend” (Works, Vol.1, p.46).