

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 234

INCARNATION

*And the Word was made flesh,
and dwelt among us.*

John 1:14

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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234

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THE WORD MADE FLESH

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.—John 1:14

THE main truth that this verse teaches is the reality of our Lord Jesus Christ's incarnation, or *being made man*. St. John tells us that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The plain meaning of these words is that our divine Savior really took human nature upon Him in order to save sinners. He really became a man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted. Like ourselves, He was born of a woman, though born in a miraculous manner. Like ourselves, He grew from infancy to boyhood, and from boyhood to man's estate, both in wisdom and in stature (Luk 2:52). Like ourselves, He hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, slept, was wearied, felt pain, wept, rejoiced, marveled, was moved to anger and compassion. Having become flesh and taken a body, He prayed, read the Scriptures, suffered being tempted, and submitted His human will to the will of God the Father. And finally, in the same body, He really suffered and shed His blood, really died, was really buried, really rose again, and really ascended up into heaven. And yet all this time He was God as well as man!¹

This union of two natures in Christ's one person is doubtless one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian religion. It needs to be carefully stated. It is just one of those great truths that are not meant to be curiously pried into, but to be reverently believed. Nowhere, perhaps, shall we find a wiser, more judicious statement than in the second article of the Church of England. "The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed virgin of her substance: so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and the manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man."² This is a most valuable declaration. This is "sound speech, that cannot be condemned" (Ti 2:8).³

¹ See FGB 219, *The Person of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² *Book of Common Prayer* (1662), Articles of Religion, II.

³ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** We endorse the use of confessions as helpful statements of biblical doctrine; but they are fallible works of men, not the authoritative, infallible Word of God.

But while we do not pretend to explain the union of two natures in our Lord Jesus Christ's person, we must not hesitate to fence the subject with well-defined cautions. While we state most carefully what we *do* believe, we must not shrink from declaring boldly what we do *not* believe. We must never forget that though our Lord was God and man at the same time, the divine and human natures in Him were never confounded.⁴ One nature did not swallow up the other. The two natures remained perfect and distinct. The [deity] of Christ⁵ was never for a moment laid aside, although veiled. The manhood of Christ, during His lifetime, was never for a moment unlike our own, though by union with the Godhead, greatly dignified. Though perfect God, Christ has always been perfect man from the first moment of His incarnation. He that is gone into heaven and is sitting at the Father's right hand to intercede for sinners is man as well as God. Though perfect man, Christ never ceased to be perfect God. He that suffered for sin on the cross and was made sin for us was God manifest in the flesh (1Ti 3:16). The blood with which the Church was purchased is called the blood "of God" (Act 20:28). Though He became flesh in the fullest sense, when He was born of the Virgin Mary, He never at any period ceased to be the Eternal Word. To say that He constantly manifested His divine nature during His earthly ministry would, of course, be contrary to plain facts. To attempt to explain why His Godhead was sometimes veiled and at other times unveiled, while He was on earth, would be venturing on ground that we had better leave alone. But to say that at any instant of His earthly ministry He was not fully and entirely God is nothing less than heresy.

The cautions just given may seem at first sight needless, wearisome, and hair-splitting. It is precisely the neglect of such cautions that ruins many souls. This constant, undivided union of two perfect natures in Christ's person is exactly that which gives infinite value to His mediation⁶ and qualifies Him to be the very Mediator⁷ that sinners need. Our Mediator can sympathize with us because He is very

⁴ **confounded** – mixed up or mingled so that the elements become impossible or difficult to distinguish.

⁵ See FGB 230, *The Deity of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁶ **mediation** – act of coming between two hostile parties to restore peace.

⁷ **Mediator** – a go-between; "It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: unto Whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. (Second London Baptist Confession, 8.1) See FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator*.

man. And yet, at the same time, He can deal with the Father for us on equal terms because He is very God. The same union gives infinite value to His righteousness when imputed⁸ to believers—the righteousness of one Who was [and is] God as well as man. The same union gives infinite value to the atoning⁹ blood that He shed for sinners on the cross—the blood of one Who was [and is] God as well as man. The same union gives infinite value to His resurrection: when He rose again as the Head of the body of believers, He rose not as a mere man, but as God. Let these things sink deeply into our hearts. The second Adam is far greater than the first Adam was. The first Adam was only man, and so he fell. The second Adam was God as well as man, and so He completely conquered.

Let us leave the subject with feelings of deep gratitude and thankfulness. It is full of abounding consolation for all who know Christ by faith and believe on Him.

Did the Word become flesh? Then He can be touched with the feeling of His people's infirmities because He has suffered Himself, being tempted. He is almighty because He is God, and yet He can feel with us because He is man.

Did the Word become flesh? Then He can supply us with a perfect pattern and example for our daily life. Had He walked among us as an angel or a spirit, we could never have copied Him. But having dwelt among us as a man, we know that the true standard of holiness is to "walk even as He walked" (1Jo 2:6). He is a perfect pattern because He is God. But He is also a pattern exactly suited to our [needs] because He is man.

Finally, did the Word become flesh? Then let us see in our mortal bodies a real, true dignity, and not defile them by sin. Vile and weak as our body may seem, it is a body that the eternal Son of God was not ashamed to take upon Himself and to take up to heaven. That simple fact is a pledge that He will raise our bodies at the last day and glorify them together with His own.

From *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. John*, Vol. 1,
in the public domain.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): English Anglican bishop and author; born in Macclesfield, Cheshire County, UK.



⁸ **imputed** – put to one's account; See FGB 191, *Imputed Righteousness*.

⁹ **atoning** – covering the guilt of sin; See FGB 225, *The Work of Christ*, and 227, *Atonement*.

CHRIST'S PRE-INCARNATE GLORY

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691)

I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.—Proverbs 8:30

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. John tells us He was “in the bosom of the Father” (Joh 1:18). To lie in the bosom is the posture of dearest love: “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved” (Joh 13:23). But Christ did not lean upon the Father’s bosom as that disciple did on His, but lay *in* it. Therefore, in Isaiah 42:1, the Father calls Him, “Mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.” [In] 2 Corinthians 8:9, He is said, in this estate wherein I am now describing Him, to be “rich.” And, [in] Philippians 2:6-7, [He is said] to be “in the form of God” and “to be equal with God,” i.e., to have all the glory and ensigns¹ of the majesty of God. The riches that He speaks of were no less than all that God the Father hath: “All that the Father hath is mine” (Joh 16:14). What He now hath in His exalted state is the same [that] He had before His humiliation (Joh 17:5). Now, to sketch out (as we are able) the unspeakable felicity² of that state of Christ while He lay in that blessed bosom, I shall consider it three ways: negatively, positively, and comparatively.

Let us consider that state negatively by removing from it all those degrees of abasement³ and sorrow that His incarnation brought Him under. First, He was not then abased to the condition of a creature, which was a low step indeed and that which upon the matter undid Him in point of reputation. For by this, saith the apostle, He “made himself of no reputation” (Phi 2:7). It emptied Him of His glory. For God to be made man is such an abasement as none can express: but then not only to appear in true flesh, but also in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3). O what is this!

Secondly, Christ was not under the Law in this estate. I confess it was no disparagement⁴ to Adam in the state of innocence [or] to angels in their state of glory to be under law to God; but it was an incon-

¹ **ensigns** – characteristic marks.

² **felicity** – happiness.

³ **abasement** – humiliation.

⁴ **disparagement** – dishonor; disgrace.

ceivable abasement to the absolutely independent Being to come under law. Yea, [He was] not only under the obedience, but also under the malediction⁵ of the Law: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal 4:4).

Thirdly, in this state, He was not liable to any of those sorrowful consequents and attendants of⁶ that frail and feeble state of humanity, which He afterwards assumed with the nature. As, (1) He was unacquainted with griefs. There was no sorrowing or sighing in that bosom where He lay, though afterwards He became “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). “A man of sorrows”—as if He had been constituted and made up of pure and unmixed sorrows, every day conversing with griefs as with His intimate companions and acquaintances. (2) While He continued in that bosom, He was never pinched with poverty and [needs] as He was afterwards when He said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Mat 8:20). Ah blessed Jesus! Thou needest not to have [lacked] a place to have lain Thine head, hadst Thou not left that bosom for my sake. (3) He never underwent reproach and shame in that bosom; there was nothing but glory and honor reflected upon Him by His Father, though afterwards, “He is despised and rejected of men” (Isa 53:3). His Father never looked upon Him without smiles and love, delight and joy, though afterwards, He became “a reproach of men, and despised of the people” (Psa 22:6). (4) His holy heart was never offended with an impure suggestion or temptation of the devil. While he lay in that bosom of peace and love, He never knew what it was to be assaulted with temptations, to be besieged and battered upon by unclean spirits, as He did afterwards: “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (Mat 4:1). It was for our sakes that He submitted to those exercises of spirit to be “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15) that “he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb 2:17). (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, though afterwards He groaned and sweat under them (Isa 53:5). The Lord embraced Him from eternity, but never wounded Him until He stood in our place and room. (6) There were no hidings or withdrawings of His Father from Him. There was not a cloud from eternity upon the face of God until Jesus

⁵ **malediction** – utterance of a curse.

⁶ **consequents and attendants of** – things that follow as an effect and that accompany.

Christ had left that bosom. It was a new thing to Christ to see frowns in the face of His Father, a new thing for Him to cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46). (7) There were never any impressions of His Father’s wrath upon Him, as there were afterwards: God never delivered such a bitter cup into His hands before as that was (Mat 26:39). Lastly, 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 until, for our sakes, He voluntarily subjected Himself unto them. Thus, you see what that state was not.

Let us consider what it was *positively* 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” (Joh 1:1). God, you know, is the fountain, ocean, and center of all delights and joys: “In thy presence is fulness of joy” (Psa 16:11). To be wrapped up in the soul and bosom of all delights, as Christ was, must needs be a state transcending apprehension;⁷ to have the fountain of love and delight letting out itself so immediately, 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) Or 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” (Joh 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;⁸ if there be something ravishing and engaging, there is also something cloying⁹ and distasteful. The purer any delight is, the more excellent. Now, there are no crystal 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,

⁷ **transcending apprehension** – surpassing the ability to understand.

⁸ **debased and allayed** – mixed with impurities and inferior things.

⁹ **cloying** – nauseating by excess.

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...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." Once more, consider the fullness of that delight, the perfection of that pleasure: "I was *delights*"—so the word is in its original, not only plural *delights*, all *delights*, but also in the abstract—*delight* itself...as though you should say, [He was] constituted and made up of pleasure and delight.

Once more, let us consider it *comparatively*. This state will yet appear more glorious, comparing it with the choicest delights that one creature takes in another, or that God takes in the creature, or that the creatures take in God. Measure these immense delights between the Father and His Son by [any] of these lines, and you shall find them infinitely short. For, (1) though the delights that creatures take in each other be sometimes a great delight...yet all this is but creature-delight and can in no particular equal the delights between the Father and the Son... (2) If you compare it with the delight that God takes in creatures...there is a great difference between His delight in creatures and His delights in Christ; for all His delight in the saints is *secondary* and for Christ's sake. But His delights in Christ are *primary* and for His own sake... (3) To conclude, compare it once more with the delights that the best of creatures take in God and Christ, and it must be confessed that [it] is a choice delight and a transcendent love with which they love and delight in Him. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psa 73:25). What pangs of love, what raptures of delight did the spouse express to Christ? "O thou whom my soul loveth" (Song 1:7). But surely our delight in God is no perfect rule by [which] to measure His delight in Christ, for our love to God—at its best—is still imperfect...So then, to conclude, the condition and state of Jesus Christ before His incarnation was a state of the highest and matchless delight in the enjoyment of His Father.

From "The Fountain of Life" in *The Works of John Flavel*, Vol. 1,
in the public domain.

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691): English Presbyterian minister; born in Bromagrove, Worcester, UK.



GOD'S LOVE AND CHRIST'S INCARNATION

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.—Ephesians 1:3-5

GOD decreed that His own dear Son should be made visibly glorious in a human nature, through a union with it to His own person. Then for His greater glory, God decreed us to be adopted sons through Him as brethren unto Him. For God [did not desire] His Son [to] be alone in [human nature], but [to] have “fellows” or companions to enhance His glory. First, by His comparison with them, for He is “anointed above His fellows” (Psa 45:7), being “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). Second, God gave to His Son a unique honor and matchless glory by ordaining Him to be [the] God-man, and, for enhancing the same, He ordained that there should be those about Him who might see His glory and magnify Him for [it] (Joh 17:24). Third, God ordained us to adoption¹ that Christ might be the means of all the glory of our sonship, which we have through Him; for He is not only our pattern in predestination,² but the virtual cause of it...By His electing act, God took the Church into a definite and personal relation to Himself, so that He reckons and regards its members as His own dear children and people. Consequently, even while they are in a state of nature, before their regeneration,³ He views and owns them as such. This is very blessed and wonderful, though alas it is a truth that is almost unknown in present day Christendom.

¹ **adoption** – Adoption is an act of God’s free grace whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 33, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)

² **predestination** – God’s sovereign foreknowledge and determination of all things, including the salvation of His chosen ones and the rejection of unbelievers.

³ See FGB 202, *The New Birth*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

It is now commonly assumed that we only become the children of God when we are born again, that we have no relation to Christ until we have embraced Him with the arms of faith. But with the Scriptures in our hands, there is no excuse for such ignorance...Love in the heart of God was a secret in Himself from everlasting, being wholly unknown before the world began, except to Christ [the] God-man; yet it has been exercised towards the whole election of grace. Though they were beloved with a love [that] contained the uttermost of God's good will unto them and to the uttermost of blessing, grace, and glory, yet it was in such a way and manner that, for a season, they were altogether unacquainted with [it]. Though the acts of God's will in Christ's person concerning them and upon them were such as could never cease, nevertheless, they were, for a season, to be in a state in the which none of them were to be opened and made known to them. All was in the incomprehensible mind of Jehovah from everlasting, and the same it will be to everlasting; but the revelation and manifestation of [it] has been made at different times and in various degrees.

The various conditions in which God's elect find themselves not only exhibit the manifold wisdom of God, but illustrate our last remark above. The elect were to be in a creature state of purity and holiness; as such they were made naturally in Adam. From that they fell into a state of sin and misery, sharing the guilt and depravity of their federal head.⁴ They were to be brought therefrom into a redeemed state by the atoning work of Christ and given a knowledge of this through the quickening and sanctifying operations of the Spirit. After their earthly course is finished, they are brought into a sinless state, while they rest from their labors and await the consummation⁵ of their salvation. In due course, they shall be brought into the resurrection state, and from thence into the state of everlasting glory and unutterable bliss...

In all these states through which the elect are ordained to pass, the love of God is exercised and displayed toward them and upon them, agreeably to "the good pleasure of His will" (Eph 1:5). The secret and everlasting love of God to His chosen and His open disclosure⁶ of [it]—though distinct parts—are one and the same love.

⁴ **federal head** – Federal theology suggests that Adam, as the first human, acted as the "federal head" or legal representative of the rest of humankind...Just as Adam was the federal head of humanity, so also Christ enters history as a second Adam, free from the curse, and acts as the covenantal head of righteousness for all those who believe in Him. (Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 50-51)

⁵ **consummation** – completion; full accomplishment at the end of the world.

⁶ **disclosure** – act of making known.

The first act of God's love to the persons of those whom He chose in Christ consisted in giving them *being* in Christ, wellbeing in Christ from everlasting. That was the fundamental act of all grace and glory, for God then "blessed them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph 1:3). The love of God in His own heart towards the person of Christ, the Head of the whole election of grace, cannot be expressed! And His love towards the persons of the elect in Christ is so great and infinite that the Scriptures themselves declare it "passeth knowledge" (Eph 3:19). The open expression and manifestation of this love is now our design to ponder.

First, *the incarnation and mission of Christ*: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (1Jo 4:9). Take notice of the persons unto whom the love of God was thus manifested, expressed in the word *us*. This is a term the sacred writers made use of to include and express the saints of God. It is a distinguishing excellency of the apostles that they bring home their subjects with all their energy to the minds of saints, and then apply them so that hereby the truth might be felt in all its vast importance. Let the subject be election, redemption, effectual calling, or glorification, and most generally they use the term *us*, as thereby including themselves and all the believers to whom they wrote. This serves fitly to evince⁷ that all of them are alike interested in all the blessings and benefits of grace, which opens the way for them to appropriate and enjoy the good of them in the Scriptures.

To illustrate what has just been pointed out: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed *us* with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen *us* in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated *us* unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made *us* accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:3-6). In that passage, the repeated *us* shows the interest that all the saints have in their eternal election in Christ. With respect to effectual calling, the apostle uses the word *us* in Romans 9:24, [as he does in] connection with salvation (note the *us* in 2Ti 1:9) and glorification (*see* Eph 2:7; Rom 8:18). Let it be carefully observed that whereas this repeated *us* in the Epistles includes the whole election of grace, yet it excludes all

⁷ evince – prove.

other and cannot with any truth or propriety be applied to any but the called of God in Christ Jesus.

We next consider in what this open manifestation of the love of God consisted, namely, in the incarnation and mission of Christ. In the infinite mind of Jehovah, all His love concerning the persons of the elect was conceived from everlasting, with the various ways and means by which [they] should be displayed and made known in time, so that the Church might be the more sensibly taken therewith. Notwithstanding His eternal love to His people in Christ, it pleased the Lord to [ordain] their fall from a state of creature purity into depravity; [likewise,] their redemption from [their fall] was predetermined. An everlasting covenant transaction took place between the Father and the Son, wherein the latter engaged to assume human nature and act as their Surety and Redeemer. His incarnation, life, and death were fixed upon as the means of their salvation. This became the subject of Old Testament prophecy: that Christ was to be manifested in the flesh (1Ti 3:16), with what He was to do and suffer, in order to take away sin and bring in everlasting righteousness.

That which was revealed in the Scriptures of the prophets concerning Christ made it fully evident that it was of God that the whole of it was originally [a] council-transaction in heaven before time began, the fruit of consultation between Jehovah and the Branch, of which the eternal Spirit was witness. He [communicated] the same to holy men, "spake as they were moved" by Him (1Pe 1:21), for He "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1Co 2:10). In the person of Emmanuel, "God with us" (Mat 1:23), by His open incarnation and the salvation He wrought out and most honorably completed, all the love of the blessed Trinity is reflected most gloriously. God has shone forth in all the greatness and majesty of His love upon His Church in Christ, and thus displayed His everlasting good will unto them. He has so loved them as to give His only begotten Son (Joh 3:16). This is clearly set forth in His Word, so that it is all-sufficient to keep up a lively sense thereof in our minds, as the Spirit is pleased to maintain a believing knowledge of it in our hearts.

A brief word upon the *end* of this manifestation of the love of God as spoken of in 1 John 4:9: it is "that we might live through him." "It is through the incarnation and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ that we live through Him a life of justification, peace, pardon, acceptance, and access to God...The elect of God in their fallen state were all sin, corruption, misery, and death; in these circumstances God commended His love toward them, in that while they were yet

sinner Christ died for them. He by His death removed their sins from them. He loved them and washed them from their sins in His own blood, and brought them nigh unto God, so that herein the Father's everlasting love of them is most distinctly evidenced."⁸

A most striking parallel with the Scripture we have looked at above is the statement made by the Lord to His Father in John 17:6: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me." The manifesting of the name of God, or the secret mystery of His mind and will, could only be performed by Christ, Who had been in the bosom of the Father from everlasting, Who became incarnate in order to make visible Him Who is invisible (1Ti 1:17). It was the office and work of the Messiah to open the "hidden wisdom" (1Co 2:7), to unlock the holy of holies, to declare what had been kept secret from the foundation of the world; and here in John 17, He declares that He had faithfully discharged it. But mark well how the *us* of 1 John 4:9 is here defined as "the men which thou gavest me out of the world." Yes, it was to them Christ manifested God's ineffable⁹ name.

In John 17, Christ opened the whole heart of God, making known His everlasting love as was never revealed before. Therein He expounded the good will that the Father bore to the elect in Christ Jesus, in a manner sufficient to fill the spiritual mind with knowledge and understanding, even such as was calculated to lead to an entire trust and confidence in the Lord for all the blessings of this life and that which is to come. And who could give this information but Himself? He came down from heaven with this express end and design. He was the great Prophet over the House of God. He had the key of all the treasury of grace and glory. In Him personally was "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3) ...It is [God's] love to the Church, His covenant relation to His people in Christ, the eternal delight of His heart to them, which Christ has been pleased to so fully reveal.

It is by the Lord's admitting us into the knowledge of Himself that we are led to know our election of God. The true apprehension of this is a ground for joy, therefore did Christ say, "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luk 10:20). As we cannot know that we are the beloved of God but by believing on His Son, so this is the fruit

⁸ Samuel Eyles Pierce (1746-1829), *An Exposition of the Epistle of First John* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press), 78.

⁹ **ineffable** – too great to be described in words.

of spiritual knowledge. Christ has the key of knowledge and opens the door of faith, so that we receive Him as revealed in the Word. By His Spirit, He is pleased to shed abroad the love of God in the heart (Rom 5:5). He gives the Spirit to make a revelation of the everlasting covenant to our minds, and thereby we are made to know and feel the love of God to be the fountain and spring of all grace and everlasting consolation. As Jehovah caused all His goodness to pass before Moses and showed him His glory (Exo 33:19), so He admits us into the knowledge of Himself as “The LORD God, merciful and gracious” (Exo 34:6).

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

A.W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



He that *was in the bosom of His Father*—an expression showing the intimate, close, and secret delight and love He had from the Father. How unspeakable is it that He should deprive Himself of the sense of it? To put Himself, as it were, out of heaven into hell? This is deeper love than ever we can imagine or conceive: no wonder the apostle calls it “the unsearchable riches of grace.”—*Anthony Burgess*

They were hard and difficult terms, indeed, on which Christ received you from the Father's hand: it was, as you have heard, to pour out His soul unto death, or not to enjoy a soul of you. Here you may suppose the Father to say, when driving His bargain with Christ for you,

Father: “My Son, here is a company of poor miserable souls that have utterly undone themselves and now lie open to My justice! Justice demands satisfaction for them or will satisfy itself in the eternal ruin of them. What shall be done for these souls?” And thus Christ returns,

Son: “O My Father, such is My love to and pity for them that rather than they shall perish eternally, I will be responsible for them as their Surety. Bring in *all* Thy bills, that I may see what they owe Thee. Lord, bring them all in, that there may be no after-reckonings with them. At My hand shalt Thou require it. I will rather choose to suffer Thy wrath than they should suffer it: upon Me, My Father, upon Me be all their debt.”

Father: “But, My Son, if Thou undertake for them, Thou must reckon to pay the last mite, expect no abatements.¹⁰ If I spare *them*, I will not spare *Thee!*”

Son: “Content, Father, let it be so. Charge it all upon Me: I am able to discharge it. And though it prove a kind of undoing to Me, though it impoverish all My riches, empty all My treasures, yet I am content to undertake it.”

—*John Flavel*

¹⁰ **abatements** – lessenings; reducings of severity.

THE PRE-EXISTENT SON

Lorraine Boettner (1901-1990)

IN a rather remarkable series of statements, Jesus conveys to our minds the idea that His existence did not merely begin when He was born in Bethlehem, but that He “came” or “descended” from heaven to earth, or that He was “sent” by the Father. Very evidently if He came, descended, or was sent, He must have existed *before* He came, descended, or was sent. These verses afford not only a unique testimony to His divine mission, but also to His heavenly origin, and set Him forth not only as the greatest of the sons of men but as a pre-existent person—in some instances as an eternal Being. Unquestionably, these sayings are spoken out of a consciousness of pre-existence and cannot be fully satisfied by any other supplement than “from heaven” or “from the Father.” And particularly is this true when the title “Son of man”...is used in these verses. He thus sets Himself forth as of higher than human or earthly origin, and therefore as One uniquely qualified to speak to men concerning spiritual things.

Typical verses of this kind are as follows: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luk 19:10). “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mar 10:45). “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Mat 5:17). “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth” (Mar 1:38). “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mat 15:24). “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mar 2:17). “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household” (Mat 10:34–36), meaning, of course, not that the ultimate and final purpose of His coming is to stir up strife, but that when the gospel is preached in a sinful world the first reaction is one of strife with the opposing sinful environment, and that this opposition often disrupts even the most intimate family ties. “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (Joh 16:28). “I know whence I came, and whither I go;

but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go... I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me” (Joh 8:14, 16). “Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world” (Joh 8:23). “He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth...he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God” (Joh 3:31-34). “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (Joh 3:13). “What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?” (Joh 6:62).

Furthermore, Jesus teaches not only that He existed before coming into the world, but that He has existed from eternity. “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (Joh 17:5). “For thou (Father) lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (Joh 17:24). “Before Abraham was, I am” (Joh 8:58)—a statement that infers that the ground of His existence is within Himself, and which also is reminiscent of the “I AM THAT I AM” (Exo 3:14), the name by which Jehovah announced Himself to Moses in the wilderness as the self-existent, eternal God. In fact, Jesus here applies to Himself the name that since the time of Moses had been known as the name of the eternal God. And in the book of Revelation the risen and glorified Christ says of Himself, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev 22:13).

Thus, in explicit terms, Jesus teaches not only His pre-existence but His *eternal* pre-existence. And with this agree the other witnesses who speak in the New Testament. “After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me” (Joh 1:30), said His forerunner, John the Baptist—not that Jesus was born earlier than John the Baptist, but that He existed earlier, and therefore stands before him in rank. We have already had occasion to refer to the Prologue of John’s Gospel, where concerning the pre-incarnate Word, he declares that [Jesus] possessed not only pre-existence but co-eternity and co-creatorship with the Father; [and] in time, this 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” (Joh 1:14).

Setting it forth as one of the maxims¹ of fundamental religious truth, Paul says, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all accepta-

¹ **maxims** – rules or principles that express a general truth.

tion, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1Ti 1:15). Writing to the Colossians, he says, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col 1:16-17). In 1 Timothy 3:16, pre-existence is assumed when he refers to Christ [as] God “manifest in the flesh.”

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb 13:8)—the same through every change and chance of life, the same to this generation that He has been to any past generation. And because He is thus unalterably constant, He is set forth as the Christian’s support and stay, the eternal refuge of His people.

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. The prophet Micah wrote, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Mic 5:2). And Isaiah described the promised Messiah not only as the “Wonderful Counsellor” and “Prince of Peace,” but as the “Mighty God” and as the “Everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6).

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, Napoleon, 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 (Gen 3:15). 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.

Thus, Jesus is consistently presented as One Who existed before He came to earth. He is presented as One Who “descended” from heaven to earth, as One Who from all eternity has shared the Father’s glory, in fact, as One Who “came forth from the Father” (Joh 16:28) and

Who was in the most intimate way identified with God. His own words make it clear that He presented Himself as a visitant² from a higher sphere and that He thought of His work on earth as a mission on behalf of men—in brief, that He came with the explicit purpose of saving the lost (Mat 18:11; Luk 19:10).

It is quite evident that the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ is a vital factor in any proper understanding of His person. As Dr. Samuel G. Craig has pointed out, “In our study of Jesus Christ it is of the utmost importance that we interpret His life in the light of His pre-existence. It is important, in the first place, in order that we may keep constantly before us the fact that the Incarnation was not simply the birth of a great man but rather the entering into human conditions of the only-begotten Son of God, and hence that we may ever realize that in Jesus Christ we are face to face with the God-man. It is important, in the second place, in order that we may adequately appreciate the service He has rendered for us. It is simply impossible adequately to appreciate what Jesus has done for us unless we remember that the Son of man *came* not to be ministered unto but to minister and give His life a ransom for many.”³

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Loraine Boettner (1901-1990): American Presbyterian theologian; born in Linden, MO, USA.



When “the Word became flesh,” He did not cease for a moment to be God. No doubt He was pleased to veil His divinity and to hide His power, and more especially so at some seasons. He emptied Himself of external marks of glory and was called “the carpenter.” But He never laid His divinity aside. God cannot cease to be God. It was as the God-man that He lived, suffered, died, and rose again.—*J. C. Ryle*

The incarnation of Christ is a most extraordinary and amazing affair. It is wonderful indeed that the eternal Son of God should become man; that He should be born of a pure virgin without any concern of man in it; that this should be brought about by the power of the Holy Ghost in a way unseen, imperceptible, and unknown, signified by His overshadowing; and all this in order to effect the most wonderful work that ever was done in the world: the redemption and salvation of men.—*John Gill*

² **visitant** – supernatural being that reveals himself to mortals.

³ Samuel Craig, *Jesus as He Was and Is* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), 58.

GOD'S PURPOSE REVEALED IN BETHLEHEM

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

And the Word was made flesh.—John 1:14

THERE was nothing great about Bethlehem. It was “little among the thousands of Judah” (Mic 5:2), perhaps but a shepherd village or small market town. Yet there, the great purpose of God became a fact: “The Word was made flesh”...Bethlehem is not named in our text, but you cannot read the verse without being transported to that city. “In the beginning was the Word” (Joh 1:1) carries you up into heaven and back into past infinity. “The Word was made flesh” (Joh 1:14) brings you down to earth and the finite things of time: to the manger, the stable, and “the young child.” The shepherds are gone; the wise men have departed to their own country; the glory has passed up again into heaven; the angels have left; the song of the plain has ceased; the star has disappeared—the star of which Balaam spoke, as yet to sparkle somewhere in these eastern heavens, and which Micah may be said to have fixed and hung over the city, when he named the name of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the coming King (Mic 5:2)...

At Bethlehem, our world's history begins. All before and after the birth of the young child takes its color from that event. As the tree, rising from a small root or seed, spreads its branches, and with them its leaves, its blossoms, its fruit, its shade, north, south, east, and west, so has this obscure birth influenced all history, sacred and secular, before and behind. That history is an infinite coil of events, interwoven in endless intricacies, apparently with a thousand broken ends—now upward, now downward, now backward, now forward; but the raveled coil is one, and its center is Bethlehem. The young child there is the interpreter of all its mysteries. As He is “the beginning of the creation of God”¹ (Rev 3:14), the “first-begotten of the dead” (Rev 1:5), so is He the beginning and ending, the center and circumference of human history. Christ is all and in all; and as such, from the manger to the throne, He is the incarnation of Jehovah's purposes, the

¹ **The beginning...God** – this does not mean that Christ is the first thing created, but the “beginner, origin” (Gk = ἀρχή arche) of all God's creation.

interpretation of the divine [actions], and the revelation of the heavenly mysteries.

Few statements contain in them such a world of truth as this of our text. Let us see what it *is* [and] what it *teaches*.

What it is: The “Word” is the eternal name for the young Child of Bethlehem. He is so called because He is the revealer of the Father, the exponent² of Godhead. He is so now; He was so in the days of His flesh; He has been so from eternity. The names *Christ, Immanuel, Jesus*, are His earthly ones, His names in time, connected with His incarnate condition; but the names *Word* and *Son* are expressive of His eternal standing, His eternal relationship to the Father. What He was in time and on earth, the same He has been in heaven and from eternity. The glory that He had “before the world was” (Joh 17:5), and of which He “emptied himself” (Phi 2:7), was the glory of the eternal Word, the everlasting Son. As the eternal revealer of Godhead, “the brightness of his [*the Father's*] glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb 1:3), His name ever was The Word. As the declarer of the mind of God to man, His name is no less The Word with this addition: “the Word *made flesh*.”

“In the beginning was the Word” (Joh 1:1) is the divine, heavenly, upper portion of the mystery. “The Word was made flesh” is the human, the earthly, the lower. It is this latter that so specially concerns us; for without it the former was nothing to us. “God was manifest in the flesh” is the great “mystery of godliness” (1Ti 3:16) that links together the creature and the Creator, that brings down to the sinner's side the waters of the eternal well. It is this that makes the inaccessible and unapproachable Godhead accessible and approachable—the unseen becoming the seen, nay, the *most* seen of all; the far-off becoming the near, nay, the nearest of all; the incomprehensible becoming comprehensible—nay, the most comprehensible of all: a little child, a child of poverty and weakness, suckled at a woman's breast and resting upon a woman's knee.

The Word was made flesh! He became truly man: man all over—within and without, in body, soul, and spirit—in everything but sin. All the nations of the earth God hath made of *one blood*, and of that *one blood* was the Word made partaker, becoming bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. His soul [was] truly human, not superhuman nor celestial. His body of the very substance of the virgin—true, real,

² **exponent** – one who sets forth or interprets.

yet holy flesh, the holiness not making Him less truly flesh, and the flesh not making Him less truly holy.

Thus, Bethlehem becomes the link between heaven and earth. God and man meet there and look each other in the face. In the young Child, man sees God, and God sees man. There is joy in heaven, there is joy on earth, and the same song suits both. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luk 2:14). Jacob’s ladder is now firmly planted on the earth. God is coming down; man is going up; angels are in attendance upon both. The seed of the woman has come! God has taken man’s side against the old serpent. He has not only knocked at man’s door, but He has come in...

What it teaches: The angel was the first to interpret it: “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy” (Luk 2:10). Yes, tidings of peace and good-will, tidings of God’s free love, tidings of His design to pitch once more His tabernacle here and to take up His abode with the sons of men.

It teaches us God’s thoughts of peace, for incarnation means this at least: God’s desire is to bless us, not to curse; to save, not to destroy. He seeks reconciliation with us; nay, He has brought about the reconciliation. He has not merely made proposals of peace and sent them to us by the hand of an ambassador; but He has Himself come to us, bearing His own message and presenting Himself to us in our nature, as His own ambassador. Incarnation is not, indeed, the whole; but it is much. It is the voice of love, the message of peace. God Himself is both the *speaker* and the *maker* of peace.

The message that comes to us from Bethlehem is a very decided one. It is not a finished one; it was only finished at the cross. But, so far as it goes, it is quite explicit, quite unambiguous. It means love, peace, pardon, eternal life. The lesson taught us at Bethlehem is the lesson of grace—the grace of God, the grace of the Father and of the Son. We may learn much, indeed, as to the way of life, from Bethlehem. It must not, indeed, stand alone; you must associate it with Jerusalem. You must bring the cradle and the cross together. But still it teaches us the first part of the great lesson of peace. It says, though not so fully as Golgotha, “God is love” (1Jo 4:8). The beginning is not the end, but still it is the beginning...Bethlehem is not Jerusalem, but still it is Bethlehem. And the Prince of peace is there. The God of salvation is there. The manifested life is there.

Do not despise Bethlehem. Do not pass it by. Come; see the place where the young child lay. Look at the manger: there is the Lamb for

the burnt-offering, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Joh 1:29). These little tender hands shall yet be torn. These feet that have not yet trod this rough earth shall be nailed to the tree. That side shall yet be pierced by a Roman spear; that back shall be scourged; that cheek shall be buffeted and spit upon; that brow shall be crowned with thorns—and all for [sinners]! Is this not love? Is it not the great love of God? And is there not life in this love? And is there not salvation in this life, a kingdom, and a throne?

At Bethlehem, the fountain of love was opened, and its waters have gushed out in their fullness. The well of David has overflowed the earth, and the nations now may drink. The good news has gone forth from the city of David, and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Would you learn the way to God? Go to Bethlehem. See yon infant: it is God, the Word made flesh. He is “the way...no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Joh 14:6). Go and deal with Him. So shall Bethlehem be to you the gate of heaven...Would you have a safeguard against worldliness, sin, error, and the snares of the last days? Choose and keep the young Child’s companionship...

Would you learn to be humble? Go to Bethlehem. There the highest is the lowest, the eternal Word a babe. The King of kings has not where to lay His head; the Creator of the universe sleeps in a woman’s arms...“Be not proud,” says yon Bethlehem manger. “Be clothed with humility,” say the swaddling-clothes of yon helpless Child.

Would you learn to be self-denied? Go to Bethlehem. See the Word made flesh. He “pleased not himself” (Rom 15:3). Where shall we find such self-denial as at the cradle and the cross? Where shall we read a lesson of self-sacrifice such as we have in Him Who made Himself of no reputation, Who chose not Jerusalem, but Bethlehem, for His birthplace—not a palace nor a temple, but a stable for His first earthly home? Shall we not be followers of His lowly love?

From “Bethlehem and Its Good News,”
available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889): Scottish Presbyterian minister and hymn writer; born in Edinburgh, Scotland, UK.



How wonderful a comfort it is that He Who dwells in our flesh is God!—*John Flavel*

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.—Luke 1:35

JESUS CHRIST, the Son of God, became man by taking to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born of her, yet without sin...I come now to show what we are to understand by Christ's being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary. This is a great mystery, beyond the reach and comprehension of a finite mind. The conception of our blessed Savior was miraculous and supernatural, above the methods of nature...

First, let us consider the framing of the human nature of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In the text, the act is expressed to be the effect of the infinite power of God. It sets forth the supernatural manner of forming the humanity of our blessed Savior—"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee" (Luk 1:35)—and by an act of creative power frame the humanity of Christ and unite it to the divinity. In the framing of Christ's manhood, we are to consider the matter and the manner of it.

The matter of His body was of the very flesh and blood of the virgin, otherwise He could not have been the Son of David, of Abraham, and Adam, according to the flesh. Indeed, God might have created His body out of nothing or have formed it of the dust of the ground, as He did the body of Adam, our original progenitor.¹ But had He been thus extraordinarily formed and not [descended] from Adam, though He had been a man like one of us, yet He would not have been of kin to us because it would not have been a nature derived from Adam, the common parent of us all. It was therefore requisite to an affinity² with us, not only that He should have the same human nature, but that it should flow from the same principle and be propagated to Him. Thus, He is of the same nature that sinned, [so that] what He

¹ **progenitor** – ancestor in the direct line.

² **requisite...affinity** – required by the nature of things to have a connection.

did and suffered may be imputed to us. Whereas, if He had been created as Adam was, it could not have been claimed in a legal and judicial way. Now, the Holy Ghost prepared the matter of Christ's body of the substance of the virgin. And He formed it of the matter thus prepared. Hence, says Christ, "A body hast thou prepared me" (Heb 10:5). And says the apostle, "God sent forth his Son made of a woman" (Gal 4:4). The Holy Ghost sanctified that part of the virgin's substance whereof the body of Christ was to be formed, purging it from all sin and taint of impurity. For though a man cannot, yet God *can* bring a clean thing out of an unclean (Job 14:4) and endue it with a capacity for the generation of a human body, which otherwise it would not have had alone.

Though Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin, yet we are not to think that He was made of the substance of the Holy Ghost, Whose essence cannot be at all made. The Holy Ghost did not beget Him by any communication of His essence; therefore, He is not the Father of Christ, though He was conceived by His power. The Holy Ghost did not minister any matter unto Christ from His own substance...And as for His soul, it was not derived from the soul of the virgin as a part thereof; for spiritual substances are indivisible and undividable—nothing can be cut off from them. But it was created and made of nothing by the divine power, as all other souls are. Hence, God is called "the Father of spirits" (Heb 12:9) and is said to "form the spirit of man within him" (Zec 12:1)...

Secondly, let us consider the sanctifying of Christ's human nature. I have already said that [the] part of the flesh of the virgin, whereof the human nature of Christ was made, was purified and refined from all corruption by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, as a skillful workman separates the dross from the gold. Our Savior was therefore called "that holy thing" (Luk 1:35). Now, this sanctification of the human nature of Christ was necessary: (1) To fit it for personal union with the Word, Who, out of His infinite love, humbled Himself to become flesh, and at the same time, out of His infinite purity, could not defile Himself by becoming sinful flesh. (2) With respect to the [goal] of His incarnation—the redemption and salvation of lost sinners—as the first Adam was the fountain of our impurity, so the second Adam should also be the pure fountain of our righteousness. "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3), which He could not have condemned, had He been sent in sinful flesh. The Father "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteous-

ness of God in him” (2Co 5:21), which we could never have been made, if He had been tainted with any sin. He that needed redemption Himself could never have purchased redemption for us.

Thirdly, we are to consider the personal union of the manhood with the Godhead. To clear this a little, you would know...[that this taking on human nature] of which I speak is that whereby the Second Person in the glorious Godhead did take the human nature into a personal union with Himself by virtue whereof the manhood subsists in the Second Person, yet without confusion...both making but one person “Emmanuel...God with us” (Mat 1:23). Though there be a twofold nature in Christ, yet [there is] not a double person. For the human nature of Christ never subsisted separately and distinctly by any personal subsistence of its own, as it doth in all other men; but from the first moment of conception subsisted in union with the Second Person of the adorable Trinity in a miraculous and extraordinary manner, being supernaturally framed within the womb of the virgin by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost...Christ took a complete and perfect soul and body with all and every faculty and member pertaining to it. And this was necessary that thereby He might heal the whole nature of the disease and leprosy of sin that had seized upon and woefully infected every member and faculty of man. Christ assumed all to sanctify all. He designed a perfect recovery by sanctifying us wholly in soul, body, and spirit; therefore, He assumed the whole in order to it...

The human nature is so united with the divine that each nature still retains its own essential properties distinct. And this distinction is not, nor can be lost by that union. The humanity was indeed changed by a communication of excellent gifts from the divine nature, but not by being brought into an equality with it; for it was impossible that a creature should become equal to the Creator. He took upon Him the form of a servant, but He lost not the form of God. He [stripped] not Himself of the perfections of the deity by taking upon Him the humanity. The glory of His divinity was not extinguished or diminished, though it was eclipsed and obscured under the veil of our humanity; but there was no more change in the hiding of it, than there is in the body of the sun, when he is shadowed by the interposition of a cloud. And this union of the two natures in Christ is an inseparable union; so that from the first moment thereof, there never was, nor to all eternity shall there ever be any separation of them...

I now proceed to show *why* Christ was born of a virgin. That Christ was to be born of a virgin was prophesied and foretold many ages be-

fore His incarnation, as Isaiah 7:14: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Now, that the mother of Jesus was that virgin spoken of by the prophet Isaiah is evident from the testimony of the evangelists, particularly Matthew 1:18, etc. It was not convenient that He should be born in the common order of father and mother; for if He had been so born, He would have been a natural son of Adam, and so represented by him in the covenant of works, and an heir of Adam’s sin, as others are that are born by virtue of the blessing of marriage. By such a birth, He would have been polluted and defiled with sin: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job 14:4). The Redeemer of the world [found it needful] to be so born, as not to derive the stain of man’s nature by His generation. For if He had been tainted with the least spot of our corruption, He would have been incapable of being a Redeemer: He Who stood in need of redemption Himself could never have redeemed others. And although God by His almighty power had perfectly sanctified an earthly father and mother and cleansed them from all original sin so that the human nature might have been transmitted immaculate³ to Him, as well as the Holy Ghost did purge that part of the flesh of the virgin of which the body of Christ was made. Yet it was not convenient for that person, Who was “God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5) as well as man, in partaking of our nature, should have a conception in the same manner with ours, but different from it, and in some measure conformable to the infinite dignity of His person. This could not have been had not a supernatural and a divine person been concerned as an active principle in it. Besides, such a birth had not been agreeable to the first promise, which calls Him “the seed of the woman,” not of the man...The seed of the woman only is set in opposition to the seed of the serpent. By His being born of a virgin, the holiness of His nature is effectually secured. This exempted Him from the stain and pollution of Adam’s sin, which His nature wholly escaped, in that He received it not as all others do, in the way of ordinary generation, by which original sin is propagated; but this being extraordinarily produced was a most pure and holy thing. Christ was an extraordinary person and another Adam; therefore, it was necessary that He should be produced a new way. At first, Adam was produced neither of man nor woman, Eve of a man without a woman, all others of a man and a woman. The fourth way remained, *viz.*, of a woman without a man; and so Christ was born. And the wisdom of God appeared in that He was born of a virgin espoused; for thereby

³ **immaculate** – spotless; undefiled; in the case of Christ, free from original sin.

the reproach of illegitimacy was warded off. He had Joseph to take care of Him in His infancy. His mother's good name and life were preserved from the malicious Jews, and our faith was the more confirmed by Joseph's testimony concerning Mary. Thus, we may be thoroughly satisfied,

That Christ had a true human body. Though He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, He had not merely the likeness of flesh, but true flesh (Luk 24:39; Heb 2:14).

That He had a reasonable soul, which was a created spirit, and the divine nature was not instead of a soul to Him. When He died, He commended His spirit to God (Luk 23:46)...And the human nature being united to the divine, there were great gifts of holiness, wisdom, etc., in the human nature of Christ by virtue of this union, which yet were not infinite (Luk 2:52).

That Christ's body was not made of any substance sent down from heaven, but of the substance of the virgin (Gal 4:4). He was "the seed of the woman" (Gen 3:15) and the fruit of Mary's womb (Luk 1:42); otherwise, He had not been our brother.

That the Holy Ghost cannot be called the Father of Christ. [Christ's] human nature was formed, not of [the Spirit's] substance, but of that of the virgin by [the Spirit's] power.

That the nativity of Christ was not [in its manner] extraordinary. [Jesus] was brought forth at the ordinary time as others (Luk 2:22-23)...yet He was born without sin, being "that holy thing." He could not have been our Redeemer had He not been so (Heb 7:26). Neither could He have sinned, seeing the human nature was put beyond that capacity by its union with the divine; and whatsoever Christ did or could do was the action of that person Who was God, and therefore free from sin.

I shall conclude all with some inferences:

Jesus Christ is the true Messiah. [He was] promised to Adam as the seed of the woman, to Abraham as his seed, the Shiloh mentioned by Jacob on his death bed, the Prophet spoken of by Moses to be raised from among the children of Israel, the Son of David, and the Son to be born of a virgin.

Behold the wonderful love of God the Father. [He] was content to degrade and abase His dear Son in order to bring about the salvation of sinners. How astonishing is it that He should send His only-begotten Son to assume our nature and bear that dreadful wrath and punishment that we deserved?

See here the wonderful love and astonishing condescension of the Son. [He] born of a woman in order that He might die in the room of sinners. O how low did He stoop and humble Himself in assuming human nature with all its sinless infirmities, in being subject to His own Law, exposed to all manner of injurious usage from wicked men, to the temptations of Satan, and at last suffering a shameful and ignominious⁴ death! What great love to sinners, and what unparalleled condescension was here!

See here the cure of our being conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity. Christ was born of a woman for us, and He was born without sin for us that the holiness of His nature might be imputed to us as a part of that righteousness that constitutes the condition of our justification before God. In Him is a complete righteousness for our guilt, and a fountain for washing away our spiritual pollution.

Christ is sensibly touched with all the infirmities that attend our frail nature. [For this cause, He] has pity and compassion upon His people under all their pressures and burdens. Hence, the apostle says, "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb 2:17-18). How comfortable it is to believers to consider that He Who is their great High Priest in heaven is clothed with their nature, to capacitate and qualify Him to have compassion on them in all their troubles and distress.

Let this encourage sinners to come unto Him that they may be united unto Him by faith, and so partake of the blessings of His purchase. Come and enter into a marriage relation with Him. Sin shall not stop the match, if ye be willing. He that could sanctify the virgin's substance to make it a sinless piece of flesh can easily sanctify you. And He that united the human nature to His divine person can also unite you to Himself, so as ye shall never be separated from Him.

From *The Whole Works of Thomas Boston: An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion, Part 1*, in the public domain.

Thomas Boston (1676-1732): Scottish Presbyterian minister and theologian; born in Duns, Berwickshire, UK.



⁴ **ignominious** – marked by shame and disgrace.

THE GREATEST EVENT THAT EVER HAPPENED

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son,
made of a woman, made under the law.—Galatians 4:4*

WHEN we say, “The Son of God became incarnate,” we mean to say that He became the Son of man, taking to Himself human nature entire. In the Apostles’ Creed,¹ this doctrine is thus expressed: “He was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.” The Athanasian Creed says, “He is not only perfect God, but perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.²” The Westminster Assembly thus teach, “The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and 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,³ composition,⁴ or confusion.⁵ Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator⁶ between God and man”⁷...

¹ **Apostles’ Creed** – early (2nd to 4th century) summary of Christian belief, used primarily in Western congregations; though probably not written by the apostles, it was believed to be in harmony with apostolic teaching.

² **subsisting** – existing as a real entity.

³ **conversion** – Christ’s deity was not lost in His humanity nor His humanity in His deity.

⁴ **composition** – Christ’s incarnation did not result in some new creature that was neither God nor man.

⁵ **confusion** – Christ’s two natures did not mix together, and His incarnation did not result in either subtraction from His deity or absorption of His humanity.

⁶ See FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁷ Westminster Confession of Faith 8.2; the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 reads, “The Son of God, the second Person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father’s glory, of one substance and equal with Him: Who made the world, Who upholdeth and governeth all things He hath made: did when the fullness of time was come take unto Him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin: being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of

The union of Christ's natures was formed, not by His humanity seeking to be [wed] to deity⁸...But His Godhead sought union with manhood. This was infinite love and condescension.⁹ Christ's human nature never existed separately or otherwise than in union with His deity. From His conception, this union was complete. The preexistent divine nature took to itself human nature. Christ's human nature never had a personal subsistence by itself. So that Christ did not assume a human person, but human nature. "His person is not a compound person; the personality belongs to His Godhead, and the human nature subsists in it by a peculiar dispensation."¹⁰ The assumption of our nature made no change in His person; it added nothing to it; and the only difference is, that the same person who was possessed of divinity has now taken humanity."¹¹ So that things done or suffered in either nature are ascribed to the one person, Christ Jesus. The properties of each nature are and will ever continue to be entire and distinct. Deity cannot be subject to any change. Humanity cannot cease to be humanity—cannot become deity. The Creator cannot cease to be Creator. The creature cannot cease to be a creature.

This union of the two natures in Christ is not without some similitude¹² in ourselves. In his constitution, man has two substances: one a soul, the other a body; one spiritual and immortal, the other material and perishable. By their union, one of these substances is not changed into the other. They remain distinct even when united. Yet a man is one person and not two persons. When we say, "He is sad," all know we refer to his soul. When we say, "He is muscular," all know we speak of his body. Yet in both cases we speak of the same person.

the most High overshadowing her, and so was made of a woman, of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures: So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures 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."

⁸ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Theological writers often use *deity* and *divinity* synonymously. However, some antitrinitarian writers use *divinity* to mean that Christ is *like* God, but is *not* God in essence. *Deity* seems to be the stronger term, though both are legitimate. "By 'deity' more is meant than 'divinity,' as this latter term is employed by different classes of antitrinitarians. The Arians [followers of Arius of Alexandria (AD 250/56-336), who taught that Jesus was not God]...taught the divinity of the Son in the sense of a *similarity of nature* between Him and the Father. This resemblance is greater and closer than that of any other being, man, or angel, but is not *identity of essence*...It is *like* it, but it is *not* it. The Son has divinity but not deity." (Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed., 258; *emphases added*)
For clarity's sake, *deity* appears in place of the author's original *divinity*.

⁹ **condescension** – action of coming down or stooping to things unworthy.

¹⁰ **peculiar dispensation** – unique arrangement of God's providence.

¹¹ John Dick, *Lectures on Theology*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Greenough and Whetham, 1840), 20.

¹² **similitude** – similarity; having the likeness of something.

So Christ's person is one and not two. When He spoke of Himself, He said, "I, Mine, Me." When His apostles spoke of Him, they said, "He, His, Him." When we address Him, we say, "Thou, Thine, Thee" (Act 1:24). The Scriptures also use singular nouns respecting Him and call Him Prophet, Priest, King, Shepherd, Redeemer. The union of His natures could not be more perfect. It is personal, perpetual, indissoluble.¹³

The Scriptures say [that] Christ was "made of a woman" (Gal 4:4). Human beings have come into the world in four ways. The first man—the very fountain of human nature—had neither father nor mother. Neither man nor woman was the instrument of his existence. The first woman had neither father nor mother; yet she derived her nature from Adam, but in no sense from a woman. Since the first pair, every mere man has had both father and mother. Yet none have denied that all these had human nature entire. Jesus Christ had a mother, but no father according to the flesh; even as in His divine nature, He had a Father only. He was made of a woman.

To be our Savior, it [was necessary for] Christ to have a human nature. His incarnation was fitting and necessary. It was [proper] that the nature that had brought our ruin should bring our deliverance. It was fit that the nature that had sinned should make reparation¹⁴ for our wrongs and so should die.

This earth, which is the abode of men, not of God or of angels, was the proper theater for the display of the grace, mercy, justice, and power manifested in the life and death of Jesus Christ. He that was rich thus became poor that we through His poverty might be rich (2Co 8:9). In some respects, this was the most amazing step in our Lord's humiliation.¹⁵ It is more surprising that a prince should marry a shepherdess than that, having made her queen, he should nobly protect and richly endow her, or even die in her defense.

Christ was "made under the law" (Gal 4:4). As to His divine nature, He could in no sense be under the Law. He was the Lawgiver. He was God; and God cannot live and act under rules fit for the government of creatures. If the Savior was to live under the Law as a rule of life and set us an example in all things, He must do it in a finite nature. As His mission was to us, [it was] most fitly in our nature.

Besides, deity cannot suffer, cannot die. But by His incarnation, Je-

¹³ **indissoluble** – not able to be dissolved or destroyed.

¹⁴ **reparation** – compensation.

¹⁵ **humiliation** – humble condition.

sus was made “a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death” (Heb 2:9).

Thus, He was made under the Law in the two senses of being voluntarily subject to its precept, being thus bound to fulfil all righteousness, and being voluntarily made under the penalty of the Law that He might “taste death for every man” (Heb 2:9). He even obeyed the Law of religious rites under which He lived: in His infancy, He was circumcised. In His manhood, He was baptized. He perfectly, personally, perpetually kept the whole Moral Law. He never sinned once, even by omission. And He freely placed Himself and lived and died under the curse of the very Law that He perfectly obeyed during His whole life. Edwards says, “The meritoriousness of Christ’s obedience depends on the perfection of it. If it had failed in any instance, it could not have been meritorious: for imperfect obedience is not accepted as any obedience at all in the sight of the law of works, to which Christ was subject. That is not accepted as obedience to a law that does not fully answer it.”¹⁶

The efficacy of Christ’s death depended on His dying in the [place] of sinners,¹⁷ who were under the curse of the Law. If He did not bear the curse for us, we shall surely be obliged to bear it ourselves.

Let us consider a few distinct propositions:

Prophecy required that Christ should assume human nature. It said He should be of “the seed of Abraham” and of “the seed of David” (Gen 12:3, 7; 17:7-8; Gal 3:16; 2Sa 7:12; Joh 7:42; Act 13:23; Rom 1:3; 2Ti 2:8). Other predictions required that He should “at the latter day stand upon the earth” (Job 19:25); that He should have a body (Psa 40:6; Heb 10:5); that He should hang upon His mother’s breasts (Psa 22:9); and that His body should be dead (Isa 26:19).

Yet still more clearly, the very first gospel ever preached, even in Eden, foretold that He should have a human nature and that derived from His mother: the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15); and later, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). So that the Scriptures would not have been fulfilled if Christ had not had a human nature—a human nature derived from His mother alone. In prophetic vision, Daniel called Him the “Son of man” (Dan 7:13).

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (London: William Ball, 1839), 576; Edwards (1703-1758) was a Congregational minister, philosopher, and theologian.

¹⁷ See FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

These predictions have been fulfilled. The whole history of our Lord upon earth proves it. “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Gal 4:4). In the New Testament, He is often called a *man*. In the gospels alone, He is more than seventy times called the *Son of man*. More than sixty times, He gives this appellation¹⁸ to Himself. The year of His ascension, Stephen saw Him glorified and called Him “the Son of man” (Act 7:56). Sixty years later, John did the same. The Gospel of Matthew is styled, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mat 1:1). John says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (Joh 1:14). Paul says, “He took on him the seed of Abraham” (Heb 2:16). In his first epistle, John expressly says that by three senses—hearing, sight, and touch—he and the other apostles had satisfied themselves of His incarnation (1Jo 1:1-3).

Jesus Christ had all that is necessary to constitute human nature entire. He Himself said, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luk 24:39). Christ had a soul. He said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death” (Mar 14:34). He had a spirit: “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit” (Luk 10:21). “When he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost” (Mat 27:50). Jesus Christ had a will: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat 26:39; *see* Mat 27:34; Joh 7:1). Jesus Christ had the affections of a man. He rejoiced (Luk 10:21). He wept (Joh 11:35). He was grieved (Mar 3:5). He had hopes, even in His early infancy (Psa 22:9). He had natural affection for kindred spirits. We are told that He loved Mary, Martha, Lazarus, John, and the rich young ruler. In some places, His soul and body are mentioned together: “The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom” (Luk 2:40). He performed bodily acts. He walked, He rode, He ate, He drank, He sailed, He slept, He rested. He was not indeed subject to mortal diseases (Psa 91:5-8). But He had the general infirmities of our nature. He hungered (Mat 4:2). He thirsted (Joh 19:28). He was wearied (Joh 4:6). He was greatly pained (Luk 12:50). He was tempted (Heb 2:18). He endured unparalleled agony (Luk 22:44). He died, as all admit. He had no moral infirmity. He was without sin (Heb 4:15).

The incarnation of Christ is something entirely beyond human comprehension. It is an ineffable mystery. The Scriptures say, “And

¹⁸ **appellation** – name or title.

without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1Ti 3:16). How could it be otherwise? The Father of eternity became an infant of days. “Though all things were created by Him, He was placed on a level with His own creatures.” He, Whom the heaven of heavens could not contain, was laid in a manger. The eternal Word and the child Jesus were one person. Possessed of infinite blessedness, the Son of God is united with the man of sorrows. Himself in both natures spotlessly holy, He consented to be treated, tormented, punished, as a sinner. He made all things, yet was made flesh. He governed all things, yet was subject to His parents. He opened His hand and satisfied the desire of every living thing, yet fasted forty days Himself. All the infinite perfections of God and all the innocent infirmities of man meet in the God-man, Christ Jesus. There is no greater gulf than that which separates created and uncreated. Yet the Son of God passes it all and takes our nature into indissoluble union with deity. This union could not be more intimate. Soul and body may be separated for a season. When Christ Himself died, His soul went to Paradise, while His body lay in the sepulcher of Joseph. But the union of His human and divine natures was not dissolved by death. Paul calls the blood [He] shed the blood of God (Act 20:28). So close was this union that we fitly speak of our Lord as a *divine sufferer*. When He was on earth, He spoke of Himself as “the Son of man which is in heaven” (Joh 3:13). We ascribe to the person of our Savior whatever belonged to either of His natures, or was done in either of them. His incarnation is a mystery in itself. Basil¹⁹ says, “He was conceived not of the substance, but by the power of the Holy Ghost, not by His generation, but by His appointment and benediction.” His incarnation is a mystery of love. It expresses infinite benevolence. It is also “the wisdom of God in a mystery”—a mystery of power, of truth, and of grace. It is the mystery of mysteries because it is “the mystery of God.” We are not required to divest it of inscrutableness,²⁰ but we are required to embrace it, and rejoice in it. It is a fundamental doctrine, the belief of which is essential to salvation: “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (1Jo 4:2-3).

¹⁹ **Basil the Great** (c. 330–379) – one of three theologians known as the Cappadocian fathers; best remembered for his contribution to the development of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity; withstood the Arian party, which denied the deity of Christ.

²⁰ **inscrutableness** – quality of something that cannot be searched into or found out by searching; being entirely mysterious.

The incarnation of Christ was the greatest event that ever happened. The birth of a prince often sends a thrill of joy through an empire, yet he may prove a shame and a curse to the nation and the world; but the birth of Christ brought inestimable blessings to Jews and Gentiles and shall do so forever. No ancient monarchy lives, even in history, to *bless* mankind; but the birth and kingdom of Christ are, and ever shall be, gladsome²¹ truths. The hopes of virtuous millions hang upon them. The joys of saints and angels are kindled by them. “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 to become a creature.” Christ’s incarnation was the confirmation of all that had been said and done in preceding ages to encourage the hopes of penitent men. It fulfilled the glorious pledges of redemption. It opened boundless and amazing prospects of enlargement and glory to God’s people and to their Redeemer. Some of its effects were immediate and some remote. Some related to angels and some to men; some to Jews and some to Gentiles. The wise men who came from the east to worship Christ were Gentiles and were representative men. Christ’s personal ministry was a blessing to several Gentiles, and the only men converted in sight of His cross were pretty certainly Gentiles. These things were assurances of the fulfilment of all God had promised respecting heathen nations. These conversions were first-fruits of the great harvest to be gathered in all lands. The immediate effect of Christ’s birth on the pious Jews was most happy. To Simeon and Anna and such lovely specimens of genuine godliness, the event gave joy unspeakable. Those who hated God and all His messengers, of course, wondered and perished. The effect on angels was amazing. They felt new joys in heaven. One of their number announced the event to the shepherds, and “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luk 2:13-14). Previous to the birth of Christ for about four hundred and twenty years, God’s Spirit, as a Spirit of inspiration, had been quite withheld from men. But about the time of His appearance, there are recorded no less than eleven instances in which men and women received the Holy Ghost as a spirit of prophecy.

The effect of Christ’s incarnation on fallen angels was great. Their power began at once to dwindle. They cried out, “What have we to do

²¹ gladsome – joyous.

with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (Mat 8:29). The Lord Himself said, “I saw Satan’s kingdom fall like lightning from heaven” (Luk 10:18). It is credibly stated that the Delphic oracle²² ceased to give its usual responses, and when asked the reason, replied, “There is a Hebrew boy who is king of the gods, who has commanded me to leave this house, and begone to hell, and therefore you are to expect no more answers.” And Porphyry²³ says, “Since Jesus began to be worshipped, no man has received any public help or benefit of the gods.”

From the day that Christ was born to this hour, all the desirable changes that have taken place in the world, either in persons or communities, have been in consequence of His incarnation and of His glorious progress in setting up His kingdom. So shall it ever be. His kingdom is constantly enlarging. His diadem is more and more glorious. Every soul saved is a new jewel in His crown.

Of Christ’s incarnation, Robert Hall says: “The epoch will arrive when this world will be thought of as nothing but as it has furnished a stage for ‘the manifestation of the Son of God’; when His birth, His death, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension to glory, and His second appearance, events inseparably connected, will concentrate within themselves all the interest of history; when war and peace, pestilence and famine, plenty and want, life and death, will have spent their force, and leave nothing but the result of Christ’s manifestation upon earth.”²⁴

From *The Rock of Our Salvation*, Sprinkle Publications,
www.sprinklepublications.net.

William S. Plumer (1802-1880): American Presbyterian minister and author; born in Greensburg, PA, USA.



There is no more important truth than this: Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This truth makes glad millions of hearts in heaven and in earth. Upon it hang all the good hopes of man for eternal life. Christ becoming incarnate made sure to mortals the work of salvation. He is mighty to save; He is able to save; He is willing to save.—*William S. Plumer*

²² **Delphic oracle** – Delphi was an ancient Greek city, where a priestess supposedly delivered prophecies from the Greek mythological deity Apollo.

²³ **Porphyry of Tyre** (AD c. 234-c. 305) – Greek philosopher, opponent of Christianity, and supporter of paganism; wrote fifteen books attacking Christianity.

²⁴ Robert Hall, *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall*, Vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1860), 507; Hall (1764-1831) was an English Baptist minister.

CHRIST'S NECESSARY HUMILIATION

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691)

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.—Philippians 2:8

YOU have heard how Christ was invested with the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King, for the carrying on the blessed design of our redemption. The execution of these offices necessarily required that He should be both deeply *abased* and highly *exalted*. As our Priest, He could not offer Himself as a sacrifice to God for us unless He had humbled Himself—humbled to death. As our King, He could not have powerfully applied the virtue of His sacrifice unless He had been exalted, yes, highly exalted. As our Priest, He would not have had a sacrifice of His own to offer had He not stooped to the low estate of a man. As our Prophet, He would not have been fit to teach us the will of God, so that we would be able to bear it. As our King, He would not have been a suitable Head to the Church. And, had He not been highly exalted, that sacrifice would not have been carried within the veil before the Lord...The government of Christ could not have secured, protected, and defended the subjects of His kingdom.

The infinite wisdom prospecting¹ all this ordered that Christ should first be deeply *humbled*, then highly *exalted*. Both [of these] states of Christ are presented to us by the apostle in this context.

Method requires that we speak to this state of *humiliation*. And, to that purpose, I have read this Scripture to you, which presents you the Son under an (almost) total eclipse. He that was “beautiful and glorious” (Isa 4:2)—yes, glorious as the only begotten of the Father (Joh 1:14), yes, *the* glory (Jam 2:1), yes, the splendor and “brightness of the Father’s glory” (Heb 1:3)—was so veiled, clouded, and debased² that He looked not like Himself. God? No, nor scarcely like a man. For, with reference to this humbled state, it is said, “I am a worm, and no man” (Psa 22:6); *q.d.*,³ rather, “Write me [as a] *worm*, than man: I am become an abject⁴ among men,” as that word signifies (Isa 53:3). This

¹ **prospecting** – seeing at a distance.

² **debased** – lowered in rank or position.

³ **q.d.** – (Latin = *quasi dicat*); as if one should say.

⁴ **abject** – person in the lowest condition and despicable.

humiliation of Christ we have expressed here in the *nature*, *degrees*, and *duration* or continuance of it.

The *nature* of it: He humbled himself...He did not impersonate a humbled man nor act the part of one in a debased state, but was really and indeed humbled, which was not only before men, but God...It is not said He was humbled, but “he humbled himself.” He was willing to stoop to this low and abject state for us...

The *degrees* of His humiliation: It was not only so low as to become a man, a man under law, but “he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Here you see the depth of Christ’s humiliation: both *specified*—it was unto death—and *aggravated*—the death of the cross, not only to become a man but a dead corpse, and that too, hanging on a tree, dying the death of a malefactor.⁵

The *duration* or continuance of His humiliation: It continued from the first moment of His incarnation to the very moment of His vivification⁶ and quickening in the grave. So the terms of it are fixed here by the apostle: from the time He was found in fashion as a man, that is, from His incarnation unto His death on the cross, which also comprehends the time of His abode in the grave, so long did His humiliation last. Hence, the observation is,

DOCTRINE: The state of Christ, from His conception to His resurrection, was a state of deep abasement and humiliation. We are now entering upon Christ’s humbled state, which I shall cast under three general heads, *viz.*, His humiliation in His *incarnation*, His *life*, and His *death*.

My present work is to open Christ’s humiliation in His incarnation, imported in these words: “He was found in fashion as a man.” By this you are not to conceive that He only assumed a body, as an assisting form, to appear transiently⁷ to us in it and lay it down again. It is not such an apparition⁸ of Christ in the shape of a man that is here intended; but His true and real assumption of our nature, which was a special part of His humiliation. [This] will appear by the following particulars:

The *incarnation* of Christ was a most wonderful humiliation of Him, inasmuch as thereby He is brought into the rank and order of creatures, “who is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5). This is

⁵ **malefactor** – criminal.

⁶ **vivification** – being made alive.

⁷ **transiently** – lasting a very short time.

⁸ **apparition** – appearance.

the astonishing “mystery of godliness” (1Ti 3:16)—that God should be manifest in the flesh, that the eternal God should truly and properly be called “the man Christ Jesus” (1Ti 2:5). It was a wonder to Solomon that God would dwell in that stately and magnificent temple at Jerusalem: “But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!” (2Ch 6:18). But it is a far greater wonder that God should dwell in a body of flesh and pitch His tabernacle with us (Joh 1:14). Had not the Scriptures plainly revealed it, it would have seemed a rude blasphemy to have thought or spoken of the eternal God as born in time—the world’s Creator as a creature, the Ancient of Days as an infant of days!...For the infinite, glorious Creator of all things to become a creature is a mystery exceeding all human understanding. The distance between 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” (Psa 113:6). What a humiliation it is, then, 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, “the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing...All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity” (Isa 40:15, 17). If, indeed, this great and incomprehensible Majesty will Himself stoop to the state and condition of a creature, we may easily believe that once being a creature, He would expose Himself to hunger, thirst, shame, spitting, death, or anything but sin. That He should endure any of these things once [He became] a man is not as astonishing as that *He should become a man*. This was the low step—a deep abasement indeed!

It was an astounding 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 angelical nature, though it had been an astounding abasement to Him, yet He would have been nearer (if I may so speak) 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. For their *nature*, they are pure spirits; for their *wisdom*, intelligences; for their *dignity*, they are called principalities and powers; for their *habitations*, they are styled the heavenly host; and for their *employment*, it is to behold the face of God in heaven. The highest pitch, both of our holiness and happiness in the coming world, is expressed by this: we shall be “equal to the angels” (Luk

20:36). As man is nothing [compared] to God, so he is much inferior to the angels. [He is] so much below them that he is not able to bear the sight of an angel, though in a human shape, rendering himself as familiarly as may be to him (Jdg 13:22). When the Psalmist had contemplated the heavens and viewed the celestial bodies, the glorious luminaries, the moon and stars that God had made, he cried out, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psa 8:4). Take man at his best, in the state of innocence, when he became a perfect and pure piece out of his Maker's hand: yet he was *inferior* to angels. They always bare the image of God in a more eminent⁹ degree than man, being wholly spiritual substances...[Man's] noble soul is immersed in matter and closed up in flesh and blood, yet Christ chooseth this inferior order and species of creatures and passeth by the angelical nature: "He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Heb 2:16).

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" (Rom 8:3), i.e., in flesh that had the marks, 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...But though it had no intrinsic¹⁰ 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.

By reason [of this], though He was not a sinner, He looked like one. 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 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! And indeed, if He will be a Mediator of reconciliation, it was necessary that it should be so. It behoved¹¹ Him to assume

⁹ **eminent** – exalted; dignified.

¹⁰ **intrinsic** – belonging to something as a basic and essential feature of what it is.

¹¹ **behoved** – was necessary for.

the same nature that sinned to make satisfaction in it. Yea, these sinless infirmities were necessary to be assumed with [human] nature, forasmuch as His bearing them was a part of His humiliation...Moreover, by them, our High-Priest was qualified from His own experience and filled with tender compassion to us. But O the admirable condescension¹² of a Savior to take such a nature—to put on such a garment when so very mean¹³ and ragged! [Was this suitable for] the Son of God to wear? O grace unsearchable! And yet more:

By 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. [Rather, He looked like] a poor, sorry, contemptible sinner in the eyes of the world. They scorned Him: “This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days” (Mat 26:61). Hereby He “made himself of no reputation” (Phi 2:6). It blotted His honor and reputation. By reason hereof, He lost all esteem and honor from those that saw Him: “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Mat 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 what was put therein (Joh 13:29)—who that had seen Him would ever have thought [He] had been the Creator of the world, the Prince of the kings of the earth? “He was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa 53:3). Now which of you is there that would not rather choose to endure much misery as a man than to be degraded into a contemptible worm that everybody treads on, and no man regards it? Christ looked so unlike God in this habit that He was scarce allowed the name of a man—“a worm, and no man” (Psa 22:6).

Think with yourselves now: was this not *astonishing* self-denial? That He, Who from eternity, had His Father’s smiles and honors—He that from creation was adored and worshipped by angels as their God—must now become a footstool for every miscreant¹⁴ to tread on and not to have the respect due to a man? Surely, this was a deep abasement. It was a black cloud that for so many years darkened and shut up His manifested glory that it could not shine out to the world. Only some weak rays of the Godhead shone to some few eyes through the chinks¹⁵ of His humanity—as the clouded sun sometimes opens a little, casts some faint beams, and is muffled up again. “We beheld

¹² **condescension** – coming down or stooping to things unworthy.

¹³ **mean** – shabby; poor in quality.

¹⁴ **miscreant** – vile wretch; unbeliever.

¹⁵ **chinks** – narrow openings or cracks.

his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father," but "the world knew him not" (Joh 1:14, 10). If a prince walks up and down in a disguise, he must expect no more honor than a mean¹⁶ subject. This was the case of our Lord Jesus Christ: this disguise made Him contemptible and an object of scorn.

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...The Lord Jesus lived at a high and inimitable¹⁷ rate of communion with God while He walked here in the flesh. Yet to live by faith as Christ here did is one thing; and to be in the bosom of God as He was before is 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 the joy of the Lord and then all overcast with clouds of wrath again; to cry, and God not hear, as He complains (Psa 55:2), no, 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?" (Psa 22:1). This was a thing Christ was very unacquainted with until He was found in habit as a man.

Lastly, if He was to become a man, it was a great stoop and condescension of Christ to take His nature from such [an obscure parent] and choose such a low, contemptible state in this world as He did. He would be born, not of the blood of nobles, but of a poor woman in Israel, espoused to a carpenter. Yes, and that too under all the disadvantages imaginable: not in His mother's house, but an inn—yes, in the stable too. He suited all to that abased state He was designed for and came among us under all the humbling circumstances imaginable: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," saith the apostle, "that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2Co 8:9). Thus, I have shewn you some few particulars of Christ's humiliation in His incarnation.

Hence, we gather the fullness and completeness of Christ's satisfaction, as the sweet first-fruits of His incarnation. Did man offend and violate the Law of God? Behold, God Himself is become man to repair that breach and satisfy for the wrong done. The highest honor that ever the Law of God received was to have such a person as the man Christ Jesus to stand before its bar and make reparation to it. This is more than if it had poured out all our blood and built up its

¹⁶ **mean** – lowly.

¹⁷ **inimitable** – impossible to imitate because of being unique.

honor upon the ruins of the whole creation.

Did Christ stoop so low as to become a man to save us? Then those that perish under the gospel must needs perish without apology. What would you have Christ do more to save you? Lo, He hath laid aside the robes of majesty and glory, put on your own garments of flesh, come down from His throne, and brought salvation home to your own doors. Surely, the lower Christ stooped to save us, the lower we shall sink under wrath that neglect so great salvation...O poor sinners! Your damnation is just if you refuse grace brought home by Jesus Christ Himself to your very doors. The Lord grant this may not be thy case who readest these lines. Moreover, hence it follows,

None doth or can love like Christ: His love to man is matchless. The freeness, strength, antiquity, and immutability of it, puts a luster on it beyond all examples. Surely it was a strong love indeed that made Him lay aside His glory, to be found in fashion as a man, to become anything, though never so much below Himself, for our salvation...His love, like Himself, is wonderful.

Did the Lord Jesus so deeply abase and humble Himself for us? What an engagement hath He thereby put on us to exalt and honor Him, Who for our sakes was so abused! It was a good saying of Bernard:¹⁸ “By how much the viler He was made for me, by so much the dearer He shall be to me.” And O that all to whom Christ is dear would study to exalt and honor Him...O ye that have escaped the eternal wrath of God by the humiliation of the Son of God, extol¹⁹ your great Redeemer, and forever celebrate His praises! O let your hearts work upon this admirable condescension of Christ until they be filled with it and your lips say, “Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ.”

From “The Fountain of Life” in *The Works of the Reverend John Flavel*, Vol. 1, in the public domain.



As men regard and treat the Son of God, Who is also the Son of Man, the Christ of God, so are they saved or lost. If they believe not in Him, they shall die in their sins. The aversion of the natural man to the person and work of Jesus Christ is dreadful. Nothing is more foolish, yet nothing is more perverse or stubborn than unbelief.

—*William S. Plumer*

If Jesus Christ be “God with us” (Mat 1:23), let us come to God without any question or hesitancy. Whoever you may be, you need no priest or intercessor to introduce you to God; for God has introduced Himself to you.—*Charles H. Spurgeon*

¹⁸ **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153) – French monastic reformer known for his devotion.

¹⁹ **extol** – praise highly.

GRACE AND TRUTH INCARNATE

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

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

IN Jesus Christ all the attributes of God are to be seen—veiled, but yet verily there. You have only to read the Gospels and to look with willing eyes, and you shall behold in Christ all that can possibly be seen of God. It is veiled in human flesh, as it must be; for the glory of God is not to be seen by us absolutely. It is toned down to these dim eyes of ours; but the Godhead is there, the perfect Godhead in union with the perfect manhood of Christ Jesus our Lord, “to whom be glory for ever and ever” (Heb 13:21)...

I wish I were able to communicate my thoughts this morning as they came to me when I was meditating upon this passage; but this thought almost speaks for itself. The Lord Jesus Christ is full of *grace*, but then He has not neglected the other quality that is somewhat sterner, namely, that of *truth*. I have known many in this world very loving and affectionate, but they have not been faithful. On the other hand, I have known men to be sternly honest and truthful, but they have not been gentle and kind. But in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no defect either way. He is full of grace that doth invite the publican and the sinner to Himself; but He is full of truth that doth repel the hypocrite and Pharisee. He does not hide from man a truth however terrible it may be, but He plainly declares the wrath of God against all unrighteousness. But when He has spoken terrible truth, He has uttered it in such a gracious and tender manner, with so many tears of compassion for the ignorant and those that are out of the way, that you are as much won by His grace as convinced by His truth. Our Lord’s ministry is not truth alone nor grace alone; but it is a balanced, well-ordered system of grace and truth. The Lord Himself is in His character “just and having salvation” (Zec 9:9). He is both King of righteousness and of peace. He does not even save unjustly, nor does He proclaim truth unlovingly. Grace and truth are equally conspicuous in Him...Now I want to dwell briefly on each one by itself.

Grace is put first. “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace.” Jesus Christ is the Son of God; He

is His only begotten Son. Others are begotten of God, but no other was ever begotten of God as Christ was; consequently, when He came into this world, the glory that was about Him was a “glory as of the only begotten.” A very singular, very special, and incommunicable glory abides in the person of our Lord. Part of this was the glory of His grace...“The glory of the only begotten of the Father” must lie in the same things as the glory of the Father, namely, in longsuffering, goodness, and truth. In Christ, there is a wonderful display of the gentleness, patience, pity, mercy, and love of God. Not merely did He teach the grace of God and invite us to the grace of God; but in Himself, He displayed the grace of God.

This is to be seen, first, in His incarnation. It is a wonderful instance of divine grace that the Word should be made flesh, dwell among us, and reveal His glory to us. Apart from anything that springs out of the incarnation of Christ, the incarnation itself is a wondrous act of grace. There must be hope for men now that man is next akin to God through Jesus Christ. The angels were not mistaken when they not only sang, “Glory to God in the highest,” but also, “on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luk 2:14) because in Bethlehem the Son of God was born of a virgin. God in our nature must mean God with gracious thoughts towards us. If the Lord had meant to destroy the race, He never would have espoused it and taken it into union with Himself. There is fullness of grace in the fact of the Word “made flesh” tabernacling among us.

More than this, there is fullness of grace in the life of Christ when we consider that He lived here in order to perfect Himself as our High Priest. Was He not made perfect through His sufferings that He might sympathize with us in all our woes? He was compassed¹ with infirmities, bare our sorrows, and endured those crosses of the human life that press so heavily on our own shoulders; and all this to make Himself able to deal graciously with us in a tender and brotherly way. Apart from that which comes out of this wonderful brotherhood, there is a bottomless depth of grace about the fellowship itself. The Lord Jesus cannot curse me, for He has borne my curse. He cannot be unkind to me, for He has shared my sorrows. If every pang that rends my heart has also rent His heart, and if into all my woes He has descended even deeper than I have gone, it must mean love to me—it cannot mean anything else. And it must mean truth, for Jesus did not play at fellowship: His griefs were real. I say, then, that this manifes-

¹ **compassed** – surrounded; encircled.

tation of God in the person of Christ Jesus is seen in His sorrowing life to be full of grace and truth.

Then think for a minute of what He did. He was so full of grace that when He spoke, His words dropped a fatness of grace, the dew of His own love was upon all His discourses. And when He moved about and touched men here and there, virtue went out of Him because He was so full of it. At one time, He spake and pardoned a sinner, saying, “Thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mat 9:2). At another moment, He battled with the consequences of sin, raising men from sickness and from death. Again, He turned Himself and fought with the prince of darkness himself, and cast him out from those whom he tormented. He went about like a cloud that is big with rain, and therefore plentifully waters waste places. His life was boundless compassion...Everywhere He went He scattered grace among the children of men, and He is just the same now; fullness of grace abides in Him still.

When it came to His death, which was the pouring out of His soul, then His fullness of grace was seen. He was full of grace indeed, forasmuch as He emptied Himself to save men. He was Himself not only man’s Savior, but his salvation. He gave Himself for us. He was indeed full of grace when He “bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1Pe 2:24). His was love at its height, since He died on the cross, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1Pe 3:18).

Pronounce the word *substitution*,² and you cannot help feeling that the Substitute for guilty man was full of grace. Or use that other word *representative* and remember that whatever Jesus did, He did as the covenant head of His people. If He died, they died in Him. If He rose again, they rose in Him. If He ascended up on high, they ascended in Him. And if He sits at the right hand of God, they also sit in the heavenly places in Him. When He shall come a second time, it shall be to claim the kingdom for His chosen as well as for Himself; and all the glory of the future ages is for them, and not for Himself alone. He saith, “Because I live, ye shall live also” (Joh 14:19).

Oh, the richness of the grace and truth that dwell in our Lord as the representative of His people! He will enjoy nothing unless His people enjoy it with Him. “Where I am, there shall also my servant be” (Joh 12:26). “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Rev 3:21).

² See FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

There is yet another word higher than *substitution*, higher than *representation*, and that is *union*. We are one with Christ, joined to Him by a union that never can be broken. Not only does He do what He does, representing us, but we are joined unto Him in one spirit—members of His body and partakers of His glory. Is this not grace, grace unspeakable? Is it not a miracle of love that worms of earth should ever be one with incarnate deity, and so one that they never can be separated throughout the ages?...

But then it is said there is in Him also a fullness of truth. By [this], I understand that in Christ Himself, not merely in what He said, did, and promised, there is a fullness of truth. And this is true, first, in the fact that He is the fulfillment of all the promises that went before concerning Him. God had promised great things by His prophets concerning the coming Messiah, but all those predictions are absolutely matters of fact in the person of the Well-beloved. “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen” (2Co 1:20). Verily He hath bruised the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15). Verily He “hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isa 53:4). Verily He hath proclaimed “liberty to the captives” (Isa 61:1). Verily He hath proved Himself a prophet like unto Moses (Deu 34:10; Act 3:22).

According to my second text, [chapter one] verse seventeen, I understand our Lord Jesus to be “truth” in the sense of being the substance of all the types. The Law that was given by Moses was but symbolical and emblematical; but Jesus *is* the truth. He is really that “blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:24)—He is in very deed the Paschal Lamb³ of God’s Passover: He is the burnt-offering, the sin-offering, and the peace-offering—all in one! He is the true scapegoat, the true morning and evening lamb; in fact, He is in truth what all the types and figures were in pattern. Blessed be God, brethren: whenever you see great things in the Old Testament in the type, you see the real truth of those things in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jew had nothing that we have not: He had nothing even in outline and shadow which we have not obtained in substance. The covenant in its fullness is in Christ: the prophecy is in Moses, the fulfillment is in Jesus; the foreshadowing is in the Law, the truth is in the Word made flesh.

Further than that, our Lord Jesus Christ is said to be grace and truth in this sense: He truthfully deals with matters of fact in the case

³ **Paschal Lamb** – lamb sacrificed at the Jewish celebration of Passover; here a reference to Christ.

of our salvation. I know the notion of the world is that the salvation of Christ is a pretty dream, a handsome piece of sentiment. But there is nothing dreamy about it: it is no fiction—it is fact upon fact. The Lord Jesus Christ does not gloss over or conceal the condition of man in His salvation. He finds man condemned and takes him as condemned in the very worst sense—condemned of a capital offense. And as man's substitute, He endures the capital penalty and dies in the sinner's stead. The Lord Jesus views the sinner as depraved, yea, as dead in trespasses and sins, and He quickens him by His resurrection life. He does not wink at the result of the fall and of actual sin, but He comes to the dead sinner and quickens him. He comes to the diseased heart and heals it. To me, the gospel is a wonderful embodiment of omnipotent wisdom and truth. If the gospel had said to men, "The Law of God is certainly righteous, but it is too stern, too exacting, and therefore God will wink at many sins and make provision for salvation by omitting to punish much of human guilt," why, my brethren, we should always have been in jeopardy. If God could be unjust to save us, He could also be changeable and cast us away. If there was anything rotten in the state of our salvation, we should fear that it would fail us at last. But our foundation is sure, for the Lord has excavated down to the rock; He has taken away every bit of mere sentiment and sham, and His salvation is real throughout. It is a glorious salvation of grace and truth in which God takes the sinner as he is and deals with him as he is, yea, and deals with the sinner as God is, on the principles of true righteousness: yet, [He] saves him.

But it means more than that. The Lord deals with us in the way of grace, and that grace encourages a great many hopes; but those hopes are all realized, for He deals with us in truth. Our necessities demand great things, and grace actually supplies those great things. The old Law "could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience" (Heb 9:9); but the grace of God makes believers perfect as pertaining to the conscience. If I were to sit down and try to imagine a flaw in the ground of my salvation by Christ, I could not do it. Believing as I do in Him "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1Pe 2:24), I [think] that by no possibility can His atonement fail me. I have not imagination strong enough to feign a reason for distrust: I do not see hole or corner in which any charge could lurk against the man that believes in Jesus Christ. My conscience is satisfied, and *more* than satisfied. Sometimes it even seems to me that my sins could not have deserved that the Son of God should die. The atonement is greater than the sin. Speak of the vindi-

cation of the Law! Is not the vindication even greater than the dishonor? Does not the Law of God shine out more lustrous in its indescribable glory through the sacrifice of Christ as the penalty for sin than it would have done had it never been broken, or had all the race of law-breakers been swept into endless destruction? O brothers, in the salvation of Jesus there is a truth of grace unrivalled! There is a deep verity, a substantiality, an inward soul-satisfaction in the sacrifice of Christ, which makes us feel that it is a full atonement—a fountain of “grace and truth.”

Nor have I yet quite brought out all the meaning, even if I have succeeded so far. Christ has brought to us “grace and truth,” that is to say, He works in believers both grace and truth. We [lack] grace to rescue us from sin. He has brought it. We need truth in the inward parts. He has wrought it. The system of salvation by atonement is calculated to produce truthful men. The habit of looking for salvation through the great sacrifice fosters the spirit of justice, begets in us a deep abhorrence of evil and a love for that which is right and true. By nature, we are all liars and either love or make a lie. For this cause, we are content with refuges of lies; and we compass ourselves with deceit. In our carnal state, we are as full of guile as an egg is full of meat. But when the Lord comes to us in Christ, no longer imputing our trespasses to us, then He takes out of our heart that deceit and desperate wickedness that had else remained there. I say it and dare avow it that the system of salvation by the indwelling of God in Christ and the atonement offered by Him for men has a tendency in it to infuse grace into the soul and to produce truth in the life. The Holy Ghost employs it to that end. I pray that you and I may prove it so by the grace that causes us to love both God and man, and the truthfulness with which we deal in all the affairs of life.

Thus has our Lord displayed the glory of God in the grace and truth with which He is filled. I am sorry I have spoken so feebly on a theme so grand. May the Spirit bless you even through the infirmities of my speech!

From a sermon delivered on Lord’s Day morning, September 27, 1885,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.

