

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN

What If Jesus Were Only a Man?

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(Concluded.)

I desire to quote one more text in illustration of the conviction of Christ's deity which those had who companied with Him while He passed up and down Jewry, preaching His Gospel and performing His miracles of mercy. In his First Epistle, John declares in unequivocal words: "This [Jesus Christ] is the true God and eternal Life." 1 John 5, 20. In calling attention to this passage, I am fully aware of the fact that there is a difference of opinion as to whether the demonstrative "this" has for its antecedent "Him that is true," "the Faithful One," that is, the Father, or "His Son Jesus Christ." However, the apparently intended progress of thought as well as general linguistic usage seem to make it compulsory to accept the phrase "His Son Jesus Christ" as the antecedent of "this." We shall give the whole of v. 20 and also v. 21: "And we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal Life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen." It surely seems most natural to accept "His Son Jesus Christ" as the antecedent of "this," for the simple reason that of the possible antecedents it is nearest, and general usage favors accepting the nearest possible antecedent, unless some other possible antecedent is the subject of the preceding clause or is

particularly emphasized. Thus in 1 John 2, 2 "He" has for its antecedent "Jesus Christ the Righteous," the last-named person, while in 1 John 2, 22 "He" has for its antecedent the subject of the preceding clause. In Acts 4, 10, 11 we have an example where "He" has for its antecedent the most remote of three mentioned persons, because the whole emphasis rests on the fact that the lame man mentioned was made whole by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. In our text, now, we find that "His Son Jesus Christ" is the nearest possible antecedent, and the possible antecedent bearing the emphasis. A careful reading of the text shows that John wishes to emphasize the fact that we have our understanding and knowledge of Him that is true through the Son, and that we are in Him that is true, that is, in the Father, because we are in His Son Jesus Christ. Then, also, the logical sequence of thought speaks in favor of accepting "His Son Jesus Christ" as the antecedent of "this." To accept "Him that is true" as the antecedent of "this" would have us say in this concluding clause of v. 20 what we have already said twice before in the same verse, namely, that the Father is the true God: "He that is the true God is the true God." Is it not unreasonable to think that the apostle is guilty of such tautology? On the other hand, if we accept "His Son Jesus Christ" as the antecedent of "this," we have a logical sequence of thought in the verse under consideration: Through Christ, the Son of God, we have an understanding of Him that is true, and in and through Christ we have communion with Him that is true, and this Jesus Christ, who has revealed unto us the knowledge of His Father and has brought us into blessed communion with Him, is Himself true God. The second predicate of the clause, "and eternal life," also points to "His Son Jesus Christ" as the antecedent of "this": for again and again John in His gospel insists that only in Christ is eternal life to be found, and he explicitly calls Jesus Eternal Life, a term which he never uses in designating the Father. John 1, 4; 11, 25; 14, 6; 20, 31; comp. also 1 John 1, 2; 4, 9. Finally, it has been pointed out that this acceptance of the sense of v. 20 gives real point to v. 21, as an earnest warning against those false prophets whom he has referred to in previous chapters of this epistle, 2, 18, etc.; 4, 1, etc. It is as though he would say: "Children, Christ with the Father is true God; to deny Him is to deny the Father and not to have God. But not to have God is to have an idol, a figment of the mind, and to serve such an idol is idolatry. Little children, keep yourselves from idols!"

Equally as strong as the testimony of the apostles who com-

panied with Jesus while He was visibly present on earth is that of Paul as to our Savior's deity.

When saying farewell to the elders of Ephesus, Acts 20, 28, Paul, in conclusion, admonishes them: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." God is here said to have purchased His Church with His own blood. He that purchased His Church with His own blood, Jesus Christ, is here declared to be God. Of course, it is a matter of dispute whether it should read "Church of God" or "Church of the Lord." Most of the uncials have *kyriou*, "Lord," but the evidence for *theou*, "God," as the correct reading is by far the weightier because of the fact that the two oldest manuscripts, the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus, have *theou*. Then, too, the phrase "Church of God" is not infrequently used by the apostle, while one would look in vain for the expression "Church of the Lord" in all of Paul's epistles.

Rom. 9, 5 the apostle writes: "Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen." After recounting various high distinctions of the Jews as a race, the apostle mentions the highest and crowning distinction last, namely, the descent of Christ from them concerning the flesh, who, Christ, is "over all, God blessed forever." For centuries this was the universally accepted understanding of this verse, as it certainly is the most obvious meaning according to the ordinary rules and usages of language. Only in modern days, objections have been raised to this interpretation, not so much because the words in their ordinary acceptance seemed to imply any other meaning, but simply because it has been thought that Paul could not have meant to say what the words in their natural and simple acceptance do say. To prevent its appearing as if Paul were calling Jesus "God," some have put a period after the word "flesh," *sarka*, and have called the concluding clause of the verse a doxology to God the Father: "God, who is over all, be blessed forever." Other have put a stop after "all," *panton*, leaving the rest of the verse to be a doxology. Still others want this last clause to be a statement that God the Father is blessed forever. But what can be the purpose of such a statement in this connection? While, however, a statement to the effect that the Father is blessed forever seems to be purposeless in this connection and the apostle's train

of thought does not call for a doxology to the Father, some expression of the greatness of Christ is surely demanded to set forth the crowning distinction of the Hebrew race from which Christ traces His fleshly descent, and just such an expression we have in the words "Who is over all, God blessed forever."

Compare also Paul's initial salutation in his Epistle to the Galatians, chap. 1, 1: "Paul, an apostle, *not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ,*" etc. Paul insists upon the Galatians' fully realizing that neither the original source of his ambassadorship nor the medium of his sending was human, and yet he declares that he was sent by Jesus Christ. If words mean anything at all, then Paul here declares Jesus to be God and refers to the deity of Jesus as a proof of his apostleship.

To the Colossians Paul writes, chap. 2, 9: "In Him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." In Christ dwells the Godhead in all its fulness incarnate. The Godhead, the Deity, the Divine Essence, is tabernacled in Christ's body; all the essential qualities of God, His infinity, His intelligence, His holiness and righteousness, His truth and benevolence, are in Christ bodily. The essential and perfect majesty of divine essence, in all its fulness, dwells in Christ's human body. The man Christ Jesus is at the same time true God, very God with the Father and the Holy Ghost. Few words, but expressive of a stupendous mystery, the mystery of the personal union of God and man in Christ Jesus!

Titus 2, 13 we read that we are "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." The translation would be more happy and in stricter conformity with the original if it were given as "awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Much is made of the fact that nowhere else the apostle speaks of Christ as "the great God"; but this can surely not be conclusive evidence that he does not wish to do so here, especially in view of the fact that this is the natural grammatical rendering, that the immediate context applies only to the Son, and that the term "glorious appearing," "epiphany," is never applied to the Father, while it does speak of the future appearing of Christ in various passages. Our "blessed hope" is the appearing in glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The inspired writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the first chapter, quotes the Second Psalm, where the Messiah is declared to be of the same nature with the Father: "Thou art *My Son*; this day have I *begotten* Thee," Ps. 2, 7, to show that Christ

is superior to the angels, Heb. 1, 5. In the sixth verse of the same chapter the angels of God are commanded to *worship* Him, to give Him the homage due only to God Most High. In the eighth verse the holy writer cites the Messianic prophecy of Ps. 45, 6. 7 to show that the title of the everlasting God belongs to Christ: "But unto the *Son* He saith, 'Thy throne, *O God*, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom.'" While attempts have been made to destroy the proof of Christ's deity in this text by rendering the original, "*God is Thy throne* forever and ever," even Unitarians admit that the idiom of the Greek forbids the expression being rendered thus. The translators of the LXX understood the word "God" as a vocative and all other ancient versions also rendered it so. In Heb. 1, 10—12 the holy writer applies the words of Ps. 102, 24—27 to Christ to prove that He is really God, since He is the unchangeable Creator of all things. And, finally, the inspired author, in the thirteenth verse, brings a final and crowning quotation from Ps. 110 to show the Son's superiority to the angels: "But to which of the angels said He, 'Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool?'" The Son is not merely to be enthroned on Zion as the Father's Vicegerent, but He is to sit at the right hand of God Himself, at the right hand of God's majesty on high, above the heavens and above the cherubim, and thus to all is to be shown His superiority to the angels and His equality with the Father, that is, His essential deity. Surely, as one reads these words as quoted by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews from the Old Testament and follows his application of the inspired words to Jesus Christ, there is but one impression that one can get, and that is, that he would have us recognize Jesus to be very God, equal with the Father in glory.

But while Jesus Christ is one with the Father in essence, very God of very God, so that He can truthfully say: "I and My Father are one," John 10, 30, it is also true that there is a distinction between the Father and the Son, and this distinction in person is just as clearly taught in Scripture as is the unity of the two in essence. But this distinction is not found in a subordination of the Son to the Father. To say that the Son must be inferior to the Father because He is of the Father, is not good reasoning and contrary to human experience; for it is by no means always the case that the son is physically, mentally, or in some other way inferior to the father. But even if our range of experience gave us no instance where a son was the equal of his father, this could

not alter the fact that in the case of God the Father and God the Son there is no subordination of the latter to the former, and to deny that would be equivalent to denying that Jesus Christ, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, is the one true God. To deny that Jesus Christ is the one true God is a denial of Col. 2, 9: "In Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

We, indeed, speak of the First Person and Second Person and Third Person in the Godhead and such designation is perfectly Scriptural, but it indicates no superiority or inferiority of the three Persons among each other. Since the Father is of no one, but the Son is born of the Father, and the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son, it is perfectly proper to designate the three Persons as we do, First, Second, and Third.

When Jesus speaks of the Father's being greater than He, John 14, 28, He does not wish to assert that He is inferior in His essence to the Father, but simply this, that in His state of humiliation, which will end with His going to the Father, He is smaller than the Father, because of the servant's form in which He is clothed. There is as little subordination of the Son to the Father to be found in this passage as in any other.

Have I exhausted your patience, dear Doctor? I hope not. But I realize that, like all things here below, this letter will also have to come to an end, even though the line of argument we have so far pursued is by no means exhausted. Other illustrations and proofs may be found on every page of Scripture. The doctrine that Jesus Christ is very God is woven into the very texture of the Bible. If Jesus of Nazareth is not God Incarnate, then there is nothing left for us to do but to cast aside our Bibles. If Christ is not true God, He is a liar; if He is not the great Jehovah, He is an impostor.

To me it appears that the argument for Christ's deity is simply irresistible, whether we examine single texts or the Scriptures as a whole; for not only individual texts, but the books as a whole, the whole sacred collections cumulatively, bear testimony to the Godhead of Jesus. It is as if every text, every book of the Bible cried out, "Christ is God, He is the very God; to Him be glory with the Father and the Holy Ghost, world without end!"

Dear Doctor, as I am about to conclude this long letter, I cannot refrain from expressing the heartfelt prayer that you may find in Jesus of Nazareth what I find in Him, my Savior and my God!
