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PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST.

For some time past, by letter and otherwise, questions have been asked me like the following: "Brother Paton, do you, or the other writers for ZION'S WATCH TOWER, deny the conscious pre-existence of Christ?" I would answer all such queries through the paper.

For myself, I answer, I not only do not deny it, but I most firmly believe it, and have invariably taught and defended it, both in preaching and writing, not only as true, but as a very important fact. Since the doubt has been set in motion in the minds of our readers (I am quite sure it was never caused by anything which has appeared in the WATCH TOWER), it has been my privilege to converse on this subject with all in our list of "Regular Contributors," who have written for the paper, and also with Brother Russell, the editor, and, if I know the meaning of words, there exists among us, on this subject, the most perfect oneness. What puzzles me is, how any one ever originated the thought that we do not believe it. I think that some one must have been very anxious that we should deny it, and that the wish has been father to the thought. I cannot expect to counteract fully the false impression made by such a report, [R106 : page 3] unless those who have circulated it among the people will be fair enough to circulate our correction. When a Christian brother has unintentionally misrepresented another, it should be considered not only a duty, but a privilege to correct the mistake. Should this not be done, and a part of our brethren who do not read this paper, are allowed to think that Brother Paton and other brethren have so far lost their light as to deny the conscious pre-existence of Christ, we will be compelled to ask the Lord for patience and courage to bear it, as we have often done during these months of misrepresentation. If

there were no danger of harm to others by such reports, it would be but a small matter to us individually.

That we meet with some whom we believe to be Christians, and in some respects seem to be well advanced, who do not believe in the conscious or personal pre-existence of Christ, is true. Though never having doubted this great truth for a single moment, even when reading the arguments offered against it, yet we have never been disposed to make our opinions on this subject a test of fellowship. We rejoice that it has been our privilege to convince some of the truth of our position. We have often said that the statements of the Bible are on the side of the pre-existence, but the opposite view has been sustained in many minds by unanswered questions as to how this or that could be.

We regard this subject and several others as revealed, but without the philosophy being given. It is not explainable, and yet it is true. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father" (knoweth). Matt. 11:27. All we can know is what is revealed. "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." 1 Tim. 3:16. He is the root of David, as well as his fruit, or "offspring." Rev. 22:16. He is David's Lord, as well as David's son. Matt. 22:42-45. These and other scriptures teach us, that in Christ was combined the Divine and human. He is called both "Son of God" and "Son of Man." Perhaps some one supposed we were denying His personal, conscious pre-existence, when, some time ago, we stated that, so far as we know, He was not called a Son until He came into the flesh, but that He was called the Word. If His being called the Word, in His pre-existent state, proves that He was not a Person, then He is not now and never has been a Person, for He was the Word and Truth when in the flesh, (John 1:14 and 14:6), and in His future glorious manifestation as Conqueror, "His name is called the Word of God." Rev. 19:13. If the statement is unscriptural, we will gladly be

corrected. But we believe that Person, who was called the Word, had a conscious existence before "the Word was made flesh" (Jno. 1:14), or before He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Heb. 2:16. He that took our nature, should not be confounded with the nature which He took, though in Him, they were mysteriously blended. We believe His action in taking upon himself human nature and human form was voluntary, and is a grand exhibition of benevolence and love on His part, and therefore used as a motive for the Christian.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God,...made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men." After which, "being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. 2:5-8.

The reason assigned by some, why we ignore the pre-existence of Christ, is that we might oppose the proposition that Christ's real death was in leaving the glory and becoming a man. We will ignore no such glorious doctrine for the purpose of opposing so absurd a proposition. The above scripture of itself overthrows the assumption, by giving the order of events. He left the glory, took human form, and afterward humbled Himself unto death. Some have supposed, on account of the influence of an assumed human leadership, that the Bible asserts that Christ left the life He had with the Father, instead of the glory. Brethren, no person can be infallibly led of the Spirit who ignores the distinction between the glory of a life and the life itself. Christ did not die by becoming a man, but He became a man that He might die. Hence, "we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death...that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." Heb. 2:9. The incarnation, or coming in the flesh, was before the death. See, also, vs. 14,15. He voluntarily accepted the work. The body was prepared for sacrifice,

and He says, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." After which the body, which was prepared for sacrifice, was offered (sacrificed). Heb. 10:5,7,10.

It was not the pre-existent One, but "the man Christ Jesus" that gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:5,6), and yet He left the glory for the purpose of becoming a man, or taking upon himself human nature and form, that He might become a sin offering. The same spirit of benevolence that moved Him to leave the glory controlled Him throughout. So we can say, as did Paul: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." 2 Cor. 8:9.

We would neither belittle nor magnify the physical or mental sufferings of Christ's life or death. We know not how much He suffered. That all His sufferings were necessary there can be no doubt. "For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." Heb. 2:18 and 4:15. We freely assert, however, that the Bible nowhere teaches that the pain He suffered made atonement. In the type, a perfect beast had to be slain, not tortured. "Christ died for our sins." "Reconciled to God by the death of His Son."

Christ's coming in the flesh and His death are related to each other, but they are not identical. Perhaps we go farther than some by saying we believe in the dual, or double, nature of Christ. In the atonement work (Lev. 16), He was represented by a double type – Priest and Sacrifice. He was both Priest and Sacrifice. As the priest took the beast (a lower being) and offered it as a sacrifice, so we have seen that Christ took our nature and form, a body prepared for sacrifice. The priest killed that which he took; was it not so with Christ? Christ "was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God, with power (or powerfully declared) by the resurrection." Rom. 1:3,4. The resurrection did not

make Him the Son of God, but declared the fact. If He was the Son of God, and also Son of Man, He had two natures. He was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." 1 Pet. 3:18. "And you hath He reconciled, in the body of His flesh, through death. Col. 1:21,22.

It was not the blood of the priest that was required, but the blood of what the priest offered. The two being combined in Christ, has made it more difficult to grasp. "Every Spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." 1 Jno. 4:3.

If the Lord Jesus, when on earth, was nothing but flesh – a mere man – then He could not be truly said to have come down from heaven. His flesh was of the earth, earthly, as much as ours, and yet it is repeatedly stated that He came down from heaven. See Jno. 3:13 and 31. "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."

Christ was the true bread, that came down from heaven. Ch. 6:33,38,50,51,58. "The Second Man is the Lord from heaven." 1 Cor. 15:47. A mere human being, having our fallen nature, as some tell us Christ was and had, should not have received worship, and could not have forgiven sin, both of which Christ did. Having taken our humanity, without its sin, He was in that nature made a sin offering. He then ascended on high to apply the merit of the work He had done, just as the priest, having slain the beast, carried its blood in to secure the object for which it was shed.

He did not make atonement with the priest's blood, but with what was shed. Our object in writing this article is not to oppose new or advanced truth, but to defend long established truth against old error dressed up in a new form. We defend the pre-existence of Christ, and also the relation between His coming in the flesh and His

death in the flesh. The first prepared the way for the second; the second was the ransom. Both were necessary, [R106 : page 4] and parts of the same plan, and both express God's great love for man. Take the pre-existence of Christ out of the plan, and there was no condescension on His part, and no motive to benevolence for us, as the apostle presents it. Take the death of Christ out of the plan, and the types of death are useless, and there is no ransom, and therefore no restitution. He came down to die, and having done the work, then He returned to the glory He had with the Father before the world was. Jno. 17:5. Christ is our Redeemer, by the Ransom. His earth life is our Example. He is our Forerunner into the perfect life, and the Regenerator by that life imparted. In Him all fullness dwells. He comes again, but not as a Sin Offering, and hence not in the flesh, but in a spiritual body, and all who, by the Spirit, have fellowship with His sufferings and are made conformable to His death, shall be made like Him and share the glory of His reign. Here, we know in part; there, we shall know as we are known. "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." 1 Cor. 13:9-12. Meanwhile, let charity prevail.

J. H. P.

[This article was sent in April 10th, intended for last month's paper, but was crowded out. – EDITOR.]
