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THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

- JOHN 1:1-18. - JANUARY 5. -

Golden Text: – "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

AS a pendulum swinging from one extreme to another, passes the true center of gravity midway, so are the conceptions of Christians in general respecting our Lord: they go to one extreme or the opposite. One extreme view declares our Lord Jesus to have been simply a good man, a member of Adam's race as are others, the son of Joseph; others that he was perfect but not preexistent. Some deny the personality of God, and claim that what is called God is merely an operation of nature – that man is the greatest personal being in existence, and that he was not created but evolved himself from lower conditions. All of these theories we must set aside as being entirely inconsistent with the divine revelation, the Word of God, which teaches us respecting the intelligent Creator that he, in his sympathy and love, provided a Redeemer separate and distinct from our race. The opposite view holds to a personal God, the Creator of all things, and accounts for the honorable station of our Lord Jesus by assuming that he was the Father, but called himself the Son of God in a harmless deception of mankind for a time. It assumes also that he was "incarnate" – that is, that God entered a human body and used it in an obsessional sense. [R4106 : page 379]

It would be in harmony with the carrying out of this thought to say that when Jesus prayed to the Father he really prayed to himself, but in this mild manner deceived because the disciples were not able to comprehend the great fact that he himself was the Father. Pursuing the same line this theory would imply that our Lord on the cross, praying to the Father, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" merely did this for the effect upon

the disciples, since he was the Father and could not forsake himself. The same theory carried out supposes that when the body of Jesus died it was merely the moment when God stepped out of it, because it would be claimed that God could not die, and that the universe could not be left even for three days without supervision, and that if God died he could not raise himself from the dead. Therefore this theory compels the thought that our Lord's experiences from first to last were deceptive. We cannot agree with this thought; it is founded upon several errors, and as a whole is repugnant to reason as well as to Scripture.

Another thought along the same line is that the declaration of the Scriptures that there is but one living and true God is to be accepted in an accommodated sense – that there are really three Gods, but that they cooperate so thoroughly in every plan and purpose and act that they might properly be called one God.

According to this theory one person of the Trinity left heaven, was incarnated, and addressed another person of the Trinity as Father, and prayed to him and not to himself, and declared that the Father was greater than he – though this was not really the truth, since they were all one, according to the Westminster Confession, "equal in power and glory." Nevertheless this view also insists that Jesus, being God, was not made flesh, but merely appeared in flesh in an obsessional sense – in the same sense in which the demons took possession of men. According to this claim this God obsessed Mary's babe and dwelt in him until he died, performing through him wonderful works and giving forth wonderful teachings, but being God this one could not die, and therefore did not die at Calvary, but merely allowed the obsessed body to die.

The foregoing statement of the views of Unitarians and Trinitarians is not in exactly the verbiage used by the advocates of these doctrines, but our presentation is truthful, merely

stripping their statements of the matter of some of the gloss they would use to hide the difficulties of their theories.

We now come to a consideration of the Bible view of this important subject, which agrees with none of the foregoing. We do not admit that either we or others [R4107 : page 379] have a right to ignore the plain statements of the divine Word, but claim, on the contrary, that the Scripture should be allowed to interpret itself, and that what it presents should be accepted by all Christian people without cavil. Let us look at the subject candidly as presented in this lesson.

"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD"

The first verse of our lesson, although not a bad translation, fails to give to the English reading the force, the significance of the Greek, and gives the implication that there are at least two Gods, whereas the Scriptures declare that "there is one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 8:6.) Nowhere in the Scripture are these said to be equal in power and glory. On the contrary, whether we take the words of the apostles, or the prophets, or of the Lord Jesus himself, they all declare in harmony that the "Father is greater than I." "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 14:28; 6:38.) When we read, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God," that makes two, the Word and the God whom he was with or represented, and then the statement that the "Word was God," we are thrown into confusion. How could the Word and God be God? It is here that the Greek gives the relief and makes the matter plain. It reads, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with *the* God and the Word was *a* God; the same was in the beginning with *the* God." If we accept this just as the Greek gives it, with the emphasis of the Greek article in the one place and not in the other, then all is straightened out – is clear. Then we can see that originally there was but the "one God,

the living [self-existent] and true God"; that the glorious personage in this verse called the Word or Logos was the beginning of the Father's creative work.

This is in full accord with the Scriptural declaration that Jesus was the beginning of the creation of God – the "Firstborn of every creature." (Col. 1:15.) But some one objects, – "You are making Jesus, the Son of God, a created being." We answer, No; we are making nothing. We are just finding out what the Scriptures say; we are twisting nothing. The fault lies in the error of the "dark ages" in assuming that Jesus was one of three Gods or that he was all of the one God. For neither of these positions is there a particle of Scripture. Let us not be wiser than God. If we accept the Bible as the divine revelation – as the voice from heaven said of our Lord Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him" – does not the very word son, applied to our Lord, imply that he was not his own father nor coexistent with the Father, but a begotten or subsequent creation? Surely there is no escape from the simplicity of the Scriptural presentation of the subject. "The same was in the beginning with the God" clearly implies a certain time recognized as the beginning, but so far as the heavenly Father himself is concerned, the Scriptures declare, "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." (Psa. 90:2.) In other words, while it may be beyond our comprehension, it is the Scriptural presentation that the Father alone was without beginning, and that the Son was the beginning of the Father's creative work – created before angels as well as before man.

"ALL THINGS WERE MADE BY HIM"

Let us notice carefully this statement: it refers to the Logos, and is in full harmony with the statement made by the Apostle, "All things are of the Father, all things are by the Son." (I Cor. 8:6.) The power was of the **[R4107 : page 380]** Father, but it was exercised through the Son, the beginning of his creation, and

hence "without him was not anything made that was made." What a beautiful testimony! How honoring to the Father! how honoring to the Son! The Father used the Son as his active agent in every creative work – nothing whatever was done without him. Is not this a sufficiency of honor for our dear Redeemer? Is it not as much or more than he ever claimed? In his humility he said nothing about his high honor, which he left to be our Redeemer.

The name he used, "The Word of God," the "Logos," was of itself significant, and in full harmony with our interpretation, as all scholars must admit. In olden times the kings kept themselves more or less apart from their subjects; they were rarely seen. It is said that it was a custom for them, when addressing multitudes of their subjects, to sit behind a screen or curtain, while in front of this stood the king's interpreter or representative, who spoke the king's words in a loud tone to be heard of all who were there. How beautifully this represents the honorable position of our Lord Jesus. He is the mouthpiece of the Father; he is his representative to every creature, to angels and to men. He is his active agent; by him were all things made, and without him was not anything made.

"In him was life." Abruptly the writer passes from our Lord's great work in the creation of all things to his appearance amongst men. He declares, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Our Lord is here contrasted with other men. He was different from others because he was not born of the flesh, though born in the flesh – that is to say, his life did not come from a human father, though it was nourished, matured, by a human mother. It was this peculiarity which marked him as separate and distinct from all of the race. That perfection of life was in marked contrast with the imperfection of the remainder of the race. The death sentence which passed upon father Adam, and which all of his children increasingly inherit, had brought them down to low mental and moral conditions, while our Lord Jesus, having a

perfect life transferred from a heavenly condition, was in consequence very different from others of his people. This life constituted the light amongst men. They perceived that he was a remarkable character – "Never man spake like this man." "They marveled at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth." (John 7:46; Luke 4:22.) They had never before seen one in whom was life: all others whom they had met, like themselves, were dying creatures, nine-tenths dead.

"And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." Not only is it true that the sin-darkened ones of our Lord's day comprehended him not, nor the light of truth and grace which shined from him, but it is still true that the darkened class comprehendeth not. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not." (2 Cor. 4:4.) This is the Apostle's explanation of the matter – he still blinds the darkened class, and their eyes will not be opened until, at the second coming of Christ, Satan shall be bound for a thousand years; and then, during that Millennial period, under the reign of our dear Redeemer, all the blind eyes shall be opened and all the deaf ears shall be unstopped, and every creature shall come to a knowledge of the mercy and goodness and love of God, operating through Jesus Christ our Lord.

JOHN, OUR LORD'S FORERUNNER

The people indeed recognized John the Baptist as a notable character and servant or messenger of Jehovah, and this the Evangelist corroborates, saying that he was sent from God to be a witness of that Light. But John's witness was received by comparatively few, though it was given to all the favored nation to whom the Light was sent. The fact that John as a servant of God was given that honorable position of identifying and declaring Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, was of itself an assurance that the great

One thus introduced and announced was very great in the estimation of Jehovah God, very honorable, the Messenger of the Covenant.

"HE WAS THE TRUE LIGHT"

"He was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." This is a prophetic statement, for our Lord at his first advent did not even enlighten all of his own nation, and made no attempt whatever to enlighten the world of mankind. Nevertheless it is God's purpose that ultimately all shall see, all shall know of his love and wonderful provision. And our Lord Jesus is that great Light, the great Enlightener, that is yet to enlighten Adam and every member of his race. When amongst men the glorious Light was not fully revealed, even though what the Jews did see caused them to marvel. Our Lord himself, according to the Scriptures, "learned obedience by the things which he suffered," and was thereby prepared for his exaltation, his glorification, which he received when he had finished the work which the Father gave him to do – when on the third day thereafter the Father raised him from the dead by his own power, to glory, honor, immortality, the divine nature. Now, in his highly exalted condition, he is still the true Light which shineth with a brightness above that of the sun at noonday. He is to be the great Sun of Righteousness which, during the Millennial age, shall bless and enlighten every man that cometh into the world; and we are given the blessed assurance that the Church, the Bride class, the Elect, will be with him in that glorious mission of blessing and enlightenment. – Matt. 13:43.

"HE WAS IN THE WORLD"

"The world was made by him and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." These words set forth in plain perspective the dignity of the Son of God, who was made flesh and dwelt among us. The world knew him

not! and, still more surprising, his own nation, the Jews, knew him not! although they had been instructed from the beginning [R4108 : page 381] of their nationality to look for the Messiah, and although to them a description had been given – not only that he should be very great, but also that he should be born of a virgin and made of no reputation. How they received him not is clearly set forth in the Scriptures: they mocked him, derided him, rejected him; they preferred instead of him Barabbas, the robber; at the instigation of their priests and doctors of the Law they cried, "Away with him! Crucify him!"

But while this was the course of the majority, a few had the eyes to see and ears to hear the message of God's love which came through him as the Word of God. Of this our lesson tells, saying, "As many as received him to them gave he power [privilege or right] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." These were the "Israelites indeed," of whom were the twelve apostles and the seventy, also the "500 brethren," and those Jews subsequently reached on the Day of Pentecost and afterward during the entire harvest of their age. These had formerly belonged to the house of Moses, the house of servants – "For Moses, verily, was faithful as a servant over all his house." But now, the due time having come, these favored ones saw the true Light, because they were in the proper attitude of heart, and they received from him not only forgiveness of their sins through the merit of his sacrifice, but also the begetting of the holy Spirit – an adoption by the holy Spirit into the family of the sons of God – quite a step above their previous position as merely members of the house of servants, for of our Lord it is written that Christ as a son was faithful over his own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. – Heb. 3:6.

The following verse (13) emphasizes all this, saying, "Which were begotten, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the

will of man, but of God." We render here the term *gennao* begotten, and not born, as in our common version, for although the same Greek word is used interchangeably as referring to begetting and birth, yet there is that in the construction of the Greek sentence which fixes it here as signifying begetting. It refers to our begetting of the holy Spirit, whereas our birth of the holy Spirit is the Scriptural designation for the resurrection. It was not along family lines of blood relationship, not along fleshly lines of worldly sympathy and judgment, not according to man's wealth or wisdom that some were changed from being members of the house of servants and made members of the house of sons of God, under Christ. It was of God that all this came to them, because they were Israelites indeed in whom there was no guile – the very class for whom God had prepared the exceeding great and precious arrangements of his plan. Only such are at present able to appreciate the full riches of God's grace and loving kindness. As sons of God, as members of the Royal Priesthood, they are privileged to have a greater fellowship in the great High Priest, Jesus, and a greater intimacy with the divine Word than is granted to others. As the Lord expressed the matter, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but unto those who are outsiders, these things are spoken in parables." – Mark 4:11.

"THE WORD BECAME FLESH"

The last verse of our lesson contains much food for thought: from it our Golden Text was selected. It declares that the Word was made flesh. The revised version renders it, "The Word became flesh." Both are correct, and both contradict the two extremes of view held by Christendom. It was the Word that was made flesh, and hence our Lord's was not an ordinary birth. On the other hand, note that it does not say that the Word was incarnated or got into flesh or obsessed it, but says quite correctly, "The Word was made flesh – the Word became flesh." Let us

make no mistake in the reading of this message on this important subject; let us take it just as it is written, without twisting. The lesson is that the great One, the beginning of the creation of God, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, came down from that glorious condition as a spirit being and was made flesh and dwelt among us, as the Apostle says. "The man Christ Jesus" was not an incarnated being, but was himself the One who had been with the Father, and whose nature as a spirit being had been changed, exchanged for human nature as a fleshly being. It was when he made his consecration at thirty years of age and symbolized it in water baptism that he received his begetting of the holy Spirit to a new nature, a spiritual nature, as high or higher than he had before. From that moment on he was the Anointed One, which in the Greek signifies the Christ, and in the Hebrew the Messiah. He was anointed with the holy Spirit, with the oil of joy above his fellows. And directly after this anointing came upon the Master, he began the work of selecting those who were to be joint-heirs, otherwise styled the members of his Body, the under priesthood, the Bride, the Lamb's Wife. In the preceding verse we have seen how some of these "fellows" were given liberty to become the sons of God – to be begotten of the holy Spirit, with a view to their ultimately reaching the same glorious nature.

It is not the Word made flesh that was glorified and exalted; rather the Word made flesh offered up himself a living sacrifice to the Father and carried out that sacrificing covenant, completing it at Calvary when he cried, "It is finished." The sacrifice was finished, the Word made flesh had died, had ceased to be. Neither was that Word made flesh ever revived. No, he gave his life a ransom for many, for Adam and all his race, and never revived as a man, never took back that sacrifice. Hence we may go free. As it is written, "Deliver him from going down into the pit: for I have found a ransom for him." – Job 33:24.

But if the Word made flesh died and did not rise again, what did arise from the dead? and who is the Lord of Glory that now ever liveth? We reply that the [R4108 : page 382] Lord of Glory was begotten at the time the Word made flesh offered up himself, namely, at the time of our Lord's consecration and symbolization of that covenant at Jordan. Not the newly begotten Son of God, begotten of the holy Spirit, but the Word made flesh sacrificed himself, gave himself up as a man, with all of his earthly rights and privileges sacrificed on behalf of father Adam for the restoration of Adam and all those condemned to death through him. This New Creature, begotten of God by the holy Spirit, prospered, grew, developed, as the Word made flesh yielded and finally died. This New Creature, which did the sacrificing of the man Christ Jesus, was the One recognized of the Father, the One who gave his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51.) This New Creature's life was not given for the life of the world, the New Creature was not sacrificed for sins. No! it was the Word made flesh, the man Jesus, that was sacrificed, while Jesus the New Creature, begotten again, was delivered in the resurrection – raised from the dead on the third day by the Father. He it was who ascended up on high, there to appear in the presence of God on behalf of the Church, which is his Body, the under-priesthood, and on behalf also of all the household of faith, the antitypical Levites.

Meantime not only the faithful of Natural Israel, but also the called-out ones from amongst the Gentiles have been privileged to walk in their Master's footsteps. True, they had not perfect flesh as he had; true, it could not be said of them as of him that in them was life. But to them was imputed life, because they believed – they were justified through faith, and their sins and imperfections reckonedly covered. Hence from this, the divine standpoint, they were thenceforth like their Lord. They also consecrated their flesh, they also were begotten of the holy Spirit, they also were reckoned as New Creatures, they also crucified the

flesh with its affections and desires, they also laid down their lives, their flesh, in death, and to them also was the promise that eventually, as the Father raised up Jesus from the dead, so also will he raise them up in his likeness, in his resurrection – the First Resurrection of the blessed and holy. They like their Lord will never more be of the human nature: when perfected as New Creatures they will be like their Lord, see him as he is and share his glory, because they will be changed – because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of heaven." – I Cor. 15:50.

When the Apostle says, "And we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," we may not surely know his thought. He may have meant that subsequent to our Lord's resurrection he and the other apostles had beheld the Lord's glory when he had manifested himself to them; or he may have meant that during the days of his flesh before his sacrifice of it was complete, that they beheld his glory, his honor, his dignity, his perfection, as the earthly image of God – God manifest in the flesh. In any event we may here apply to ourselves, not only a good doctrinal lesson, but also a good practical lesson, for we are amongst those who are hoping to make our calling and election sure, that we may become joint-heirs with our dear Redeemer in his glory and Kingdom. The lesson shows us clearly that if we would be so honored by a share in his resurrection, we must be faithful now and make our calling and election sure by walking in his steps and finishing the sacrificing of our flesh: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, your reasonable service." – Rom. 12:1.
