

CHRIST MORE  
THAN MAN

Christ was more than man. We may overlook this in the efforts which have rid us of the false conceptions derived from "the vain traditions of our forefathers". He was a man, but a man who was the vehicle of a manifestation of God, the eternal God, even the Father. The manifestation was a progressive one, but real at every stage-fainter at the beginning than at the end, but as real at the beginning as at the end. A rose in the bud is as really a rose in nature as when it is full blown. The babe that received the adorations of the wise men of the east and whose birth was angelically signalled on the plains of Bethlehem, was as really the manifestation of the name of the Father as the glorified man who felled Saul of Tarsus to the earth with his brightness. The difference was a difference of degree. The Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary gave the impress, which laid the foundation of the manifestation to be made. But for this impress there never would have appeared in Israel such a man as Jesus of Nazareth. There never would have come the Lamb of God without spot. Poor Adamic flesh, in which dwelleth no good thing, never could have yielded such a perfect character as that of Jesus, unless the Father had taken hold of it and wrought it for us into such a pattern. It is "of God, that He (Christ) is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

This in no way excludes the fact that the perfect man so made for us was of the same physical nature, and put to the proof, and in all points tempted like as we are. Without temptation, the perfection of the result would not have been manifest. The best of characters, even among men, are not pronounced or seen to be the best till they have come through the fire. And it was needful for the perfection of this most glorious of the works of God upon earth, that in suffering, its excellencies should be tested and made manifest. But though put to the proof, it was in itself the excellent thing God had made it-a pattern of His own character, the exhibition of His own excellence, the interposition of His own power and kindness for the salvation of His people from their sins. At thirty years of age, with the maturity of developed manhood and the anointing of the Holy Spirit in abiding fulness, the manifestation entered upon a fuller phase; but it was the same manifestation: the manifestation of God among men: the exhibition of the Word made flesh-a man who was one with the Father- sanctified and sent forth into the world by the Father, for

the manifestation of the Father's name and the accomplishment of the Father's work.

When His work in the flesh was accomplished-when having, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself on the cross, without spot unto God (Heb 9 v 14) He was raised from the dead and glorified, and transformed into luminous and powerful spirit-substance, the manifestation of the Father's name was complete, with the result of giving to mankind such a head as their every need calls for-a head that appeals to every sympathy and strikes the chord of our deepest admirations, and evokes our highest praise. Talk of "heroes"! They are mostly figments of the imagination. The Gentile gods are stucco when you come close to them. The excellencies of Christ are such as grow in brightness in proportion to our contact and acquaintance with them. They cannot be exhausted: they cannot be exaggerated. "The fulness of the god-head bodily" is the only description that at all approaches an accurate description.

The divine origin of Christ supplies an explanation of every phase in which the gospel narratives exhibit the Lord Jesus Christ, and every utterance that came out of His mouth. They give the key that is beyond the reach alike of those who consider Him to have been a mere man, and those whose theology compels them to describe Him as eternal God. They account to us for what appear otherwise to be contradictions. They explain to us why in a man, the deportment of God is visible; why in sinful flesh, a sinless character was evolved; why in the impotent seed of Abraham, the power of Abraham's God should be shown; why a man born as a babe in Bethlehem should speak of having come down from heaven; why a man not forty years of age should speak as if He had been contemporary with Abraham; why a man should at once be David's son and David's lord; why a man of our own flesh and blood should assume the authority that belongs to God only, saying "ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well, for so I am"; why of a man it should be said that the world was made by Him; that He dwelt in the bosom of the Father, and that He was the image of the invisible God, by whom and for whom all things had been created.

They explain to us, at the same time, why such a man should say "of mine own self I can do nothing: "my Father is greater than I". "I have kept my

Father's commandments and abide in His love". "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" They show us that there is only one God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that whatever in Christ's sayings seemed to indicate another God, was referable to the Father in Him, whose Son and medium and power He was, and in no way inconsistent with the fact that Jesus was but His Son, in loving submission to all His commandments.

Christ is glorious to us in the converging of all these elements. He is not only the first-born among many brethren, but He is their head, their redeemer, their saviour, their lord. Not a forgiven sinner Himself, He has power to forgive sins. Without sin Himself, we are washed in His blood, though it was blood drawn from our poor sin-cursed stock. Clothed with strength, crowned with glory and honour, He has known the weakness of human exhaustion, and the bitterness of ridicule and insult. Anointed with joy and gladness, He has a history of sorrow and grief as a perpetual background to His everlasting glory. Loving friend and powerful God, compassionate Saviour and sinless example, saved man and embodied God-head, a sympathetic high priest and devourer of the adversary-there is no element wanting to the charm of His name.

Not only in power and legal status, but in the intrinsic attributes of His character and nature, Christ stands in that relation to man which justifies the ardent declaration of His servant Paul that he counted all things else dross and dung by comparison. Excellent men are universally admired for what they are in themselves, even though the excellence is not rooted in them, but is a mere organic phenomenon, like the beauty or the fragrance of the rose. But in Christ the excellence we see is rooted in Himself by reason of the indwelling of God: "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily".

And what is this excellence? It is every excellence. There is no excellence that was ever seen among men that is not to be found in Him in superlative degree; and there are excellencies in Him that were never shown by any man. These words of the psalm are apposite, as they never were to Solomon: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured upon thy lips. God hath blessed thee for ever".

Consider His dignity. This comes in all cases with the strength of conscious power and security, and the sense of the lawfulness of supremacy. Men accustomed to power show it in measure, though they are but as the worm in their ephemerality, and have no. right to authority. But here is one who is rooted in THE ETERNAL FATHER, and who is the same yesterday, today, and forever-one everlasting as God, and to whom it is commanded that every knee should bow; and one, therefore, mantled with the dignity of unapproachable and ineffable power. He showed it all through His mortal days-creating astonishment and commanding obedience by the authority with which He spoke. What must it be now-in the strength of immortal life and power? What an unspeakable delight it will be to be permitted to observe the movements and waft upon the commands of such an august Master, to whom all power in heaven and earth has been accorded, and at whose beck glad legions of the angelic host wait submissively.

Realise, too, that this unspeakable kingliness of carriage is blended with a grace of purity and a sweetness of kindness never seen in the haunts of men. We get a glimpse occasionally of the beauty of goodness in man but how mixed with inferior elements! And even if approximating for a moment to the grace of the divine original, how incapable of continuance. The human organism cannot long stand the combustion of the heavenly flame. The power of corruptible man soon burns out, and through sheer weakness of nature the divine phenomenon collapses. Understand here why royal courtesies are so brief, and the genialities of public men so transient and intermittent. But here is one in whom the springs of power and grace are inexhaustible: in whose wise kindness there is no flaw: and in the stream of which there is no check or failure from exhaustion or fatigue.

The perfection of the character of Christ is seen in every view we take of Him. His kindness and sympathy are a healing ocean in which the world will yet bathe to the healing of all their woes; and this phase of His character is naturally attractive to everyone. But there is another side-a stern side-which might seem inconsistent with His meek and lowly side. and yet which is one of the chiefest glories of His character. How defective would that character be if it had not this other side. How lamentable if His kindness and sympathy were not counter-poised by the faithfulness and firmness essential to justice.

The popular conception of Christ mars Him in this respect. He is considered all love-nothing but love. This would be moral weakness, and would fail to constrain the adoration evoked by the perfect blending of all the excellencies. The attitude of Christ, when He was upon the earth in the days of His weakness and submission to evil, ought to be sufficient of itself to correct this one sided idea of Him. His brusque setting aside of domestic relationships and obligations when they come into competition with duty towards God; His unsparing denunciation of Peter as "Satan", when his thoughts ran counter to the divine plans; His condemnation of the rulers and teachers of the people, in language which could not be exceeded for heat and severity, are all illustrations of a vigour outside the modern ideal of the character of Christ.

But when we go forward to the day of His appearing, how immeasurably is this consideration strengthened. Look at the judgment seat, before which are gathered the multitudes of responsible men and women of all generations, of whose destiny He is the sole appointed arbiter. Consider what is involved in His rejection of the bulk of them: "Depart from me ... I never knew you". What inflexible faithfulness! What indomitable firmness of purpose! What judicial vigour and stern executiveness implied in His sentence of a vast and wailing crowd to everlasting death, and their dismissal from His presence!

And when this scene is over, follow Him with the phalanx of His loved and loving brethren-accepted and glorified: follow Him to the waiting conflict with the nations of the earth. Contemplate "the war of the great day of God Almighty": behold the scenes of violence and carnage; consider the deeds of war and judgment by which He overcomes the confederate hostility of all the world, and treads the wine press of Yahweh's anger, in preparation for the spreading of His imperial pavilions in the midst of men for their blessing. Pondering these scriptural exhibitions of the work that waits Him, we get even a more vivid view than is yielded by His attitudes when upon earth, of the mighty and majestic willpower that dwells in the midst of His kindness.

If we are for a moment overborne by the sternness, we are re-assured by the recollection that it is exerted on behalf of righteousness, and that none will feel the terrible kindlings of His wrath but those who refuse to "kiss the son" in implicit and revering and obedient trust.