

'Christ-the Key to Creation' Ch. 1:1-18

by Charles Alexander

The sermon explores the theme of creation, the purpose of God's life, and the redemption of mankind through Christ, highlighting the uniqueness of Christ as the true light and life of men.

Topics: "Christology", "Divine Sovereignty"

Description

John, in his Gospel, proclaims the absolute deity, supremacy, eternity, and omnipotence of Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son, who is the eternal Word made flesh, revealing the glory of God in Himself. The drama of God's life is being worked out through Christ, who is the revealer of the Godhead and the source of grace and truth. John's Gospel is not just a history but a sermon, carefully constructed with divine symbolism and teaching, emphasizing the importance of believing in Jesus as the Son of God for eternal life.

Transcript

THE ENIGMA OF CREATION is the lofty theme in the Prologue to the Gospel of John. Everywhere this Gospel is transcendental. It deals with matters which transcend all that is earthly, and plunges always into the eternal, and the meaning behind all meanings. The drama of God's life is being worked out. The natural creation has a purpose - to reveal God and provide the field on which will be developed and displayed, the manifold wisdom of God.

The manifestation of the life of God begins in that region of NO BEGINNING, the eternal birth of the Only Begotten Son, who always WAS and ever will be, in the bosom of the Father. Proceeding from, towards, and within the communion of the Father and the Son is that life and love personified in the Holy Spirit, who is of both, yet is a THIRD, eternally proceeding in an origin which never began but always IS - and we have the glory of the Holy Trinity, one God in the mystery and the marvel of Three Persons, always at rest, yet ceaselessly working, always complete and unchanging, yet ever traveling to that glorious destiny yet to be realised, but which in the timeless, ineffable peace of the Godhead is eternally achieved and not subordinate to the alphabet of history.

Incomprehensible? Indeed. For no-one knows the Son save the Father, and no-one knows the Father save the Son - and he to whom the Son will reveal Him. Yet though incomprehensible, God brings Himself into the sphere of existence, to be "known" in a knowledge which transcends all mental apprehension - a knowing which is itself eternal life:

This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.
John 17:3

In that blissful unknowing (after the earthly sort) we know Him (after the heavenly manner) with a knowledge which is conveyed and regulated and made apprehensible and sure through a Written Word, inspired, preserved, infallible, which is the vehicle by which the Eternal and Living Word who was before all things and by whom all things consist, unfolds Himself to those who believe, that by faith they might grasp and receive Him who is the Eternal.

To as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
John 1:12

This is the theme of John in all his writings. Everything has its being for the praise and glory of God. The Wisdom of God is projected in created form, in the visible universe. Our three-dimensional creation, however, is not an end in itself. It is a thing of time, which must pass away with time itself. It is a means to the great end God has in view, in making Himself visible by arraying Himself with a garment which displays His manifold and many-coloured perfections - as Joseph's coat of many hues. Into this scene He comes down from above. The Son of God becomes the Son of Man - the representative man, the heir to Creation and the means of realising its full purpose - an end which the First Man (and the race in him) surrendered in a colossal act of disobedience. The disinherited race finds a Promise of Deliverance, but for four thousand years knows not, except by enigmatical prophetic hint, imperfectly grasped even by the greatest of men, that the Deliverer is God Himself - the Word become flesh and dwelling amongst us, even He who was the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

In this glorious Second Man, who is the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. 15: 47) a new creation arises, invisible, transcendent, eternal. Because it depends on His obedience its course is sure. It is a creation in which will be fully realised all God purposes to do. In the mediation of the Redeemer all is certain, because though truly man He is Very God of Very God. Likewise because this is He who should come and none other, the purpose embodied in Him is sure from the beginning and is as, eternal as the life of God. God being what He is, nothing can miscarry. The end is as sure as the beginning. The number of the elect is sealed. Their salvation is secured from before the foundation of the world. All evil is comprehended and brought under the harness of Almighty Sovereignty. The fixity of the end is according to the dictates of absolute wisdom, and is ordained after the pattern of that nature of God which is incomprehensible. As is His nature so are His works and ways, His thoughts are high above ours as heaven is high above the earth; His ways are as far removed from our ways as the east is from the west (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The FACT we may know, because He has declared it. His eternal thought and all-embracing comprehension and justice, we may not know. His word which proceeds out of His mouth must infallibly accomplish that which He pleases and prosper in the thing whereto He sends it (Isaiah 55:11). That Word is Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God. It is not the word of the 'preacher in the pulpit.

THE WORD WHICH DOES NOT RETURN VOID

Christians who pray, and that most earnestly, that God's Word will not return to Him void, are too late with their prayer. God has already decreed it will not return void. When they apply it to their own preaching, they misapprehend Isaiah 55. God is not referring to preaching but to His unchangeable decrees in Christ eternally promulgated before the foundation of the earth. We ought not to think so highly or so foolishly of

ourselves as to suppose the Word which comes from our lips is the word which goes forth from the mouth of God. Let us indeed be sure or as sure as men can be, that what we say from pulpits is the preaching which God commands in the written Word, but what we say does not have IN OUR MOUTH the power of a divine decree. The sound of our voice will not move a dead leaf, much less a soul dead in trespasses and sins. Only the effectual call of the Spirit can do that

Why then must we preach? Because it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. It is the voice of Christ sounding through the truth of His word preached, which reaches down into the sepulchres .of sin and the rottenness of the graves of those who are slain thereby, and raises the dead

The hour is coming and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God - and they that hear shall live. (John 5: 25)

Let the preacher labour as the poor mouthpiece. Let him not think that HIS faithfulness, HIS fervour, HIS gifts, HIS consecration, HIS prayers (or the prayers of his supporters) are the effectual cause of conversions. Above all, let Christians in these days of shallow and decadent evangelicalism cease to sing the praises of preachers as though there were something magical or specially meritorious which accounts for their 'success'. Whatever success attend our ministry is the decree of God. Into all faithful ministry there enter the elements of a man's consecration to the great end in view, his early rising, his hard and devoted labours, his sacrifice of his own interests, the agony of the consciousness of his own inability and the awful sense of his responsibility for speaking in the name of God. The ministry of the Word is a real thing, not a schoolroom exercise. It requires the total application of a man's soul. But let not that man, or any of his adulating admirers, say that this is the secret of his success, if any, or judge him if God does not please to raise him to prominence and fame.

Who is Paul? Who is Cephas? Who is Apollos? Are they not but the servants by whom we have believed? What have they which they did not receive by grace alone? Truly they ought to be loved and revered for their works' sake, for their faithfulness and zeal, for their pastoral devotion, for their sufferings for the gospel's sake, for their tender concern (as under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd) for the flock of Christ. For all this and more, let their name never perish or be slighted. "I will give men for thy life," says the Lord to His Church, and let the peerless faith, ceaseless devotion, and selfless sacrifice of the Lord's true witnesses who have loved not their own lives even to the death that the truth of the Gospel might continue amongst us, witness to the love that Christ has for us. That He should give us such men as our ministers, is proof indeed of His grace toward us.

Let the sufferings of Paul, his ill-treatment at the hands of bitter foes and false friends, his stripes and imprisonments, in deaths oft, in hunger and nakedness, testify to us of what Christ must think of us, His sheep, that such men should be raised up who should fill up in themselves those sufferings of Christ which lie behind and beyond the cross, for His body's sake, which is the Church (Col 1:24).

If a man would be esteemed the true minister of Christ let him also be as Paul was, or as John - "our brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ".

Let all preachers beware, however, of that falsity (common in our times) whereby a man rates himself as indispensable and arrogates to himself language and function which belong to Christ alone, as in the deplorable ease of that individual whose publications make his own name pre-eminent on every page, and the Name of Christ scarcely at all, who recently boasted, "If you pray for me, I believe God will help me to

save many souls".

Evangelism is not a matter of hiring the right man, choosing the right moment, spending the right amount of money, using the appropriate amount of publicity. Paul had none of this. Luther knew nothing about it. The mighty works of God in the gospel have never owed anything to money or organising skill. Those who think otherwise do not know their Gospel of John. Least of all do they know the first chapter with its glorious prologue on spiritual creation, with Christ supreme, the source and the sole glory of it all.

Nor have they understood John's fifth chapter with its description of the prerogative of Christ in raising the spiritually dead, nor the seventeenth with its probing truth about the secret of those who are destined to salvation, having been given to Christ before the world was, nor the last chapter with its governing word from the Almighty Redeemer - "Cast thy net on the right side of the ship" - and the consequent haul of the specific number, one hundred and fifty and three - which as we hope to show later in this series, is the exact mystical and prophetic number of the elect church of Christ.

If these things are not true, then let men look to themselves and not to Christ, because God has abdicated His rule, creation has broken loose from the throne of the Almighty, and WE ARE LOST.

WORDS WHICH DESCRIBE THE WORD

We now proceed in our endeavour to exhibit the uniqueness of Christ in a new family of words which the inspired John introduces to theological thought, and which he brings up from the depths of that prophetic Word which God spake by all His holy prophets since the world began.

He begins with the word LOGOS (for those unfamiliar with the Greek - two short "o's", please! as in "cosmos"). This word of words we have already studied to explain. There are other vital and extraordinary words, which describe the unique glory, nature, and purpose of the Son of God in His incarnation.

Here in his Prologue, John presents Christ as the Life, the Light, the Unknown, THE ERKMOMENOS (the one who should come), the Shekinah, the Only Begotten. In a few graphic sentences full of these significant words, he presents a portrait of Christ which can only be interpreted as a portrait of absolute deity.

Pursuing the analogy of the first and natural creation, its light dispelling the darkness, glorious life appearing in manifold forms, he shows how in the New Creation (for which the Old was only the prelude or the overture) Christ is the only light and life, the glorious source and fountain of that new order in which the purposes of God are fully realised, and His manifold wisdom displayed.

The redemption of the Church through Christ is the means by which the nature and purpose of God are fully revealed. Paul writes "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known, by the Church (i.e. by means of the redemption of God's elect) the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3: 10).

Light is life -- eternal life: "In him was life and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). This light is knowledge and truth concerning God.

The light of which John speaks is not that of natural creation but of grace. This is the light which was promised in Isaiah: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined"(Isaiah 9: 2).

"For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee and his glory shall be seen upon thee".

(Isaiah 60: 2)

The "light which shineth in darkness" is that eternal life "which was with the Father and which was manifested unto us" (1 John 1: 2).

"AND THE DARKNESS COMPREHENDED IT NOT" John 1:5

The darkness is spiritual - it is the ignorance and blight of sin and unbelief. It is the moral depravity of the human race through the fall of man. The inability of the human mind in its best state to grasp, understand, and receive the truth, is the substance of John's statement here.

John has a unique way of stating the evangelical doctrines. In his teaching there is no glimmer of suggestion that there is in human nature that which can respond to, or receive the light, apart from an act of divine mercy, selective and sovereign.

As the darkness of the original state of Creation in Genesis 1 could not bring forth the light or utter that commanding word which could bring life to the birth out of a dead and barren ground, so man is destitute of all ability of will or comprehension, to raise himself to God and life and truth. - The blight of sin hangs heavily upon all his faculties and desires. There is a love of darkness and hatred of light which can only be remedied by a sovereign act of electing and predestinating grace. This the scriptures clearly reveal, especially in the writings of Paul (Ephesians 1), and this was the basic principle in the restoration of the Church in the 16th Century - that great and dynamic episode in the Church's history known as the Reformation. It was the recovery of the doctrine of grace - absolute mercy, unconditional and undeserved - which enabled the Reformers to overthrow the antichristian darkness which so long had reigned in the visible Church.

"THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD" (vs. 6-8)

Most appropriately, John proceeds to show the historical means by which an All-Wise and All-Merciful God restored light and life in the darkness of this world. John the Baptist was sent primarily to the Jewish people, as the inheritors and custodians of the divine testimony in the world, that they, deeply fallen into the same darkness of unbelief, pride and sin, which had engulfed the heathen world, might experience first the saving grace of God. The Promised One silently comes. A child appears in their midst: "He came unto his own and his own received him not".

The coming of John the Baptist in the purpose of redemption called together a nucleus of believing people from which should grow that glorious Kingdom destined to outlast and outgrow and overcome all other kingdoms of the earth - yet should be in midst of the earth, invisible and uncomprehended, a Kingdom and Church in which Christ should suffer and prevail and overcome, till all enemies be made His footstool:

"My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36)

"The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (Luke 17:20)

John the Baptist was "a burning and a shining light" but "he was not THAT light"

"That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (verse 9)

This introduces our next great word in the cycle of truth which John's Prologue unfolds, namely "The One who should come" or, as it is in the Greek:

THE ERKHOMENOS

Dominating the Gospel of John, as it also dominates the prophetic word throughout the O.T. scriptures, is this concept of Christ, "the true light that cometh into the world". Our authorised translators, not surprisingly, had difficulty with this sentence, and, as was their wont, they reproduced the literal order of the words of the text and left it to theology and exegesis to unravel the truth contained therein.

The termination of the text ("that cometh into the world") belongs not to "every man" but to "the true light". Hence the text may be rendered,

"That was the true light (which should come into the world) which lighteth every man".

In other words, John was not that light, for he could give no more than a testimony or a witness to the true light, who should come into the world, and who should, not by any reflected or borrowed light, but by Himself and from Himself, the true and only light and life of man, cause the darkness of mankind to be penetrated and illuminated by the bright rays of grace and truth of which He was the everlasting SUN.

The text does not teach that there is a light of reason or a light of conscience in "every man". However much this may be true, it is not the meaning of this verse. "The light which lighteneth every man" is the same light already referred to several times in the preceding verses. It is that light which is the life of men and which shines in the darkness of a morally depraved creation.

The contents of this great verse are deeply rooted in the Old Testament prophecies, as we shall now proceed to show.

"Every man" does not mean all men born into the world, but mankind as such, considered in that portion of humanity enlightened by faith and drawn from all parts of mankind and from all ages, nations, peoples and tongues. It is the elect part which represents the whole. This is in distinction to the limited ministry of Old Testament time, when God suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, and tolerated their ignorance (Acts 17: 30) until the appointed time when light should arise upon all mankind. That time was the gospel time. "Now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6: 2).

"THE ERKHOMENOS" in John ("the One who should come") is the LOGOS, the Everlasting Word, the Image of the Father, and the Revealer of the Godhead.

With our fallen race from its beginning, was this expectation of One who should come, who would destroy the Serpent's dominion and be the head of a New Creation. This One was to be known also as "the Second Man, the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. 15: 47)

"UNTIL SHILOH COME"

The first foreshadowing of His coming is in Genesis-3:15 - the great prophecy of the Seed of the Woman who was to destroy the Serpent's head (or dominion).

The prophecy found a yet clearer unfolding in the great promise of the Shiloh in Jacob's dying words in Genesis 49: 10: "UNTIL SHILOH COME".

Shiloh ("the Man of Peace" who should make peace between earth and heaven), gave His name to Solomon, the Son of David, who in his unique wisdom, peaceful reign, and building of the Temple foreshadowed the greater Solomon who should arise from amongst his remote descendants. The name "Solomon" is a construction of the name "SHILOH".

Luther, commenting upon the great Shiloh passage in Genesis 49, says: "This is a golden text and well worthy of remembrance, namely: that the Kingdom of Christ will not be such a kingdom as that of David, of whom it is said that he was a man of war. The Kingdom of Shiloh consists in this - that the Word by which it is ruled is heard believed and obeyed. All will be done by means of preaching: and this will be just the sign by which the Kingdom of Christ is distinguished from the kingdoms of this world which are governed by the sword and by physical power".

Luther adds, "The kingdom will be realised by the proclamation of the promise. Shiloh will be present with it and will be efficient and powerful through our tongue and mouth".

EZEKIEL AND THE SHILOH

The remarkable prophecy of Ezekiel (Chap. 21, verse 27) of the coming of Christ to set up His gospel kingdom on the ruins of the Davidic monarchy is based entirely on Jacob's description of the SHILOH.

Here are Ezekiel's words:

I will overturn, overturn, overturn it (i.e. David's Kingdom) UNTIL COME whose right it is and I will give it to him.

The three fundamental letters of SHILOH reappear in the words underlined, as we shall endeavour to show by transliteration. The Hebrew for "whose right it is" reads:

ASHR LO HMSHPT (Literally, "which to him the judgment")

The letters underlined read "Shiloh". There are no vowels in the original Hebrew. Vowel "points" were added in a much later age.

Ezekiel's prophecy denounces the wickedness into which David's successors had fallen and the consequent decree of God to "remove the diadem and take off the crown" (v. 25-26). This was to continue until Christ, the true Shiloh, should come, when the crown and kingdom of Grace (of which David's kingdom was but the foreshadowing, just as Aaron's priesthood was but the foreshadowing of Christ's true and eternal priesthood) - should be given to Christ.

This prophecy was fulfilled in the first advent of Christ when, having fulfilled the will of the Father in righteous obedience even unto the death of the Cross, Christ was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God to be a prince and a Saviour (see Acts 5:31). It is a false and dangerous millennialism which teaches that Christ's reign does not begin till His second Advent.

Shiloh has come and been crowned King of the Ages. He now sits on the throne of heaven and earth, from henceforth expecting until His foes be made His footstool.

"TAANATH - SHILOH" in Joshua 16: 6 is a place specially named in view of Jacob's prophecy. The Hebrew signifies "The appearance of Shiloh" or "Shiloh shall come".

There cannot, of course, be any doubt that the name Solomon was conferred by David upon his heir, in view of Jacob's prophecy, for the root of the two names is the same and David foresaw that Solomon would be a type of Shiloh.

(See 1 Chron 22: 6-10).

The Bridegroom in the Song of Solomon is this same heavenly, Solomon or Shiloh, and the heavenly bride is "the Shulamite" whose name also is derived from Shiloh in the feminine form.

(See Song of Sol. 6: 13).

The angelic chorus announcing Christ's birth at Bethlehem borrowed their words from Jacob's prophecy. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" is a paraphrase of Genesis 49:10, where Judah ("Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise") means praise, or glory, and Shiloh means peace. The termination of the Shiloh prophecy, "to him shall the gathering of the people be", reappears in the words of the angels, "Goodwill toward men". This is a prophecy of the ingathering of the election of grace from all nations into the kingdom of Shiloh.

Contrary to the usual interpretation of the words of the angels, the chorus does not foreshadow a peaceful earth, but proclaims the setting up of the mystic, invisible kingdom of peace.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of Jacob's dying utterance. The "hidden meaning" in these prophecies of the Coming Redeemer is one of the gems of inspiration, and remarkable internal proof of the supernatural nature of the Holy Scriptures. Not Reuben the firstborn; not Levi from whom came the High Priestly succession; not even Joseph, that grand and good man - but Judah, sinful, erring Judah: this was the man the prophecy named as the progenitor of David, Solomon and Shiloh, at a time when no-one could have dreamed that the fourth son of Jacob and Leah would be the favoured one through whom the birthright would descend.

Here we have in the inspired words of the dying saint, as he leaned upon the head of his bed surrounded by his twelve sons, the promise which was to keep the light of God burning in the blackness of that long night when the people of God waited in Old Testament times for the dawning of the day of Shiloh. Here in the words of Jacob are the Coming of Messiah. His mysterious name, the characteristics of His life on earth, His sure and certain and worldwide triumph - all in covered language, so designed that only faith can receive it.

Had they known this hidden wisdom, this concealed Word, says Paul, "they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory" (1 Cor. 2: 8).

Why then should God proclaim His truth so enigmatically? Why not say it all plainly rather than conceal it in words and names which require hard searching and meditation?

Because His Word is hidden from the eyes of the wicked. "I thank thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden those things from the wise and the prudent and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11: 25-26).

The message of God can only be received and understood by faith. Hence, prophecy is NOT merely "history written in advance". It is that, but much more than that. It is the hidden Word of God shining in the darkness, to be sought after and longed for and grasped by faith alone.

There is a ministry from the Lord which hardens the heart of the wicked while it rejoices the soul of the righteous; which conceals truth from the one while revealing it to the other. Those who seek for godly pearls will find them - if they sell all that they might be possessed of them.

To these Christ will be unveiled in new and ravishing beauties and they will sit down in the banqueting house to eat and drink with the Beloved.

"Judah", said the dying patriarch, as his prophetic eye saw beyond the solemn figure of his principal son, "Judah: thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise". The dying saint saw in his noble son, the royal personage of heaven's king who lay concealed in great Judah's name.

ISAIAH'S "ERKHOMENOS"

Isaiah perceives in this Coming One none other than the Lord God Himself. In his 40th chapter he declares the comfort which is to come to the people of God, beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist - "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness". The glory of the Lord would be revealed; to the cities of Judah would be proclaimed this word "Behold your God."

"Behold, the Lord God will COME...." (Isaiah 40:10)

Again he declares. "The redeemer shall COME to Zion" (Isaiah 59:20)

This "coming" of the Redeemer to Zion is the first ADVENT, not the second, or away goes John and prophecy, and away goes the hope of the gentiles.

It is in Malachi, however, that the promise of the Coming One is most clearly and categorically declared, as we should expect in the book which closes the canon of O.T. scripture.

MALACHI'S "NEXT EVENT"

THE ERKHOMENOS is "the next event" in Malachi's prophecy. John the Baptist is clearly seen as the forerunner in the spirit and power of Elijah:

"Behold, I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before me: And the Lord whom ye seek SHALL SUDDENLY COME to his temple, even the messenger (Angel) of the Covenant whom ye delight in: behold HE SHALL COME, saith the Lord of Hosts" - Mal. 3:1.

John the Baptist dwelt deep in this verse. In it he saw his own identity and perceived himself contrasted with the great, the ineffable, the Eternal One: - the Angel of the Covenant, the Unveiler and Revealer of God, who was with God and who also was God. Here in the one verse are the two "Messengers" - the human and the divine, the earthly and the heavenly.

"For him (John the Baptist) this passage was, as it were, the basis of his existence, the programme of his appearance, the defining of his position with respect to Christ". Dr. Hengstenberg)

Hence the doctrine of the ERKHOMENOS runs through the ministry of the Baptist.

"HE THAT COMETH after me is mightier than I" (Matt. 3:11).

"Art thou HE THAT SHOULD COME, or look we for another" (Matt. 11: 3).

Three times in the first chapter of John's gospel, the Baptist uses the word (15, 27, 30).

The apostle John's uses the same word constantly in reference to Christ:

"He that cometh from above is above all" (3: 31).

"This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (6: 14).

"I know that thou art the Christ the Son of God, that should come into the world" (11: 27).

The woman of Samaria says "I know that Messias cometh which is called the Christ". (4: 2.5)

So, to revert to our text (John 1: 9), it is conclusive that when John declares, "That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world", he is referring to Christ as the one who should come, and that this would be the mark by which He should be identified - that His coming would lighten the whole world. This has been fulfilled in the gospel which has gone forth into all the world. Incidentally, it is a most valuable key to the interpretation of all prophecy.

The true light which was to come into the world to shine out in this world's darkness was to be known and recognised by its complete contrast with all other lights. The prophets were lights in their day, as also was John the Baptist, but they were not THAT LIGHT, the true promised "light of lights".

This glorious Light would appear, said the prophecies, to lighten all ages, all time, and all peoples. When darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people, then would appear that bright uprising of the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4: 2). The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4: 6), would enlighten not just a Jewish fragment of the human race but would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

If these promises have not already been fulfilled in Christ, we are without the final proof that He is our Promised Deliverer and Redeemer.

The fulfillment of that Word is the most formidable proof that He is Lord and God, Jehovah and Saviour, the Word that was with God and was in fact God.

THE SHEKINAH

John 1: 14 - "The Word was made flesh and DWELT among us ... full of grace and truth".

The remarkable word translated "dwelt" in our Version, occurs in this, its verbal form, only in John's writings. It is the common word used as a noun in the Septuagint (the O.T. translation in Greek) and in the New Testament for the Tabernacle - the tent raised by Moses in the wilderness according to the divine specification given to him on Mount Sinai and used as the centre of worship for the tribes until the days of Solomon when the Temple was built to replace it.

The noun means "a dwelling place" and is compounded from three Greek letters (SKN) corresponding with the same three letters in the Hebrew denoting a tent or dwelling place.

There is no doubt whatever that the Greeks derived their word from the same Hebrew source.

The rabbinical period (between the two testaments) saw the development of the Hebrew form of the word into "Shekinah" (note the SKN) a manufactured word used by the rabbis to denote the appearance of the

glory of the Lord between the golden cherubim which, in the Mosaic tabernacle, overshadowed the "Mercy Seat" or "place of propitiation for sin", beyond the inner veil of the sanctuary.

Into this Most Holy region, only the High Priest penetrated, and that but once a year as he carried the blood of the sacrifice on the annual Day of Atonement, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

This appearance of the glory of the Lord between the cherubim is referred to by David in Psalm 80:1 "Thou that dwellest between the cherubim" (See also King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19: 15).

This glorious symbol of the Divine Presence is fully developed by the prophet Ezekiel in his vision of the glory of the Lord departing from the temple at Jerusalem prior to the Chaldean judgment.

"Upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it, And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord". (Ezekiel 1: 26-28)

This splendid enlargement of the Shekinah appearance in Ezekiel's vision with its foreshadowing of the incarnation in the "appearance of a man above upon it" prepared the way for John's use of the word: "The Word was made flesh and DWELT (SKN) among us" (John 1:14).

Only here and four times in Revelation (7:15; 12:12; 13:6 and 21:3) is the verb used in this form in the N.T. In the last reference we have the words -

And. I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell (SKN) with them and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them and be their God.

Here is the final development of the glorious word which we have been examining.

The dwelling of God with His people in the O.T. tabernacle was a typical and physical showing forth of that work of atonement by which a holy God was able to dwell with a sinful people.

The majesty is further unfolded in Ezekiel where the bow of the covenant (the Everlasting Covenant of Grace) appears as the glory surrounding the throne of God on which Christ ("the appearance of a man") sits and reigns as the Mediator of His people.

The final development is in John 1:14 where God becomes Man so that as man's Redeemer God might dwell among us according to the original concept of creation.

The eternal state presented in Revelation 21 shows how in the accomplishment of the design of redemption under the Everlasting Covenant all is completed: man's eternal condition (that is, mankind in the election of grace) is one of glorious dwelling and companionship with God through the Mediator, the God-Man, Christ Jesus.

Revelation can carry us no further, for this is the consummation, this is the eternal state of the redeemed and this is the Redeemer's own reward, when He will welcome "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9) and bring her into everlasting mansions (John 14:2).

Mystically, Solomon tells us in his Song:

"My beloved is gone down into his garden to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies" (Song of Sol. 6: 2-3).

Christ has His reward for His obedience unto death, and we have ours in Him. The lilies among which He feeds are His elect, and the spices of the garden through which He moves are their worship and adoration. So He breathes the atmosphere of heaven created by the prayers and praises of His saints wafted upward in gales of glorious adoration by the breath of the Spirit:

Oh, I am my beloved's And my beloved's mine:

He brings a poor vile sinner

Into His house of wine.

I stand upon. His merits;

I know no other stand

Not e'en where glory dwelleth

In Emmanuel's Land.

Oh, well it is for ever -

Oh, well for evermore:

My nest hung in no forest

Of all this death-doomed shore.

Yea, let the vain world vanish,

As from the ship, the strand -

Since glory, glory dwelleth In Emmanuel' s Land.

And when our theology becomes a rapture like that, we may know that we held aright the truth of Christ and God and atonement and heaven and eternity.

"And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (v. 14).

That "glory" is the Shekinah glory, and denotes that Christ is the unveiling of the divine Presence among men in God's redemptive purpose to dwell with His people.

THE ONLY BEGOTTEN (MONOGENES)

Here, finally, is the designation which completes John's unique presentation of Christ. Only in John's writings does this word (it is a single word in the Greek) occur in relation to Christ. To John it was given peculiarly to be the one who should use a term which finally and fully exalts Christ to the highest conception of Godhead.

John's use of the term "only begotten" is derived from Genesis 22. He uses the word "MONOGENES" in relation to Christ five times - here, and inverse 18, John 3:16, 18, and 1 John 4:9.

In Genesis 22: verses 2 and 16, Isaac is referred to as "thine only son, whom thou lovest". As Abraham "did not withhold" so the Father, in love, "gave" His only-begotten Son (John 3:16).

Paul (Hebrews 11:17) tells us that Abraham offered up "his only begotten son". The word which John uses only of Christ, is shown therefore to be derived from the book of Genesis.

That the word means more than to describe an only son is clear from the fact that Isaac was not, in fact, the "only begotten" of Abraham, for there was Ishmael and the children by Keturah. In the case of Isaac the designation indicates the exclusive birthright which belonged to him as the sole inheritor of his father's name, purpose, place and significance in prophecy.

Fully developed in Christ the term does not and cannot refer to a historic moment of birth, but to an exclusive and unique relationship by which Christ is set forward as the Only Son of the Eternal Father by an act of eternal begetting in which is bequeathed to the Son the Father's name, nature, purpose and glory, so that as the Father is, so is the Son; what the Father is, that the Son is likewise.

In the explicit words of the Athanasian Creed, "Such as the Father is, such is the Son and such is the Holy Ghost".

The Father is the eternal source or fount of being, of whom the Son is begotten, not by a process in time, but by eternal generation in the divine state of no-beginning. The Holy Ghost is not made, nor created, nor begotten - but proceeding: that is, in the order of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the THIRD, proceeding from, the Father and the Son in a "procession" which never began, but is the eternal fact and condition of the triune God.

As the Only Begotten, Christ has eternal right to the Godhead and all that the Father is or possesses is the right and the prerogative of the Son.

Hence, says John:

"The Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into his hand" (John 3:35).

Again: "The Father loveth the Son and sheweth him all things that himself doeth" (John 5:20).

The Son does nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do (John 5:19). This indicates the filial relation between the Persons. There is a perfect unanimity in the Godhead, a oneness of thought, purpose and action, in a region of pure and eternal love.

The false view of the atonement which has troubled the evangelical world so long - that the Son thrust Himself between an angry God and the guilty sinner - aims a fatal blow at the integrity of the Godhead and it is small wonder that there is so little of "the fear of God" in our congregations or our preaching. The Father SENT the Son to be the Saviour of the world. God so loved the world that He GAVE His only begotten Son.

It is proper to the Son always to do that which pleases the Father that only and always which the Father determines and decrees. Then at the last, when the Son has executed all which is in the Father's wisdom and love and purpose, He will render up to the Father the completed Kingdom and return to that bosom

which He never left, that God in Three Persons might eternally appear to be what He always was - One God, All in All (See 1 Cor. 15: 28).

As the Only Begotten, the Son was (IS) always "subject" to the Father, not in inferiority of Person but in the ORDER of the Godhead, as the Holy Spirit is always the THIRD, never acting independently.

In John, supremely, the mystery of the Holy Trinity is unfolded. In the Old Testament, this mystery is only shadowed forth in a way which requires New Testament light to make it plain. In John's writings, supremely Christ "shows us plainly of the Father" (therefore, by consequence, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit). See John 14 - 16.

Appropriately, therefore, it had to be John who should give us in a sentence the final statement of the doctrine of the triune Godhead:

"And there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one". 1 John 5: 7.

We have elsewhere dealt with the Arian falsehood that this statement is an "interpolation" inserted by the wicked Trinitarians. Those interested will find our defence of this text and of the Authorised Version and the Received Text of the Holy Scripture, in our treatise, "The Wretched Woman of John Eight".

Christ is Son and Only Begotten, in a sense entirely different from human conceptions of paternal and filial relationship. Christ is Son in that He is the bearer of the Father's name and nature, "the express image of his person", the reproduction of the Godhead in filial form. He is the only begotten because there is not such another. He only lay from all eternity in that everlasting bosom. To Him it is given to be the Revealer of the Godhead. His are all things which have been created. He is the inheritor of all the Father is, but as the Father never dies or changes, and as the Son was never born historically (except on becoming Man), Christ is what He always was and always will be. When on earth, He was also in heaven. All that the Father is, the Son is, and all the Father's glory is His likewise. In honouring the Son we honour the Father, but he who dishonours the Son, belittles Him, takes from Him His deity, destroys God and destroys all true religion. Without the God-head of Christ there can be no atonement, and no hope for fallen man.

"FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH".

Hengstenberg says well that "in verse 14 we have before us a new proposition, the proper acme of the Prologue, for here the Logos of the opening verses returns. To the fullest expression of the mystery of the advent of Christ in the flesh, is added in. verses 15-18 the most sublime statement of the honours of Christ, and of the glorious gifts and graces which have been conferred through Him on the human race".

"Full of grace and truth". Here John takes a description of absolute deity found in the Old Testament and gives it to Christ.

In Exodus 34:6, the Lord (Jehovah) proclaims Himself to Moses as "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth".

This is the source of John's statement - "full of grace and truth". "This is a designation which raises Christ far above the stage of humanity, and presupposes omnipotence and true divinity". (Hengstenberg)

"John bare witness of Him and cried saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for he was before me" (v. 15).

"The thought is the pre-mundane existence of Christ, His superhuman nature and dignity". (Hengstenberg)

The vast compass of the ministry of John the Baptist, his well-formed theology, and the completeness of his doctrine of Christ, is one of the wonders of the Holy Word of God. Where was this man taught, and by whom? How did he obtain this knowledge?

In the deserts of Judea, in the great solitudes of the wilderness where Elijah (his own forerunner) heard the voice of God, this man meditated upon the Old Testament writings, and God spoke to him of the coming of that One upon whom all history waited, who was before all things, who would appear as man, yet who was God, the only begotten Son, and who would be the sin-bearing lamb of sacrifice foretold by Isaiah (53: 6-7).

"He was before me" says this John. Long before Christian theology was developed this man knew it all. The Redeemer was, and is, and is to come, none other than the Almighty. John the Baptist had no doubt of the pre-existence of Christ, nor of His divine dignity. "Though I am His forerunner yet He preceded me" - this is what John is saying.

"GRACE FOR GRACE"

V. 16 "And of his fulness have all we received and grace for grace."

The Baptist is speaking in the name of the "Israel of God" in all ages.

"All we ever knew or received; all the mercy and truth, guidance and protection we ever enjoyed in our history was His. Out of His fulness, His inexhaustible grace, his fathomless mercy, we all have received, and the One from whom we received it, the God of Israel; the Redeemer of us all, stood before me in the flesh and I knew Him as the Eternal One, the Son of God". This is what John is saying.

The grace of the Old Covenant and the grace of the New are here in contrast. The lesser light and hope of the Law are exchanged in Him for the fulness of grace and truth in the Gospel.

This is what "grace for grace" means. It was grace indeed, in times past, that God should illuminated the darkness of man's ignorance and shame with the torch of hope - that a Redeemer would be provided, that mercy would find a way - that death and the grave would be destroyed.

It was grace indeed that God should have separated for Himself a people to whom He would give His Law and His ordinances, which, like a mirror, would catch the rays of the rising sun of His mercy and reflect beforehand the forgiveness of sin and the hope of immortality.

But greater grace still was that mercy which came when that peerless sun of righteousness rose at last over the horizon of time and bathed the whole world with living light and healing beams.

Now is death abolished. Now is the Word of Life fully revealed through Him who was crucified, dead and buried, who was and is "The resurrection and the life, and he who believeth in Him, though he were dead yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth, should never die". Now has God come down to redeem His people and His own arm has brought salvation. The year of His redeemed has come and the acceptable time has been proclaimed.

"IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST"

"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (verse 17).

How great the contrast between law and gospel! Even that which was glorious (the Law) has now no glory by reason of that Covenant which excels it in glory (the Gospel). The face of Moses shone when he came down the Mount, so that he must put a veil over his countenance. But now is the full light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord revealed in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. Chap. 3 and 4)

"Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ". And again the language is borrowed from the prophets. Micah (7:20) in that most glorious peroration to his prophecy, beginning with the words "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity....." concludes:

"Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old".

So are the promises of the Old Testament made "yea and amen" in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

ABSOLUTE DEITY

The prologue concludes with John's second reference to the Only Begotten:

"No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him". (verse 18)

This remarkable verse is worthy of a whole volume in itself. We can but give an intimation of where the greatness of its conception lies. God is unapproachable as to His essential being. "Dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see". (1 Tim. 6:16).

Who can see God save God? Who can know God except God? The visions of the glory of God granted to exceptional men in the Old Testament were visions of the Angelic appearance of the Logos - or, to be more intelligible, Christ, as the Revealer of God, showed Himself in angelic form, preparing the way for His own incarnation. John (the apostle) is enlarging upon the statement that the Law only was given through Moses, but grace and truth, the exclusive virtues of the Godhead, came by Jesus Christ, who therefore was God. Yet how can this be, in that it is impossible for God to be seen? The answer is, that there is an unveiling of God in the Person of the Only Begotten who, being made flesh, has shown forth and made visible the Name and glory of God in Himself. That He (the Son) dwells in the bosom of the Father indicates the intimacy and oneness, in the Godhead, of the Father and the Son.

Here again we have a dramatic and final declaration of Christ's Godhead, who, even when on earth IS in the bosom of the Father which He never left nor could leave; just as in chapter 3:13, the Lord Christ declares to Nicodemus that He, the Son of Man, though on earth, was nevertheless in heaven - that is, eternally with the Father, and inseparable from Him even in the mystery of the Incarnation, when He lay an embryo in the womb of the Virgin, a babe upon her breast, a child in Nazareth, or the Victim on the Cross expiring in agony and blood.

There never was, never could be, and never will be any interruption of communion between the Father and the Son, and those who interpret otherwise the so-called 'cry of dereliction' on the cross had better look to their understanding. We have fully dealt with this matter in our pamphlet, "The Concert of the

Trinity" and its sequel, the pamphlet entitled, "Decline and Fall".

On verse 18 Luther writes, "Therefore all stands entirely on the Son: no man even knows anything of God but such as is revealed to him by the Son, who fully knows the Father's heart, that the whole world might be brought under the Lord Christ and be subject unto Him; for without Him no-one can be saved."

Hengstenberg adds: "He who is without Christ is excluded from the knowledge of God, and thus from the source of all salvation and blessedness.....By 'seeing' is designated the entire knowledge of God... The closeness of the relation which is designated by the being in the bosom of the Father, was not disturbed by the incarnation. Against the assertion that John had in mind the exalted (i.e., the risen and glorified) Christ who has returned to the bosom of the Father, chap. 3.13 is decisive, where the Son of God in His abasement designates Himself as in heaven; as also the words, 'I and my Father are one'. So soon as we are really in earnest with respect to the divinity of Christ, it becomes a matter of course that the intimateness of His relation to God cannot have been essentially altered by the incarnation."

EPILOGUE

John is writing from Patmos. The long night of the Church's sufferings had begun under the primary persecution by Domitian. The pestilential heresy of Cerinthus, father of all that prolific brood which down the ages has attacked and impugned the doctrine of Christ's deity and equality in the Godhead, had raised its head in the Church. To enemies without and within, "John, our brother" proclaimed in eloquence unexampled and language unqualified, the absolute deity, supremacy, eternity, omnipotence of that glorious One, who was with the Father, always in the bosom of the Father, appeared as our Redeemer and Mediator, bore our sufferings and curse, expiated our sin by His own blood on the Cross, rose from the dead, sits at the right hand of power on the Eternal Throne, intercedes for us, is ever with us, and one grand day will return in glory to receive us into the everlasting mansions He has gone to prepare for us.

Those who are troubled need but fly to take refuge in this knowledge of Christ as their God and Saviour. Nothing can fail. He rides the storm. He walks on the tossing waves. He is pledged by His very life to preserve His own and carry them through all that can ever be against them. We can but trust - and watch with Him one little hour.

ADDENDUM

THE DIVINE ORDER OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.

The four Gospels are the wonder of Creation. They are in correct chronological order, despite false critical theories which have even invaded the evangelical encampment. The imagination that there was a "common source", an original collection of sayings and acts of Christ from which grew first the gospel according to Mark, later filled out by Matthew and further modified by Luke, is one of the myths by which the enemy of all truth introduces the first element of doubt as to the credibility of the whole.

We waste no time on fabrications of this nature other than to use them to underline a glorious truth.

Only two of the "gospels" were written by apostles - Matthew and John. The other two were written under the tutelage of apostles by men of lesser status - Mark and Luke. The Word of God in the New Testament proceeded from apostles alone. That is why we believe in the apostolic authorship of Hebrews which,

being one of the chief doctrinal treatises of the Christian faith, must needs be written by an apostle; and there was only one apostle who could have written it - Paul. Hence the opening book of the New Testament was of necessity written by an apostle, for to the apostles alone was it given to sit upon the twelve thrones of authority in the Church (Matthew 19:28).

It would not have been fitting that Mark, who lacked the apostolic status, should commence the New Testament of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, much less some anonymous or hypothetical character clumsily erected in the bookrooms of the critics and unbelievers and masquerading in history under the dubious signature of "Q" - (a sort of code name for a manuscript specially invented to bolster up a theory).

The "common source" of the four Gospels lies far beyond that world, and far beyond all worlds. The "Common Source" is the Eternal Word Himself, that Word which was made flesh and dwelt among us.

To Matthew first the commission came to write the history of the Incarnate Word on earth. Mark followed the apostolic lead, in due reverence for what had been already written, compiling his complementary record under the direct authority of Peter. Then came Luke, the companion of Paul, writing his two histories (the Gospel and the Acts) under the direct authority of the Apostle to the Gentiles, to fill out the record and keep it straight in the face of the attempts even then being made by unauthorised persons to enter the sacred field of divine history

(Luke 1:1).

The Gospel of John completed the holy and historic task, appearing for the first time when the great heresies concerning the Person of Christ began to arise to trouble the Church at the same time that Satan was stirring up the enmity of the world to crush by physical power, the Kingdom of Christ on earth.

John. Owen writes, "It was the eruption of the poisonous brood of heretics, questioning the deity of the Son of God (originating) in Cerinthus, that gave occasion to the writing of the gospel by St. John".

Dr. Owen is right, but only partly right. He overlooked Patmos and the peculiar significance of the first general persecution of the Church. Cerinthus within and Domitian without - these were the two principal agents of Satan's Kingdom, as they are to this present day.

John wrote from the position of his own apostolic authority to establish for all time the full doctrine of the deity of Christ as the Only Begotten Son, the Word of God, the Prince Emmanuel of heaven - and on that doctrine to establish the comfort, security and eventual triumph of Christ's Church in her age-long conflict.

We have already shown the falsity of that opinion which regards John as the Apostle of meekness and sentimental love. He was Boanerges, son of thunder, and there is more thunder and lightning in John's writings than in all the rest of the New Testament put together.

It was an apostle (Matthew), therefore, who began to write the earthly history of Christ and it was an apostle who wrote the fourth gospel which closed and completed that history.

But there is a difference between John and the other three writers. John's Gospel is more than a history - it is a sermon. It is a sermon on a text: "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name". (John 20:31). Most of us have noticed how John keeps up a running commentary of his own as his story advances - so much is this the case that it is often difficult to determine where the narrative ends and where John's comments begin.

(See John 1:16-18; 2:24-25; 3:16-21; 3:31-36 etc.)

Always, John is teaching. His Gospel bears all the marks of careful selection and construction. It is built on the divine number seven, begins and ends with a Holy Week of seven days, and records seven miracles during the Lord's earthly ministry. The eighth lies beyond the resurrection (Chap.21:6). Each miracle is integrated into the teaching ministry of the Lord and the eighth displays in the draught of fishes (and, their specific number 153) the future ministry of the Church in the calling of the gentiles. We shall see the certification of this when we come to the last chapter of John. Even the excellent Hendriksen has not heard of it, though he records seven other opinions on the draught of fishes. Incidentally, he wavers with extreme uncertainty as to whether Peter did right or wrong to go fishing. Oh, woe!

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