

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

into what is common enough in the composition of those who have not studied, or who do not regard, the "wisdom of words" and the "excellency of speech"—a little tanglement of phraseology. It is common enough in New Testament diction. But in this case the tanglement may be disentangled thus: the Apostle had been "set apart to God's gospel, which, under the form of a promise concerning his Son, he announced afore, through his prophets, in sacred writings."

JAMES MORISON.

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

XI.—THE LATER TEACHING.

LOOKED at on the surface, the conflict of Jesus with the Jews seems but an ignoble waste of the noblest Being earth has known. And in many respects it was what it seemed. The antagonists of Christ were poor enough, especially when compared with Him. Shallow, selfish, short-sighted men; bigots in creed and in conduct; capable of no sin disapproved by tradition, incapable of any virtue unenjoined by it; too respectable to be publicans and sinners; at once too ungenerous to forgive sins against their own order, and too blind to see sins within it—they remain for all time our most perfect types of fierce and inflexible devotion to a worship instituted and administered by man, but of relentless and unbending antagonism to religion as the service of God in spirit and in truth. And to think of our holy and beautiful Christ, his heart the home of a love that enfolded the world, his spirit the stainless and truthful mirror of the Eternal, his mouth dropping with every word pearls of divinest wisdom—to think of

Him hated and wasted by these men, is to think, as it were, of the crown of God, with all its stars, dimmed, corroded, dissolved by mists bred in dismal swamps formed by the decayed life of ancient worlds. The conflict of evil with good is inevitable; we dare not mourn it, dare only welcome it as the hard but necessary way to peace and perfection. But as the issues are immense, we expect the struggle to be manifestly immense also. If the Prince of God stands forth to fight, we cannot but wish it to be with a godlike adversary, and not with men who hold tradition to be as sacred as the law and temple of their God.

But the ignoble was all on one side; on the other was a magnanimity that only became the more magnanimous in the struggle with the little and the mean. As the darkness deepened round the Hero's path his heroism shone the brighter; as the conflict thickened his strength became calmer, mightier, more manifest. His consciousness grew more exalted as his way grew more troubled. The shadows that fell upon his spirit were pierced and penetrated and made translucent by the light which streamed from within. And the change in his spirit was marked by a correspondent change in his teaching. He became sadder, was in speech as in soul more the Man of Sorrows, despised and rejected of men; less the exalted servant of God coming in beauty over the mountains and through the valleys to publish peace. The contradiction of sinners was the prophecy of Calvary. The iron had entered his soul, and his heart was bearing its cross. The spring-time was passed; autumn with its falling leaves and withered flowers had come. Cities, once zealous, were cold; crowds, once ardent, were suspicious; ene-

mies, once soft-spoken and fearful, were harsh and arrogant. But just when men were falsest and feeblest He was truest to Himself. His person came into the foreground; He Himself became the great theme of his discourses. He proclaimed Himself to be greater than David or Solomon, as the last and greatest of the prophets, as above the law, as superior to the temple, as the revealer of God. He declared Himself to be the Bread of Life, the Life of the World, the Light of the World. The impending suffering He glorified; the death that was coming so surely He interpreted into a sacrifice of universal efficacy and eternal worth. The gathering clouds left his soul clear. His confidence in his cause and triumph seemed to grow in calmness and rise in strength as the storm increased. His spirit had depths storms could not reach, heights they could not disturb. The fierce wind may vex the surface of the ocean till its waves look like loose and rolling mountains, but down fathoms deep the waters lie placid as the lake smiling in the summer sun. The clouds may darken the sky, and speak to us of tempest and thunder and gloom; but away above, on the everlasting hills, eternal calm and soft sunshine are making radiant sleep. So while human passions were darkening Christ's path, and human enmities were preparing the doom that was to be his glory, sweet peace sat like the blessed angel of God within his spirit, and filled it with celestial light and joy.

The conflict of Jesus with the Jews was thus fruitful of the most opposite results. While without Him it created an atmosphere of doubt, suspicion, and estrangement, within Him it marked the rise of a clearer and more certain consciousness of his nature and mission.

The antagonism of the Pharisees affected the people. They could hardly imagine that the men who had been to their fathers and were to themselves like the incarnated wisdom of the past could be altogether wrong. Names, too, especially when coined in the schools, are moral forces of a very powerful order, and so to be called "the Friend of publicans and sinners," "a speaker of blasphemies," a Sabbath breaker," a child and agent of "Beelzebub," was to be enveloped in a set of associations that only the deepest knowledge and truest love could pierce and disperse. Then, other influences came to the help of the custom that almost compels the led to follow the leaders. Jesus was too true to the Divine ideal He embodied to gratify the wishes or fulfil the hopes of the men who thought to make Him an idol. The idol of the crowd must not transcend it; if he does, the passion that prompted to worship passes into the fury that pants to destroy. To be hailed by a people that did not understand Him, must have been to Jesus but as the prelude of a cry that was to end in the shout, "Crucify him!"

Most significantly the first word of doubt and disappointment comes from the Baptist. The man who had proclaimed Jesus as the Christ was also the man who sent to ask, "Art thou he who should come, or do we look for another?"¹ The question was that of a man not disillusioned, but doubtful, expectant, wishful, yet afraid that the hope which grew dearer and intenser in his solitude might prove to be false. He saw much in Jesus to justify it, his preaching, his call, his power to move and inspire the people; but he also saw much to condemn it, in his obscurity, his refusal to exercise

¹ Matt. xi. 3.

political power, his love of seclusion and Galilee, his dislike of publicity and Jerusalem. The Baptist, as a prophet, could admire the great Preacher; but, as an ascetic, could only doubt the claims and authority of one who was reputed to be "gluttonous and a wine-bibber." So the conflict of doubt and desire, fear and hope, urged him to make the touching appeal to Jesus, to which Jesus so finely answered — "Go and shew John those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."¹

But the people did not halt and hesitate like John. More governed by impulse, less possessed by an exalted and spiritual faith, they took an ungratified wish for an unfulfilled hope. They did not feel, like the Baptist, the Divine beauty that lived even in the blurred image of Jesus presented to him by curious report, but they hastily concluded that He who was not a Messiah in their sense could be no Messiah at all. So when Jesus returned to the cities where his mightiest works had been done, He found coldness: they refused repentance, and He announced judgment.² But even while the pain of desertion was freshest and most bitter, the consciousness of Divine Sonship was deepest and most real, and He knew Himself as the Son who knew the Father, whom the Father knew, the Revealer of his word and will to the world.³

Now here we find the root and source of the peculiarities that distinguish Christ's later teaching. It is more personal than the earlier, more concerned with the claims and meaning of his person, the reason of his

¹ Matt. xi. 4-5.

² Ibid. xi. 20-24.

³ Ibid. xi. 25-27.

coming, the authority of his words and purpose of his work. In the very degree men turned from Him the face of the Father turned to Him, and so his filial consciousness became fuller, clearer, more intense. The two things, the growth of isolation and antagonism on the one hand, and the growth of this fuller consciousness of his person and work on the other, are variously indicated in the Gospels. The attempt had evidently been made to excite the jealousy and fear of Herod, to rouse him to action by representing Jesus as a dangerous political character, plotting and teaching treason.¹ The death of John was premonitory; and Jesus interpreted it as meaning that the man who did not spare the Baptist would, when his passions were roused, as little spare Him.² And so with an unfriendly people and a jealous ruler, prone to swift and cruel deeds, Galilee became to Him an uncongenial home; and He "departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon."³ It was in those days of wandering and desertion, when He had come into the region of Cæsarea Philippi, that He asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?"⁴ The answer shewed the conflict of opinion, and elicited the further question—"But whom say ye that I am?" Peter's answer—significant of what his most esoteric teaching had been, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"—was hailed and ratified by the singular and suggestive words, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." This remarkable response not only recognized and proclaimed the reality of his Christhood and Sonship, and faith in them as the necessary condition alike of disciple-

¹ Luke xiii. 31.

² Matt. xiv. 1, 2, 13.

³ Ibid. xv. 21.

⁴ Ibid. xvi. 13.

ship and beatitude, but also ascribed the faith expressed in the confession to the special inspiration of God. The more perfectly the consciousness of his disciples reflected his own, the more certain was He that his Father was in them as in Him, that human apostacy only contributed to the reality of his Divine work. But while antagonism developed in Himself and his disciples this higher consciousness, it also made the dark and dread forms of the future stand out before his eye. "From that time forth he began to shew" to the men who had confessed that He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," "how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."¹ The shadow of the cross never lifted from his soul; it saddened his spirit and deepened the meaning of his speech. His words became, as they had never been before, expository of Himself, of his relation to God and man, to death and life. And so the later is unlike the earlier teaching. He speaks less like a King proclaiming his kingdom, enforcing obedience, creating in man the sense of benevolent order and beneficent law, than like a Redeemer who redeems by death, a Deliverer who delivers by the sacrifice of Himself. And so within the apparent history He helps us to see a real Divine presence and purpose. While priests and rulers were to their own infamy and disaster plotting his death, He was preparing to make it the symbol of his truth, of his might to save.

Now here we have the point of view from which we must try to interpret his teaching as a transcript or explication of his own consciousness. His speech is

¹ Matt. xvi. 21.

the incarnation of his spirit, the mirror of his thought. His person is reflected in his words ; the worth of the one explains the worth of the other.

His words do not expound a theology—they institute a religion. This is their essential and distinctive characteristic. In the Acts and the Epistles we have a theology : the disciples explain the mission and sayings of their Master, especially in their relation to the mind and will of God, and to the state and destinies of men. But the Gospels simply record the words which reveal the consciousness of Jesus, which help us, as it were, to stand within his spirit and know the Person who created our religion as He knew Himself. And it is because his words stand in this relation to his Person that they are so creative. It is of far greater importance that we know what Jesus thought of Himself than that we know what Paul thought of Him ; what the Son knew of the Father is of diviner worth to the world than what the disciples thought concerning Him. Religion precedes theology ; every theology runs back into a religion, and every spiritual religion into a creative personality ; and so the Person and words of Jesus underlie alike the religion of Christ and the discourses and discussions of his apostles. It is more possible to interpret the theology through the religion than the religion through the theology. Paul is inexplicable without Christ, but Christ is not unintelligible without Paul. The disciple explains the Master only after the Master has explained the disciple.

We can hardly approach the words of Christ without reverence. As we study them we almost feel as if we were overhearing his speech, or looking into his spirit, or watching the ebb and flow of emotion on his

wondrous face. Theologians of a certain school have almost resented the attempt to present Christ the Teacher, as if it were better for Christian thought to be busied with his work than with his words. But what without his teaching would his Person and death signify? Are they not mutually necessary, reciprocally explicative? Would not his teaching be aimless without his death? Does not his death grow luminous only as He Himself is made its interpreter? His words have been a sort of infinite wonder to the world, a kind of Divine heart and conscience to it. They are but few; we can read in an hour all of his thought that survives in the forms human art has created to clothe and immortalize the human spirit. Nor was He careful to preserve them, wrote no word, commanded no word to be written; spoke, as it were, into the listening air the words it was to hear and preserve for all time. And the speech thus spoken into the air has been like a sweet and subtle Divine essence in the heart of humanity. If we imagine a handful of sweet spices cast into the ocean subduing its salt and brackish bitterness, and making it for evermore pleasant to the taste; or a handful of fragrance thrown into the air spreading and penetrating till it filled the atmosphere of every land, and made it healing and grateful as the breath of Paradise;—we may have an imperfect physical analogy of what Christ's words have been, and what his teaching has done for the thought and spirit of man. Had the words of any other great teacher perished; had the wisdom of Socrates, or the science of Aristotle, or the eloquence of Cicero, or the poetry of Æschylus or Sophocles been lost, our world had still been little different from what it is to-day. But had the words of Christ vanished into silence, passed

into the great halls of oblivion, or had they never been spoken, our world had been quite other than it is, and been far from as wise and good as it is now. So great and infinite in value have been those teachings, in quantity smallest of fragments, in quality greatest and most priceless of the treasures that have enriched the world.

In proceeding to details, we had better start with Christ's teaching as regards Himself. Here our first duty must be to interpret the two descriptive titles, "Son of man" and "Son of God."

I. "Son of man." This title is in the New Testament significantly enough used, with one exception, by Christ alone. The exception occurs in the speech of Stephen, in the very last words he is allowed to utter. "Behold," he cries, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."¹ The position is remarkable and significant, expresses dignity, dominion, authority. And these are ideas that are usually associated with the title, and that it was manifestly intended to connote. Thus it is said, the Father "hath given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man."² In one of the great eschatological discourses we read, "As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be;" and He is to be seen "coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."³ The pre-eminent dignity the title is meant to express is evident from the text where it first occurs: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."⁴ The force of the passage

¹ Acts vii. 56.

² John v. 27.

³ Matt. xxiv. 27, 30.

⁴ *Ibid.* viii. 20.

lies evidently in the contrast of right with fact, of ideal position with real experience. These usages place us on the line along which the explanation must be sought. The title belongs to one who possesses authority, and can execute judgment, and first appears in the later prophetic literature. Daniel says,¹ "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven." The vision is one of a cycle in which symbolical expression has been given to the essential characters of the great empires of the past and present. The symbols employed were beasts: the first, a lion with eagle's wings; the second, a bear, with ribs riven from a side in its teeth; the third, a leopard, four-winged, four-headed; the fourth, a mythical beast, "dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly." The empires thus symbolized are brutal, based on mere fierce strength. When their dominion ceases, the one "like the Son of man" comes in the clouds of heaven; "and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him."² The meaning is evident: the symbols of the old empires were beasts, but the symbol of the new Divine kingdom is "the Son of man." Its character was humanity, as theirs was inhumanity; it is personified in gentle and forethoughtful reason, as they were personified in cruel and selfish force. "The Son of man" institutes a kingdom that carries out the purposes of God as to man, and realizes in humanity his reign.

The title thus emphasizes the humanity of Him who bears it, but a humanity that accomplishes a Divine work, creates and controls a society which is so finely human because so entirely a realization of the thought

¹ Dan. vii. 13.

² Ibid. vii. 14.

or mind of God as to man. Schleiermacher rightly said: "Christ would not have adopted this title had He not been conscious of a complete participation in human nature. But his use of it would have been meaningless, had He not had a right to it which other men could not possess. And consequently the meaning was a pregnant one, marking the distinctive differences between Him and other men."¹ These references shew the powers and prerogatives that belonged to the title, and the duties they involved. "The Son of man" is the bond between earth and heaven, belongs in an equal degree to both; He is the medium through which God reaches man and man reaches God.² As the One who unites and unifies earth and heaven, He is the Source of the Divine life in man, is the Light that creates, the Bread that maintains, life in the world.³ As the Creator of the new society, the Founder of the Divine kingdom, He has the right to repeal whatever impedes its progress, to modify or adapt to its service⁴ old institutions like the Sabbath. He must, too, exercise rule, see that his citizens are worthy of his city.⁵ If to exercise authority be his right, to obey is man's duty; and confession becomes the subjects of the King.⁶ But these powers and prerogatives are rooted in sacrifice. Without death, without resurrection, "the Son of man" cannot fulfil his mission, carry through his Divine work.⁷ He suffers that He may save; by death He gives his life a ransom for the many.⁸

The title, so often and so emphatically used, enables us to see what Christ conceived Himself to be, and

¹ *Glaubenslehre*, ii. 91, third edition.

² John i. 51, iii. 13, vi. 62, viii. 28.

³ *Ibid.* vi. 53.

⁴ Matt. xii. 8.

⁵ *Ibid.* xiii. 41.

⁶ *Ibid.* xvi. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.* xvii. 9, 12, 22, 23, xx. 18.

⁸ *Ibid.* xviii. 11; Mark xiv. 21-25.

where He believed Himself to stand: He affirmed that He possessed our common human nature: He was a "Son." But He also affirmed his pre-eminence—"the Son of man." Other persons had been, or were, sons of individual men, members of particular families or nations; but Jesus, as "the Son of man," was no man's son, was the Child of humanity; belonged to no age, but to all ages; to no family or people, but to mankind. He is, as the Divine Ideal realized, universal and everlasting, an individual who is, in a sense, humanity.

The title is in a manner translated and interpreted by Paul in the phrases, "the last Adam," "the second Man."¹ Adam failed to become what God intended him to be, was only a "living soul," did not become "a life-giving spirit." His sons were also failures, and earth, though built to be the home of humanity, had never seen humanity realized. But Christ came and realized it, appeared as the vital form of the Divine idea, the articulated image of the Divine dream. And so the "last Adam" was greater than the first, "a quickening spirit," able to vivify those that were as good as dead. Humanity was like a colossal aloe, growing slowly through many centuries, throwing out many an abortive bud, but blossoming at length into "the second Man," who remains its for ever fragrant and imperishable flower.

2. The "Son of God." This title was less common on the lips of Christ, but was frequent with the apostles, with whom it assumes a peculiar meaning, especially when qualified by *μονογενής* and *ἴδιος*. As used by Christ, it occurs only in the Fourth Gospel, and ex-

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 45, 47.

presses not simply a figurative, but an essential filial, relation to God. The Jews so understand it, and charge Him with blasphemy for daring to use it.¹ One passage in the first Synoptic ² shews that the use was no peculiarity of the Johannean Christ. The ideas it connotes are finely expressed in the great filial confession recorded by Matthew: "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."³ The mutual knowledge is absolute: Father and Son know each other as they alone can who never were but face to face and heart to heart. The knowledge the Son possesses of the Father He possesses that He may communicate; He knows God that He may make Him known. Where his knowledge is received, his spirit is born; to know the Father as the Son knows Him, is to love as the Son loves. In the filial confession the High Priest's prayer is anticipated; the world that does not know the Father is to be brought to the knowledge of Him through the Son.⁴ And here we can see the truths that meet and blend in the titles. "The Son of God," through his essential relation to the Father, is the vehicle of true and absolute knowledge concerning Him; "the Son of man," through his essential relation with humanity, is the medium of its living union with God. The first title denotes Christ as God's mediator with man, the second denotes Him as man's mediator with God.

Christ's common use of the one title and rare use of the other was a custom beautifully true to his nature. It shews how intensely his consciousness had realized

¹ John xix. 7.² Matt. xxvii. 43.³ Ibid. xi. 27.⁴ John xvii. 25, 26.

his affinity with man, how He wished men to feel his and their community of nature. It was by his humanity that He hoped to lift and save men. The sense of our kinship with God through Christ is our regeneration.

It was a peculiar and transcendent consciousness that could be expressed in the titles "Son of God" and "Son of man;" and He who so conceived Himself shewed He had a mission worthy of his transcendent Personality. Very early He had declared his judicial authority and functions, asserted and exercised his right to forgive sins, advanced his claim to the faith and homage of Israel.¹ But these general statements could not satisfy his consciousness: truth required Him to become more specific and personal. While He is the least self-conscious of teachers, He is of all teachers the most conscious of Himself; while the least egotistical, the most concerned with his own Person. He conceives his Person to be a supreme necessity to the world: He is the Saviour of the lost; He is the Shepherd, now giving his life for the sheep, now returning with the rescued lamb in his arms. The death that is to come to Him by wicked hands cannot defeat his mission, can only help to fulfil it; it is to mark the culmination of his sacrifice: it is to be the condition and symbol of victory. The theme of Christ's later teaching was Christ, and there is no finer witness to his truth than this: while his teaching is concerned with Himself it is never selfish, remains infinitely remote from egoism, is penetrated by the sublimest universalism. To speak of Himself is the highest boon He can confer on the race, for the words that unfolded the consciousness of Divine Sonship that is in

¹ Matt. vii. 23, ix. 1-8, x. 5, ff. xi. 19-24.

Him are the only words that have been able to create a conscious Divine sonship in the race.

Round this centre the varied elements of his teaching beautifully crystallize. Out of his twofold relation, to God and man, springs what He has to say of both. The Son who is in the bosom of the Father declares Him, shews Him mindful of sinful man, seeking him, receiving him with a weeping joy that makes all heaven glad. The "Son of man" reveals man to himself, shews the transcendent worth of the soul He loves to save, makes man conscious of the infinite possibilities of good within him, of the Divine affinities that sleep in his nature. The Person that manifests the Divine and the human in beautiful and holy unity fitly shews how God and man can sweetly meet, and rejoice in each other with exceeding great joy. He who is, as it were, our virtues incorporated, is the fit teacher of duty, a voice gentle where most authoritative, making its most imperative commands as sweet as reasonable. And so person and word combine to bring round the fulfilment of his grand prayer: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."¹

A. M. FAIRBAIRN.

THE PRODIGAL AND HIS BROTHER.

ST. LUKE XV. 11-32.

There are, I suppose, very few readers of the New Testament who have not wished at times that this parable had closed with Verse 24, and left us rejoicing in the joy of the father over his regained and penitent

¹ John xvii. 21.