

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 Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

But with Christmas there comes a change.

Once more we sang: they do not die,
Nor lose their mortal sympathy,
Nor change to us, although they change.

Rapt from the fickle and the frail,
With gathered power, yet the same,
Pierces the keen seraphic flame
From orb to orb, from veil to veil.

These stanzas, like so many others, seem to be a reminiscence of words not actually recorded. What were these words? Not the mourner's. It is clear that he had not as yet reached a stage at which either the words as they stand, or any of similar import, would have expressed his feeling. No; he might have sung—

They rest . . . their sleep is sweet—

but the suggestion of a life progressive, yet unchanged, "more life and fuller," must have come from a different source. Some familiar hymn or text, or words suggested by them, such as in the earlier moments of desolation could appear but "vacant chaff well meant for grain," may have fallen at last on soil prepared for them, and borne fruit in the questions before us. "Does he indeed still live? If so, how and where? Shall I see him again? Shall I know him? Shall we be still together?" Let us follow more closely the expression of these thoughts.

The Christmas song, whatever it may have been, has recalled the more sacred associations of Christmas Day, and the evening that began so sadly has ended with the prayer,

O Father, touch the east, and light
The light that shone when Hope was born.

Naturally, the poet's thoughts revert to the Gospel record, and he asks himself what light that throws on the problem of the after-life. There is one case recorded, he remembers, of a traveller who returned

from the "undiscovered country," but we are told nothing of what that country was like. For the interest of the friends of Lazarus, and especially of his sister, is centred rather on the Saviour than on the saved.

Then one deep love doth supersede
All other, when her ardent gaze
Roves from the living brother's face
And rests upon the Life indeed.

Ah! if he could have a faith like hers!—this surely is the unexpressed thought that underlies xxviii.—Is it all gain, the sight so keen that heaven is dim to it, the life set free from all control but reason? Yet is not life itself a witness to immortality? A life that dies is not life.

All that *is*, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall.

Nor is the love truly love that can cease to love. Such love is mere brute passion, or, at best, a "sluggish fellowship." The Christian revelation is not needed for truths like this. What then is its function? May it not be to popularise such truths, to bring them home to the hearts and homes of men?

We yield all blessing to the name
Of Him that made them current coin.

Or is he presumptuous in touching on such themes at all? Does the heavenly Muse, the inspirer of Milton—of Moses and David—bid him content himself with the "middle flight" of classic or romantic song? "I am indeed unworthy," the poet replies, "but remembering Arthur,

And all he said of things divine,

I too, the disciple, have

. . . loitered in the master's field
And darkened sanctities with song."

(*To be continued.*)

Christ's Knowledge: Was it Limited or Unlimited?

A SOLUTION IN ALTRUISM.

BY THE REV. J. ALEXANDER CLAPPERTON, M.A., BLOXWICH.

THIS question is of great practical importance. Some of the best of Christians declare that they can get but little encouragement from the example of Christ. They cannot forget that He was God.

They lose the comfort that should flow from the consideration that Christ had to struggle through darkness and uncertainty even as we have.

On the other hand, when Mr. W. T. Stead

declares that it is our duty, not only to be Christians, but to be Christs,¹ it is clear that he cannot forget the humanity of Christ's Person, and is in danger of forgetting our Saviour's divinity. The result of such a view is easily seen. For one thing, if Christ was only what we may be, it becomes natural for men to have a feeling of distrust towards those of His sayings and revelations that most surprise or startle us.

If, on the one hand, we endeavour to honour Christ's divinity, the force of His example seems to be weakened. But, on the other hand, if we endeavour to emphasise His humanity, the authority of His teaching seems to be weakened,—to say nothing of the efficacy of His Atonement.

Is there, then, no means of reconciling these two views? We believe there is.

Let us look at the problem as it particularly affects the *knowledge* of Christ.

There are two great facts that need to be recognised. (1) Christ was God, and therefore knew all things. (2) Christ was man, and therefore did not know all things. Let us briefly review the testimony of Scripture in regard to each of these facts.

In the first place, we are clearly taught that Christ, as God, knew all things. Peter exclaims, "Lord, Thou knowest all things." On many occasions this supernatural and superhuman knowledge displays itself. John says (John i. 18), "*No man (οὐδείς) hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.*" Christ says (Matt. xi. 27), "*No man knoweth the Father but the Son only, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.*"

In the lesser events of His life, this knowledge is very clearly seen. He miraculously reads the records of the vicious life of the woman of Samaria. He tells Peter to look for a coin in the mouth of "the fish *that first cometh up*" (Matt. xvii. 27); He can say plainly and without any fresh message from Bethany, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, Lazarus is dead"; He predicts the fall of Peter, the destruction of Jerusalem, the death of Peter by crucifixion.

But, in the second place, Christ, as man, did not know all things. He Himself tells us (Mark xiii. 32), "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, NEITHER THE SON, but the Father." In Gethsemane and upon Calvary we find Him open to the attacks of doubt.

¹ "Say no more to any man or woman, 'Be a Christian'; say only, '*Be a Christ.*'"

If to doubt is to be full of uncertainty, Christ certainly doubted. He said, "Father, *if it be possible*, let this cup pass from Me . . . My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" At those terrible moments He was uncertain of two momentous truths: first, the necessity of His sufferings—"If it be possible"; secondly, their reasonableness and justice—"Why?" He did not, He could not, see any sufficient reason. In that unmistakable condition of doubt, we have a clear proof of the limitation of His mental horizon at the time. He did not know everything.

Now these two facts that He was, on the one hand, divine, and, by consequence, knew everything; and, on the other hand, that He was human, and, by consequence, was unacquainted with some things, are apparently irreconcilable. Shall we choose one and ignore the other? We dare not. If we wish to know Christ, we must not overlook any of those aspects of His mysterious Person that have been vouchsafed to us.

The problem, however, should not appear a new or a strange one to the thoughtful Christian. It is much the same as two other problems that ought to be quite familiar to us. (1) Christ was God, and possessed of "everlasting strength" at the very moment that He was man with a very limited supply of strength. He was God even when He fell asleep from exhaustion in the stern of the storm-tossed vessel, when He fainted from weariness in the *Via Dolorosa*, when He died of weakness upon the Cross. (2) Christ was God and present everywhere at the same moment that He was man and *not* present everywhere. It is folly to answer that His divine nature was everywhere and His human nature located in one spot. For herein is the very wonder and the very essence of the Incarnation that it was the divine nature that "became (*ἐγένετο*) flesh." The same "Word" that "was God" "was made (*ἐγένετο*) flesh." When Jesus Christ was in Galilee, the report was true that He was absent from the Feast in Jerusalem, and men searched for Him in vain. With the strictest truth and without the slightest correction from our Lord, the loving sister ejaculated: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John xi. 21). And yet Christ could also say as He sat conversing with Nicodemus in the town of Jerusalem (John iii. 13), "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which

is in heaven." He was both come down from heaven and in it at the same moment.

These closely-related problems will probably suggest what of solution appears to be available. The mystery and the very essence of the Incarnation lie in just such facts as these, that at each moment Christ was both everywhere and *not* everywhere; omnipotent and weak; omniscient and nescient.

But in this last case there are two special difficulties. In the first place, it seems at first sight impossible to suppose that one person can at the same moment both know and not know everything. But even in ordinary human lives we find something very similar. If we take into account everything that we ourselves *know*,—everything locked up in the chambers of memory at the present stage of our lives,—it is clear that there is very little of it consciously known at the present moment. Something similar may, perhaps, have been our Lord's case. When He was made flesh, He very possibly consented to leave His knowledge of all things in a condition something like that of the facts packed away in our memories. He knew all things as we may be said to know everything that we can recall at a moment's notice. But, as we shall see, He *voluntarily* declined to take advantage of the power and joy that the facing of every truth would naturally bring Him. In His personal trials He *chose to be ignorant*. As He could walk on the water and yet in general was subject to the law of gravitation, so could He command omniscience and yet in general submit to a limitation of conscious knowledge.

The other difficulty is practical, not theoretical. It is the difficulty that may be said to have hastened the death of Canon Liddon. If Christ's knowledge was limited, what sort of confidence may we have in His revelations and teaching? Does the limitation of His knowledge make Him liable to error, whether it be in religion, in morals, in science, or even in Old Testament criticism? An answer to these questions as far as they concern morality and religion will suggest a clear answer to the remaining problems.

The application of the principle of Altruism seems fitted to remove all such difficulties. It enables us to tell when to expect limited and when to expect unlimited knowledge in our Lord's utterances. He appears to have employed limited knowledge for the guidance of His own individual life, but to have drawn upon His omniscience when He wished

to benefit others. The reasonableness of this principle of action and its presence in the history of the Gospels are both clear. Omniscience is a miracle affecting the realm of knowledge. In the Temptation of our Lord, we see very clearly the principle with which our Lord began His public ministry. He refused to work miracles for His own convenience, and only consented to do so when the welfare of mankind demanded it. He refused to turn the stones into bread for the satisfaction of His own hunger, but not many days after He turned the water into wine to relieve the distress at the marriage-feast in Cana, and convince the newly-made disciples of His divinity. He manifested forth His glory.

In regard to His teaching, we may be confident that He would never deny Himself the use of all the power at His command. For *our* sakes He would see to it that divine truthfulness stamped His utterances. Every moment that it was desirable for the sake of men that He should avail Himself of His divine knowledge, He was both able and ready to have omniscience at His command. But, at other times, He declined to strengthen His faith or withstand His foes by the use of any knowledge other than that which may be possessed by any earnest, thoughtful man. He was tempted in all points as we are, and learned obedience by the things He suffered; and among those trials and lessons there is no question that He felt the dreariness of the mists of uncertainty and the sting of doubt. *His* faith like ours had to cope with difficulty and darkness. He was a true man; and while His teachings and all His work for *us* are full of divine, unlimited perfection, *His work for Himself was limited to the use of the very powers that every poor sinner can command*. His battle was won with the strength that God is waiting to thrust into *our* hands, and His sorrows were met, not with the might of His divine character, but with the spiritual might of His human heart. He disdained to fall back upon miraculous aid, but He fought the spiritual fight with the very weapons that every man may grasp.

It is in view of these facts that we can feel the force of the thought that

"Though Lord of heaven, He deigneth still to wear
The glory of His peerless *Manhood* there.
A *human* heart is beating on His throne;
With *human* lips He pleadeth for His own;
His *kindred*—such as do the Father's will,
And not ashamed to call us 'Brethren' still."

But let us glance, in conclusion, at the bearing of the above principle on Christ's relations to science and criticism.

Christ says of God, "He maketh His sun to rise." The question will be asked, "Are we to accept this statement as scientifically accurate?" An answer is not difficult. If it were of practical benefit at that moment that Christ should understand how false were the popular views of astronomy, then, doubtless, he would exercise His power of divine insight and understanding. Few, however, will suppose that there was any occasion for Christ to take a deeper view of the laws of Nature than did the Jews around Him.

"But how," some one will ask, "how was Christ to tell that any subject deserved or demanded the exercise of His divine consciousness without first viewing it with His divine powers? On what principle did Christ determine whether it was worth His while to bring His divine powers to bear upon any given subject of thought?"

To that question an answer might most justly be declined. To find, as a fact, that Christ acted upon the principle mentioned above is one thing, but to explain how a person who was divine as well as human could so act is quite a different sort of problem. This, however, we may suggest. As a man, our Lord may have been able to subdivide

beforehand the subjects of His meditations and inquiries so as to settle in a manner satisfactory to Himself which subjects solely concerned Himself and which subjects would affect others. In addition to this suggestion, we need to bear in mind that Christ's divine foreknowledge may have forewarned Him against thinking too deeply on certain subjects—those subjects, namely, that were to be veiled from Him during His earthly mediatorship.

But there is another question that has often been asked. When Christ speaks of David writing a psalm, are we to accept this statement as authorising the tradition, or as a mere accommodation to popular views that had but little spiritual importance?

When Christ uses Old Testament quotations conveying great spiritual truths, the importance to all concerned is so vast that we cannot understand Him to speak with merely human wisdom as far as the lessons taught are concerned. But as far as authorship and readings are concerned, it seems likely that Christ would consider these questions of so scholastic a character and so utterly out of touch with the moral and spiritual interests of those around Him, that He would scarcely concern Himself with the accuracy or inaccuracy of the traditions involved.

The Gospels and Modern Criticism.

BY THE REV. ARTHUR WRIGHT, M.A., FELLOW AND TUTOR OF QUEENS' COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

IF Mr. Halcombe will do me the justice to read again the opening sentences of my third article, he will see that the strong expressions in the third paragraph to which he takes exception were not directed against him, but against an imaginary case put forth to illustrate the direction which the argument would take, and to excite the interest of the reader upon whose attention considerable demands would be made.

Secondly, if he will notice the presence of the definite article in one sentence and its absence from another, he will see that my logic is not so absurd that he need stoop to ridicule it. The context also makes the meaning clear. A man may, I declare, take into account *all the facts* relating to the subject which he is studying, and yet construct

his system in defiance of other *facts* external to it, but belonging to the universal order of things, and not to be neglected with impunity.

Thirdly, I cannot admit that I have damaged my cause by allowing that such a man's system may be wrong, and yet incapable of refutation. To show this, I will take an example from the present controversy. The four Gospels declare that our Lord predicted on *one* occasion that St. Peter should deny Him *thrice*. They then describe how this prediction was fulfilled to the letter. But Mr. Halcombe's principles lead him to maintain that our Lord twice foretold St. Peter's denials, and that St. Peter denied Him six times. It is impossible for me to refute this. For anything that I know to the contrary, St. Peter may have denied Christ nine