

God Manifest in the Flesh

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Throughout John's Gospel we may perceive that a sense of the glory of His person is ever present to the mind of Christ. Whether we follow Him from scene to scene of His public ministry (John 1 - 12), through His parting words with His elect (John 13 - 17), in the path of His closing sorrows (John 18, 19), or in resurrection (John 20, 21), this is so.

This full personal glory that belongs to Him is declared at the very beginning of this Gospel (John 1: 1), and there recognized by the Church, conscious, as she is, that she had discerned it. (John 1: 14.) But, as I have just said, it is always present to His own mind. He is in the place where covenant arrangements put Him, and He is doing those services which care for the manifestation of the Father's glory laid on Him; but still He takes knowledge of Himself in the fulness of the Godhead glory that belonged to Him, essentially and intrinsically His. (See John 2: 21; John 3: 13; John 4: 14; John 5: 23; John 6: 46, 62; John 7: 37; John 8: 58; John 9: 38; John 10: 30, 38; John 11: 11, 25; John 12: 45; John 14: 9; John 16: 15; John 18: 6; John 19: 30; John 20: 22.)

The Spirit in the saint, after this manner, glorifies Him still. The saint may recognize Him in the place of covenant subjection, or think of Him in His sorrows and sufferings, but (like Himself in the day of His flesh) never loses the sense of that personal glory which is essentially and intrinsically His. Christ's own way when He was here, and the saint's present experience, are thus in perfect concord. And when we look a little at the epistle, we shall find something still in harmony — I mean in this particular. The Spirit in the apostles does not meet an injurious treatment of the person of Christ in the same style that He does a wrong dealing with the truth of the gospel. And this difference in style is very significant. For instance, in the Epistle to the Galatians, where the simplicity of the gospel is vindicated, there is a pleading and a yearning in the midst of earnest and urgent reasonings. So there are measures and methods recommended (such as charging, rebuking, stopping the mouth, 1 Tim. 1 and Titus 1), and not a summary process and outlawry at once, when Judaizing corruptions are dealt with. But when the person of the Son of God is the thing in hand, when His glory is to be asserted, there is nothing of all this. The style is different. All is peremptory. "They went out from us, because they were not of us." "Receive him not into your house." "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God."* The Spirit, as I may say, holds the decree most sacred, and guards it as with instinctive jealousy, "that all should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." (John 5: 23.)

*The eating of herbs only, and the observing of days, if fully interpreted, are customs which depreciate the gospel, or affect the full beauty of the truth. But such things are to be borne with. (Rom. 14.) But our souls have the full sense of this, that depreciation of the person of the Son would not receive a decree in its favour after this manner.

All this about His full divine glory is precious in the thoughts of His people. We are, however, led to look at man in Him also, and through a succession of conditions we see in Him man presented to God with infinite though varied delight and satisfaction. I have, long since, traced Him in the following way, as man in all perfectness: —

Born. — The material, so to speak, moral and physical, is presented in Jesus as the born one. He was a taintless sheaf of the human harvest. Man in Him was perfect as a creature. (Luke 1: 35.)

Circumcised. — Jesus, in this respect, was under the law, and He kept it, as of course, to all perfection. Man in Him was thus perfect as under law. (Luke 2: 27.)

Baptized. — In this character Jesus is seen bowing to the authority of God, owning Him in His dispensations, and man in Him is perfect in all righteousness, as well as under law. (Luke 3: 21.)

Anointed. — As anointed, Jesus was sent forth to service and testimony. In this respect man is seen in Him perfect as a servant. (Luke 3: 22.)

Devoted. — Jesus surrendered Himself to God, left Himself in His hand to do His utmost will and pleasure. In Him man was therefore perfect as a sacrifice. (Luke 22: 19, 20.)

Risen. — This begins a series of new conditions in which man is found. This is the first stage of the new estate: John 3: 31, 32, intimates a new course in man, as here said. The corn of wheat, having fallen into the ground and died, is now capacitated to be fruitful. Man in the risen Jesus is in indefeasible life.

Glorified. — The risen Man, or man in indefeasible life, wears a heavenly image. The new man has a new or glorious body.

Reigning. — The risen and glorified Man receives, in due season, authority to execute judgment. Dominion is His. The lost sovereignty of man is regained.

Scripture leads us through this series of contemplations on the Son of man. And though I speak here of the Man, as before I did of the divine glory, yet I divide not the person. Throughout all, it is "God manifest in the flesh" we have before us.

We need to walk softly over such ground, and not to multiply words. On so high a theme, precious to the loving, worshipping heart, we may remember what is written, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin."