

Doctrinal Truths for Our Day

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Devotional

Directional

To "... strengthen the things which remain..." Revelation 3:2

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Introduction to "Truths for our Day"

John closed his gospel by saying, concerning the Lord Jesus' life on earth, that "if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25). In his last recorded letter, Paul appealed to Timothy to bring the cloak and the books, but especially, the parchments (2 Timothy 4:13). He desired Timothy's Company, the cloak's Comfort, and the books' Consolation. Timothy would provide fellowship for the spirit, the cloak would give warmth for his body, and the books would give instruction for his mind. Both of these references to the Scriptures undoubtedly refer to their different forms given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so that we recognize the abundance of material that could have been recorded for the spiritual blessing of the believer, so much more than we have been given.

The inspired Scriptures are complete and sufficient for every day of testimony, but what can be written about them continues. "Of making many books, there is no end," said the wise man, (Eccles. 12:12). We dare not pretend to write inspired material, but if it is possible to make good material available to believers today, materials that will help to encourage and strengthen the saints in the truths of God's Word, this would be a worth-while goal. In "Truths for our Day," it will be our desire to print new articles that current brethren will write, to reprint articles of a past day that have lasting value for us, and to make available various helps that can be gleaned from other publications. For this purpose and with this exercise, this publication will be sent out free of charge as often as such material is obtained, and we trust that, if

God blesses, it will be a help to strengthen saints who are exercised about faithfulness to the Lord in our day.

Please note that "Truths for our Day" is not intended to compete with or supplant other currently available publications, nor to draw readers away from those sources of profitable material, but to supplement them for the blessing of the saints. There is always room for more profitable writings concerning the Scriptures, and a number of brethren are capable and exercised to write those articles. We trust that the Lord will guide and control in all that will be done so that ultimately this will be for the glory and honor of the Lord Jesus and for the blessing of His people.

Joel N. Portman

Neglect of the Reading Meeting

(An article emphasizing the importance of an assembly Bible reading)

by F. W. Grant

(author of the "Numerical Bible" commentary)

The reading meeting is a great test of the state of an assembly; for it is there, if things be right, that the knowledge, gathered in whatever way, is tested and made sure by that personal conference and comparison which help so largely in making it the realized possession of the soul. Here we may learn too, if there be the freedom and candor of brotherly love, the needs to which the truth ministers, and the ability to use it for real edification. It is of immense value to test in this

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way how far we have got the truth, while it is by this means what has been learned by each is thrown into the common fund, to enrich the whole. Those who know least would be surprised to realize how much the questions suggested by their own need may help in various ways the very people who answer them. And this is only one of the many modes in which the waterer is watered—the minister is ministered to.

The reading meeting is never, therefore, made needless or of little value by whatever multiplicity there may be of more detailed and connected teaching. Nay, all this creates a special need for the reading meeting, in order that the food laid before the whole may be individually digested and assimilated. Here, however, any lack of nearness to, and confidence in, one another will be surely felt as a hindrance, and need of another sort manifested to those who have eyes to see.

“The children of this world are” indeed “wiser in their generation than the children of light.” Persons brought into the inheritance together of large worldly possessions would soon realize the necessity of becoming acquainted with what they had so much personal interest in. How few are there who, in the case of spiritual wealth which God has made their own, have boldness and earnestness to lay hold of what is theirs by any means available to them. When, over eighty years ago, the Spirit of God began to move freshly in the hearts of His people to recover them to one another, and to revive the almost lost idea of the assembly of God, the reading meetings were a marked and prominent sign of the awakened interest in His word, and that the people of God as such were awaking to claim for themselves their portion of it. No class of men could be allowed, however gifted, however educated and sanctioned by the mass, to stand between their souls and the possession of what was needed alike by all and designed by God for all. Now, alas, the decay of the reading meeting means nothing else but the subsiding of that eager enthusiasm for the truth that then was, and the lessened consciousness of the Spirit of God being in each and all to give to each for himself the power to acquire possession. The flood-tide is gone, and the diminished stream begins to confine itself to the old channels.

We need to proclaim again that God never designed “theology” to be for a class of theologians, but all the treasures of His word to be for all the people, not a thing in it to be hidden, save from the eyes of the careless and indifferent, those who are willing to exchange their heavenly birthright for a mess of the world’s pottage. We need once again to assert that teachers are only a pledge on God’s part of His eager-

ness to have all to know,—not that He has restricted to these the possession of any kind of spiritual knowledge. Teachers are only to show that there, in the living fount from which they draw, is the living water for all, as free for others as for themselves. They are only the truth of God’s word made to stand out in blazon before the eyes of those who have not yet found it there where He has put it for them, and with this for a motto of encouragement to those who have faith in a God that cannot lie, “Every one that seeketh, findeth.”

The success of teachers is shown by their ability to make others independent of them when men say to them, as the Samaritans to the woman of Sychar, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying”; and in proportion as the church of God by their means is made to realize its ability for self-edification. So the apostle says that Christ has given gifts unto men,—“some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the edification of the body of Christ, until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. iv. 11-13). That is, the “work of the ministry”—and this is left open to the largest construction—is what the saints as a whole are to be perfected unto[?]. Every saint is free to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (I Cor. xii. 31), and responsible to use all the ability he has, of whatever kind, to enrich others with it. “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to *profit* withal”; and if there are special evangelists, all are free and called upon, each in his measure, to evangelize; if there are special teachers, all are free and responsible to communicate to others what God has given them of His truth. Love to each other, love to souls, is to have liberty and to be encouraged everywhere.

How blessed would be an assembly of saints in this condition, everyone realizing that the fullness of all spiritual knowledge was open to him to enjoy, that the best gifts were his to covet, that he was, by the simple wondrous fact of his endowment with the Spirit, the ordained minister of Christ to the world, the ordained servant and helper of his brethren. How intolerable is the thought of class restrictions to limit and hinder the grace of God in His people, yet, alas, into which, sensibly or insensibly, they so readily sink down! The development of all gift is necessarily hindered by it; and this is largely the reason why so few among us are going forth to labor in the ample fields on every side, and why the gatherings develop so little strength and stability. We need not *talk* about a “laity” to *have* one. Let God’s people sink down into indolent acquiescence in their

inability for their spiritual privileges, and little gift of any kind is likely to develop among them. Those that can be fed only with the spoon, are infants or invalids. On the other hand, where spiritual life is strongest we shall be most fully conscious of our need of one another. For spiritual feebleness means always a strong world-element, and occupations, aims, pleasures, in which as children of God, we can have no fellowship—can be no help to one another. Our spiritual links have become proportionately theoretical, formal, sentimental. But where life is practical and earnest, its needs will be felt and the grace realized which has united us together. Every one has a place to fill that none other can fill; every one is necessary. Good it is to remember this, as to ourselves and as to every other. If we forget it, we cannot by this escape from the consequences.

F. W. Grant, July 1914

THE PREEXISTENCE OF CHRIST IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

by John H. Portman (deceased) 1944

Of the four Gospel Narratives in the New Testament, John is the only one who attempts definitely to prove the preexistence of Christ. The other three writers begin their accounts with the incarnation and only show the deity of Christ in an incidental way. Their purposes are connected with Christ as the King, the Servant, or the Son of Man and not as the Son of God.

John, the writer of the Fourth Gospel, begins his gospel, not with a human genealogy, but with a prologue in which he introduces the Logos. No other writer uses this term in the New Testament, though it was common in Greek literature.

In the beginning was the Logos. The phrasing of this is an allusion to Gen. 1:1, and somewhat similar to I Jn. 1:1 also, but no two of these beginnings are the same. The beginning of Gen. 1:1 is obviously that of creation, this beginning in John 1:1 antedates creation. One can see this because verse one precedes logically verse three where creation is mentioned, and it would be impossible to have the Logos as creator and not have Him existing before creation.

No matter what definition was placed on "logos" by Greek writers, God took that word and invested it with a peculiar meaning. The Logos of John is the eternal revealer of the divine being. The Logos is the means by

which God reveals Himself just as the Spirit is that by which He communicates Himself.

That the beginning here antedates creation we have already seen. Whether it be of eternity past or just prior in point of time to creation matters little to our finite minds. The fact is that as far back as we can go there was the Logos, the revealer of God. The Logos existed with God and the Logos was God. Even without this last statement we would of necessity conclude that the Logos was God, for only an infinite Being with divine essence could be the revealer of a like infinite Person. Nothing finite can grasp the infinite, much less make other finite beings comprehend Him.

That the Logos was the Creator we have already stated. Verse three states that He created all things. Whether these "all things" of John 1:3 (c.f. Col. 1:16) are included in the statement of Gen. 1:1 or not, we do not know, but the fact remains that the Logos was the One who was the active agent in all creation.

Verse four refers, not merely to the possession of life but to that attribute of God which is Life. Men possess life as a transient gift but God is Life. If the Creator was not Life, He could not create living organisms.

In these four short verses we have profound statements, the depths of which cannot be fathomed. The Logos was God, was preexistent with God, and was the Creator of all things. So far we have not attempted to identify the Logos as the Christ. But in John 1:14 the writer speaks of the incarnation, clearly linking the Logos with the babe born in the manger at Bethlehem, who was Jesus of Nazareth. That the Logos is Christ may also be seen by a comparison of Col. 1:16 with John 1:3,10. Beside all this we have the logical deduction of the prologue of John, and the comparison of the body of the writing in which Christ states that it was His mission to reveal the Father, whom no one had seen at any time, John 1:18; 4:25,26; 5:20,37; 8:19,28, etc.

John 1:14 further states that the glory of Christ was that of the Only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. From the passage Phil. 2:5-8 we learn that Christ had to veil His glory when He became incarnate; but despite this, those who knew Him as John did could see that He was divine by the glory of His person. This is a real testimony to the deity of Christ, and therefore also to His preexistence.

Both in 1:15 and 1:30 John the Baptist testifies that Christ existed before becoming incarnate. As to earthly life John was some six months older than Christ, but he states that He was before him. This does not alone

mean before in the sense of preferment or position, but also before in the sense of preexisting before John was born.

Moving on to 8:58 we have the statement of Christ Himself to His preexistence. He testifies to the Jews that He was before Abraham. Back in verse 56 He intimated that Abraham knew about Him, though those Jews about Him didn't. He might have revealed what we know from a study of Old Testament Theophanies, that He had spoken with Abraham and supped with him (Gen. 18). The Jews thought Him a blasphemer and took up stones to kill Him because they understood the claim Christ had made to be the claim of deity.

There are many places in this Gospel in which Christ asserts His deity. Of these we do not have the space to speak, but a study of the term applied to Christ, "Son of God" we shall consider. John the Baptist speaks thus of Christ three times in 1:29, 34, 36. of God also in 1:49. Nathaniel calls Christ the Son of God.

We are all children of God by faith in Jesus Christ when we believe, by virtue of the new-birth through which God makes us His sons. Not one of these terms is used of saints in the way that Son of God is used of Christ. Each of us belongs to a class or group called sons or children. Not one of us can be called the son, but only a son. To be a son of God in the sense in which Christ is, one would need to be God also. Christ is said to be begotten of God, we understand that He is of identical substance and essence with the Father. This of necessity excludes us because we are not begotten of God as the Only Begotten Son is. We do not believe that Christ was not eternal in His preexistence and not always coexistent with the Father, but that the relations between the two in the Godhead are best illustrated to us as father and son in the human family in that the Father directs the Son, though both are coequal with the Spirit.

The term "only begotten" as used in John in 1:14,18; 3:16,18 always means Christ's relation to the Father which is peculiar to these two members of the Godhead. Preexistence, then, is not only implied by these clear references to deity, but demanded, as Christ could not be God without being endlessly existent from eternity past to eternity future.

Many other passages in John could be alluded to in proving the preexistence of Christ, but one conclusive one is found in chapter sixteen which leaves no room for doubt on the subject. In 16:28-30 Christ reveals to the disciples in the upper room on the eve of His cruci-

fixion that He came forth from the Father. Because of this frank statement the disciples were convinced in their own minds that He had preexistent life. They were harder to convince than most men would be after seeing as many miracles and hearing so often the claims of Jesus to deity had seen.

Again in 17:5 in Christ's high priestly prayer, He asks the Father to glorify Him with the glory that He had with the Father before the world was. This takes us back to a time in eternity past before the creation of the universe. There Christ existed in fellowship and equality with the Father. Only the Trinity existed together without any created beings whatsoever.

In conclusion we may say that John answers very conclusively Pilate's question which he put to Christ in the judgment hall, "Whence art thou?" Christ gave him no answer because He did not want to satisfy idle curiosity to speak preexistence to an unbelieving Gentile. John has undertaken to develop the answer for us in his writing, and for this revelation we are grateful because it helps us to see the love of Christ even more--to see from what heights He came to save lost human souls.

Christianity is Christ

Bernard A. Stapley

Every true believer in our Lord Jesus Christ will be convinced of the truth expressed in the well known phrase that Christianity is Christ. Indeed it could be nothing less, for God, before the world began, destined us "to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). His great purpose is to fill heaven with men and women like Christ, "that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1 :4). It is with great joy that we look for the day when our Lord Jesus shall change "the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory" (Phil. 3:21 RV). Oh, the wonder of that day when He shall "present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish", (Eph. 5:27). When at last the deep, prayerful longing of His heart is answered: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my , thou hast given me" (John 17:24). Then, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11).

There are many scriptures that come to mind when we contemplate our blessings and privileges. They often remind us of the great price that was paid in blood by our Lord Jesus in order that we might be so blessed. We wonder at the greatness of the love of God for a world of

sinners expressed in John 3:16. We wonder too at the greatness of the love of Christ for His church; "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5 :25) and at the extent of that love for us collectively; "... Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end", (John 13:1). Our appreciation deepens as we contemplate that end and consider that "He was obedient unto death even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). But perhaps the most humbling thought of all is expressed by Paul, "... the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). It is wonderful when we understand, at least in a small measure, that this mighty sacrifice and deep suffering and submission was for me personally. If I was the only sinner under the blue canopy of heaven all this was necessary for me to be blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Not only was it necessary, but so great is His love for each of us individually, it was a price that He willingly paid.

Paul expresses his response to such love in Philippians 1 verse 21. He had only one objective before him and that was Christ, "For to me to live? - Christ. To die is gain" - to be forever with and like Christ. Meantime he had only one ambition, namely "that I might know Him" (Phil. 3:10). This was not a natural ambition. It was one that was built on the word of God. Like every Jewish boy Paul knew well the Old Testament scriptures. He knew the exhortation of Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart. . . In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths". This Hebrew word here translated 'direct', means to make straight or right. The purpose of God for my life is only found in 'knowing Him'!

The apostle Peter will also take up this ministry in chapter 1 of Second Peter. He will tell us that the abundant supplies of grace and mercy needed for each of us to walk the path that the Lord has chosen for us are only to be found "in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord", verse 2. Not only so but everything that is necessary for "life and godliness" is given to us "through the knowledge of Him", verse 3. Peter also tells us that these "exceeding great and precious promises" have been given to us for two reasons. Firstly and most importantly, that we might become "partakers of the divine nature" - that we might become Christ-like in character as we walk this pathway of life. The second great blessing is that we shall "escape the corruption that is in the world through lust", verse 4.

All this Peter tells us will need deep, personal exercise. We will need to be prepared to live a life of faith. This will require courage. The type of courage that is envisaged will be controlled and directed by the knowledge of and obedience to everything that is written in the

word of God. This will entail self-control, submission in every aspect of life to the will of God. We will need to develop endurance because "the race that is set before us" is a marathon and not a sprint. Godliness will be the hallmark of our life and a willingness to be like our Lord Jesus and become a kindly servant to the brothers our motive. In addition, our service towards God, our fellow believers and to sinners must be from a heart of love (2 Pet. 1 :5-7). If we choose such a pathway we are promised that we shall "neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ", verse 8. We will have a busy and fulfilled Christian life.

A life lived like this will give assurance to our own heart, to the hearts of our brethren and will be a clear testimony to all those among whom we work and live, that we belong to Christ. Not only so but we shall be preserved from bringing reproach upon the name of Christ, verse 10. Finally, at the end of life's pathway "an [abundant] entrance shall be ministered unto you into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ", verse 11. The picture painted here by Peter is of an old-fashioned sailing ship entering harbor in full sail with all colors flying! The best example of this in the scriptures is perhaps recorded by Paul: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord.. .shall give me" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Past failure is no excuse for future conduct. "Forgetting those things which are behind. . . I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). It is not that we ignore the lessons of our past but the question we all have to answer is, "What is my response going to be from this point forward?"

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