

What the Bible teaches about

The Person of Christ

Stuart Olyott



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Preface

This book is not a summary of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor does it examine what he came on earth to do. It is a look at his glorious person. It studies what the Bible says about *who he is*.

There are many reasons why such a book as this is needed. One springs from the rise of the modern cults. Our homes are frequently visited by those who teach things about the Lord Jesus Christ which are far less glorious than what the Scriptures teach. We cannot bear to see him so publicly degraded, and need to learn how to answer these false teachers convincingly.

Then there is the need of young Christians who, largely because of poor teaching in the churches, are very confused about what God has revealed concerning his Son. It is from the ranks of these new converts that our future Christian leaders will come. It is therefore supremely important that they should learn to uphold clearly the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world.

But there is a reason for this book which is greater than all the others. What the Scriptures teach about the person of our Saviour is so high and glorious that it can evoke nothing but adoring wonder from those who love him. We spend too little time merely contemplating him. The spirit of devotion is dying among us. The mystery no longer awes us. The Trinity is the first

great mystery of being, and the person of our Lord is the second. When we consider him afresh, we fall at his feet to worship him. We are truly 'lost in wonder, love and praise'.

If this little book causes some child of God to seek a quiet place and there, in holy adoration, to enjoy the company of the Lord Jesus Christ, it will have served the real purpose for which it was written.

Jesus! my Shepherd, Saviour, Friend;
My Prophet, Priest and King;
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End:
Accept the praise I bring.

Stuart Olyott

The Lord—his deity

Introduction

What the Bible teaches about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is summed up in his name.

He is *the Lord*, the self-existent and self-sufficient God. He is *Jesus*, his human name reminding us that he became man and that to this day he has a real human nature. He is *Christ*, the ‘anointed one’, the Messiah—not two persons, but one.

These are the three facts that we must keep in our minds whenever we think of him. The use of his name helps us to do so. The three sections of our book, each composed of three chapters, look at these themes in turn.

1

Eternally God

If Christ is not God, then we who worship him are idolaters. However, if he is God and we fail to worship him, we are the worst rebels of all.

If Christ is not God, he was a blasphemer, a fake and an impostor. We cannot even accept him as a good man, because his claims to deity were clear. However, if he is God, but we talk of him only as a good man, it is *we* who are the blasphemers.

There is no question so crucial and as far-reaching as this one: who is Jesus? Is he, or is he not, God? What do the Scriptures teach?

Pre-existent

The Bible's teaching is that Jesus Christ existed before his conception and birth. His birth did not mark his origin, but only his appearance as a man on the stage of history. Throughout his earthly life he displayed a consciousness of his previous existence. 'I came forth from the Father,' he said, 'and have come into the world' (John 16:28). He described himself as 'he who came down from heaven (John 3:13), and asked his hearers what they would think if they saw him 'ascend where he was before' (John 6:62). That these public statements were an accurate reflection of his deepest consciousness is proved by his personal prayer to God: 'And now, O Father, glorify me together with yourself, with the

glory which I had with you before the world was' (John 17:5). The inspired writers of the Scriptures saw Jesus as he saw himself. He is the one who is 'from the beginning' (1 John 1:1), 'in the beginning' (John 1:1) and 'before all things' (Colossians 1:17). He was in the world, not as one with a normal human origin, but as 'he who comes from above ... he who comes from heaven (John 3:31). Before he entered into the poverty of his human life 'he was rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9). Of course he was! This man was none other than 'the Lord from heaven' (1 Corinthians 15:47). It was because he recognized Christ's true identity that John the Baptist could say of the one born after him, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for he was before me' (John 1:15,30).

Pre-existent as God

No student of Scripture can fail to be convinced of the pre-existence of Christ. But many have been slow to see that pre-existence implies deity. This was the mistake of the Arians who caused so much difficulty in the early centuries of the Christian church. They were willing to accept Christ's pre-existence, but still saw him only as the greatest of all creatures, through whom God created everything else. They could not accept that his pre-existence was *eternal*. To them he was simply the greatest creature God had made, and more like God than anything else in existence. But because he himself was created, he could not be God in the same sense as the Father was.

Nearer the truth, but still far from it, were the so-called Semi-Arians. They accepted Christ as eternal, and denied that he was a creature. But they could not bring themselves to believe that he was as much God as the Father was.

Christ's own testimony

In stark contrast to these views stand the statements of Christ himself. 'Before Abraham was, I AM,' he said (John 8:58). This was not just a simple statement of pre-existence. He could have made that by declaring, 'Before Abraham was, I was.' His 'I AM' was

a claim to a continued and ever-present existence from before Abraham's time to the moment he was speaking. Indeed, it is the language of self-existence. Jesus Christ's own claim to pre-existence was also a claim to deity. This was well understood by the Jews who were listening, especially as they knew 'I AM' to be God's description of himself. To them Christ's words were open blasphemy, and their response to them was to take up stones to stone him. They could never have done this if they had put an Arian or Semi-Arian interpretation on his statement.

Pre-existence and deity are also linked together in the mind of the apostle John at the very beginning of his Gospel. The profound words which open it are well known: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made' (John 1:1-3).

These words are worthy of our closest attention. They clearly teach that when things began to come into being, he already *was*. Jesus Christ had no beginning. If he did, how could he possibly have been present 'in the beginning'? Equally clearly, these verses teach that he is not a creature. If he was a creature in any sense it would not be true that 'without him nothing was made that was made'. The Word was without beginning and unmade. We can never again countenance the errors of the Arians.

John says that this eternal Unmade was eternally with God. But this does not mean that he was less than God, as the Semi-Arians contend. 'The Word *was* God.' John is as dogmatic as that about the deity of Christ, and his words stand as a perpetual contradiction of the Semi-Arian position. There is no way to dismiss these words, or to evade their full impact. Indeed, the way in which John arranges his words in the original Greek (with the predicate preceding the subject) means that he is actually *stressing* the full deity of Christ. It would be perfectly legitimate to render his words, 'And the Word was God *himself!*'