

Original Contributions.

The Character of Christ of Supernatural Origin.

BY JAS. W. LOWBER.

What think you of Christ? is an interrogation the most fundamental and all-engrossing that has ever been propounded to men. For more than eighteen centuries it has been the most vital question among all classes. Even unbelievers can not let it alone, for they feel that their eternal well being might depend upon a proper answer to it.

We do not understand by supernatural, something contrary to all means; but that which is super-human, and above the common laws of nature. We believe that the supernatural comes within the domain of law, but it is a higher law than any with which we are now acquainted. All nature at first originated in the miraculous, and it is impossible for the world to get rid of the idea of a miracle. In all this, however, we believe there was profound method. The mission of the Christ into this world was not without means; but it was the grandest methodical arrangement of which man can form a conception.

The Jews did not originate the character of Christ, for it was the opposite of all their preconceived ideas of the Messiah. It arose far above any conception of which the Jewish mind was capable. It could not have taken its origin among the Gentiles, for it was entirely too Jewish for them. That it did not originate with the disciples of Christ is shown in the fact that even after His resurrection from among the dead, it required miraculous power to make them fully comprehend the completeness of His character. We must, therefore, conclude that the character of Christ was of supernatural origin, and that it required the Great Artist to present to the world such an original and such a perfect picture.

The teaching of Christ proves his divine origin. It can not be said of him that he simply taught good things; for everything he taught was absolutely perfect. At the conclusion of his grand sermon on the mountain, the people were astonished at his teaching; for he taught with authority, and not as their scribes. The first seven beatitudes of that sermon should convince every honest mind of the

divine mission of Jesus. They refer to traits of character and to states of mind, and are paradoxical: for the world's conception of the man who is superlatively blessed has always been the opposite of what is taught in them. The doctrine was new and strange not only to the heathen world, but also to the most cultivated students of the Jewish law. The truth of all these maxims has been fully realized by all who have accepted and practiced them. They make up a perfect character.

The life of Jesus corresponded to his teaching; for he perfectly practiced what he taught. Not a man among the keen-eyed critics, or the vilest opposers of Christianity, has been able to produce a single instance, where Jesus violated in practice what he had taught. In this Jesus stands alone; for he is the only teacher who has had a perfect practice, and the only one who has perfectly practiced what he taught. Now account for this without admitting the divine authority of Jesus Christ?

The teaching and life of Christ have stood the test of time. What has become of the philosophers who were contemporary with Jesus? With the exception of a very few they have gone into forgetfulness, to be heard of no more until the unfolding of the records of the last judgment. What has become of the great statesmen of Greece and Rome? With the exception of a few, they too have passed from the records of time, and have gone into the shades of forgetfulness. What has become of the Jewish doctors who lived in the days of Jesus? Their names have also perished, and they have left but few foot-prints on the sands of time. The name of Jesus acquires more influence day by day. How understand this without accepting the divinity of his mission? The admissions of those not favorable to Jesus in his day are sufficient to show that his teaching was of super-human origin. His question to the Jews about the baptism of John silenced them, and showed that they despised the truth. They admitted that he cast out demons, and tried to explain it away. Judas, the traitor, understood all the private counsels of Jesus, and he went to the chief priests to confess that he had betrayed innocent blood. The wife of Pilate, and even the governor himself, pronounced Jesus innocent.

After the resurrection of Christ, the guard came into the city to report the fact, and was hired by the Jewish priests to tell an absolutely unreasonable falsehood.

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Systems of Religion.

The recent baptismal controversy in the *Apostolic Times*, though regretted by some, will doubtless result in good. The discussion is virtually over; at least the phase discussed, viz: "Is the sinner pardoned in the mind of God, before baptism?" The question, at first sight, appears needless, and if we mistake not, Bro. Turner has expressed the opinion that no such question should have been raised. The writer once thought the same, but after a sober second thought, concludes that there will be a beneficial outgrowth. The position that some among us hold is awkward if not extreme.

In our discussions of the question, crude and harmful statements, and the want of clear and precise expressions have lead many into error. This error has not only served to drive those who oppose us, farther away, but not a few who come to us, are equally mistaken.

On one occasion an evangelist made this kind of an expression, "If a man who believed, repented and confessed were on his way to be baptized, and die before the consummation of the act, he would have no promise of being saved." Others have said that we cannot be saved without baptism. Without referring to the accuracy or inaccuracy of such statements, they are to be condemned for their worthlessness. The Gospel is positive and so are its commands and promises, and it is worse than useless to raise these negative questions. They are well enough for the study of the thinker, but for perishing souls, seeking the way of life, they are worse than nothing.

Now and then, without any search for them, we meet disciples who claim that because they have been baptized, they are eternally saved. That they need not strive to grow, but that they are as ready for heaven as soon as they come up out of the water as they ever possibly can be. Such members only bring harm to the cause and retard Christian growth. They predicate their salvation on the one fact, viz: because they have been baptized. We have no man of any prominence, no we have no preacher

who holds any such position; but some who are too indolent to study and carefully prepare their sermons make the impression that baptism is the chief thing. This, by all means, should be carefully guarded against.

Another class of people contend that any one baptized and not holding our theory of baptism and coming to us, should be re baptized. Those who hold this are as sectarian as can be. They make a theory, a test of orthodoxy, and that theory about an ordinance. For such a theory there is no reason, and can be none. The reception of God's blessing depends not on any opinion about his commands, but on obedience to them. The test question is, "Do we love God and keep his commandments?"

We need to come severely to the Pauline example to know nothing but Christ and him crucified. A faithful presentation of him, in earnestness, is all that the sinner needs. We generally approach the question—baptism—from the wrong direction. We need not insist so strenuously on men to receive the theory of baptism unto remission of sins, in preaching to the world.

The first object of preaching is to convince the world of sin. To make men realize their sinful condition, and to know that they are lost is the first one thing needful. When they realize this—that they are lost—they will, as on Pentecost cry out, "What shall we do to be saved?" When men are thus anxiously inquiring after salvation, they will not stop to question about the necessity of this or that. They will not want to hear my theory, or yours, about any command. All we need to do is to show a thus saith the Lord. "What does God require at our hands?" Answer this from the Bible, and the question is settled. They need no three or four sermons about baptism. It is beyond question that such a mode of procedure is apostolic, and will avoid many difficulties. Too many pulpits become debating grounds, where preachers oppose men of straw, and come off champions, thus getting glory to themselves, and forgetting the glory of God. We should learn to exalt Christ, and to abase self. We have the order reversed—we exalt self. We love to be called big preachers, eloquent, etc.

In our next we will discuss another phase of the question.

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