

May 169.

"WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night:
if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

ASPECTS OF THE INCARNATION - III

In the study of the Pauline statements on the incarnation of Christ, one is impressed with the emphasis placed on the extent of the condescension - the level to which Christ descended to reach man. To the Corinthian church, Paul appealed to their knowledge of the grace - the unmerited favor of our Lord Jesus Christ, reminding them that though He was rich, yet for the sake of man, He accepted poverty.¹ And the "poverty" of man which Christ accepted was more than an economic condition. It was a poverty viewed from the stand point of heaven. "For He [God] hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."²

To the Galatian believers, Paul declared that in sending the Son, God's plan called for Him to be "made of a woman, made under the law."³ He who was the commander of heavenly hosts, equal with the Father in glory and majesty, upon Whom no yoke of obligation rested, accepted the working of the great law of heredity, and descended to the lowest parts of the earth, - the womb of a woman⁴ - to accept a human nature at the very ground level at which man receives his nature. And lest there be any doubt as to Paul's understanding of the nature of Christ's humanity, he, soon after this Epistle³, in writing to the church at Rome stated that God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" that sin might be "condemned. . . in the flesh."⁵

Paul's final summation is found in the Letter to the Philipians. Christ is presented as existing in the "form of God"; but exchanging that basic iden-

tity with the Godhead for the "form of a servant" [δουλος], thus coming to be in the slave nature of man. Then as the cap sheaf of the condescension, Christ obediently submitted to the very results of sin, and accepted the penalty for transgression - death itself, even the death of the cross.⁶ His identity with the fallen sons of Adam was full and complete. One Who existed as very God, became fully man. Why such depths?

The plan for man's redemption required that Christ have certain experiences. It is stated thus:

It was in the *order* of God that Christ should take upon Himself the form and nature of fallen man, that He might be made perfect through suffering, and *Himself endure the strength of Satan's fierce temptations*, that He might understand how to succor those who should be tempted.⁷

Now a temptation is not a temptation unless there is a possibility of yielding. To accept such a situation presented a two-fold risk to the Godhead. 1) A risk personally to the Son of God; and 2) a risk to the unity of the eternal throne unless certain precautions were taken. From the beginning God had exercised great care lest sin become immortalized. Our first parents were driven from the garden so that they could not partake of the tree of life following their disobedience.⁸ Now if Christ came into humanity with the immortal aspect of divinity - the glory He had with the Father before the world was⁹ - and failed, which was a possibility, then there would have been two Beings in eternal antagonism. The incarnation, of necessity, had to synthesize these two risks.

Christ accepted *such* a condescension. He accepted the personal risk. We read:

He could not have been tempted in all points like as man is tempted had there been no possibility of His failing. He was a free agent, placed on probation, as was Adam, as is man. Unless there is a possibility of yielding, temptation is no temptation. Temptation comes and is resisted when man is powerfully influenced to do a wrong action, and knowing that he can do it, resists by faith, with a firm hold upon divine power. This is the ordeal through which Christ passed.¹⁰

Christ also shielded the divine throne. "He humbled Himself, and took mortality upon Him. As a member of the human family, He was mortal; . . ."11 Thus if He sinned, "divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam."12 All would have been lost, for there was no intercessor to step between Christ and the Father. But while Christ yielded up the divine perogatives, His place in the Godhead was held in sacred trust, and could not be lost, "while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty."13

There is another aspect of the incarnation that we need to consider. His entrance into human flesh was a preparation for His sacrifice on the cross. The wages of sin is death, and an offering was provided by God in Jesus Christ to meet the demands of the broken law. But as God, in "the form of God", Christ could not have died. This was an impossibility. "But coming as man, Christ could die."14 This He did. What we need to ever keep in mind is the fact that "the man Christ Jesus was not the Lord God Almighty."15

As we consider the yoke of obligation accepted by Christ, and agreed to by the Father, so that man might have a second chance, and at the same time the universe be preserved so that a second chance would be meaningful, we come to understand and appreciate more fully these words:

Into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.

The heart of the human father yearns over his son. He looks into the face of his little child, and trembles at the thought of life's peril. He longs to shield his dear one from Satan's power, to hold him back from temptation and conflict. To meet a bitterer conflict and a more fearful risk, God gave His only begotten Son, that the path of life might be made sure for our little ones. "Herein is love." Wonder, O heavens! and be astonished, O earth!16

- ¹II Cor. 8:9 ²II Cor. 5:21 ³Gal. 4:4
⁴Eph. 4:9; Ps. 139:15 ⁵Romans 8:3 ⁶Phil. 2:6-8
⁷Ellen G. White, The Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 2, p. 39
⁸Gen. 3:22-23 ⁹John 17:5
¹⁰Ellen G. White, Manuscript 29, 1899
¹¹Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 5, p. 1127
¹²Ibid., p. 1131 ¹³Ibid., p. 1129
¹⁴Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 925
¹⁵Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 1129
¹⁶Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 49

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A SUPPLEMENT

There are certain statements in the Spirit of Prophecy which cause perplexity when we accept the fundamental position of Adventism that Christ took upon Himself the fallen nature of man, "degraded and defiled by sin." The most frequently quoted are these:

Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He *took upon Himself* human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature is tempted. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there *in Him* an evil propensity. . .

Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption *rested* upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption. . .

Let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be.

These statements are from a single letter (Letter 8, 1895) and are reproduced in the Bible Commentary (5BC:1128-29). Many have concluded that these cautions were penned to Elder A. T. Jones, who had made some very strong remarks on the incarnation at the General Conference Session of 1895. Jones had stated:

Now the flesh of Jesus Christ was our flesh, and in it was all that is in our flesh, - all the tendencies to sin that are in our flesh were in His flesh, drawing upon Him to get Him to consent to sin. (GC Bulletin, Sermon #17, p. 328)

But while Sister White did write to A. T. Jones in 1893 from New Zealand about extreme statements in regards to the relationship between faith and works (See Notebook Leaflets, No. 5, Vol. 1, No. 21), no where has there been published any letter of counsel in regard to Jones' understanding of the incarnation. His position was the same as Waggoner's, Haskell's and others.

Letter 8, 1895 was written to an evangelist in Australia named, William L. H. Baker. We do not have any record of what this man was teaching, or what he might have written in regard to the incarnation, and thus we are left without a means of comparison. We must, therefore, analyze the statements of caution in the light of what Sister White wrote on other occasions.

First, we need to keep in mind that Christ was unique in comparison with the other sons of men. But this uniqueness was in regard to His *pre-existence*, which none of us have ever had. Our "self" is the result of an earthly father and mother. But with Christ, there was a "Divine Self", which had existed from all eternity in the "form of God." This "divine Ego", at Bethlehem, changed forms, from the "form of God" to the "form of a servant." He - the Divine Ego - took upon *Himself*, our human nature as received through Mary. In that human nature was found just what is in our human nature. But the acceptance of our human nature did not corrupt in the least the Divine Ego. "In His human nature, He maintained the purity of His divine character." (YI, June 2, 1898) Sin never *rested* upon Him, for "not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation." (GC p. 623)

The inherent (innate, intrinsic) propensities of man are a very part of his "self" or ego. It is in this sense that the Spirit of Prophecy uses the term, "propensities". She states:

Self-indulgence, self-pleasing, pride, and extravagance must be renounced. We cannot be Christians and gratify these propensities.

(*Review and Herald*, May 16, 1893)

With Christ, "He emptied Himself", and sought to do only the Father's will. There was not *in Him* an evil propensity, no self-indulgence, self-pleasing, pride, or love of display.

In the same year that the letter was written to Evangelist Baker, the servant of the Lord wrote the following:

Leaving the royal courts of heaven Christ came to our world to represent the character of the Father, and thus help humanity to return to their loyalty. The image of Satan was upon men, and Christ came that He might bring to them moral power and efficiency. *He came as a helpless babe, bearing the humanity we bear.* "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." He could not come in the form of an angel; for unless He met man as man, and testified by His connection with God that divine power was not given to Him in a different way to what it will be given to us, He could not be a perfect example for us. He came in humanity, in order that the humblest being upon the face of the earth could have no excuse because of his poverty, or ignorance, and say, Because of these things, I cannot obey the law of Jehovah. Christ clothed His divinity with humanity, that humanity might touch humanity; that He might live with humanity, and bear all the trials and afflictions of man. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. *In His humanity He understood all the temptations that will come to man.* (Manuscript 21, 1895) [7BC:925]

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