

THE DEITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

PLAINLY INFERRED FROM HIS BEING EXHIBITED IN SCRIPTURE AS THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP

When he bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. Heb. i. 6.

WHITBY:
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY HORNE AND RICHARDSON,
BRIDGE STREET.
1833.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION.

THE question whether our Lord Jesus Christ were a divine person or a mere mortal man, is of vast importance to every individual Christian.

If he be God, then they who refuse to honour him as such rob him of his glory, and are consequently rendering themselves obnoxious to his just displeasure. But if he were only a man, how awful is the condition of all those who worship him as God! They are worshipping a fellow creature in despite of the strictest commands of the Almighty.

The only source whence any satisfactory information on this momentous subject can be derived, is the Bible. That Holy Book, however, treats of it as fully and clearly as the most fastidious enquirer could wish. For as Bishop Burnett remarks, " Although idolatry and a plurality of gods, seem to be the main things that the Scriptures warn us against; yet we have in these same Scriptures a pursued thread of passages and discourses, which do naturally lead a man to think that Christ is God."

The passages and discourses which the Bishop here speaks of, may be divided into several different classes, or series, according to the different kinds of reasons which they supply us with, whereon to found our belief in the Lord's divinity. Some of them would lead us to believe that Christ is God, by incidentally hinting at his divine nature; others, by representing him as exercising the prerogatives of Deity. Sometimes they ascribe to him the divine attributes and perfections; sometimes he is plainly called God; and not unfrequently they would persuade us to believe in his divinity, by exhibiting him as the proper object of our worship.

From this last class of " passages and discourses" we shall endeavour to make such a selection, as may, through the blessing of God, be serviceable to the humble Christian in his search after the truth of the Gospel; as may serve to dispel his fears, to confirm his faith in Jesus, and enable him to give a reason for the hope that is in him.

Assuming the Bible to be true, we shall first show,—that it entirely prohibits the worship of any being except the true God; and then attempt to prove,—that it sanctions the worship of Jesus Christ. If this can be satisfactorily made out, the unavoidable inference is—that Christ is God.

CHAPTER 2.

GOD ONLY TO BE WORSHIPPED.

THE most careless reader of the sacred Scriptures must have remarked the peculiar jealousy of Jehovah with respect to the worship and adoration due unto him from his creatures. The Bible contains line upon line and precept upon precept inculcating the worship of the one true God only; it denounces also the severest punishments against those who may dare to violate its injunctions in this particular; and, if we attend at all to the historical part of God's word, we shall find that its threatening were faithfully executed, whenever the objects of them persevered in their disobedience to the Most High, and served strange gods.

" I am the Lord thy God,—thou shalt have no other gods before me;" [Exodus 20. 3] is the first commandment of the moral law. And the second commandment is nearly of the same import, only a little more definite in expression: " Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in earth beneath, or that is in the water under the

earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them." And the Psalmist says, " Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship Him all ye gods." [Psalm 92. 7].

Similar language is constantly to be met with throughout the whole of the Old Testament, sometimes addressed to large bodies of men, sometimes to single individuals. David near the close of life exhorts his intended successor in these words: " Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him he will cast thee off for ever." [1 Chron. 28. 9] And Isaiah says to the Israelites, " Sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your fear and let him be your dread:" [Isaiah 8.13] offer no more vain oblations to other gods, for the Lord Jehovah alone is worthy of your adoration. Passages to the same effect are also frequently occurring in the New Testament. Christ is there represented as saying to Satan, " It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." [Matt. 4. 10] A similar lesson is taught us in the Acts of the Apostles; where it is said, when Cornelius the centurion met Peter he fell down at the Apostle's feet and worshipped; but Peter took him up, saying, " Stand up; I myself also am a man:"[Acts 10.25] implying as much as if he had further added, therefore thou must not worship me, for God only is the proper object of our worship.

· These quotations from holy writ are sufficient to prove bow strictly we are enjoined in Scripture to refrain from following after false divinities, which are no gods; or from putting a creature in the room of the Creator. And it will be made equally clear from what follows, that the denunciations pronounced against those who adhered not to the service of their Maker in preference to the abominations of the heathen, were often executed with signal severity.

All the history of the Jews is one painful and continued series of testimony to this fact. They worshipped a calf in Horeb, and in consequence about 3,000 of them were slain. [Exod. 32. 28] After this they did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forsook the Lord and served Baalim and Ashtaroth. "And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of the spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the bands of their enemies round about, so that they could not stand any longer before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord bad said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed." [Judges 2. 14]

This passage you may find in the second chapter of the book of Judges; and in the eleventh chapter of the first book of Kings, there is an account of the troubles brought upon the wise builder of the temple, because "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God." For it appears that this illustrious monarch was seduced in his old age from the right paths; " and he went after Ashtaroth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites;" [1 Kings 11. 5] notwithstanding that the Lord God of Israel " had appeared unto him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods;" and notwithstanding the solemn and pathetic admonition of his dying father, which we have already noticed. The concluding chapter of the Chronicles records another instance of the "sore punishments" inflicted on the seed of Jacob for this sin. "

The Lord brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary; and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand." [2 Chron. 36. 17]

After reading such terrible displays of the jealous anger of the Almighty exercised against his chosen people whenever they presumed to give his glory to another; and even against Solomon, a man so peculiarly favored and distinguished by Himself; we need not be surprised at the following awful relation, in the Acts of the Apostles, in reference to an unbeliever. " Upon a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration: and the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god and not of a man. And the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost." Acts 12. 23.

CHAPTER 3.

THE BIBLE SANCTIONS THE WORSHIP OF CHRIST.

THE same infallible book that contains the above and numerous other commands and threatenings of the like tendency,—that records these and many other severe chastisements inflicted upon those who forsook the worship of the One True God,—teaches us, both by example and precept, to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, and to honor him as God.

Was not the psalmist looking unto Jesus when he said, " All Kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him?" [Psalm 72. 11] And the prophet Isaiah foretold, as the Rev. Matthew Henry observes, both the humiliation and the exaltation of the Messiah, in the following words: "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to Him whom man despiseth, to Him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers,—Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee." [Isaiah 49. 7] But lest any doubt should remain respecting the person here spoken of as despised, abhorred, and a servant, yet respected by kings and worshipped by princes, we would ask—is it not plainly He whom St. Paul describes, " who made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant?" [Phil. 2. 5] If the inspired

Apostle has thus evidently adopted the prophet's language in this place, and applied it to Christ, we surely need not hesitate to do the same.

But, although a Christian may be greatly edified, by perceiving such striking references to Jesus, to his character, and to his circumstances, in the writings of the holy men who lived many ages before his nativity, it is to the Evangelists and Apostles that we must principally look for those incontrovertible evidences of his Deity, which are to be derived from his being worshipped. To them, therefore, we shall immediately turn our attention.

St. Matthew, in the fifteenth chapter of his gospel, relates, that a certain woman came to Jesus, and said unto him, " Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." And when he gave her no answer we are told, " She came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me." I am aware that, in this case, an unbeliever may object to the worship here mentioned, as being nothing more than the reverence usually paid by supplicants to people of rank or consequence in eastern countries. Therefore, without laying much stress upon it, I shall leave it to the reader's consideration, and instance another case, against which this objection, owing to certain circumstances, cannot be so speciously adduced.

The disciples of Christ crossing the sea of Galilee with a contrary wind and a troubled sea, in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came unto them, walking upon the waters. When the disciples saw him walking on the waters, they were afraid, thinking that it was a spirit. But he condescendingly calmed their fears, and kindly said unto them, " It is I; be not afraid." Peter being among them, answered, " Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." And he said, " Come." But when Peter perceived how boisterous the elements were, his fears returned, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, " Lord, save me." Jesus immediately stretching forth his hand, caught him; and as soon as they were come to the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, " Of a truth thou art the Son of God." [Matt. 14. 33]

It is clearly evident, from the tenor of this narrative, that Jesus was here worshipped, not as a superior man, but as a Superior Being. The parties worshipping were not strangers come to ask a favor, and therefore willing to do him reverence, in order to have their suit more readily granted: they were his own familiar friends and disciples. They knew previously to this, that he was somebody more than ordinary; for they had just witnessed his multiplying five loaves and two fishes so as to feed five thousand people with them. They previously knew him to be the Messiah, and the Son of God; yet their faith in him seems not to have been hitherto so lively as to keep them always in remembrance that nothing could be impossible unto him. But now, when it was plainly demonstrated to their senses that he was Lord even over the elements of nature, their faith was called into more vigorous exercise; they obtained, all at once, clearer views of his character and perfections, and compelled by the force of their convictions, they fell down and worshipped him, saying, " Truly, thou art the Son of God!" And who could have refused his assent to this great truth, or refrained from joining in their worship, after beholding such a wonderful manifestation of his divine power and Godhead?

Observe, the Evangelist takes no notice of any refusal, on the part of our Saviour, to receive the religious homage rendered him, on either this or the former occasion. He did not say to those kneeling before him, as Peter said to Cornelius, " Stand up, I myself also am a man. [Acts 10. 26] Was he, considered with respect to his humanity, less humble than Peter? Or did he, as a man, wish to be honoured above his fellows? No: He received their worship, because he knew himself really to be, what the disciples, moved by the Holy Spirit, had declared him to be, the "proper Son of God;" and, as such, fully entitled to receive worship, and glory, and honour, equally with the Father.

Again: In the ninth chapter of St. John, we read of a blind man, whose eyes our Saviour opened. And we are further informed there, that, because this man shortly afterwards refused to agree with the Pharisees in condemning Jesus as a sinner, they put some mark of disgrace, or indignity upon him. When Jesus heard of it, and had found the man, he asked him, " Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him." [John 9. 38]

This case is still more evident than the former one. It admits of no equivocation. For, if the person here spoken of did not perform an act of real worship, what man ever did? Jesus had restored him to sight, or, more accurately speaking, had given him sight,—for he could never see until that time; but no mention is made of his worshipping the Saviour on that account. He knew that Jesus had performed a positive miracle, in having opened his eyes; and he was persuaded that he must therefore be a good man, or a prophet sent of God; for, says he, " If this man were not of God, he could do nothing,"—that is, nothing uncommon or miraculous. But though he was aware of all this, and, no doubt, properly grateful for the great benefit which had been conferred upon him; yet he did not offer to worship Christ in consequence of these things. The reason is obvious. He had hitherto regarded Jesus as nothing more than a man; and he was too good and conscientious a man himself to adore a fellow worm, however highly gifted or endowed. But, as soon as he recognised in his benefactor, the Saviour of the world—as soon as he was informed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and, of course, partaker of the Divine Nature—he instantly said, Lord, I believe;" and, then, as the rational result of that belief, "he worshipped Him."

Another worshipper of the Lord Jesus, was Stephen. He worshipped the Saviour at his martyrdom, by praying to him.

Stephen's prayer, on this occasion, is of very great importance to the establishment of the doctrine which we are contending for: and, as I wish to let it have its full weight, I shall present the reader with the excellent observations of Dr. Dwight upon it,—they being far more conclusive and satisfactory than any thing which could be expected from me. He takes it up thus:

" Stephen, in Acts 7. 59, 60, prayed to Christ. 'And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God'; or, as in the original, 'they stoned Stephen, invoking and saying, Lord Jesus receive my Spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord lay not this sin to their charge; and having said this, he fell asleep.'

" On this prayer of St. Stephen's I make the following remarks:

" 1. Stephen was, at this time, full of the Holy Ghost, [56 verse] and therefore perfectly secured from error.

" 2. He was singularly favoured of God, on account of the greatness of his faith and obedience; and, as a peculiar testimony of the Divine favour, he was permitted 'to see the heavens opened, and to behold the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.'

" 3. In the full assurance produced by this vision, and the faith with which he beheld it, he presented his final petitions to Christ.

" 4. The first of these petitions respected the highest personal object which can be prayed for, viz., the eternal salvation of his soul; and it attributed to Him, to whom it was made, that infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, which alone can bestow salvation.

" 5. The second petition was of the same nature, being a prayer that his enemies might not be finally condemned for the sin of murdering him; and, of course, attributed to the person to whom it was addressed, the power of forgiving or condemning those murderers. No higher act of worship was ever rendered than this, nor was any act of worship ever performed on a more solemn occasion, nor by a person better qualified to worship aright, nor with a more illustrious testimony of acceptance. Yet this act of worship was performed to Christ.

" 6. This was the very worship, and these were the very prayers offered to God, a little while before, by Christ at his crucifixion. Stephen, therefore, worshipped Christ, just as Christ worshipped the Father." [Dr. Dwight's Theology, vol. 2.]

CHAPTER 4.

SUBJECT CONTINUED.

ANANIAS of Damascus, speaking of the glorified Redeemer in a vision, said, in reference to Saul of Tarsus, " Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name." [Acts 9. 14]

Now, who were these that called on the Lord's name? Were they not the immediate disciples of the Saviour, and their first converts to their faith! And what did they call upon him for? What object could they have in view in thus addressing themselves to Christ after his crucifixion and ascension from the earth? What, but to make known to him their cares and desires, from the assurance that he still cared for them, and was able to supply all their wants out of his rich fulness. What, but to ask for his' intercession at the Throne of Grace, that they might have access to the Father through him, and receive, for his sake, the remission of all their sins?—And is not such calling upon his name, equivalent to praying to him, or, in other words, worshipping him? But THEY would not thus have called upon his name, had they supposed him to be only a mere man: THEY were not creature worshippers. We may, therefore, rest satisfied that, in calling upon Jesus, these his first followers considered him to be a being of a superior nature—they knew him to be God.

St. Paul was in the constant habit of invoking the name of Christ, or praying to him.

Paul had, like other, men, his weaknesses and infirmities. One of these, in particular, he designates—" a thorn in the flesh;" [2 Cor. 12. 8] on account of which, he says, " I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." And he further informs us, for our encouragement, that he did not pray in vain, but received, in answer to his supplications, this comfortable assurance, " My grace is sufficient for thee: my strength is made perfect in weakness." And then the Apostle adds, lest we should mistake the person from whom this assurance came, " Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me,"—" But is Christ only a man,—a dead man?"—Then how absurd to talk of his strength, or of his power, resting upon any one!

" Now God himself, and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you." [1 Thess. 3.11]—This is another prayer of St. Paul's, addressed alike to the first and second persons of the Trinity; wherein the Apostle (after the example of his Divine Master) thinks it not robbery to equalize the Father and the Son, coupling both their names to the same petition. In the succeeding verse, his prayer is continued, but addressed to the Lord Jesus only. It is to this effect: " And the Lord make you increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards all men." [1 Thess. 3.12]—Here the Apostle prays Christ to bestow on the Thessalonians, that highest of all Christian graces, Charity; which, if he is able to impart, he is able to impart every other good and perfect gift—all things are at his disposal. Hence it is that the same Apostle exhorts his readers to imitate his example in offering petitions to Christ; and assures them, that " the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him;" [Rom. 10.12] adding the greatest possible incentive that could be set before them, as an inducement to pray to him: " For," he continues, " whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved."

Our Lord himself, bath given a powerful reason why we ought to render him divine homage. The Father, he informs us, judgeth no man, but bath committed all judgment to the Son, in order that, "All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." [John 5.23] And in the very same verse, the Lord Jesus makes another very strong assertion in connexion with the former—an assertion which, if taken in its plain and literal sense, as undoubtedly it ought to be taken, amounts to little less than a sentence of condemnation against some amongst us, who call themselves Christians. lie maintains that, unless we do worship the Son, our worship of the Father is no worship at all; or, at any rate, it is such as does God no honour: for, says he, " He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which bath sent him." [John 5.23]

It may possibly be alledged, that the honour spoken of, in both these places, is not synonymous with worship; that there are other ways of honouring the Saviour besides praying to him, and worshipping him;—as, for instance, we may honour him as much by our lives, as by our religious services.

It is very true,—we may and ought to honour him in our lives; but if we would honour him even as we honour* the Father, it is plain we must honour him in all the different ways by which God is honoured. Now, one of the ways in which we endeavour to honour God, is, by worshipping him. Therefore, it follows of course, that the Son must be worshipped likewise, if we would accord to him equal honour with the Father. But do they honour the Son, in this respect, even as they honour the Father, who pray to the Father, but pray not to the Son; who sing Psalms and Hymns in honour of the Father, but none in honour of the Son; who acknowledge the Father to be God over all, blessed for ever, but will not allow the Son to be any thing greater than a mere mortal man? Theirs is a very different mode of honouring their Saviour and their God, from that which is described in the book of Revelation, as taking place in the heavenly world. It is there written:

" And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying,—Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen." [Rev. 5. 11-14]

This is the language of the enraptured John. Influenced by the Prophetic Spirit, he bears witness to the declaration made by the hosts of heaven, that He whom God hath highly exalted, is worthy to receive honour, and glory, and blessing. He moreover testifies that he heard every creature of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, ascribing to the Lamb that was slain, the same blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, which they ascribed to Him that sitteth upon the throne; using the very same language to the Son as to the Father; rendering one and the same homage to both; and doing it at the very same moment of time: praising and magnifying the crucified Redeemer, in the same hymns with which they praised and magnified the Invisible and Eternal God; and thus perfectly equalizing, as far as regarded worship and honour, the two first persons of the Divine Trinity.

CHAPTER 5.

ANCIENT TESTIMONIES.

To illustrate this subject still further, and to show that the view which has been taken of it in the foregoing pages, is in strict accordance with the doctrines of the primitive church; I shall here introduce a few authorities from the earliest fathers, whose opinion, on this point, is deservedly considered as carrying great weight with it.

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, was a disciple of St. John. He, speaking of Christ, says, " To whom all things are made subject that are in heaven, and that are in earth; whom every living creature serves." Justin Martyr, in his first apology for the Christians, addressed to Anto-ninus Pius, refutes the charge of atheism which had been brought against them, and tells the emperor,— " They did not worship the gods, commonly so called; but they worshipped and adored the true God, and his Son, and the prophetic Spirit, honouring, them in word and in truth." This was written about the year one hundred and forty.—Miletus was bishop of Sardis sometime in the second century. He wrote a book, " On God Incarnate." This work is unfortunately lost; but the title alone is a sufficient proof of his belief in the Divine nature of our Blessed Lord. A fragment of his, however, has been preserved, which gives us still more unequivocally his opinion on this subject. "Christians," says he, " do not adore insensible stones; but they worship one God alone, who is before all things, and in all things; and Jesus Christ, who is God before all ages."* Milelus appears, like Justin, to have been pleading the cause of Christianity against the heathen; Eusebius, on the other hand, quotes an anonymous author who was opposing some foul heresy in the church which had sprung up in his day.t This author asks, " Who knoweth not that the works of Ireuteus, Melito, and all other Christians, do confes% Christ to be both God and man. In fine," says he, " how many Psalms, and Hymns, and Canticles, were written from the beginning by faithful Christians, which celebrated Christ, the Word of God, as no other than God indeed?": Arnobius, too, who flourished about the year three hundred, says, " The Christians do really worship Christ; but it is from their indubitable knowledge that he is the True God."§ This is very strong language, and directly to the point in hand.

To these friendly testimonies it may be added that the heathen Celsus, a professed enemy of the gospel, who lived in the second century, every where speaks of the Deity of Christ as the well-known doctrine of Christians; and the worship of Christ as the established practice. Lucian, also, another heathen writer who was contemporary with Celsus, mentions the worship of our Lord, and in such a manner, says Bishop Tomline, as shows that it was a thing not recently adopted. Lucian expresses himself thus: " The Christians still worship that dead man who was crucified in Palestine."

Thus these ancient writers, whether friends or enemies to the gospel, testify the same thing, with respect to the worship of the Son of God. There were, however, always a few nominal Christians, even in the early ages, who denied the proper divinity of the Saviour; but they were so few as not to prevent Christians generally from being stigmatised by the Jews, as worshippers of a plurality of gods; and by the heathens, as worshippers of a " dead man."

CONCLUSION.

IN the foregoing pages, we have seen that the Bible strictly prohibits the worship of any being whatever, except the One True God; and, it is presumed, they contain such a selection of passages and discourses from the Sacred Scriptures, as are abundantly sufficient to convince any ingenuous mind that Christ is there set forth as the proper object of our worship; especially when it so clearly appears, that this opinion is in perfect accordance with the sentiments of those Christians who immediately succeeded the Apostles. What shall we say then to these things? Is the volume of Inspiration inconsistent with itself? Does it forbid us to bend the knee to any created thing, and yet forcibly enjoin upon us the worship of a creature? Or, are we not rather bound to believe that our Saviour Christ is indeed God, of one Substance with the Father; and that we ought to worship and adore him as God, even as Jehovah, the Lord God Almighty? If we admit the Scriptures to be true, we cannot, I think, arrive at any other conclusion.

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