2 John 1:9 (John Gifford Bellett) 144244

Brief Expositions and Spiritual Meditations, Jesus Christ Come in the Flesh (1:9)

The ark and the camp were, in some sense, necessary to each other during the journey through the wilderness. The ark, seated in the tabernacle on which the cloud rested, had to guide the camp; and the camp, in its order, had to accompany and guard the ark and all connected with it.

This was the business of the camp. There was to be subjection to the will of Him who dwelt in the cloud; dependence on Him who led them daily; conscious liberty because of having left Egypt behind them, and hope because of having Canaan before them. Such a mind as this was to be in the camp; but its business was to conduct the mystic house of God onward to its rest, “the possession of the Gentiles.”

Their journeying through that desert would not have constituted divine pilgrimage. Many a one had traveled that road without being a stranger and pilgrim with God. In order to be such, the ark must be in their company.

The mind of the camp, of which I have spoken, might betray its weakness, or forget itself, and this might lead, as we know it did, to chastening again and again. But if its business, of which I have also spoken, were given up, there would be loss of everything. And this did come to pass. The tabernacle of Moloch was taken up, instead of the ark of Jehovah, and the camp, therefore, had its road diverted to Damascus or Babylon, far away from the promised Canaan (Amos 5:25; Acts 7:1:3).

And thus it is with ourselves. We are to maintain those truths or mysteries which the tabernacle and its furniture represented: and the apostle commits our entrance into Canaan to that. “If ye continue in the faith”; and again, “if ye keep in memory what I have written unto you.” Our safety, our rest in the heavenly Canaan, depends on our keeping the truth.

This, however, is to be added — that not merely for our own safety’s sake, but for Christ’s honor, is the truth to be kept. This is to be much considered. Supposing, for a moment, that our own safety were not concerned in it, Christ’s honor is, and that is enough. Such a thing is contemplated in 2 John 10: the elect lady was inside the house — she was in personal safety, but she has a duty to perform to “the doctrine of Christ”; so that if one come to her door, and bring not that doctrine, she must keep him outside, and refuse to have him where she is.

Title to entrance is confession to that doctrine, a confession of “Jesus Christ come in the flesh,” a confession that involves or secures the glory of His person. A full confession to His work will not do. The one outside may bring with him a sound faith as to the atonement, sovereignty of grace, and like truths; but all this is not a warrant for letting him in. There must be confession to the person also. “Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God: he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God’s speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

Surely this is clear and decided. I believe that this is much to be considered. The truth touching Christ’s person is to be maintained by us, even though our soul’s safety were not involved in it. I grant that our salvation is involved. But that is not all. He who owns not that truth is to be kept outside. It imparts tenderness as well as strength to see that the name of Jesus is thus entrusted to the guardianship of the saints. This is what we owe Him if not ourselves. The wall of partition is to be raised by the saints between them and Christ’s dishonor.

Mere journeying from Egypt to Canaan will not do. Let the journey be attended with all the trial of such an arid, unsheltered, and trackless road, still it is not divine pilgrimage. A mere toilsome self-denying life, even though endured with that moral courage which becomes pilgrims, will not do. There must be the carriage of the ark of God, confession to the truth, and maintenance of the name of Jesus.

Now, in John’s epistles, the name “Jesus Christ” expresses or intimates, I believe, the deity of the Son. The Holy Spirit, or the Unction, so filled the mind of that apostle with the truth that “the Word which had been made flesh” was God, that though be speaks of Him by a name which formally expresses the Son in manhood or in office, with John that is no matter. The name is nothing — at least nothing that can interfere with the full power of prevailing assurance, that He is “that which was from the beginning,” the Son in the glory of the Godhead. This is seen and felt at the very opening of the 1 John, and so, I believe, throughout. (See 1 John 1:3,7; 2:1; 3:23; 4:2; 5:20; 2 John 3-7.)

In the thoughts of this epistle “Jesus Christ” is always this divine One, so to speak, the eternal Life manifested. With John “Jesus Christ” is “the true God.” Jesus is the “He” and the “Him” in the argument of his first epistle; and this “He” and “Him” ever keeps before us One who is God, though in assumed relations and covenant dealings.

The confession, therefore, which is demanded by them is this—that it was God who was manifested, or who came in the flesh (See 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7). For in these epistles, as we have now seen, “Jesus Christ” is God. His name as God is Jesus Christ. And it is assumed or concluded that “the true God” is not known, if He who was in the flesh, Jesus Christ, be not understood as such; and all this simply because He is God. Any other received as such is an idol (1 John 5:20-21). The soul that abides not in this doctrine “has not God,” but he who abides in it “has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).

This, I judge, is the mind and import of the required confession that “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” I here speak of God under the name of Jesus Christ, and it is, therefore, the demand of a confession to the great mystery of “God manifested in the flesh.”

The very adjunct (as another has written to me), “come in the flesh,” throws strongly forward the deity of Christ; because if He were a man, or anything short of what He is, it would be no such wonder that He should come in the flesh. And 1 John 1:2-3 guide us to John’s thoughts in the use of the name “Jesus Christ.” That which was from the beginning, the eternal Life which was with the Father, was the Person he declared to them. The words “with the Father” are important, making it evident that the Son was the eternal One, the name of this eternal Son being Jesus Christ. And it is interesting to compare the close with the commencement of this epistle, “This is the true God and the [with the article] eternal life.”

I desire to bless the Lord for giving my soul fresh assurance, on such simple ground of Scripture that this duty lies on us of maintaining the honor of the name of Jesus.

In the course of our Lord’s journey on earth, we see Him in the following ways:—

As the born One — holy, meeting God’s mind in the nature or human material.

As the circumcised One — perfect under the law, meeting God’s mind in it.

As the baptized One — meeting God’s mind in dispensational order and righteousness.

As the anointed One — meeting God’s mind as His image or representative.

As the obedient One — doing always those things that pleased the Father,

As the devoted One — meeting God’s mind in all things; and in laying down his life (John 10:17-18).

7. As the risen One — sealed with God’s approval in victory for sinners.

Thus does He meet all the mind of God while providing for us. All was magnified in Him and by Him, all made honorable. God’s proposed delight in man, or glory by him, has been richly answered in the blessed Jesus. While in His person He was “God manifest in the flesh,” in the succession of His stages through the earth He was accomplishing all the divine purpose, delight, and glory, in man. Nothing unworthy of God was in the man Christ Jesus, His person, experiences, or ways.

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