

## II. THE COMING OF CHRIST.

"He was in the world, and the world was made through, him, and the world knew him not."

Page 208 -----

94. All this is said of Christ as man and refers especially to the time after his baptism, when he began to give light according to John's testimony. He was ever in the world. But what place of the world knew it? Who received him? He was not even received by those with whom he was personally associated, as the following shows:

"He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not."

95. This also is said of his coming as a preacher, and not of his being born into the world. For his coming is his preaching and illumining. The Baptist says: "He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose," Math. 3, 11; Luke 3, 16; Mark 1, 7; John 1, 27. On account of this coming John is also called his forerunner, as Gabriel said to his father Zacharias: "He shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him," Luke 1, 17. For, as has been said, the Gospels begin with the baptism of Christ. Then he began to be the Light and to do that for which he came. Therefore it is said that he came into the world to his own people and his own received him not. If this were not said of his coming to give light by preaching, the Evangelist would not thus reprove them for not having received him.

96. Who could know that it was he, if he had not been revealed? Therefore it is their fault that they did not receive him; for he came and was revealed by John and by himself. Therefore John says, "That he should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing with water," John 1, 31. And he says himself, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive," John 5, 43. This is also evidently said of the coming of his preaching and of his revelation.

97. He calls the Jews his own people because they were chosen out of all the world to be his people, and he had been promised to them through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. For to us heathens or Gentiles there was no promise of Christ. Therefore we are strangers and are not called "his

own"; but through pure grace we have been adopted, and have thus become his people; though, alas, we also allow him to come daily through the Gospel and do not esteem him. Therefore we must also suffer that another, the Pope, comes in his place and is received by us. We must serve the bitter foe because we will not serve our God.

98. But we must not forget in this connection that the Evangelist refers twice to the divinity of Christ. First, when he says: "The world was made through him." Secondly, when he says: "He came unto his own." For it is the nature only of the true God to have his own people. The Jews were always God's own people as the Scriptures frequently declare. If then they are Christ's own people, he must certainly be that God to whom the Scriptures assign that people.

99. But the Evangelist commends to every thoughtful person for consideration, what a shame and disgrace it is that the world does not recognize its Creator, and that the Jewish people do not receive their God. In what stronger terms can you reprove the world than by saying that it does not know its Creator? What base wickedness and evil report follow from this fact alone! What good can there be where there is nothing but ignorance, darkness and blindness? What wickedness where there is no knowledge of God! O, woe! What a wicked and frightful thing the world is! The one who knew the world and duly pondered this, would fall the deeper into perdition. He could not be happy in this life, of which such evil things are written.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believed on his name."

100. We see now what kind of a Light that is of which the Evangelist has hitherto been speaking. It is Christ, the comforting light of grace, and not the light of nature or reason. For John is an Evangelist and not a Platonist. All who receive the light of nature and reason receive him according to that light; how could they receive him otherwise? Just as they receive the natural life from the divine life. However, that light and that life do not give them any power to become

the children of God. Yea, they remain the enemies of this Light, do not know it, nor acknowledge it. Therefore there can be no reference in this Gospel to the light of nature, but only to Christ, that he may be acknowledged as true God.

101. From now on this Gospel is familiar to all, for it speaks of faith in Christ's name, that it makes us God's children. These are excellent words and powerfully refute the teachers of the law, who preach only good works. Good works never bring about a change of heart. Therefore, although the work righteous are ever changing and think they are improving their deeds, in their hearts they remain the same, and their works only become a mantle for their shame and hypocrisy.

102. But, as has often been said, faith changes the person and makes out of an enemy a child, so mysteriously that the external works, walk and conversation remain the same as before, when they are not by nature wicked deeds. Therefore faith brings with it the entire inheritance and highest good of righteousness and salvation, so that these need not be sought in works, as the false teachers of good works would have us believe. For he who is a child of God has already God's inheritance through his sonship. If then faith gives this sonship, it is manifest that good works should be done freely, to the honor of God, since they already possess salvation and the inheritance from God through faith. This has been amply explained heretofore in the sermon on the second Epistle for this day.

"Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

103. To explain himself, the Evangelist here tells us what faith does, and that everything is useless without it. Here he not only does not praise nature, light, reason, and whatever is not of faith, but forcibly overthrows each. This sonship is too great and noble to originate from nature or to be required by it.

104. John mentions four different kinds of sonship: one of blood, another of the will of the flesh, a third of the will of man, the fourth of this will of God. It is evident that the son-

ship of blood is the natural sonship. With this lie refutes the Jews who boasted that they were of the blood of Abraham and the patriarchs, relying on the passages of Scripture in which God promises the blessing and the inheritance of eternal salvation to the seed of Abraham. Therefore they claim to be the only true people and children of God. But here he says, there must be more than mere blood, else there is no sonship of God. For Abraham and the patriarchs received the inheritance, not for blood's sake but for faith's sake, as Paul teaches in Heb. 11, 8. If mere blood-relationship were sufficient for this sonship, then Judas, the betrayer, Caiaphas, Ananias, and all the wicked Jews who in times past were condemned in the wilderness, would have a proper right to this inheritance. For they were all of the blood of the patriarchs. Therefore it is said, they were born, "not of blood, but of God."

105. The other two relationships or sonships, to wit, of the will of the flesh." and "of the will of man" I do not yet sufficiently understand myself. But I see very well that the Evangelist thereby wishes to reject everything which is of nature and which nature can accomplish, and that he would retain the birth by God alone. Therefore there is no danger in whatever manner we explain these two parts and variously attribute them to nature outside of grace. It is all the same. Some understand the sonship of the will of the flesh to come not of blood, but through the law of Moses He commanded that the nearest kin to the wife of a deceased husband marry the widow, and raise a name and heir to the deceased one, that the name of his friend be not put out of Israel. To this interpretation belongs also the step-relationship, which comes of the will of the flesh, and not of blood-relationship.

106. But the Evangelist here calls by the name of flesh man, as he lives in the flesh, which is the common Scriptural designation. Therefore the meaning is: not as men have children outside of their own line of descent, which is carnal and human, and takes place in accordance with man's free will. But what is born in the line of ancestral blood, takes place without the free will, according to nature, whether a man wills it or not.

Page 212 -----

107. The third kind of sonship mentioned is "of the will of man." This is taken to mean the sonship of strangers, commonly called "adoption," as when a man chooses and adopts a strange child as his own. Though you were Abraham's or David's real child, or step-child, or you had been

adopted, or you were a stranger, it would all be of no benefit to you unless you were born of God. Even Christ's own friends and relatives did not believe in him, as we are told, John 7, 5.

108. But those who wish may explain this relationship as follows: "Those born of blood" may mean all those who belong to the blood-relationship, whether it be a full or a step-relationship; "those born of the will of the flesh" may include all those who are not born of blood, or those who have been adopted into the relationship. But "those who are born of the will of man" are spiritual children of those who are the disciples or followers of a teacher. Thus the Evangelist rejects everything that might be accomplished by blood, flesh, nature, reason, art, doctrine, law, free will, with all their powers, so that no one may presume to help another by means of his own doctrine, work, art, or free will, or be allowed to help any man upon earth to the kingdom of God; he is to reject everything, except the striving after the divine birth.

I am also inclined to think that "man" in the Scriptures usually means a superior, who rules, leads, and teaches others. These are properly and before all others rejected, since no relationship is more stubborn, more insolently presumptuous, and confides more in itself than this, and does most strenuously oppose grace at all times, and persecutes the Lord of grace. In this respect let every one have his opinion, as long as he bears in mind that nothing avails which is not born of God. For if something else would have availed anything, the Evangelist would without doubt have put it side by side with the divine birth, especially as he looks for it so carefully, and would not have exalted only this divine birth.

109. The divine birth is therefore nothing else than faith. How can this be? It has been explained above how the light of grace opposes and blinds the light of reason. If now the Gospel comes and bears witness to the light of grace, that

Page 213 -----

man must not live and do according to his fancy, but must reject, put away, and destroy the light of nature, if this man accepts and follows such testimony, gives up his own light and fancy, is willing to become a fool, allows himself to be led, taught and enlightened he will be entirely changed, that is, in his natural light. His old light is extinguished and a new light, to

wit, faith is kindled. He follows this new light in life and in death, clings solely to the witness of John or the Gospel, even should he be compelled to abandon all he had and could do before.

Behold, he is now born again of God through the Gospel, in which he remains, and lets go his own light and fancy, as St. Paul says: "For in Christ Jesus I begat you through the Gospel," 1 Cor. 4, 15; again, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures," Jas. 1, 18. Therefore St. Peter calls us "new born babes," I Pet. 2, 2. It is for this reason also that the Gospel is called the womb of God, in which we are conceived, carried and born as a woman conceives, carries and bears a child in her womb. Isaiah says: "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been borne by me from their birth, that have been carried from the womb," Is. 46, 3.

110. But this birth properly shows its power in times of temptation and death. There it becomes evident who is born again, and who is not. Then the old light, reason, struggles and wrestles and is loath to leave its fancies and desires, is unwilling to consider and resort to the Gospel, and let go its own light. But those who are born again, or are then being born again, spend their lives in peace and obedience to the Gospel, confide in and cling to the witness of John, and let go, their light, life, property, honor, and all they have. Therefore they come to the eternal inheritance, as real children.

111. But when this light, reason and man's old conceit are dead, dark, and changed into a new light, then the life and all powers of man must be changed and be obedient to the new Light. For where the will goes reason follows, and love and pleasures follow the will. And so the whole man

Page 214 -----

must be hid in the Gospel, become a new creature and put off the old Adam, as the serpent puts off its old skin. When the skin becomes old the serpent seeks a narrow crevice in the rock, crawls through it, sheds its old skin, and leaves it on the outside.

Thus man must resort to the Gospel and to God's Word, confidently trusting their promises, which never fail. In this way he puts off the old Adam, sets aside his own light and conceit, his will, love, desire, speech, and his deeds, and becomes an entirely new man, who sees everything in a different

manner than before, judges differently, thinks differently, wills differently, speaks and loves and desires differently, acts and conducts himself differently than he did before. He now understands whether all the conditions and works of men are right or wrong, as St. Paul says: "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man," 1 Cor. 2, 15.

112. He now sees clearly what great fools they are who pretend to become pious through their good works. He would not give one farthing for all the preachers, monks, popes, bishops, tonsures, cowls, incense, illuminations, burning of candles, singing, organs, prayers, with all their external performances; for he sees how all this is simple idolatry, and foolish dissimulation, just as the Jews prayed to Baal, Astaroth, and the calf in the wilderness, which they looked upon as precious things in the old light of stubborn, self-conceited reason.

113. From this it is evident that no blood, nor relationship, nor command, nor doctrine, nor reason, nor free will, nor good works, nor exemplary living, nor Carthusian orders, nor any religious orders, though they were angelic, are of any use or help to this sonship of God; but they are only a hindrance. For where reason is not first renewed and in agreement with the new birth, it takes offense, becomes hardened and blinded, so that it will scarcely, if ever, be able to be righted; but thinks its doings and ways are right and proper, storming and raving against all who disregard and reject its doings. Therefore the old man remains the enemy

Page 215 -----

of God and of grace, of Christ and of his light, beheads John and destroys his testimony, the Gospel, and sets up his own human doctrines. Thus the game goes on even now, in full splendor and power, in the doings of the pope and his clergy, who together know nothing of this divine birth. They prattle and speak nonsense in their doctrines and commandments of certain good works, with which they hope to attain grace, though still clad in the old Adam.

114. But what is here said remains unchangeable: Not of blood, not of the will of the flesh nor of man, but of God, is this new birth. We must despair of our own will, works, and life, which have been poisoned by the false, stubborn, selfish light of reason; in all things listen to the voice and

testimony of the Baptist; believe and obey it. Then the true Light, Christ will enlighten us, renew us, and give us power to become the sons of God. For this reason he came and was made man, as follows: