

Publishing Editor's column

THE OPENING VERSES of John's Gospel are well known to us as a problem passage, used to support the doctrine of the Trinity. As such it is easy for us to concentrate on trying to prove what it does not say rather than what it does say. Let us, however, put aside the idea of this being a problem passage and concentrate on one aspect of what it does say, as indicated in the following: "In the beginning was the Word . . . And the Word was made flesh . . . full of grace and truth" (vv. 1,14). We know that this does not mean that the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, took upon himself human form, for Scripture contains no such doctrine; but what does it mean?

One application of this passage is that it refers to the way Jesus fulfilled what was spoken before in the Old Testament. Right from Creation ("the beginning" of verse 1) God declared His purpose with the earth, centred in one to come. In promises, prophecies and types He revealed in great detail what His Son would do, and at last He caused His Son to be born of Mary and to begin to fulfil His Word.

But this is not the only way in which we can think of Jesus being the Word made flesh. He not only fulfilled the words of the Old Testament, he continued the work of the Old Testament prophets in giving God's Word to men: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1,2, RV). In John's Gospel we frequently read of Jesus speaking forth God's Word, as in the following passages:

"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (3:34);

"I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (8:28);

"For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father Which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (12:49).

All that Jesus spoke was from God, and in that sense he was the Word made flesh.

But however true these applications of the phrase "the Word was made flesh" are, there is a further application which fits the context bet-

ter. Jesus was "the Word . . . made flesh" because he was "full of grace and truth"; this is surely the implication of John 1:14. The phrase "grace and truth" is a summary of the character of God Himself, as revealed to Moses in Exodus 34:6,7. This is indicated by the words in brackets in John 1:14: "and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father"; for that declaration of God's character in Exodus 34 came in response to Moses' plea to God, "shew me Thy glory" (33:18).

This great truth continues to be proclaimed in the subsequent verses of John 1: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him" (vv. 17,18). Jesus certainly declared God to men in the words that he spoke, but he also declared God to men in the things that he did, the life that he lived, the character that he showed. Just as we read later on in John of Jesus saying that he always spoke the words of his Father, so we also read of him speaking of the way he always did the will of his Father:

"My meat is to do the will of Him That sent me, and to finish His work" (4:34);

"I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father Which hath sent me" (5:30);

"the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him" (8:29).

In this sense of the Word being made flesh we can apply it to ourselves. We do not fulfil prophecies about us as Jesus did, we do not speak forth words from God as Jesus did (except in the sense that we proclaim the things already revealed to us in the Scriptures), but we can, indeed must, allow God's Word to develop our characters to become more like God and His Son, we can try always to do what pleases God, we can try to become the Word made flesh, though it will be but imperfectly. This is surely what the Apostle Paul is referring to when he writes to the Corinthian believers:

"ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3).

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