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# THE FINALITY OF THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

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**THIS** is not an attempt to answer the modern Documentary Critics of the New Testament, who not only limit the authority of Jesus Christ, and His biographers and doctrinal teachers, but also reduce the New Testament to a crazy-patch quilt form, but rather a reply to such authors as Dr. D. W. Forrest who, while admitting Christ's Divine personality, yet limits His authority as a teacher in human nature. Paul taught that the mind of the Lord was not revealed by the spirit of the world (Kosmos-world system) but by the Spirit of God. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord that he might instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ." However, the scholastics of our day seek to apply the worldly wisdom test—scientific and literary—to the teachings of Christ, and by it to interpret and explain the mind of the Spirit in His teachings, notwithstanding the fact that every effort to bring the teachings of Christ within the scope of human science has only issued in awakening doubts in anxious hearts of the authority of the Christ whose teachings have always had such a marvelous power in the uplift of the peoples and nations of the world, who have been brought under their influence. It has been truly said, "This Christ, whoever He is, has not only originated a system, but has put Himself into it as its very life and soul and power. Other men have established systems, but their personal force has not gone down into them. But so thoroughly, so absolutely is Christ in the Christian system that it may be truly said what Christianity has done Christ has done; what Christianity professes to do Christ professes to do. If Christianity reveals a way, Christ is the way; if Christianity teaches truth, Christ is the truth; if Christianity brings life, Christ is the life." Still, notwithstanding this, the scribes of our day, like the scribes of His day, have once more forced the issue between Divine authority and scholastic authority. We recognize the difference and are prepared to say with His contemporaries of old, "He does not teach like

the Scribes, but as One having authority." "Never man spake like this man;" and our endeavor will be to show that His authority was that of the Messianic prophet of the Lord who spake only the mind of God, who Himself was God, and in the human nature in which He taught, He was qualified of God by an immeasurable endowment of the Holy Spirit, so that all His teaching was inerrant and, therefore, was infallible and absolutely authoritative.

The authority of Christ has in all ages been acknowledged by the Christian church as final. Even this is conceded by many, at least, who would determine the scope of it by scientific reasoning. But when they come to define what they mean by final, it is not absolute; that is to say, they deny that Christ's allusions to certain books and authors or to certain personages and events are authoritative in the sense that they are a guarantee of historical accuracy; claiming that, although He mentions these for purpose of illustration of spiritual truths, yet He did not know it as historically true that such authors wrote the books, that such persons ever lived, or that the events ever transpired; but simply referred to them because of the accepted traditional knowledge of them by the Jews of His day; and that absolute infallible knowledge of many things of which He speaks was impossible to Him because of the limitations growing out of His incarnation. That is to say, He could only teach as a man, with all the necessary human imperfections; and that Christ held opinions, at least gave expression to opinions, which in the light of modern scientific criticism turn out to be unscientific, untrue; and that it is now absolutely necessary to relinquish those opinions, if either the Jewish or the Christian faith would be satisfactorily defended. But if it be true that by holding fast to that which He taught we are imperiling the interests of Christianity, then has the Christ of God truly become an unsafe and unreliable teacher; and the sooner we get rid of Him the better. I know the critics try to evade this issue by saying that He is safe as an authority in, and was qualified for, His own proper work, which was religious and spiritual, but not literary; and that,

viewed in His own proper sphere, He was authoritative, but that in questions of history, of scholarship and criticism, He speaks only as any other man, so that when He gave utterance to opinions or historical statements which are now regarded as inaccuracies or popular errors, He was simply accommodating Himself to the current opinion or belief, and that His opinions have no more weight than those of any other man; that "The divine nature in Jesus was dominated by the human during His earthly life, and therefore, it is unreasonable to believe His teaching to be infallible." But let us not forget that if Christ's statements, for example, about the authorship of certain parts of the Scriptures give a measure of countenance to opinions which are now standing in the way of both scholarship and faith, they not only cannot be regarded as instances of justifiable accommodation, but also make it impossible to vindicate His absolute truthfulness, except by imputing to Him a degree of ignorance which would wholly unfit Him for His office as a prophet of the Lord sent to reveal His will to man, and a permanent teacher of the Christian church. To admit errancy in the respect claimed by His critics, would not only awaken a strong suspicion of errancy in all His teachings, but would make the Lord's Christ's teaching as absurd and unauthoritative in spiritual matters as is that of the most radical scientific rationalist who attempts to interpret Christ to a lost world today. For, after all, the question of His authority involves the whole question of the limitations of His knowledge in what may be called the scientific sphere, as opposed to the religious. We admit the indisputable sphere of Christ's authority is that of faith and conduct, as He reveals "What man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." But to admit errancy in any statement, even as to person or event by which He would illustrate and enforce this revelation, is at once to destroy our confidence in Him as an infallible, safe and authoritative teacher in the things themselves which He would reveal and enforce. If He is the supreme revealer of our duty to God, and to our fellow man, and

of human destiny, then Himself must infallibly know the mind of God. All authority in heaven and earth must be given to Him in that human nature in which He teaches, and if all authority, then authority on persons and events as well as on the things He would use them to illustrate and enforce.

Dr. Forrest makes this statement, "Now it has been demonstrated beyond dispute that there are sayings of our Lord which, taken literally, seem to conflict with established results of Biblical investigation, and that His teaching in many respects is colored by temporary Jewish influences"; and when challenged that this being true, then Christ is not a final definite authority, His answer is, "we do not claim that Christ's word is final in all spheres, but we do claim that He has embodied in His Person, and in the principles He expounded, the final revelation of religious truth and practice of what is to be believed concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." But why should he claim this for a fallible teacher, One whose word is not final in all spheres? We admit there were limitations in knowledge in His human nature admitted by Himself; for example, of the end of the age, etc., but these were things of which He was not authorized of the Father to speak, because they were of no use to Him either by way of spiritual instruction, or of illumination and enforcement of the same. But on all points on which He did speak He was final authority. It may also be freely admitted that certain parts of His teaching had reference to local conditions then existing and are only authoritative in their application to similar conditions today; also, that some of His teachings were expressed in highly imaginative language drawn from forms of thought prevalent in His day, and that here it is the *fact*, the essential truth taught, and not the imagery that bears the stamp of authority; but these admissions in no wise detract from the absolute authority of the Christ.

This now leads me to say that in the discussion of the finality of Christ's authority we should never lose sight of the fact that it is not the authority of the philosopher,

or of the scientist, but of *the prophet of the Lord*, the divinely appointed One to reveal God to man in human redemption; and as we shall attempt to show, of a prophet so endowed with wisdom, and so endued with the Spirit of God in the human nature in which He taught, as to be absolutely inerrant in His teaching. This enduement took place at His baptism when He received the measureless gift of the Holy Spirit (John 3:31-34).

Only as we recognize His supreme and solitary greatness in His human nature as a prophet of the Lord thus endowed may we have a right conception of Him and of His authority. It was exceedingly interesting to find that Dr. Forrest in his "The Authority of Christ" (Page 71, Chap. II), concedes this whole truth, even though he does at once try to evade the issue in his explanation of it. He says, "There can be no doubt that Christ displays at times a knowledge of facts and events which at first sight does not seem to have been through ordinary human channels. But this is a characteristic which always marks prophetic vision." And then a little farther on he adds, "A hundred passages in the gospels prove that our Lord had this interpretative insight in an unequalled degree." And when endeavoring to describe the conditions of Christ's miraculous authority, Himself calling the dead to life, he says, "Hence while the prerogative of power which He possessed reveals the unexplored truth of human nature, whose relation is perfected with God, and thus belongs to humanity in its truly normal or ideal state, yet the fact that His human nature alone was normal in an otherwise abnormal race, argues in Him a special interposition of God, and the presence of the divine in a supreme and transcendent sense." The shame of it, to admit all this and not be able to see the secret of it all in the measureless gift of the Spirit of God in that nature! Recognize this qualification and we understand what He meant when He said, "The words which I speak unto you are not Mine, but the Father's that sent Me." And, "As My Father hath taught Me I speak these things." "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, and I know that His commandment is life everlasting; *whatsoever* I speak, therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak." "For He whom God hath sent *speaketh the words of God.*"

Back of what He says is what He is; and in human nature what He is must be endowed in that nature so that it not only witnesses to what He is, but gives authority to what He says. Hence in His incarnation, with all its limitations discovered by literary and scientific criticism, He could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

Let us now see how we are borne out in our interpretation of Him as an infallible teacher thus qualified. We start with the title itself—"The Christ," for Christ is not His name, or even a part of His name as Peter is a part of Simon Peter. It is His *official title*. Jesus is His proper name. If therefore "Christ" belonged to Him, if He had any right to it at all, that of itself is a very strong argument in favor of His divine authority; for the Christ was the anointed prophet of the Lord,—an authoritative teacher sent from God, appointed of God officially and authoritatively to represent God. And such He claimed to be when He said He only spake by the command of the Father. Six times in John 17 He asserts that God sent Him. If He was *the* Christ, then, as the word means, He was the Anointed of God to whom all law and prophecy alike pointed. So that when Paul asserted (Acts 17:3) "This Jesus whom I preach unto you is *the* Christ (not simply "Christ" as in the A. V.), he meant to say He was the Messiah of promise,—God's officially anointed One. So likewise when Jesus Himself asked His disciples, "What think ye of the Christ, Whose Son is He?" He did not mean what think ye of me, or, of my descent, but what think ye of *the* Christ, the Messiah, the anointed One, and especially of His paternity. For if He was not only God's officially anointed One, but also God's own proper Son, as Peter's answer declared Him to be, then the whole matter of the authority of His mission and ministry is established. For the Divine Son would not appear even in a distinctly human nature as

a teacher from God except under qualifications which would render Him inerrant and absolutely authoritative. The scholarship of our day can no more evade this challenge of Jesus, than could that of His own day. His teaching, His whole ministry, the salvation of a lost race, depended not only on *what* He was, but also on *who* He was. With Ritschl they may try to evade the question, but an undefined Christ is no Christ at all even to the man of science, and a Christ that is not God has no saving power over the millions of humanity; for they also are men. "Like a beautiful dream when one awakes, the merely human Christ fades away amid the grime and heat, the struggles for the lead, the infinite wickedness, the sorrows and disappointments of a disillusioned life. Low views of Christ give no inspiration to spiritual quickenings; from them come to the jaded millions no transforming power" (Dr. Cooke). By an inevitable law all theories of Christ which make Him less than God, and less endowed in His human nature by the absolute fulness of the Spirit of God, lead at last to a denial of infallible authority. Hence, deny His own claim to be the Divine Messiah in the sense that He was God's own proper Son, and you have taken from the Person of Jesus everything that was attached to Him by prophet and evangelist and forerunner. "The pomp of royal lineage and fulfilled prediction, the prerogative of King, of Priest, of Judge, the advent with the retinue of angels on the clouds of heaven, become merely men deforming investitures, misplaced like court dresses on the spirits of the just; and He is simply the divine flower of humanity blossoming after ages of spiritual growth—the realized possibility of life in God." Take from His human nature the absolute untrammelled fulness of the Holy Spirit, and you rob Him of all the glory of an infallible teacher, and world Saviour.

We go back into sacred history to find that anointing was, from a very early age, the divinely appointed emblem of consecration, or the setting apart to a particular, especially to a religious purpose. One can follow this through the Old Testament economy under which High Priest,



Priests, and Kings were regularly set apart to their several offices (both of which, strictly speaking, were sacred ones) by the ceremony of anointing, and that the prophets also were occasionally designated by this same sacred rite. This will be admitted by all. The force of the argument from it in our present contention is this, If Jesus was *the* Christ, the Messiah, the anointed of God, as He claimed to be, and as the prophet Isaiah had said (61:1) He should be, and, as He claimed, the prophecy had found fulfilment in Himself (Luke 4:18, 19), then He was God's own One set apart to the prophetic office, and spoke the words of God Who had sent Him. And if in fulfilment of His mission He claimed to be possessed of Deity,—God's own proper Son, and in His incarnation to be possessed of the absolute fulness of the Holy Spirit, and making such claim still met the Divine approval, then beyond all controversy His authority was absolute and infallible, and His teachings inerrant. It was the testimony of the angels who heralded His birth, that He was "Christ the Lord." The devout Simeon's testimony was that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him and revealed to him that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ, and that in the Spirit he came into the temple upon the presentation of the child Jesus, and then the Lord's promise was fulfilled and he was ready to depart, for he had seen the Lord's Anointed. John the Baptist's testimony was that God had sent him to baptize with water and had said unto him, "Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, the same is He who baptiseth with the Holy Ghost, and I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God." Peter testified of Him in his discourse in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:36) "Preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)," and declared—vs. 38—that His anointing for His mission was "with the Holy Spirit and with power;" and, if so, must have been with absolute authority. Luke testifies that the Holy One to be born of Mary should be called "The Son of God." Matthew 3:16-17, Mark 1:10, and John 1:32, each tell us that the anointing by the Holy Spirit took

place at His baptism, which was His setting apart to the work the Father had given Him to do; and John (3:34) states the completeness of the anointing, with the result, "For He whom God hath sent *speakeeth the words of God*; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him." And then note the significant words of the next verse, "For the Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into His hands."

Now if that was true, He the Son of God, and Son of man, thus endowed with the absolute infallible authority of the Father, Himself must have been an infallible and inerrant teacher; and it would seem no less blasphemous to assert the possibility of errancy in His teaching than of the Father Himself. "He that honors not the Son, honors not the Father that sent Him." Godet truly says in his Commentary on the Gospel of John (Vol. I, p. 320) "From the time of the baptism the Spirit becomes the principle of His psychical and physical activity of His whole personal life. . . . The baptism, therefore, constitutes in His interior life as decisive a crisis as does the ascension in His external state. The 'open heaven' represents His initiation into the consciousness of God and of His designs. The voice, 'Thou art My Son' indicates the revelation to His inmost consciousness of His personal relation with God, of His eternal dignity as Son, and at the same time of the boundlessness of divine love toward Him, and toward humanity on which such a gift was bestowed. He fully apprehends the name of Father as applied to God, and can proclaim it to the world. The Holy Spirit becomes His personal life, makes Him the principle and source of life for all men." And he might have added, the teacher of men who is of infallible and absolute authority. And why not? For it would only be in keeping with the prophecy of Isaiah (11:1, 2) concerning Him, "And there shall come forth a shoot of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah." This was further manifested in that He

never did anything, nor taught anything, in His human nature which was not by the authority of the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us (4:1) that "Being full of the Holy Spirit" He went forth to defeat the devil in the temptations of the wilderness; and in verse 14 he tells us that it was in the power of the same Spirit that He went forth to teach in Galilee; and in verse 18 Himself claims it was all in fulfillment of the prophecy made by Isaiah (61:1) that by the Holy Spirit He should be anointed for His mission.

Establish His divine Messiahship and you establish His authority; establish His Deity, which He claimed for Himself (John 5:17), and for which claim the Jews sought to put Him to death (Jno. 5:18), and you have established a necessity for a full and complete equipment to be a teacher of absolute infallible authority. His Deity is established beyond controversy, except by a positive denial of Scripture, by six lines of argument, which we can only take space to indicate.

I. The Scriptures assert that He is from eternity begotten of the Father in a manner no mere creature is: Psa. 2:7, Jno. 1:14; 8:42; that He is equal to Him as a Person: Zech. 13:7; Phil. 2:6, 7; and is one with Him in essence: Jno. 10:36; I Jno. 5:20.

II. Names and titles proper only to God are ascribed to Him, as Jehovah: Jer. 23:6; 33:16; Isa. 45:23-25; cf. Rom. 14:10-12; Isa. 40:3; cf. Luke 1:26; 3:4; Isa. 6:1, 9, 10; cf. Jno. 12; 40, 41.

III. He is called God, Matt. 1:23; Jno. 1:1; 20:28; I Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:1; The true God, I Jno. 5:20, 21; The great and mighty God, Tit. 2:13; Isa. 9:6; The only wise God, Jude 24:25; Rom. 16:27; I Tim. 1:16, 17; The God of glory, Acts 7:2; The only God, Isa. 45:15-23, cf. Rom. 14:11; God blessed forever, Rom. 9:5; The Lord of Hosts, Isa. 8:13, 14, cf. I Pet. 2:6-8; Psa. 118:22, cf. Matt. 21:42; Lord of lords and King of kings, Rev. 17:14; 19:13-16, cf. I Tim. 6:14, 15; The First and the Last, Rev. 1:17, 18; 2:8, cf. Isa. 41:4; 44:6.

IV. Divine attributes are ascribed to Him; as Omniscience, Col. 2:3; Rev. 2:23; Jno. 21:17; 2:24, 25; 16:30; Omnipresence, Matt. 18:20; 28:20; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3;

Almighty power, Phil. 3:21; Rev. 1:8; Eternal existence, Rev. 1:11, 17, 18; Jno. 1:1; Unchangeableness, Heb. 1:12; 13:8.

V. Divine works of Creation, Providence and Redemption are ascribed to Him, Jno. 1:1-4; Col. 1:16, 17; I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:3; Acts 20:28.

VI. He is presented as the object of religious worship, without any limitation, as in baptism, and by faith, prayer, praise and vows. Matt. 28:19; Jno. 5:23; 14:1; 20:28; Heb. 1:6; Phil. 2:9-11.

As one has said, "The whole life of a real teacher teaches." The teaching of Jesus is not alone the words which He spake, it is also the deeds which He did, and the example of His life; so that He who manifested His divine power by removing moral disease as well as healing physical disease; by opening the spirit of man to the eternal truths and beauties of God and His universe, as well as restoring physical sight and hearing; by giving spiritual sustenance, that righteousness which the hungering soul craves, as well as supplying the physical necessities of man; by soothing the troubled heart, as well as quieting the raging waves of the sea; by renewing the moral and spiritual being, as well as restoring the dead to life, He was the accredited Messenger of the Most High. And "One attestation of the truth of His utterances is the beauty of the life which shows that truth in concrete realization." He was, and is, the great authoritative religious Teacher whose coming fulfilled the hopes of centuries, and who embodied His words in His acts, and illustrated them in His character. He knew that He and He alone stood in a relation of perfect Sonship to the Father; that in Him alone was manifested the Father's ideal of humanity, and the Father's purpose of grace towards the sinful, and that thus through Him alone could men in any age come to a knowledge of the Father, and to true and full communion with Him. He speaks, therefore, not as a teacher who merely reveals truth *about* God, but as Himself the embodiment of God's life in humanity, and the guarantor of His presence and power. In Him God verifies Himself to us as Father and

Redeemer. This consciousness of His centrality for the whole human race as the one perfect Son and mediator of the divine life, so identifies Him with God that He felt Himself warranted to say not only, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," but also, "I and the Father are One."

Truly He is the Christ, God's infallible Teacher, before whom the heart cries, "My Lord and my God." The Christ of promise, the Christ of fulfillment, the Christ of God, the Christ of Mary, the Christ of life, the Christ of Calvary. There is but One—CHRIST crucified. All the gathered might of the infinite God is in that Word.