

✓  
PRINCETON SERMONS

CHIEFLY BY

THE PROFESSORS IN PRINCETON  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

NEW YORK

CHICAGO

30 Union Square East

148-150 Madison Street

*Publishers of Evangelical Literature*

COPYRIGHT,  
1893,  
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY.

*The Carlton Press*  
171, 173 Macdougall Street, New York

## INCARNATE TRUTH.

BY PROF. BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, D.D., LL.D.

*“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, . . . full of . . . truth.”—JOHN 1:14.*

THE obvious resemblance between the prologue to John's Gospel and the proem of Genesis is not a matter of mere phraseology and external form. As the one, in the brief compass of a few verses, paints the whole history of the creation of a universe with a vividness which makes the quickened imagination a witness of the process, so the other in still briefer compass traces the whole history of the re-creation of a dead world into newness of life. In both we are first pointed back into the depths of eternity, when only God was. In both we are bidden to look upon the chaotic darkness of lawless matter or of lawless souls, over which the brooding Spirit was yet to move. In both, as the tremendous pageants are unrolled before our eyes, we are made to see the Living God; and to see him as the Light and the Life of the world, the De-

stroyer of all darkness, the Author of all good. Here too, however, the Old Testament revelation is the preparation for the better to come. In it we see God as the God of power and of wisdom, the Author and Orderer of all; in this we see him as the God of goodness and mercy, the Restorer and Redeemer of the lost. Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Through what a sublime sweep does the Apostle lead our panting thought as he strives to tell us who and what the Word is, and what he has done for men. He lifts the veil of time, that we may peer into the changeless abyss of eternity and see him as he is, in the mystery of his being, along with God and yet one with God—in some deep sense distinct from God, in some higher sense identical with God. Then he shows us the divine work which he has wrought in time. He is the All-Creator—"all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that hath been made." He is the All-Illuminator—he "was the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." And now in these last days he has become the All-Redeemer—prepared for by his prophet, he came to his own, and his own received him not; but "as many as received him," without regard to race or previous preparation, "he gave

to them the right to become children of God, to them that believe on his name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Then the climax of this great discourse breaks on us as we are told how the Word, when he came to his own, manifested himself to flesh. It was by himself becoming flesh, and tabernacling among us, full of grace and truth. He came as Creator, as Revealer, as Redeemer: as Creator, preparing a body for his habitation; as Revealer, "trailing clouds of glory as he came"; as Redeemer, heaping grace on grace.

It is clear that it is primarily in its aspect as a revelation of God that John is here contemplating the incarnation. Accordingly, he bears his personal witness to it as such: "The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us, and *we beheld his glory*, a glory as of an only-begotten of the Father." Accordingly, too, he summons the prophetic witness of the forerunner. And accordingly, still further, he closes the whole with a declaration of the nature of the revelation made, and its guarantee in the relation of the incarnated Word to the Father: "No man hath seen God at any time; God only-begotten which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

In the special verse from which we have taken

our text we perceive, then, that John is bearing his personal witness: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and *we beheld his glory.*" He is telling us what of his own immediate knowledge he knows—testifying what he had heard, what he had seen with his eyes, what he had beheld and his hands had handled. An eye-witness to Christ's majesty, he had seen his glory and bears his willing witness to it. Nor must we fancy that he gives us merely a subjective opinion of his own, as if he were telling us only that the man Jesus was so full of grace and truth in his daily walk that he, looking upon him admiringly, had been led to conjecture that he was more than man. He testifies not to subjective opinion but to objective fact. We observe that the testimony is made up of three assertions. First, we have the fact, the objective fact, of the incarnation asserted: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Secondly, we have the self-evidencing glory of the incarnation asserted: "And we beheld his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten of the Father." And thirdly, we have the characteristic elements which entered into and constituted the glory which he brought from heaven with him and exhibited to men, asserted: "Full of grace and truth." Jesus Christ was incarnated love and truth. And precisely what

John witnesses is, that the Word did become flesh, and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth, and that the blaze of this his glory was manifest to every seeing eye that looked upon him.

Now it seems evident, further, that John had an especial form of the manifestation of love and truth before his mind when he wrote these words. He is thinking of the covenant God, who proclaimed himself to Moses on the mount when he descended on the cloud as "Jehovah, Jehovah, a God full of compassion, and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth." He is thinking of David's prayer, "O prepare loving-kindness and truth"; and his heart burns within him as he sees them now prepared. It is the thought of Christ's redeeming work which is filling his mind, and which leads him to sum up the revelation of the incarnation in the revelation of love and truth. Therefore he says, not "love," but "grace"—undeserved love to sinners. And in "truth" he is thinking chiefly of Christ's "faithfulness." The divine glory that rested as a nimbus on the Lord's head was compounded before all else of his ineffable love for the unlovely, of his changeless faithfulness to the unfaithful. For in Christ, God commended his love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Nevertheless, it would be a serious error to confine the words as here used to this single implication. This is rather the culmination and climax of their meaning than the whole extent and impletion of it. Christ is not only love as manifested in grace, but as the God of love manifest in the flesh he is love itself in all its height and breadth. Not only the loftiest reaches of love, love for the undeserving, find their model in him, but all the love that is in the world finds its source and must seek its support in him. His was the love that wept at the grave of a friend and over the earthly sorrows of Jerusalem, that yearned with the bereaved mother at Nain, and took the little children into his arms to bless them; as well as the love that availed to offer himself a sacrifice for sin. In like manner, that John has especially in mind here the highest manifestations of truth—our Lord's trustiness in the great work of salvation—in no way empties the word of its lower connotations. He is still the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world; and all the truth that is in the world comes from him and must seek its strength in him. "We beheld his glory," says the Apostle, "*full*"—complete, perfect—"of grace and truth." And perfection of love and truth avails for all their manifestations. This man, the man

Christ Jesus, could not act in any relation otherwise than lovingly, could not speak on any subject otherwise than truly. He is the pure fountain of love and truth.

I. We confine ourselves on the present occasion to the latter of the two characteristics here brought together. And, doing so, the first message which the declaration brings us is one so obvious that, in circumstances other than those in which we are now standing, it would seem an insult to our intelligence to direct attention to it. It is this, that since Jesus Christ our Lord, the manifested Jehovah, was as such the incarnation of truth, no statement which ever fell from his lips can have contained any admixture of error. This is John's testimony. For let us remind ourselves again that he is here bearing his witness, not to the essential truth of the divine nature incarnated in our Lord prior to its incarnation, but to the fullness of truth which dwelt in the God-man: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, . . . full of . . . truth." More—it is the testimony of our Lord himself. "I," he declared, with his majestic and pregnant brevity, "I am the Truth." Nor dare we fancy that his plenitude of truth is exhausted in his witness to the great and eternal verities of religion, while the pettier affairs

of earth and man are beyond its reach. His own norm of judgment is that only he that is faithful in the least may be trusted with the great. And it was testified of him not only that he knew whence he came and whither he went, but equally that he knew all men and needed not that any should bear witness of man, for he himself knew what was in man. He himself suspends his trustworthiness as to heavenly things upon his trustworthiness as to earthly things: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

Are we beating the air when we remind ourselves of such things? Would that we were! But alas! we are fallen on evil days, when we need to defend the truth of incarnate truth itself against the aspersions of even its professed friends. Oh, the unimaginable lengths to which the intellectual pride of men will carry them! Has one spun out some flimsy fancy as to the origin and composition of certain Old Testament books, which is found to clash with Jesus' testimony to their authorship and trustworthiness? We are coolly told that "as a teacher of spiritual truth sent from God and full of God he is universal," but "as a logician and critic

he belongs to his times," and therefore had "a definite, restricted outfit and outlook, which could be only those of his own day and generation." "Why should he be supposed to know the science of the criticism of the Old Testament," we are asked, "which began to exist centuries after his death?" Does another cherish opinions as to the interpretation of certain Old Testament passages which will not square with the use that Christ makes of them? He tells us at once that "interpretation is essentially a scientific function, and one conditioned by the existence of scientific means, which, in relation to the Old Testament, were only imperfectly at the command of Jesus." Has another adopted preconceptions which render our Lord's dealings with the demoniacs distasteful to him? He too reminds us that the habit of ascribing disease to demoniacal influences was universal in Jesus' day, and that we can scarcely expect him to be free from the current errors of his time. Let us cut even deeper. When one desires to break out a "larger hope" for those who die impenitent than Christ's teachings will allow, he suggests that in his efforts to lead his hearers to repentance Jesus spoke habitually as a popular preacher, and far more strongly than he could have permitted himself to do had he been an exact theologian. When another burns with a zeal

for moral reform which is certainly not according to knowledge, he suggests that we have reached a stage of ethical development when "new and larger perceptions of truth" have brought "new and larger perceptions of duty" than were attainable in Christ's day, and are accordingly bound to govern our lives by stricter rules than would apply to him in that darker age. Or, to sum up the whole, we have been recently told plainly that "Christ in his manhood was not the equal of Newton in mathematical knowledge," and not "the equal of Wellhausen in literary criticism," because—so we are actually told—the pursuit of such sciences requires "much exercise of mind."

Is, then, the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world gone out in darkness? What is left us of the Truth Indeed, who proclaims himself no more the Way and the Life than the Truth, if his testimony cannot be trusted as to the nature, origin, authority, and meaning of the Scriptures of which his own Spirit was the inspirer; as to the constitution of that spiritual world of which he is the Creator and the King; as to the nature of that future state which it is his to determine as Judge; or as to the moral life of which he is the sole author? Yet these are devout men who are propagating such teachings; and each has of course his own way

of saving himself from conscious blasphemy in erecting his own thought above the thought of the God-man. The most popular way at present is to suggest that when God became man he so surrendered the attributes of divinity as that, though God, he had shrunk to the capacity of man, and, accepting the weaknesses, become subject also to the limitations of a purely human life in the world. Thus it is sought to save the veracity of the Lord at the expense of his knowledge, his truthfulness at the expense of his truth. But who can fail to see that, were this true, the sorrowing world would be left, like Mary standing weeping in the garden and crying, "They have taken away my Lord"? Where then would be Christ our Prophet? Who could assure us of his trustiness in his witness to his oneness with God, to his mission from God, to the completeness of his work for our salvation? Faith has received a serious wound, as it has been well phrased, if we are to believe that Jesus Christ could have been deceived; if we are to believe that he could—wittingly or unwittingly—deceive, faith has received its death-blow.

Let us bless the Lord, then, that he has left us little excuse for doubting in so important a matter. To the law and the testimony. Is the man Christ Jesus dramatized before us in the length and breadth

of that marvelous history which fills these four Gospels, as a child of his times, limited by the intellectual outlook of his times, or rather as a teacher to his times, sent from God as no more the power of God than the wisdom of God? Is he represented to us as learning what he taught us from men, or, as he himself bore witness, from God?—"My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me;" "I am come down out of heaven," and "he that hath sent me is true"; and "the things that I have heard from him, these speak I unto the world." Did he even in his boyhood amaze the Doctors in the temple by his understanding (Luke 2:47)? Did he know even "letters," not having learned them from man (John 7:15)? Did he see Nathanael when, under the fig-tree, he bowed in secret prayer (John 1:47)? Did he know without human informant all things that ever the Samaritan woman did (John 4:29)? Did he so search the heart of man that he saw the thoughts of his enemies (Matt. 9:4); knew that one of the twelve whom he had chosen was a "devil" (John 6:70); led Peter to cry in his adoring distress, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee" (John 20:17); and called out the testimony of John that "he knew all men, and needed not that any should bear witness concerning man, for he himself knew what was in man"

(John 2:25); as well as the testimony of all the disciples that they knew that he came from God, because "he knew all things" (John 16:30)?

But why need we go into the details that are spread from one end to the other of these Gospels? In our text itself John bears witness that the fullness of truth which dwelt in the incarnate Word so glorified all his life as to mark him out as the Son of God: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten of the Father, full of truth." We surely need not fear to take our stand not only by the truthfulness but by the truth of our Lord. We surely need not shrink from, with the utmost simplicity, embracing, proclaiming, and living by his views of God and the universe, of man and the world. It was he that made the world; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. Who shall teach him how its beams were laid or how its structure has grown? It was he that revealed the Word. Who shall teach him how were written or what is intended by the words which he himself gave through his servants the prophets? It is he who is at once the Source and Standard of the moral law, and the Fount and Origin of all compassion for sinful man. Who shall teach him what it is right to do, or how it is loving

to deal with the children of men? We need not fear lest we be asked to credit Jesus against the truth; we may confide wholly in him, because he is the Truth.

II. Nor let us do this timidly. Trust is never timid. Just because Jesus is the Truth, while we without reserve accept, proclaim, and live by every word which he has spoken, not fearing that after all it may prove to be false, we may with equal confidence accept, proclaim, and live by every other truth that may be made known to us, not fearing that after a while it may prove to contradict the Truth himself. Thus we may be led to the formulation of a second message which the text brings us: That since Jesus Christ our Lord, the Founder of our religion, was the very incarnation of truth, no truth can be antagonistic to the religion which he founded. John tells us that he was the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world; and we may read this as meaning that as the Word of God, the great Revealer, it is he that leads man by whatever path to the attainment of whatever truth. There is, then, no truth in the world which does not come from him. It matters not through what channel it finds its struggling way into our consciousness or to our recognition, —whether our darkened eyes are enabled to catch

their glimpse of it by the light of nature, as we say, by the light of reason, by the light of history, or by the light of criticism. These may be but broken lights; but they are broken lights of that one Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Every fragment of truth which they reveal to us comes from him who is the Truth, and is rendered great and holy as a revelation from and of him.

We must not, then, as Christians, assume an attitude of antagonism toward the truths of reason, or the truths of philosophy, or the truths of science, or the truths of history, or the truths of criticism. As children of the light, we must be careful to keep ourselves open to every ray of light. If it is light, its source must be sought in him who is the true Light; if it is truth, it belongs of right to him who is the plenitude of truth. All natural truths must be—in varying degrees indeed, but all truly—in some sense commentaries on the supernaturally revealed truth; and by them we may be led to fuller and more accurate comprehension of it. Nature is the handiwork of God in space; history marks his pathway through time. And both nature and history are as infallible teachers as revelation itself, could we but skill to read their message aright. It is distressingly easy to misin-

terpret them ; but their employment in the elucidation of Scripture is, in principle, closely analogous to the interpretation of one Scripture by another, though written by another human hand and at an interval of an age of time. God speaks through his instruments. Prediction interprets prediction ; doctrine, doctrine ; and fact, fact. Wherever a gleam of light is caught, it illuminates. The true Light, from whatsoever reflected, *lighteth*.

Let us, then, cultivate an attitude of courage as over against the investigations of the day. None should be more zealous in them than we. None should be more quick to discern truth in every field, more hospitable to receive it, more loyal to follow it whithersoever it leads. It is not for Christians to be lukewarm in regard to the investigations and discoveries of the time. Rather, the followers of the Truth Indeed can have no safety, in science or in philosophy, save in the arms of truth. It is for us, therefore, as Christians, to push investigation to the utmost ; to be leaders in every science ; to stand in the van of criticism ; to be the first to catch in every field the voice of the Revealer of truth, who is also our Redeemer. The curse of the Church has been her apathy to truth, in which she has too often left to her enemies that study of nature and of history and philosophy, and even

that investigation of her own peculiar treasures, the Scriptures of God, which should have been her chief concern. Thus she has often been forced to learn from the inadvertent or unwilling testimony of her foes the facts she has needed to protect herself from their assaults. And thus she has been led to borrow from them false theories in philosophy, science, and criticism, to make unnecessary concessions to them, and to expose herself, as they changed their positions from time to time, to unnecessary disgrace. What has the Church not suffered from her unwillingness to engage in truly scientific work! She has nothing to fear from truth; but she has everything to fear, and she has already suffered nearly everything, from ignorance. All truth belongs to us as followers of Christ, the Truth; let us at length enter into our inheritance.

III. In so speaking, we have already touched somewhat upon a third message which our text brings us: That since Christ Jesus our Lord and Master is incarnate Truth, we as his children must love the truth.

Like him, we must be so single of eye, so steadfast in purpose, so honest in word, that no guile can be found in our mouth. The philosophers have sought variously for the sanction of truth. Kant found it in the respect a man owes to the

dignity of his own moral nature: the liar must despise himself because lying is partial suicide—it is the renunciation of what we are and the substitution of a feigned man in our place. Fichte found it in our sense of justice toward our fellow-men: to lie is to lead others astray and subject their freedom to our selfish ends—it is ultimately to destroy society by destroying trust among men. From each of these points of view a powerful motive to truth may be developed. It is unmanly to lie; it is unneighborly to lie. It will destroy both our self-respect and all social life. But for us as Christians no sanction can approach in power that derived from the simple fact that as Christians we are “of the Truth”; that we are not of him who when he speaketh a lie speaketh of his own, who is a liar and the father thereof, but of him who is the fullness of truth—who is light and in whom is no darkness at all. As the children of truth, truth is our essential nature; and to lie is to sin against that incarnate Truth who is also our Lord and Redeemer—in whom, we are told, no liar can have part or share.

Bare avoidance of falsehood is far, however, from fulfilling our whole duty as lovers of truth. There is a positive duty, of course, as well as this negative one beckoning us. We have already noted the im-

pulse which should thence arise to investigation and research. If all truth is a revelation of our Lord, what zeal we should have to possess it, that we may the better know him! As children of the truth we must love the truth, every truth in its own order, and therefore especially and above all others those truths which have been revealed by God for the salvation of the world. How tenacious we should be in holding them, how persistent in propagating them, how insistent in bearing our witness to them! "To this end was I born," said our Lord himself, "and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." And we too, as his servants, must be, each in his place, witnesses of the truth. This is the high function that has been given us as followers of Jesus: as the Father sent him into the world, so he has sent us into the world, to bear witness of the truth.

We all know in the midst of what dangers, in the midst of what deaths, those who have gone before us have fulfilled this trust. "Martyrs," we call them; and we call them such truly. For "martyrs" means "witnesses"; and they bore their witness despite cross and sword, fire and raging beasts. So constant was their witness, so undismayed, that this proverb has enshrined their eulogy

for all time, that "the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church." They were our fathers: have we inherited their spirit? If we be Christians at all, must not we too be "martyrs," "witnesses"? must not we too steadfastly bear our witness to the truth assailed in our time? There may be no more fires lighted for our quivering flesh: are there no more temptations to a guilty silence or a weak evasion? Surely there is witness still to be borne, and we are they to bear it. The popular poet of the day sings against "the hard God served in Jerusalem," and all the world goes after him. But we—do we not know him to be the God of our salvation? the God who hath lovingly predestinated us unto the adoption of sons, through Jesus Christ, unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace? May God grant that in times like these, when men will not endure the sound doctrine, we may be enabled by his grace to bear unwavering witness to the glory of the Lord God Almighty, who "hath made everything for its own purpose, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."

Need we pause further to enforce that highest form of the love of the truth, the love of the Gospel of God's grace, which braves all things for the pure joy of making known the riches of his love to fallen

men? The missionary spirit is the noblest fruit of the love of truth; the missionary's simple proclamation the highest form of witness-bearing to the truth. This spirit is no stranger among you. And I am persuaded that your hearts are burning within you as you think that to you "this grace has been given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the stewardship of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God." You need not that I should exhort you to remember that above all else "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." May God grant that while you may ask in wonder, as you contemplate the work of your ministry, Who is sufficient for these things? you may be able to say, like Paul, "We are not as the many, corrupting the Word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ." May God grant that the desire which flamed in Paul may burn in you too:

Oh could I tell ye surely would believe it!  
 Oh could I only say what I have seen!  
 How should I tell or how can ye receive it,  
 How till He bringeth you where I have been?

Give me a voice, a cry and a complaining,—  
 Oh let my sound be stormy in their ears!  
 Throat that would shout but cannot stay for straining,  
 Eyes that would weep but cannot wait for tears.