

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION Chapter 4 THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AS UNVEILED IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

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Transcript

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

Chapter 4

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AS UNVEILED IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

In the dispensations of His Providence, the revelation which God has made of Himself unto mankind has been a progressive one. First, He is manifested in the realm of creation, and that with sufficient clearness as to leave all without excuse if they perceive not that He is. Second, God is revealed in man himself, so that his very constitution evinces his Divine origin and his conscience bears witness of his accountability to his Maker. Third, God is plainly to be seen in human history: most patently in His dealings with the Jews during the past 35 centuries; yet with sufficient clearness everywhere as to attest that He is the moral Governor of this world, the Regulator of human affairs. But over and above these—O wonder of wonders—God has become incarnate. In the Person of His blessed and co-equal Son, God deigned to clothe Himself in our flesh and blood and manifest Himself unto the sons of men. For the space of 33 years He appeared among men and displayed His glory before their eyes; yea, gave proof of His matchless mercy by performing a work, at infinite cost to Himself, which has made it possible for Him to righteously save the very chief of sinners. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). It is by means of words that we make known our wills, reveal the caliber of our minds and the character of our hearts, and communicate information unto others. Appropriately, then, is Christ designated, "The Word of God," for He has made the Transcendent immanent, the incomprehensible God intelligible to us. Thus, too, is He denominated "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and the "Alpha and the Omega" (Rev. 1:8)—the One who spells out the Deity unto us. "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared" or "told Him forth" (John 1:18). In Christ's life of impeccable purity, we behold God's holiness; in His utter selflessness, God's benevolence; in His peerless teaching, God's wisdom; in His unrivalled miracles, God's power; in His gentleness and longsuffering, God's patience; in His love and grace, the outshining of God's glory. The record of Christ's unprecedented life is found in the four Gospels. Those Gospels were written by men who were constantly in Christ's company during the days of His ministry, being an unvarnished record of what they personally saw with their own eyes and heard with

their own ears. Numerous copies of those Gospels have been in known existence since the first century of this Christian era. Only three explanations of them are feasible. First, that they were written by deluded fanatics. But the character of their contents, the calmness of their tenor, the absence of anything savoring of enthusiasm, cause anyone capable of weighing evidence to promptly reject such an hypothesis. The dreams of visionaries had never received such widespread credence. Second, that they were the inventions of deceitful men. But that could not be, otherwise their contemporaries had exposed them as impostors. Wicked men could not have devised the Sermon on the Mount. Third, that they were written by honest men, who chronicled actual facts. The Person of the Lord Jesus presents a baffling problem, yea, an insoluble enigma unto infidelity. Skepticism is quite unable to supply any rational explanation of the phenomenon which He presents. Yet, "what think ye of Christ?" is a question which cannot be avoided or evaded by anyone who professes to use his reasoning powers or lays any claim to being an educated person. The obvious fact confronts believer and unbeliever alike that the appearing of Jesus Christ on the stage of this world has exerted a more powerful, lasting, and extensive influence than has any other person, factor, or event that can be named. To say that Christ has revolutionized human history is only to affirm what His bitterest foes are compelled to acknowledge. He dwelt in no palace, led no army, overthrew no mundane empire, yet His fame has spread to the ends of the earth. He wrote no book, framed no philosophy, erected no temple—yet He occupies a place in literature and religion which none else has ever achieved. How is this to be explained? Unbelief can furnish no answer! Nor can it refute, for the historicity of Christ is established far more conclusively than that of Socrates and Plato. Viewed simply from the human plane the Lord Jesus presents a phenomenon which admits of no human explanation. The law of heredity cannot account for Him, for He transcends all merely racial characteristics. Though according to the flesh He was the Son of Abraham, yet He is bounded by no Jewish limitations. Instead, He is the Man of men, the Pattern Man. The Englishman and the Dutchman, with their vastly different racial temperaments, the stolid German and the warm Italian behold their Ideal in Christ: He rises above all national restrictions. The law of environment cannot explain Him, for He was born in poverty, lived in a small town, received no collegiate training, toiled at the carpenter's bench. Such an environment was not conducive to the development of thought and teaching which was to enlighten the whole world. Christ transcends all laws. There is nothing provincial about Him. "The Son of man" is His fitting title, for He is the Representative Man. Christ was not tintured or affected by the age in which He lived. And that can be said of no one else. Study the characters and teaching of any of the outstanding figures of history, and we are at once aware that they were colored by their own generation. By common consent we make certain allowances for those who lived in former times, and agree that it would not be just to measure them by present-day ideals. Men of the most sterling worth were, in measure, marred by the crudities, coarseness, or superstitions of their contemporaries. But the Lord Jesus is the grand Exception. You may test Him by the light of this twentieth century—if light it be—or you may judge Him by any century, and no lack or blemish is to be found in Him. His teaching was pure Truth without any mixture of error, and therefore it stands the test of all time. His teaching was neither affected by the prevailing traditions of Judaism, by that of Grecian philosophy, nor by any other influence then abroad. The timeless value of Christ's teaching is without parallel. That of Socrates and Plato has long since become obsolete, but Christ's is as pertinent and potent now as the day He uttered it. There is no part of Christ's teaching which the subsequent growth of human knowledge has had to discredit. Therein it is in marked contrast with that of all other men, whose dicta have to be constantly revised and brought up to date. There is a universal quality to His teaching which is found in none other's—an originality, a loftiness, an adaptability. There is nothing petty, local, or transient about it. It is of general application, suited to all generations and to all peoples. It possesses a vital and vitalizing freshness without a parallel. It is profound enough for the mightiest intellect, practical

enough for the artisan, simple enough for the little child. It is profitable for youth, for maturity, and old age alike. It furnishes that which is needed by those in prosperity, brings comfort to those in adversity, and has imparted a peace which passes all understanding to thousands who lay upon beds of suffering, and while they passed through the valley of the shadow of death. Those are facts attested by a multitude of witnesses whose testimony cannot be fairly impeached. Unto Christ the master minds of the ages have paid homage. Such mighty intellects as Lord Bacon and Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday and Lord Kelvin, Milton and Handel; Calvin and John Locke, and a host of others who towered above their fellows in mental acumen and genius, bowed before Him in adoring worship. Not that Christianity is in any need of human patronage to authenticate it, but that it may be evinced to the thoughtful ones of this rising generation that Christians are far from being a company of credulous simpletons. Christianity is not something suited only to little children or old ladies in their dotage. When the young men of this age behold such hard-headed men as General Dobbie, the valiant defender of Malta, and Field Marshal Montgomery, the Commander-in-chief of the British Army, unashamedly acknowledging Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, they have before them that which clearly challenges them to seriously consider the claims of Christ and carefully examine His teachings— instead of contemptuously ignoring the same as something unworthy of their best attention. Napoleon Bonaparte, the military genius of a century ago, declared, "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and myself have founded empires, but upon what did those creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone established His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him. I think I understand something of human nature, and I tell you, those were men and I am a man; Jesus Christ is more than a man. I have inspired multitudes with such an enthusiastic devotion that they would have died for me . . .but to do this it was necessary that I should be visibly present, with the electric influence of my looks, of my words, of my voice. When I saw men and spoke to them, I lighted up the flame of self-devotion in their hearts. Christ alone has succeeded in raising the mind of men toward the Unseen, that it becomes insensible to the barriers of time and space. Across a chasm of 1,800 years Jesus Christ makes a demand which is, beyond all others, difficult to satisfy. "He asks for the human heart. He will have it entirely for and to Himself. He demands it unconditionally, and forthwith His demand is granted. Wonderful! In defiance of time and space, the soul of man, with all its powers and faculties, is annexed to the empire of Christ. All who simply believe in Him experience that remarkable, supernatural love towards Him. This phenomenon is unaccountable: it is altogether beyond the scope of man's creative powers. Time, the great destroyer, is powerless to extinguish this sacred flame; time cannot exhaust its strength, nor put a limit to its reign. This it is which strikes me most. I have often thought of it. This it is which proves to me quite convincingly the Divinity of Jesus Christ." Paul Richter said of Christ: "The holiest among the mighty, the mightiest among the holy, who with His pierced hands has lifted empires off their hinges, turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages." Alexander, Napoleon, Lincoln, are dead, and we refer to them in the past tense. But not so with Christ. We do not think or speak of Him as One who was, but as One who is. The Lord Jesus is far more than a memory. He is the great "I am": the same yesterday and today and forever. He is more real to mankind, His influence still more prevalent, His followers more numerous in this twentieth century than they were in the first. On what principle, scientifically, can we rationally account for the dynamical influence of the Lord Jesus today? That One now at a distance of almost two millenniums is still molding human thought, attracting human hearts, transforming human lives, with such mighty sway that He stands forth from all other teachers as the sun makes the stars recede into dimness and pale before the luster of His refulgence. As a strictly scientific question, the mystery of Christ's influence demands an adequate solution. It requires neither science nor philosophy to deny, but it does to explain. The only satisfactory explanation is that Christ is God, omnipotent and omnipresent. We call attention now to what has well

been termed "The Logic of the Changed Calendar": what follows is an enlargement of some notes we made nearly forty years ago from a book entitled *The Unrealized Logic of Religion*. Few people stop to inquire for an explanation of one of the most amazing facts which is presented to the notice of everybody, namely, the fact that all civilized time is dated from the birth of Jesus Christ. This is the twentieth century, and from what event are those centuries dated? From the birth of a Jew, who, according to the view of Infidels, if He ever existed, was a peasant in an obscure province, who was the author of no wonderful invention, who occupied no throne, who died when, as men count years, He had scarcely reached his prime, and who died the death of a criminal. Now if the Lord Jesus Christ were nothing more than what skeptics will allow, then is it not utterly unthinkable that the chronology of the civilized world should be reckoned from His birth? The effect must correspond to the cause, and there is no agreement between such a phenomenon and such an inadequate producer. To have some common measure of time is, of course, a necessity of organized society, but where shall we find an adequate starting point for the calendar?—i.e., one which will be acceptable to all civilized nations! A world-shattering victory, the founding of some many-centuried city, the birth of a dynasty, the beginning of a revolution: some such event, it might reasonably be expected, would give time a new starting point. But no conqueror's sword has ever cut deep enough on Time to leave an enduring mark. The Julian era, the Alexandria era, the era of the Sileucidae—all had their brief day and have vanished. There is for civilized men but one suitable, enduring and universally recognized starting point for civilized time, and that is the manger at Bethlehem! And how is that strange yet startling fact to be explained? It was imposed neither by the authority of a conqueror, the device of priests, the enactment of a despot, nor even by Constantine; but by slow and gradual consent. The name of Jesus Christ did not emerge in the calendar till five centuries after His death—a space of time long enough for Him to be forgotten had He been an impostor. It took another 500 years to become universally accepted; and the process is linked to no human name. Here, then, is a phenomenon that skepticism cannot explain: that without any conspiracy of Christian fanatics Jesus Christ has altered the almanacs of the world. The one event which towers above the horizon of history serves as a landmark to measure time for all civilized races. The Lord of time has indelibly written His signature across time itself; the years of the modern world being labeled by common consent the years of our Lord! Every letter you receive (though penned by an atheist), every newspaper carrying the date of its issue (though published by Communists), bears testimony to the historicity of Christ! The One who entered this world to shape its history to a new pattern changed its calendar from A.M. to A.D. All that had transpired previously in human history counted for nothing. The name of the most famous of the world's generals or of its most powerful monarchs was not deemed worthy to be imprinted upon all succeeding centuries. By a deep, unanimous, inarticulate and yet irresistible instinct, each nation has recognized and recorded on its almanacs the true starting point of its life. Several attempts have been made to establish another point of departure for recorded time. Islam has made a faint but broken mark upon the centuries, relating time to the sword; but the Moslem almanac is confined to but a cluster of half-civilized races. La Place, the astronomer, proposed to give stability and dignity to human chronology by linking it to the stars, but the world approved not. France sought to popularize its Revolution, and count 1793 as year one, but her calendar lasted but 13 years. The centuries belong to Christ and pay homage to Him by bearing His name! Men and women of all ages, who are at present being tossed to and fro upon a sea of doubt, there is no reason why you should remain there. It will be your own fault if you fail to secure firm ground to stand upon. You may imagine Christians make an idle boast when they affirm "we know," and declare, "That is exactly what you do not: you suppose, you hope, you believe. The dream may be alluring, the hope pleasing, but you cannot be sure." If so, you err. The children of God have infallible proof, and if you follow the right course, assurance will be yours too. The value and Divinity of Christ's teaching may be personally

verified by yourself. How? "If any man will do His will," said Christ, "he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). If you will read the record of it in the Gospels, submit to Christ's authority, conform to His requirements, regulate your life by His precepts, then you shall obtain a settled conviction that He "spake as never man spake," that His are the words of Truth. Nay, further. If you be an honest inquirer, prepared to follow the Truth wherever it leads—and it will be out of the mists of skepticism and away from the fogs of uncertainty—you may obtain definite and conclusive proof that Christ is and that He is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. His invitation is, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (John 7:37), and upon compliance, He promises to satisfy that thirst. Test Him for yourself If the empty cisterns of this world—their poor pleasures or their intellectual speculations—have failed to satisfy your soul, Christ can. He declares, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). If you have toiled in vain for peace and your conscience be burdened with a sense of guilt, then cast yourself on the mercy of Christ right now, and you shall find "rest unto your soul"—such as this world can neither give nor take away. Then you, too, will know the reality and certainty of His so great salvation. Put Him to the test!

Source:

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