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OUR LORD'S NESCIENCE

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As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ was necessarily omniscient. Yet the Evangelist records that He 'increased in wisdom' (Luke 2:52), whilst, centuries earlier, the prophet uttered even more startling words, applicable to Him, when he said, 'The Lord God hath given Me the tongue of them that are taught . . . He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as they that are taught' (Isa. 50:4, 5). Despite the constant demonstration of a supernatural knowledge during Christ's earthly life, therefore, there was, *prima facie*, a growth in wisdom, leaving the plain inference to be made that His human knowledge at an earlier period of His life was inferior to that at a later period.

In *The Triune God*, C. N. Bartlett suggests that when our Lord descended from heaven, His divine consciousness fled from Him, but that it slowly returned during His earthly life until, at the moment of His baptism, He was again in full possession of it. 'We might describe the entrance of Christ upon His incarnate career', he writes, 'as a sort of amnesia, divinely appointed by the Father and voluntarily entered into by the Son, from which there was to be a slow but sure return of the consciousness of His unique and eternal Sonship to God'. This explanation does not seem completely satisfactory for even after the baptism—and, indeed, right up to the Cross—it is evident that, although the Master knew some things without the impartation of any external information regarding them, there were other matters, the details of which He ascertained by the usual means of investigation. For example, He knew (without being told) of Lazarus' death, but ascertained by inquiry where he was buried (John 11:14, 34). He knew that power had gone out of Him, but He discovered who had touched Him by asking (Mark 5:30). He knew that a colt would be tied up at a certain place, but the next day He examined the fig tree to find out whether it bore fruit (Mark 11:2, 13). He foretold the manner of His death (Matt. 26:2), but discovered by taste the nature of the contents of the sponge before refusing to drink (Matt. 27:34).

On one occasion our Lord apparently specifically indicated His nescience regarding a certain subject and this has been used to bolster the theory that omniscience ceased to be His during His earthly life. Of the date of the future judgment, He said, 'Concerning that day and hour knoweth no one, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father' (Mark 13:32). It has been claimed by some that the words *ei me*, translated 'but' in the last clause of this verse, could equally well be rendered 'if not', thereby converting our Lord's statement into an assertion of His equality and identity with the Father and, therefore, a declaration of His deity. This ingenious argument falls to the ground, however, when reference is made to the parallel passage in Matt. 24:36, since the latter contains no reference at all to the Son.

The passage is admittedly a difficult one and many are the explanations which have been submitted. It is maintained by some that the words must be taken literally—that Christ was, in fact, completely ignorant of the date. It has been suggested, on the other hand, that this matter (like every other) was potentially within the range of His knowledge, but that He deliberately excluded it from His mind. An explanation which has found considerable acceptance is that the Master's ignorance was economical: His life as man was lived according to the guidance of God and under the Divine direction, and consequently He knew only what God willed Him to know. Other teachers have propounded the theory that the Lord was ignorant as man, but not as God, and that His words were uttered solely from a human point of view.

It has frequently been remarked that the simplest and most obvious deduction to be made from our Lord's statement is that He was ignorant of this particular fact. Bengel, grasping the nettle firmly, writes, 'Our Lord's knowledge is infallible, unerring. But it is limited. There is no contradiction in these two statements. To be infallible and incapable of error is not the same thing as to be omniscient. . . . But a knowledge which requires no correction within its own province, which is perfect so far as it goes, is not necessarily encyclopaedic. Perfection is complete adaptation to function and requirement. Knowledge is none

the less perfect if, beyond its proper scope, there are phenomena of which it does not need to take account'. In other words, Christ's knowledge was always perfect, but it was not synonymous with omniscience. Moreover, Bengel makes it clear that, in his view, our Lord was not speaking merely of His human consciousness and stating that, as Man, He was ignorant of something of which He was cognisant as God. The word 'Son' is set against the word 'Father,' and it is as *the Son* that He speaks. The old theologian accordingly insists that it was the whole Person who was ignorant. The inevitable result of such a view, however, is ultimately a denial of the Deity of Christ. Omniscience is an attribute of Divinity and if it was not possessed by the Son of God, *ipso facto* He was not Divine.

The theory that the fact in question was potentially within the range of knowledge of His rational soul, but that He deliberately excluded it, possibly seems more reasonable. It is clear that He was aware that no man knew the date of the approaching judgment and that the angelic hierarchy was similarly limited. In addition, the passage makes it plain that He was equally cognisant of the fact that the Father knew. Whilst this does not imply absolute omniscience, it does reveal that His knowledge was unique and extensive. He was patently capable of controlling His mental processes and, if He so determined, of refusing admission of certain facts to His mind. A supernatural knowledge was constantly being infused into His mind, and the deprivation of cognisance of this one fact must have been a dispossession by His own deliberate volition and choice. This solution, however, seems little more than an ingenious subterfuge to evade the difficulty.

Many writers take the view that, in His complete self-renunciation, our Lord knew only what the Father willed Him to know and that the date of the day of judgment, as Dean Alford writes, 'is one of the things which the Father hath put in His own power (Acts 1:7), and with which the Son, in His mediatorial office, is not acquainted'. It is true that He spoke the words given Him of His Father and that His object of life was to do the Father's will. Moreover, since times and seasons are in the

Father's sphere of authority, it would have been inappropriate for the Son to reveal them: it would have been outside His functions. Even this explanation is attended with difficulties, however, and it has been objected that it virtually attacks the unity and identity which exist between the Father and the Son.

Our Lord never ceased to be God and, as Mackenzie says, 'the union of the Divine and human natures in the Person of our Lord did not extinguish or confound the essential attributes of either'. The one Person of Christ had (and has) two spheres of existence, and of Him as one Person may be predicated the attributes of both God and man. As God, the Master must manifestly have known the day of judgment, but He did not draw upon His essential knowledge of God to communicate something which was not a subject of Divine revelation. In other words, it was known to His Divine nature, but not to His human. But Liddon justifiably asks, 'Does not this conjunction of "knowledge" and "ignorance" in one Person, and with respect to a single subject, dissolve the unity of the God-man? Is not this intellectual dualism inconsistent with any conception we can form of a single personality?' The difficulty is no greater, however, than that of reconciling the picture of an unwearying God with that of a tired Man sitting on a well, for example. Christ was not merely Man: He was the God-Man, fully possessed of Godhood and manhood simultaneously.

It is not without significance that Mark 13:32 is the only occasion when our Lord stated His lack of knowledge and the words He used at that time are virtually an implicit claim to complete knowledge otherwise. In the same discourse, He revealed more than fifty future events—and with the utmost authority and confidence.

You call Me Master and Lord: and . . . so I am. John 13, 12

Have you ever stood surrounded by the surging waves of unrest and doubt? Then listen to the echoes of that same voice speaking directly to you to-day. His feet have left their mark, His finger points the way, and His presence goes with you on the journey. You call Him Master and Lord. Let Him be so fully. It is that obedience and adoration which He asks and longs. It is the blessing which comes therefrom that alone can satisfy the hunger of your famished heart.—A. T. SCHOFIELD.