

Study 19: The Christ of the Church

SECOND DAY: NOT A CREATION OF OLD TESTAMENT CONCEPTIONS

1. Since we are told by naturalism that we cannot now with certainty get to know the historical Jesus, but only "the Christ-figure of the primitive Christian faith," the next step is to account for this creation itself. For this purpose the Old Testament, contemporary Jewish thought, Greek, and even Buddhistic parallels are adduced as materials out of which the great Christian thinkers wrought up the Jesus of history into the Christ of the Church.
2. It is true that the Jesus of the New Testament is inexplicable apart from the Old Testament. Indeed we have already seen that every vital conception of Jehovah is applied to Christ, and all the spiritual prophecies with respect to the theocracy are shown to be fulfilled in His kingdom. The Old Testament is a storehouse of unsurpassed wealth for the student of the New Testament. However different from ours may be the method employed by writers of the New Testament to prove in detail that the promises of the old covenant are fulfilled in the New, it is very evident that they have penetrated to the living stream of truth which underlies all the history and literature of the Old Testament, and they prove that in quality it is the same stream as has found its way to the surface in such overflowing purity in Jesus Christ.
3. It is easy to unlock the secrets of the Old Testament when we have the historic Jesus Christ as the Key. But it would be impossible to start from the texts of the Old Testament and construct from them alone the Jesus Christ of the New. In fact Jesus Himself was the first one to open up the Scriptures to men. The voice of the prophets had been stilled. The scribes had so overloaded the letter of the books with traditional interpretations as to bury the truth beneath their rubbish. Jesus restores to the people a lost Bible, speaking with authority as He explains how the eternal truths of prophecy concerning the Servant of the Lord, the remnant of true Israel, the Kingdom of the Son of Man and the Day of the Lord came to completion in Himself.
4. Naturalism assumes on the part of the inspired and prophetic personalities of the early Church the conviction that since Jesus was the Messiah He must surpass in grandeur those great figures of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah. So they decked Him out in a miraculous equipment surpassing the powers of those men of God. But the old recurrent difficulty appears. (a) Whence arose the majestic, harmonious Person, the most splendid that has ever entered into the mind to conceive? How did the early Christians weave these disjointed prophecies of Ps. 2, Dan. 7, and Isaiah, together with suggestions from the life and work of Moses and Elijah, into that Son of God whom the Church loved, not as an ideal figure, but as a living Person, with most passionate devotion. (b) How came it that Jews, a people who at this time had magnified more than any other the distance between God and man, overcame their horror of blasphemy, and invested the Man Jesus with these sovereign attributes of Jehovah?