

after antient and repeated predictions, that his dominion should be universal and everlasting, what attention would the records of such predictions command! But when the Father bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, saying (according to prophecies the most antient and repeated) Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom; lo! men reply (yea even yet reply) there is no beauty in him, wherefore we should desire him. In this perverse temper all men continue till the vail is taken from their heart, and it is turned to the Lord: then, with open face, they behold his glory; and say, Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes are we healed.

In short, if, from general information, we actually possess a love of preference for Jesus Christ, our future inquiries will be crowned with success: but if that be wanting, and  
aversion

aversion to his kingdom and person prevail, were we to be ever learning, we could not come to the knowledge of the truth. None of the wicked shall understand. The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them : but transgressors shall fall therein.

It gives me pleasure, that I have spoken of these things, as a believer to believers. The continuance of that pleasure is desired and expected in the following discourses on the Character of Christ.—On them, and this, may God command his blessing ! AMEN.

S E R M O N II.

ON THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST.

JOHN viii. 58.

BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS I AM.

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**I**N this sermon, it is taken for granted, we have no knowledge of the Pre-existence of Christ, but what the scriptures impart ; and that what they say on this subject is of the highest authority. But it is also taken for granted, that our judgment of what is there written is not infallible.

On these principles, it becomes us to search the scriptures carefully ; to speak of what we find, or think we have found in them, with caution ; and to be reasonably open to conviction :—but, on these principles, it also becomes us to be deaf to every false alarm.

Should

Should any man, however respectable, attempt to terrify us, by pronouncing a curse on those who cannot subscribe to his opinion, surely, we have no reason to tremble at his intemperate resentment. We may be confident, the curse causeless shall not come.

A different disposition, it is hoped, will pervade this discourse. It is the result of some reading, and of many thoughts, on this mysterious subject. It will not be curtailed, lest some superior should be provoked; nor will it be enlarged, on any intention to exasperate men of understanding, or merely to fill up this part of my proposed plan. No, it will contain the best account I am able to give of the Pre-existence of our Lord, and such additional remarks as may supply what is defective in it, or shew that the substance of that account deserves your re-consideration.

That our Lord, according to the *flesh*, was born of the Virgin Mary, in Bethlehem, under the reign of Tiberius, is undoubted. Whether before he was the reputed son of Joseph, he

he existed, and in what character, we are now to inquire.

The Jews, in general, believed (what some authors now believe) that Christ did not exist till he was born of Mary ; and that he was a mere man. Christ affirmed of himself, that he had a prior existence. Your Father Abraham, said he, rejoiced to see my day ; and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old ; and hast thou seen Abraham ? Our Lord replied, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was I am. At this answer, the Jews were highly offended. The words I AM, were held by them in great reverence. They could not apply them to any object but JEHOVAH : but that Jesus had any, the least claim to such honour, they denied with indignation. They even took up stones, and cast at him.

We are now to consult the scriptures on this-article of our creed. To do this with caution, let us first consider what evidence they

they afford us of the Pre-existence of Christ ; and then, by the same medium, discover if we can, what our Mediator was before his Incarnation.

I. The evidence which the scriptures exhibit of the Pre-existence of Christ, is more than careless readers imagine ; more than prejudiced readers will admit ; and much more than can be produced in a single sermon. Perhaps, the following abridgement of it will be thought sufficient for this discourse.

In the Old Testament we find *one* object who frequently appeared to the antient patriarchs, distinguished from every other. This illustrious person, in a manner we cannot explain, appeared to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Manoah, and others, with a kind of dignity that must have been dangerous, unless he had been truly that prophet that should come into the world.

From these appearances, and from what inferior prophets said of him, the *antient* Jews

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firmly believed he was the Lord of Hosts : so Isaiah called him, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Solomon introduces this illustrious object in one of his sublimest compositions, speaking thus : Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom. I am understanding. I have strength. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way : before his works of his old. I was set up from everlasting ; from the beginning, or ever the earth was.—Then was I by him, as one brought up with him ; and I was daily his delight : rejoicing always before him. Rejoicing in the habitable parts of HIS earth : and MY delights were with the sons of men.

It is easy to say, that these words are to be explained, by conceiving that Solomon speaks of an impersonal quality, agreeable to the vivid colouring of the eastern stile, and not of any person then actually existing, and who was afterwards to be manifested in the flesh. But, the literal sense of scripture is not to be given up, where it contains nothing inconsistent with the analogy of faith, or with the con-  
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text of the sacred writer. On this principle, the words of Solomon may be safely applied to Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, as we have seen, the Pre-existence of our Lord is strongly asserted ; and the evidence exhibited of the same fact in the New Testament, is as clear and strong ; taken together, it would be petulant in us to wish for more.

John says, In the beginning was THAT Word which was afterwards made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, full of grace and truth. In another place he says, That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life ; [For the life was manifested ; and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to us :] THAT which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship  
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with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

The words of John are worthy that Evangelist ; and the following words are worthy of Jesus Christ. He was risen from the dead. John was in banishment, in the isle of Patmos, for the word of God. Our Lord appeared to him in that lonely place, and said, I am Alpha and Omega ; the first and the last. John turned to see from whom this voice proceeded ; and being turned, he saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. When he saw him, he fell at his feet as dead. But he who spake to him, laid his right hand upon him, and said, Fear not, I am the first, and the last. I am he that liveth, and was dead ; and behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen. And have the keys of hell and death.—If this does not prove it was JESUS that appeared to John, and that he is *Alpha*, or from the beginning, we must I believe, despair of obtaining satisfaction of the Pre-existence of Jesus Christ.

II. But

II. But now, a deeper question calls for our attention. For the question is, WHAT was Christ in his pre-existent state ?

That he was a person, we may take for granted. They who deny it, whatever may be their consequence on other subjects, are upon this, of no consequence at all. Still it remains to be considered, whether our Lord, in that state, was a man, an angel, or, in a peculiar sense, the Son of God.

The first of these propositions, I venture to deny ; and say, he was not a man. My reasons are, because he was afterwards, and not before, made in the likeness of men ; and because what is attributed to him, prior to his Incarnation, cannot be ascribed to any thing that we know, or believe of human nature. We are told, that God made man ; and therefore, it seems incredible that he would say to him, Let us make man, in *our* image, after *our* likeness.

But, whatever our Lord was before he dwelt

amongst us, we must admit, if he existed before the foundation of the world, that he was a person of uncommon excellence, and possessed of exuberant understanding. Yet Luke says, of the child Jesus, that he grew and waxed strong in spirit. If this be true; if the child that was born of Mary, gradually grew in wisdom and in stature; if, while the Virgin held him in her arms, he really knew not what homage was paid him by the eastern Magi, and afterwards by others; are we to suppose his previous intellectual excellence was lost? or, that though he seemed a babe, he was then as rich in understanding as he that made the world, and upholdeth all things by the word of his power? If he *really* lost his former wisdom, what end was it to answer? Wherein could such waste of the highest worth be a benefit to us? or how could such an example produce humility? If, on the contrary, the child of Mary only *seemed* to be a babe in understanding, but was, in truth, as wise then as now, this conclusion bears hard on the character of an inspired writer; and should that be given up as indefensible, where  
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are we to stop, and on what must we rely in reference to the character of Christ ?

Further ; I contend, that our Lord in his Pre-existent state, was not an angel, in the common acceptation of that ambiguous term. It is well known the word angel is not expressive of the nature of any agent, but of his office ; and that it literally signifies a messenger, whether he is more or less important.

There is a wide difference between created angels and that Lord who is called the messenger of the covenant. Of him, it is said, And thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth ; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish ; but thou remainest ; and they all shall wax old, as doth a garment ; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed ; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. Thus spake the Father to his Son. But to which of the angels said he, at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy

footstool? Are they not *all* ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?—I conclude, therefore, that since our Mediator was neither a man, nor an angel, before his Incarnation, he was a person superior to both: not that I mean to say, he was super-angelical (a phrase as arbitrary as it is uninstruċting); no, from what has been adduced, and from other portions of scripture, I am fully persuaded, that he who became Incarnate was, in a sense peculiar to himself, THE SON OF GOD.

The sonship of Christ is a subject far above our comprehension. I am glad it is: for could we, with our slender abilities, comprehend this mystery, the object comprehended by us would sink in our esteem. But as an article of faith, I have long thought, and yet think, that the sonship of Christ is of such importance as by no means to be given up, however unpopular it may appear, or though we should meet with some objections extremely difficult to be removed.

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You will not wish me to explain what I never professed to understand. On this subject, I am merely a believer; and my belief amounts to this: that the term, Son, is not to be applied to the divine *nature* of our Lord, but to his *person*; that so considered, he is the only begotten Son of God; that the term, *begotten*, is not to be taken up either in the metaphorical or literal sense of that expression; but is to be interpreted as a term which gives us an analogical notion of a real fact; and that no other word will convey to us exactly the same meaning. It is most certain, God is not a man. To argue, therefore, as if he was, and, because he is pleased to speak to us in our own language, to suppose there is but little difference between the human nature and the divine, is extremely rash. 'Tis hard to say, whether a contempt of reason, or a rage for reasoning, have done the most mischief. If that from which we reason is not at all understood, our deductions, however numerous or ingenious, are delusive. We are therefore, on those subjects which are to us of the  
greatest

greatest moment, compelled to live by faith, or to live in error : but we may safely *believe* many things of which we neither have, nor can have, direct and adequate notions ; provided our faith rests on that authority which our reason tells us it would be foolish and wicked to resist.

As to *self-existence*, were they who plead for it, to confess they do not comprehend what they assert, so far, by their modesty, they might attract attention ; but when they seem to know much of that which passeth all understanding, and proceed to apply self-existence to the *person* of Christ, they give offence, and will find at last that their positive assertions can by no means answer their sanguine expectations.

To say that Christ is a son *by office*, is less artful than it is evasive. If he who is in office is not a son, what must that office be that can give existence to filiation ? Some post it seems, under the œconomy of Salvation. But God is above all his works. Creation, Redemption, and Providence, may make  
manifest

manifest what God is to angels and to men ; yet neither these divine operations, nor all the blessings of grace, are the ground of that eternal and immutable relation which subsists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Such are my notions of the Pre-existence of Christ. If this discourse be shorter than you expected, the difficulty of treating the subject with becoming caution, must be my apology. However, before we conclude, and for the purposes which have been mentioned, I shall now add the following remarks.

I. If Christ did not pre-exist his dwelling amongst us, he had no knowledge of the church or world, of himself or his heavenly Father, till some years after he was born of Mary. But is it possible to believe, that patriarchs, prophets, and an innumerable company of angels, take the lead of our Lord in the antiquity of their understanding? He that can believe this, may believe more ; and indeed, there is nothing more silly than the credulity of unbelievers. It deserves your  
notice,



notice, that they who have jested most at orthodox sentiments, have, by a just series of consequences, been given up to believe the most unaccountable things that ever were circulated amongst mankind. For my own part, I have long since observed, that they who affect to sneer at creeds, have always one of their own. Every man believes something; and he who deviates most from that testimony which is the standard of religious truth, lives in the belief of those sentiments which believers have a right to despise.

II. If Christ did not pre-exist, it must follow, that he did not execute any public office till after he was baptized. But what! are we to suppose that the Church of God was actually without a prophet, priest, and king, till Jesus, according to the *flesh*, began to be about thirty years of age? If so, the prophets, priests, and kings, under the Levitical œconomy, had a priority which contradicts all that is testified of them in the sacred scriptures. To attempt a formal refutation of this wild opinion would be a waste of  
time,

time, an abuse of your patience, and an affront to your religious understanding.

III. If Christ did not pre-exist, his Incarnation must be denied. The birth of Christ was not as ours, but by his own choice. He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.—For as much as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.—For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Here are such evident marks of our Lord's being Incarnate by his own *choice*, that they cannot be set aside. Nor can we wish them to be effaced. To what end? Since where choice has no place, religion has no power. His assumption of our nature did not make him a person; but his Incarnation makes it manifest that his person is divine. On any other supposition we cannot conceive he could have taken hold of angels; and, unless this be granted, on the seed of Abraham he could not have taken hold.

Of

Of the Incarnation of our Lord I am to speak in the following discourse ; all therefore, now contended for is, that between it and his Pre-existence, the connection is so close, that if the latter be denied, the former must be given up.

To introduce a different turn to these inferential remarks, instead of negative deductions, let us take it for granted, that our Lord really did pre-exist as the Word of God.

If this be admitted, we must allow, that in dignity, he is greater, not only than Moses and Aaron, but that, as the Son of God, he is far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. Should it be said, this text speaks of our Lord's exaltation after his resurrection, we answer, neither his resurrection, nor any thing else, makes his person to be that it was not from the beginning. In the beginning, he was the Son of his Father, in truth and love. How else, to believers  
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in him, could Paul have reasoned thus : If children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ? When we consider that Jesus Christ is the word of God, the Son of God, the Lord from heaven, the quickning Spirit, the Messenger of the Covenant of Grace, the same yesterday, to day, and for ever ; when we are told, that being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; we must confess, we meet in these expressions, a grandeur we can neither overlook, nor comprehend.

I am aware, that the sense of some of these words, and of others, which relate to the divinity of Christ, is controverted : and shall only say, that what is here quoted in favour of that article of our faith, seems to me to admit of ample defence. But by defending the divinity of our Lord, I mean, the giving a good account why we are persuaded of it, and not to insinuate it is in our power to make that evident to our reason, which is only revealed to our faith.

Some