

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## ART. IV.—MARK XIII. 32.

Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ἢ τῆς ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι ἐν οὐρανῷ, οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ Πατήρ.

But of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.—R. V.

THIS passage has furnished an ample field for comment and controversy in ancient times, as well as in our own. Many of the Fathers, whose names are above all suspicion of heresy or advocacy of doubtful theories, have given evidence in their writings that they maintained that our Lord was speaking entirely from the standpoint of the human nature which He had assumed, in which, as He suffered hunger and thirst and presented other features of likeness to His brethren in the flesh, so in this utterance He showed that His human knowledge was limited by the conditions He had submitted to; while they hold that at the same time in His Divine nature He knew all things. Others assert that our Lord in this place was speaking *economically*, or according to the necessities of the case. It was not good for His disciples to know this secret, consequently it was not conceded to Him by the Father to reveal it. He knew, and yet did not know for the purpose of making it known to others. Whatever weight or consideration we may give to these theories, whether they are satisfactory or otherwise in our estimation, one thing is clear, that modern critics have considerably advanced upon the admissions made by the ancients, as they venture to argue that this passage furnishes an example to be extended universally; they infer that as the Lord's knowledge was limited on this particular question, it was upon many, if not upon all, others; that in "emptying Himself" He laid aside all the Divine prerogatives, and amongst them omniscience; and therefore His opinion upon any subject connected with modern learning, such as science or criticism, was only of the same value as that of any other Jew of His time and locality. A moment's reflection will teach us that this is making our passage to be endowed with an elasticity which is quite unwarranted. For this conclusion there are, indeed, no grounds. We might as well say of any one of our fellow men that because he admitted his nescience of some abstruse question in Hebrew or in Sanskrit grammar he knew nothing, therefore, of Latin or Greek or other departments of a liberal education; or because a man did not know one trade he could not know any. The utmost that can fairly be inferred from this passage is that our Lord stated that this particular secret was not made known to Him by the Father, but it is simply

gratuitous to include other matters; indeed, the impression made upon the mind is that all other questions were made known to Him, hence the emphasis laid upon the exception. Again, it is to be borne in mind that the general question of our Lord's knowledge during His earthly ministry is capable of being submitted to test and proof. If anyone will take the pains to compare all the places in which our Lord's knowledge is definitely spoken of, he will find that it was always certain, infallible, and superhuman (see CHURCHMAN for January, 1892). This would lead us to conclude that although there was no mixture or confusion between the Divine and human properties in our Lord, yet that the former always aided, directed, and illumined the latter. This passage, even if we were to admit that it refers to the human nature alone, stands alone in solitude and isolation. We have said this text stands alone, if thus interpreted, but there is another passage, not bound by this supposed restriction, which undoubtedly refers to a kindred or, we might say, practically to the same subject, though at a different period of our Lord's presence upon earth.

It is generally admitted, even by those that hold the limitation theory, that after the Resurrection the limitations, whatever they had been, were removed, and that thenceforth the Lord's knowledge was perfect in all respects, as St. Peter confessed, "Lord, Thou knowest all things." Now, the question which was put to the Lord in Mark xiii. involved the *how* and the *when* with reference to His coming. To the former He replied most definitely by describing the signs that would appear in heaven above and the troubles and terrors that would come upon the earth beneath; but to the latter He gave no answer beyond the information that this was a secret which no one knew, neither the angels nor the Son, but the Father only. If we turn to Acts i. 7 we hear the disciples, after the Resurrection and just before the Ascension of the Lord, making this inquiry: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" This question embodied the same secret as before, for the restoration of the kingdom and the second advent are synchronous events. It is noteworthy that our Lord made the same reply to all intents and purposes as in the former case: "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father placed in His own authority" (*ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ*). It is true that there is no specific mention made of either the angels or the Son, but the strong and definite expression (*ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ, in His own proper authority*) seems evidently intended to bring the former declaration to their remembrance, and to insist upon the sole proprietorship of the Father in this one particular. So we

may conclude that neither before nor after the Resurrection—neither in the state of humiliation nor after His victory was achieved and He had given proof of His being the Son of God—did our Lord know the day or the hour of the Second Advent.

We are now brought face to face with a still greater difficulty. Our modern critics argue, as we have seen, that the Lord confessed His nescience in the passage in St. Mark, and they refuse to restrict this to that one singular instance, as He appears to do Himself. To be consistent, they must also admit that the same nescience is implicitly contained in the citation from the Acts which was made after His Resurrection, which was the determining proof of His Deity.

But the previous difficulties vanish in the presence of a far greater one, which appears to be beyond the power of refutation, that *ὁ υἱός*, the Son, when found absolutely and alone, without any qualifying adjunct, is never predicated of the human nature of our Lord as such, but always of the original Divine personality. If this is proved, the whole argument for the limitation theory, as based upon this passage, crumbles to pieces, and the purpose for which it has been so vigorously advanced, to prove that our Lord's ignorance concerning the real authorship of the Pentateuch, of a prophecy, or of a psalm of David, is hereby accounted for, is scattered to the winds.

We may anticipate the objection with which this will be met, that such a proposition would introduce a far more serious heresy than the one removed or avoided; but this is a matter for after-consideration. The simple question before us now is this: What is the use throughout the New Testament of the title *ὁ υἱός*, *the Son*? If we examine all the passages in which it occurs, and if it is found to be a truth that the personal Word is thus represented, or if in some places the duplex nature in the one Divine person is involved, yet it never connotes the humanity alone, but the Deity is always foremost, then we must seek a satisfactory solution of the problem elsewhere; but we must not ignore the value of the term on which the truth of the quotient depends, or build up a visionary doctrine upon a foundation that refuses to bear it.

I must here express my regret that the Editor cannot spare the space for a brief exposition of the passages involved, to enable me to show the connection between the statements contained in them with their contexts, and so to establish the thesis that *the Son* is always equivalent to *the Son of God* and not to *the Son of man* as such; but we may leave the intelligent reader to carry out this comparison by himself. The following is the list of the places where *ὁ υἱός*, *the Son*, occurs absolutely as in the text, which is the ground of the controversy (we omit those where any such qualifying

words as *θεοῦ* or *αὐτοῦ* are added): Matt. xi. 27; xxviii. 19; Luke x. 22;<sup>1</sup> John iii. 17. In the received text *αὐτοῦ* is added; but it is omitted in the Revised Version. The former is the reading of A and D, and the latter of B and  $\aleph$ . John iii. 35, 36; v. 19-28. In this passage *ὁ υἱός* is found independently in various cases; once it is followed by *τ. θεοῦ* and once by *ἀνθρώπου*, but the Divine personality is prominent throughout. John vi. 40; viii. 35, 36; xiv. 13; xvii. 1. The reading *the Son* in the second clause is supported by B  $\aleph$  C, and *Thy Son* by A D. The former is adopted by the Revised Version. 1 Cor. xv. 27, 28; Heb. i. 8; 1 John ii. 22-24; iv. 14; v. 12; 2 John 9.

In passing these various passages under the strictest scrutiny, only one conclusion will appear to be possible, as no single exception can be found to the rule; that is, that whenever *ὁ υἱός*, *the Son*, stands by itself without any additional definition or amplification, it never connotes only the human nature of the Lord as such. In those examples which refer to the pre-incarnate period, the Divine nature only is defined; and in those which relate to the post-incarnate period, the Person subsisting in the two natures is expressed; but even in these instances it must be remembered that, as our Lord was a Person in the Godhead before His assumption of our flesh, His personality is therefore Divine, and could not be affected by the incarnation. After that act He was in no respect less than He was before; there was the addition of the human nature to the Divine nature, but no subtraction of any kind from the Divine. Whenever, therefore, the person of the Son is spoken of, it is the Deity that is prominent; when the manhood, as such, is specified with the attributes, appearance, and concomitants of human nature, it is never expressed by *the Son* or by *the Son of God*, but by *the Son of man*.

We are now in a position to apply the result of this investigation to Mark xiii. 32. This passage has, both in ancient and modern times, as we have said already, called forth much comment and controversy, but has never been made a more conspicuous battle-field between two schools of thought than at

<sup>1</sup> John i. 18: "The only begotten Son (or God only begotten)," *ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός*, or *Θεός*. This text hardly comes under our category for two reasons: first, there is an adjective with the noun; secondly, because the reading *Son* is doubtful; *υἱός* is supported by A and the bulk of manuscripts, and the Curetonian Syriac version; and *Θεός* by B  $\aleph$  and the Peshitto Syriac. Professor Rendel Harris makes a clever suggestion that the double reading arose from a misunderstanding of a very ancient system of abbreviation which stood for all cases of the same word alike. See "Study of Codex Bezae," p. 252. If *υἱός* is retained as the true reading, the personality and the Deity are as unquestionable as if the reading *Θεός* was adopted.

the present period. It has been chosen as the centre of the controversy, the pivot on which the whole question of the limitation theory turns. Writer after writer challenges those that are at issue with him. Does not our Lord Himself tell us plainly that in the days of His humiliation in the flesh one thing was positively unknown by Him? When, therefore, He took on Him our nature, they continue to urge, He submitted—voluntarily, indeed, but actually—to limitations, the limitations of ordinary human nature; they deny the possibility of knowing in one capacity and not knowing in another, knowledge and nescience being a self-contradiction in the same person, neither can *economy* be pleaded here as an escape from the difficulty. The Lord Himself confesses nescience, or even ignorance, of this fact, and, as we have seen, they claim this as a ground for believing that a like nescience or ignorance pertained to His human nature on all subjects that had not been discovered by man's intellect or investigations up to that date among His own people and in His own locality. This is plain speaking, but we meet with such opinions expressed in various literary productions, magazine articles, letters and books of the so-called advanced rationalistic school. It therefore seems to be no breach of charity nor a false accusation to say that such teaching leads men to think not that the Divine assumed the human nature, but the human the Divine, and then the Divine was reduced to the contracted conditions of humanity. The incarnation thus viewed is made a nullity. But to return to the passage which is held to afford proof beyond the reach of doubt of the nescience of the human nature of our Lord, and is advanced with all confidence to save His character for veracity when He differs in His expressed opinions and plain teaching from the results of modern criticism concerning the authorship of some of the books of the Old Testament Scriptures; what can be said when it appears evident from the examination of all the places where the title *the Son, ó viós*, is found, that our Lord was not pointing to the time of His humiliation on earth, nor speaking of Himself as the Son of man, nor restricting Himself to the proprieties of humanity, but was speaking of Himself as *the Son*, the Son of God, the Divine Person who was one with the Father from all eternity? What becomes of the foundation-stone which has been elected to support the limitation theory? It has shifted its position. What becomes of the superstructure reared upon it? It is fallen to the ground. Where is the proof of the nescience of the human nature? The human nature is not the meaning of the phrase, and if the phrase refuses to maintain that reference, where shall be found the inference derived from such a supposition?

The plain truth is that, whatever this utterance of our Lord may portend, one thing is clear, it cannot mean what these critics teach. *The Son* does not signify the *human*, but the *Divine* nature, or rather Divine person, of the Lord, and if He had intended to reveal any mystery which concerned the nature which He had assumed, He would have used the phrase which He always employed when such was His purpose and intention, *the Son of man*.

In the endeavour to solve an intricate problem, it is an easy task to determine what the unknown quantity is not; it is quite another thing to arrive at the true solution, which will satisfy all the conditions of the problem, and prove itself to be the quotient. In the above question the value of the term *the Son* has been demonstrated to be not the *human nature*, and we may advance a step further towards a certain result: it expresses the Divine nature, or the Person who possesses both the Divine and human natures, in which case the former, and not the latter, is always the prominent feature. But when we attempt to proceed further, and would fain unveil the mystery by demanding, "How can these things be?" then we are aware of the difficulties that arrest our progress. How is the statement to be explained of the Deity or Divine Sonship of the Lord? We repeat that the difficulty, or even the inability, to obtain a true answer does not make a false answer right. It was our purpose to prove that the exposition that made *the Son* simply equivalent to the *Son of man*, and so accounted for our Lord's ignorance of His own Scriptures, was without foundation, and erroneous. So far that point has, we think, been demonstrated; but how we are to account for the features of the new problem that confronts us is a different question.

It may be that in the union of the Persons of the Deity, in the identity of essence and the distinction of Persons, in the oneness of Being and the difference of the offices, there may be mysteries into which the mind of man has not the ability or capacity to be initiated. It is almost postulated nowadays that reason can understand "all mysteries and all knowledge," and search out even the depths of Deity; but there are boundaries probably which we cannot pass, and secret things which belong to the Lord our God which we cannot unveil and disclose. But in seeking to satisfy our minds as far as may be given to us, some modes of explanation may be suggested. The following may claim attention as probable solutions:

(1) It is the Catholic Faith that the Son is of the same essence as the Father, and in the Trinity there is nothing before or after, greater or less. The Persons subsisting in one and the

same essence are in all respects consubstantial, co-equal, and co-eternal; but the Son is Son because the Father is Father, and whatever the Son is, or has in essence, attributes and powers, He has from the Father, and in this consists the distinction of the Persons. The Father is and has all from Himself, He alone has aseity, whereas the Son is and has all from the Father. Hence our Lord says: "The Son can do nothing from Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing" (John v. 19). "The words which Thou gavest Me I have given unto them" (John xvii. 8). "The works which the Father hath given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me" (John v. 36). And thus in all things "The only begotten Son (God) which is in the bosom of the Father, He declared Him" (John i. 18). It is He whose office it has been in all spheres, ages, and dispensations to make the Deity intelligible to the creatures. The Father revealed to the Son, and the Son is the Mediator between God and man. The Son says and does only what the Father commissions Him to say and do. All, therefore, which the Son is in Himself, has, works, speaks or reveals, is from the Father, as much in the depths of eternity as in the time of His incarnation, when the Word took up His tabernacle in the flesh. This is the explicit side of the truth revealed; the implicit side would suggest that what the Father did not convey to the Son either in eternity or in time was the prerogative of the Father as Father, a propriety of His *Person* as such, involving no differentiation in essence, but intimating a phase of distinction between the *Person* of the Father and the *Person* of the Son. It may help us to remember that knowledge, as the attribute or capacity of knowing, belongs to the *nature* of all sentient beings; but knowledge, in the concrete sense of the things that are known, belongs to the *person*. It may be in the depths of this mystery that the secret "neither knoweth the Son" is folded up and hidden, and the "pavilion of dark waters" that surrounds the Deity, like the veil of the Holy of Holies, conceals the mystery from the scrutiny of man. It may be readily advanced against this that the omniscience of the Son is invaded, but accurately stated and understood there is here no invasion or diminution of the honour due unto the Son. The attribute of omniscience of the Father and of the Son pertains to the *nature and essence* of Godhead, and is with all other attributes of Deity given by eternal generation to the Son by the Father; but the function of agency and instrumentality both in eternity and in time, and the charge of special revelations, whether in word or work, in connection with office or mission, are appurtenances and properties which belong to the *Person*. The attribute is not



here limited, but authority is not delegated to disclose a certain event. The Father is the ultimate Source of all sovereignty, authority and power; the Son is the agent of the Father in the dispensation of these attributes of Godhead. Throughout the New Testament the prepositions *ὑπό* and *διά* represent the mode of operation, and it is possible that this is the intent of the passage under discussion, that all the attribute of knowledge was the original property of the Father, and was with all other Divine attributes eternally generated in the Son, but can only be *exercised* by the Son in the way and for the purpose and at the time that befit the wisdom and decree of the Father: light accompanied by immediate illumination, speech contemporaneously caught and re-uttered by the echo. This word has never been spoken by the Father, and therefore never heard nor issued by the Son. In the material creation we read, "And God said," that is, uttered His word, and each specific act of creation followed, the Father working by the agency of the Son. If God had not uttered His creative word at any stage in the construction of the universe, the creative act would not have taken place, and the working through the Son, so far as that particular act was concerned, would have been suspended unacted and unknown; so the same argument will apply to the utterance of the word of revelation: if not "said" by the Father, it is not formulated by the Son, and consequently finds no divulgence among angels in heaven or mankind upon earth. In any case, the mystery pertains to the Divine Person and not to the Humanity.

(2) In addition to the explanation that has come down to us from some of the Fathers, alluded to in the beginning of this paper, that our Lord as the Word—that is, in His Divine nature—knew the date of the day of judgment as He knew all things, being omniscient, but in His human nature He was content to submit Himself to the laws of the nature He had assumed, there is another held also by ancient teachers of high repute, that our Lord was speaking economically, not with reference to Himself or His own knowledge, but what was suitable to His disciples and their converts afterwards; in other words, He did not know the date of His coming for the purpose of giving this information to them, as it would not be beneficial to them or to others. The acceptance or rejection of this theory must largely depend upon the customary modes of expression in use at that time and amongst the Jewish people; it is not to be set aside without deep consideration, if we remember the strongly anthropomorphic language which pervades Scripture, and the accommodation everywhere made to the capacities and infirmities of men. At the same time, if the previous explanation appears unsatisfactory, or involved

in too dense a cloud of mystery, or rendered obscure by the technicalities of theological thought and terminology, the interpretation which meets the wants of the general reader seems to be that this secret was not in the commission intrusted to our Lord to impart, though the phrase used may be thought to go beyond this, and yet if we admit the doctrine that Deity assumed humanity, and not humanity Deity, the truth must be found somewhere in this direction.

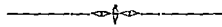
There is one thing to be borne in mind which seems to have been much overlooked. A text which appears to contradict other texts, many other texts, perhaps all other texts, is one which requires very careful investigation, and calls on us to exercise patience before pronouncing a final decision as to its interpretation. This text is certainly isolated, and the one which affords anything like a parallel only increases the difficulty. Now, the mistake that is made in our day has been to take this exceptional utterance, which, to say the least, seems to be in perfect opposition not only to other texts, but to the whole doctrine of the Christology, as furnishing the rule to which all others must bend. We used to be taught that the unknown was to be arrived at by the comparison of the terms of the known; but this solitary case is set forth as the proof of a proposition which the whole testimony of Scripture negatives. Our duty should rather have been exercised in searching for a satisfactory solution of the single difficulty, and not in creating difficulties in a hundred instances where none existed. Either the solution lies deep down in the unfathomable depths of the ocean of Deity, that man's reason and ingenuity, whether influenced by motives orthodox or heterodox, cannot reach the point where Deity denies admittance to the inquisition of the creature, or the statement itself was intended to be a very plain and simple one, couched in language in use at the time, and perfectly intelligible to the minds of those that heard the words as they fell from the lips of the Lord. One thing is to be entirely repudiated in this inquiry, the endeavour that has been made to charge the Lord with error concerning the Scriptures, which the Catholic Faith holds to be the Word of the WORD, and then advances a text, confessedly in both ancient and modern times surrounded with impenetrable barriers, as proof of His ignorance, and urging that because He knew not one thing He might not, did not, know many more, and hence His testimony to the ancient Scriptures is null and void. Where can such a mode of argumentation stop? How can we know whether the Lord knew other facts, whether His word in anything is infallible?

There is an insuperable difficulty in the self-limitation theory as applied to the knowledge of the Old Testament

Scriptures. It involves the unthinkable proposition that our Lord voluntarily deprived Himself at the incarnation of the power to perform the very function which He came to exercise, namely, the unfolding of the mysteries of the Scriptures which testified of Himself. How could He explain all things, fulfil prophecies, and open the understanding of His disciples that they should understand the Scriptures, if He Himself had parted previously with the knowledge necessary to constitute Him an interpreter to others? But enough; it is useless for men to pull down the middle wall of partition between the infallible and the fallible, and, after removing the landmark which Scripture and the Church have fixed, to set up one of their own. It is open to anyone to try his ingenuity and craft at this trade, but where, after all these destructive efforts, will the Christian faith be? where the revelation of God? where our holy religion? where our eternal hope? And, above all, what will be done with Jesus Who is called the Christ?

F. TILNEY BASSETT.

Dulverton Vicarage, *March 23, 1892.*



#### ART. V.—MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN BRITISH INDIA.

WHEN the British nation annexed the provinces of the country called British India, with a population of 280,000,000 of souls, a wise spirit of toleration guaranteed to the conquered races their religions, so far as they were not contrary to moral law, and their customs having the force of law regarding marriage and inheritance. Idolatry, polygamy, polyandry, divorce, adoption of children by childless persons, marriage at the age of puberty of both sexes, life-long widowhood, the levirate law of a younger brother taking the widow of his deceased elder brother—all these incidents are phenomena of every-day occurrence in one or other province of this vast empire amidst one or other section of the extremely heterogeneous community, divided by caste, religion, colour, dialect and ancestral customs, yet compelled to travel in the same railway carriages, to send their children to the same secular schools, attend at the same judicial courts, obey the same municipal law and pay the same taxes.

Under the long Pax Britannica the population has increased enormously, the area of cultivated land has reached its maximum. Of the three great scourges which keep down exorbitant population, war has ceased to exist; pestilence has been reduced to narrow limits and brief periods; famines occur periodically, but roads, railroads and heavy disbursements from the State greatly mitigate the evil, and the