

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE

In this chapter, we are going to be discussing a subject which is very holy. The object of our investigation is God Himself. Therefore, I would like to urge every reader, before beginning to read, to take off their shoes—spiritually speaking that is. What I mean to say is this: God is far beyond our human comprehension. He is the Creator and we are but His creatures. It is completely impossible for us to fathom Him or figure Him out. Consequently, in seeking some enlightenment about this most holy subject, we cannot, indeed we must not, get our minds into gear. Comprehending even the smallest aspect of our God is absolutely not a mental exercise. The only way we will understand anything concerning the Almighty is if He chooses to reveal Himself to us. Although we cannot comprehend Him, yet He can give us spiritual revelation which far surpasses human wisdom. The early apostles were not learned men. Many of them were simple fishermen. Yet the revelation given to them regarding the person of God is rich and full.

With all this in mind, I would like recommend that all of us together humble ourselves before the Lord. Let us put aside our human logic and reasonings. Let us not trample His courts with our own imaginations and ideas. Let us put away doctrinal preconceptions and theological arguments and worship Him as Creator and King. What He has revealed in His word is immensely profound. And through His word, He also can reveal Himself to us if and when He so chooses. May He find our attitude reverent, our hearts humble and open to receive all that He wishes to reveal.

How many Gods do we have? Is there one or are there three? We read in the Bible about God the Father, about His Son Jesus Christ and about the Holy Spirit. But how are we to understand this? The scriptures state explicitly that there is only one God. Gal 3:20 reads: “but God is one.” James 2:19 says: “You believe that there is one God. You do well.” I Cor 8:4 confirms this by stating: “there is no other God but one.” But if there is only one God, who then is Jesus Christ and what about the Holy Spirit? Certainly we will never understand these things by mental analysis. He is far, far beyond our understanding. Significantly, in Isaiah 9:6 we read that the Son of God’s name shall be called “Wonderful.” I have been told that this means in Hebrew, “so great as to be beyond comprehension.” Truly, this is a mystery which cannot be “figured out” but can only be revealed.

Many have erred doctrinally by inventing new, extra-biblical phrases and words to try to describe the nature of God. This is perilous, since the words of the Bible were carefully chosen by the authors to express exactly what God was trying to say. Others have tried to make God into different phases or “modes” imagining that He moves or has moved from one to the other. They suppose that now there is no longer the Father but that He has “become” the Son. Still others have mistakenly assigned different

“personalities” to the Father, to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus. For them, the Father is somewhat stern, strict and distant. On the other hand they think that Jesus is much more approachable and loving and maybe shields us from the Father’s harsh, judgmental attitudes. The Holy Spirit they imagine has still other characteristics, perhaps sort of hovering around like a dove, who comes upon us once in a while to give us good sensations or do some kind of miracle.

These and many other concepts have been propagated since the death of Christ as a means to “explain” this mystery. But all of these erroneous ideas are simply the product of the human mind trying to understand God. How we need to humble ourselves before Him so we can receive the revelation of Himself which only He can give. Let us beseech God together for a “spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph 1:7) from Him so that we too see what the early apostles saw.

Let us begin our investigation here by speaking about God our Father. While meditating in His holy word, one fact becomes clear. One aspect of His person is revealed in a manner beyond doubting. That is that He is invisible. Col 1:15 teaches is that Jesus is the image of the “invisible God.” This is exactly the case, we have a heavenly Father who is invisible. Heb 11:27 confirms this when speaking about Moses as he was fleeing Egypt saying that he “endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”

Jesus Himself shows us that this “invisible God” is in fact the Father when He says: “not that anyone has seen the Father” (Jn 6:46). Obviously, people have seen the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. But it is quite clear here that no one has seen the Father. And why is this? It is because He is invisible and therefore it is impossible for anyone to see Him. In John 1:18 we read Jesus clearly stating: “No one has seen God at any time.” This phrase is repeated so that there can be no doubt in I John 4:12 where we read again: “No one has seen God at any time.” No one has ever seen God the Father. This is abundantly clear from the New Testament. Again, the reason no one has ever seen Him is that He is invisible and consequently impossible to see. Although this may not be your concept, it is very biblical and true.

Not only has no one ever seen God the Father, but no one ever will see Him. This too is a biblical fact. I Tim 6:16 states for our benefit that God dwells: “in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.” No one ever has seen God and furthermore no one ever can see God. The simple reason for this is that He is invisible, therefore, it is impossible to see Him. Some may have the idea that, although God is indeed invisible today, someday in the future, He is going to change and become visible for all to see. This is an erroneous idea.

Besides the verses we have read already, I Timothy 1:17 teaches that our King is “eternal, immortal” and “invisible.” These three aspects of God are what He is. They are not temporary states of being. When will God cease being invisible? When can we finally see Him? God will cease to be invisible only when He is also no longer immortal or eternal. Obviously, our God always has been and always will be immortal. He has always been and will always be eternal. In the same way, He has always been and will always be invisible. This means that you cannot see Him and never will be able to see Him.

Undoubtedly, some will be a little confused about this, perhaps remembering various passages such as in Acts 7:55, 56 where Stephen, when he was being stoned, “gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” But please notice here that our brother Stephen saw “the glory of God” rather than the face or form of God. This revelation of God’s glory is repeated in Hebrews 1:3 where we read that Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Seeing

“glory” or “Majesty” is one thing, seeing the Father’s form or person is another. It is stated in His word that He dwells in “unapproachable light.” Perhaps some have seen this light or glory, but none have ever seen or will see His face. We can be absolutely sure that neither Stephen nor anyone else saw the Father “in person” because of the scriptures we have reviewed already. Writing long after the fact of Stephen’s death, Paul and John both clearly affirmed that no one ever has or can see God. Since the scriptures never contradict one another, it is certain that what we have stated here is absolutely true. The phrase “sitting on the right hand” of a king, or in this case God, is an expression which indicates that the person shares the power and authority. Certainly, Jesus is “the power of God” (I Cor 1:24) and has “all authority” (Mt 28:18) from the Father.

Once again, I beg you, do not try to figure all this out with your mind and intelligence. The understanding which God has for us will never come in this way. God’s revelation is not through the mind, but in the spirit. What we need is not information but revelation. We will absolutely never understand until it is revealed. Let us therefore, enter in together into the presence of God to receive all the He has to give to us.

GOD REVEALED

Even though, as we have seen, the Father is invisible, He does reveal and has revealed Himself. Ever since the beginning of time, God has been expressing Himself to the universe. When God unveils, or reveals Himself, this is called His “image.” For example, if you were to see a my photograph, this could be called an image of me. It would be a revelation of or an expression of myself. This image would tell you a lot about me. Now, for some reason which is very hard for us human beings to understand, God has called this “image” or revelation of Himself “My Son.” According to the scriptures, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). This means that the Son is nothing less than God revealed—God manifested. Verifying this fact, we read in II Corinthians 4:4 about: “Christ, who is the image of God.” You see, when the Father displays His image—when He shows Himself in a way that is perceivable—this is His Son. Hebrews 1:3 further clarifies this truth. Speaking about the Son, we read that He is: “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” The revelation of and the expression of the image of God is His Son.

Returning to John 1:18 we read: “No one has seen God at any time.” But, “The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” You see, the Father is invisible, but the Son has declared Him. He has exhibited Him. He has revealed and displayed Him. The Son of God has manifested, disclosed and proclaimed the Father. This “declaration” of God is the Son. This is truly a wonderful thing. Whenever and wherever the Father reveals Himself, this is what He calls “His Son.” Actually, we will get to see God the Father someday. Revelation (22:4) reads: “and they shall see His face.” But where will we see Him? We will see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Cor 4:6). This is the only place He is or will be revealed.

Not only this, but the Son is the complete manifestation of God. That is to say that outside of the Son, the Father does not reveal Himself, but in the Son is the totality of this revelation. Colosians 2:9 states that in Him, “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Again in Colossians 1:19 we read: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.” Therefore, to know God or to see and understand

Him, there is but one place to look—His Son. If we are desiring an understanding of the Father or if we would just like to see what He is like, we only need to look at Jesus. Truly, in Him God is manifested. This is the reason that it is impossible for anyone to come to God outside of Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Him (Jn 14:6). Jesus is the unique expression of God. The Son is the only place that the Father is “exhibited.” No one can come to the Father unless He is revealed to them and the only place in which He is revealed is in the Son.

Jesus walked on this earth with His disciples for about three and one half years. During this time, they had ample opportunity to examine His character. No doubt they loved His gentle nature. They enjoyed His purity, His strength of purpose, His great love. I’m sure that every day brought them a new appreciation of just Who and what He was. Yet with time, some of them became curious. If Jesus was so wonderful, what must the Father be like? So one day Philip came to Him and said something like this: “Jesus, you are really great and we appreciate you very much, but could you please just show us a little glimpse of the Father?” Jesus was quite startled by this request. He responded by saying: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘show us the Father?’” (Jn 14:8,9). And in another place He asserts: “I and My Father are one” (Jn 10:30).

How about you? Have you too “been with Him” a long time, but still do not really know Him? Perhaps you have been a Christian for many years, yet do not really realize Who He is? Our Lord Jesus is truly the image of the invisible God. He is not some different “personality.” He is the perfect and complete manifestation of the Father. All the attributes of the Father are revealed in the Son. For example, we know that Jesus was loving. Yet it was not His own love which He expressed but the love of the Father which was revealed through Him. The Bible clearly says that it was the “love of God which was in Christ Jesus” (Rm 8:39). Jesus’ patience, His caring concern, His authority, His gentleness, His holiness, His purity, His zeal—all these were just a manifestation of the Father. His words and actions were not His own, but were simply an exhibition of the Father’s life (Jn 14:10). When He spoke, it was the Father’s authority which was heard. When He worked miracles, it was the Father’s power which was seen. Even the expressions of Jesus’ face were a display of the Father’s heart. The Father is not some different “personality.” This is a great mistake. If we think this way it shows we do not really know who Jesus is. He is indeed the exact image of the invisible Father. Truly “he who has seen [Him], has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

It is clear from the New Testament that God is invisible. Also it is abundantly plain that no one has seen Him. Yet when we read through the Old Testament, it seems that many individuals and even groups of people saw God. For example, Ex 24:9,10 reads: “Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel.” The prophet Amos said: “I saw the Lord” (Amos 9:1). Micaiah, another prophet, also said that he “saw the Lord” (II Chron 18:18). Isaiah too declares that, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple” (Is 6:1). Who then did these people see? Jesus, Paul and John all emphatically declared that no one had ever seen God and that He is invisible. Yet these individuals obviously saw Someone whom they identified as God. How can this be? The only explanation must be that they saw God “revealed.” They saw God’s Son. Long before He was known as Jesus Christ, God was already revealing Himself in His Son. It is this Son that was and is “the God of Israel.”

THE WORD OF GOD

One of the principle ways in which it is possible for anyone to reveal themselves is by speaking. In fact, without speech, it is very hard to communicate anything to anyone. I remember very clearly coming to Brazil for the first time. I spoke not one word of Portuguese. I did a lot of smiling and nodding, but real communication was impossible with those who did not speak English. Our words are the very core of our self-expression. Without them, our ability to express ourselves is extremely truncated. An artist may express himself or herself through their creations, but this also is a very limited expression of all that is in their hearts. It is through our words that we reveal our plans and purposes and also the deepest thoughts of our heart. In the same way, God speaks and expresses Himself through words. Since His words are a revealing of Himself, they too are His Son. It is very clear that Jesus Christ is the "word of God" (Jn 1:1). He is the summation of all of God's speaking, both to man and to the universe as a whole.

Hebrews 1:2 teaches us that it was through the Son that God created the universe. But how did God accomplish this creation? He spoke. He revealed Himself in speech, speaking into being all that He desired. As we have seen, this unveiling of Himself is His Son. Also, the Son is the "One" who is holding together all of creation today. We read in Colossians 1:17 that it is in Him that "all things consist." Hebrews 1:3 says that God is upholding all things by the word of His power. Putting these two verses together we see that the Son of God is indeed the "word of His power."

Perhaps this may resolve for some of you Bible scholars a theological dilemma which has puzzled many for years. The Bible states clearly that Jesus was the "firstborn of all creation." Although some translations have tried to "help" us understand by rendering this as the "firstborn over all creation," without a lot of imagination this translation has very little meaning in the English language. The problem for the scholars is that God's word also indicates that this "Word" who is the Son has always existed. He was clearly "in the beginning . . . with God" (Jn 1:1). Therefore, how is it possible that He was "born" at some period of time and that at that "birth" the Father said: "You are my Son, this day have I begotten You" (Heb 1:5)? If He was really "in the beginning with God," how can He have been "born?"

God's Word, the expression of Himself, has always been with Him. In "eternity past," before anything was created, this Word—His Son—was in the "bosom of the Father" (Jn 1:18). For example, this message I am writing has been in my heart for years. It is not something which is coming to me as I write, but has been waiting within me for the time when I would finally sit down and do the work. So also, God's Word was always with Him, even since "the beginning." You see, there was a "time" before time, when God had never spoken. He never had revealed Himself in any way. But He decided within His heart to begin a marvelous creation and using this creation as a base, set in motion the glorious plan to secure a bride. In order to make this creation, God spoke for the "first time." He "said" and it was (Ps 33:9). This is how the universe was created, through His Word (Heb 11:3). When He spoke, the Word which had always been in Him, came forth from Him—was "born" so to speak. And God said of this word which came forth: "You are my Son, this day I have begotten You." Remembering that Jesus is also "the wisdom of God" (I Cor 1:24), take time to review Proverbs 8:22-31 which gives a very clear picture of this truth.

Possibly this will "explain" too for those who might wonder about it, how Jesus

could say, "My Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28). Since we know that Jesus is God (I Jn 5:20) and that the Father is God, how can one be greater than the other? The revelation of the Son as the image of the Father should help us here. For example: Whatever I say or do, is an expression of myself. It is certainly "me" in a very real way. Yet I am and always will be "greater" than my expression. The totality of who I am perhaps will never be fully expressed. So even though I reveal myself in many ways and this revelation is exactly who I am, I will always be "greater" than any image of myself which is revealed. In this way, the Son could say, "the Father is greater than I" yet still be completely and totally God.

THE INCARNATION

What we have been discussing here is truly a mystery. It is not something which can be logically figured out but which must be revealed. But there is also a further deepening of this mystery. This Son of God who is the unique and full revelation of the Father—the same One who was "in the beginning with God"—became a man and walked here on the earth. John 1:14 reads: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Through a woman who was a virgin, Mary, this eternal Son of God was born into this physical world. This is what we call the "incarnation"—the eternal Son receiving a physical, human body. How this was possible, for the "fullness of the Godhead" to dwell in bodily form, is truly a great mystery. The scriptures themselves declare this, saying: "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (I Tim 3:16). For me it is too profound. I cannot understand it. Yet I know it to be true. The unique expression of the Father became a human being and walked on the earth.

No doubt, this too was a necessary step to accomplish His eternal plan. As we saw in the first few chapters, God is planning to enter into a marriage union with man. And in order for this "marriage" to take place, the parties to the wedding (that is those who are getting married) must be alike. They must be the same kind of being. We have already discussed how it is that God is preparing man for this holy union. First He is imparting His own eternal life to those who believe and then through this life is changing their very nature to be like His. But on His part too there has been a kind of "change." The image of the invisible God has become flesh and blood (Jn 1:14). He has taken upon Himself the form of man, not only to redeem us but also so that the marriage union can be consummated between two parties who are the same. Now there can be God in man and man in God, who together will enter into a holy, intimate, spiritual union. Jesus did not discard His physical body, but when He was resurrected, His body was glorified. So too at the resurrection of the dead, our mortal bodies will be glorified to be like His.

Perhaps another reason for the incarnation was the desire of the Father to be known in a way which would be much easier to understand for us who are bound to this earth. Before the Son became the "Son of man," God was a distant figure, Someone who most considered to be very unapproachable. He was far away in heaven and man was here on the earth. But in order to demonstrate His great love which He had for man, He sent Jesus to us. In this way, all that God is became more knowable and approachable. The scriptures say that the first apostles even "handled" with their hands the word of Life (I Jn 1:1). They saw His character. They knew His grace. They beheld His glory (Jn 1:14). All that the Father was, was manifested to them in the Person of the

incarnate Son. Thus, it was and is possible to know God in the most personal, real way. Through the Son, all that the Father is is revealed to us.

Still another reason for the incarnation of the Son was the necessity for a sacrifice. Due to man's sin, the plan of God had been evidently thwarted. The possibility of man receiving the holy life of God was completely removed when Adam and Eve entered into sin. As we have seen, in God's eyes, only death could remove this stain. And so our loving Father sent His Son to die as a substitute for us. For this, a human body was necessary. As we have seen, eternal life cannot die, so the Son also needed to receive a human life along with a physical body. Having been incarnated as a man, He could then offer Himself up for our sins. This too is part of God's incredible plan.

THE WORD OF LIFE

This creation in which we live was brought into being by the Father's Word. He spoke and it was. However, this creation is not the only creation which God has made. He already has begun a new creation (II Cor 5:17). This work too has been and is being done through His Son. God is speaking today through His Son, and those who receive this Word have something wonderful happen inside of them. In them a new creation has begun. The Living Word, entering into a human being, begins this work. And it is this same Word, being heard and received every day, that is causing this new creation to grow and expand. Day by day, as we are in communion with God and "hear" and obey His word, something new and incredible is happening within our being. God is speaking into us, and through this speaking, He is doing a new creative work. Although this work is being done in secret, that is that it is hidden inside our old bodies, it is very real. Someday when Jesus comes for us, all that has been newly created inside of us will be revealed. This "earthen vessel" (II Cor 4:7) will break open and the glory of God will pour out. The glorious character and nature of Jesus will then be on display through us for all the universe to see. II Thessalonians 1:10 speaks about "when He comes in that day to be glorified in the saints and to be admired in all those who believe."

How important it is for us therefore to be continually open to receive more of God's living word. The more His word penetrates our hearts, the more His new creation grows within us. Not only is it important for us to read the Bible, but it is essential that we "hear" our Savior's voice speaking to us through its pages. Not only is it essential that we have communion with God, but through this communion allow His word to do His work inside of us. The living word, this Person who is the manifestation of all that God is, is speaking into being a holy, righteous creation. The more we are willing and ready to receive this word, the more we will be changed into His image.

Although it is not the subject of this writing, perhaps it would be good to say a few words about the Holy Spirit. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, many people have misconceptions about the Spirit, including the idea that He has a different personality from either the Father or Jesus Christ. To investigate this further, let us go back a few chapters to our discussion of man. We learned there that we have a body, a soul and a spirit. This spirit which we have is not a separate individual or personality from us. It is our human spirit. In the same way, the Spirit of God is not a separate being with its own personality, but simply the Spirit of God.