

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God Incarnate Explains God Invisible

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:18)

If God is "spirit" in His essential being, it means that He is not material. Thus our material eyes which can only see material things cannot possibly see God. This point is repeatedly affirmed in Scripture; "...whom having not seen ye love," "...the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen..." and "...neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son...." So how do preachers and communicative Christians know anything about God that they can speak with any authority to those who inquire about their faith? Are we left to the frustrating and futile state of being "agnostic Christians"?

People in our age, not altogether unique in this point but definitely more extreme than people in most past ages, have become intoxicated on the sentimental. If something touches "my heart," or in some way evokes a tender emotional response in me, it gets an immediate and automatic thumbs-up approval. I just listened to a fascinating discussion of the surprising impact of *The Da Vinci Code* on ungrounded Christians. The author-speaker is a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky; he has written an expose of *The Da Vinci Code*, documenting over a hundred significant factual and historical errors in the author's basic premises. His assessment is that contemporary Western Christianity is rapidly becoming an emotional religion with almost no factual, historical knowledge from which to discern such fictional and factually flawed works as this one. Thus emotional, sentimentality based Christians read or hear about anything, however non-factual, that challenges their faith, and they shatter on the spot. If a Christian wasted sufficient time to read this fictional work (acknowledged by the author as fiction, but, not unlike the LaHaye novel series *Left Behind*, intended to have a specific—and not healthy—influence on the Christian community) I would highly recommend that the same Christian take the time to find and read Iranaeus' *Against Heresies*, an old work by an ancient Christian specifically against the heretical Gnostic influence that failed in its attempt to corrupt primitive

Christianity to its own designs. Since *The Code* attempts to build its case, albeit rather void of accurate facts, on Gnostic writings that were written long after the death of the men to whom they attributed their works, would it not be wise stewardship for the concerned Christian to read first-hand what ancient Christians really thought about Gnosticism? For that matter, you need only read John's gospel and general letters, or Paul's letter to the Colossians to get a New Testament expose and unequivocal rejection of ancient Gnostic ideas directly from the New Testament itself.

Our question—and our challenge—is to move decidedly away from groundless, emotional Christianity in which the inherent final authority is personal sentiment or emotion and not Biblical fact, and to discover what we can know about God with some basis in fact and documented authority. John has devoted eighteen verses that will serve as the preface or prologue to his entire gospel to affirming the full deity and the full humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Having covered more ground—and with absolute accuracy that avoids all the errant views—on this question than has been covered clearly in multitudes of shelves of other books, John devotes the last verse of his prologue to our question. Why be so specific and so precise in dealing with the nature of God and of the Incarnation? Why indeed! Our view of God—and of what He has revealed to us, and how He has revealed it to us—will shape our whole Christian worldview, or it will expose our worldview as sentimental, or non-Christian in other ways.

John begins with the obvious. *No man hath seen God at any time.* We have various Biblical affirmations of this point. Some might ask about those occasional Old Testament records in which God is said to have appeared to individuals in visible form? We speak of a God-appearance as a "theophany." I suggest that those Old Testament appearances are pre-Incarnate "Christophanies." When Moses directly asked God to "see" Him, God responded with the alarming

news; Moses, or any other human, could not see God and survive. God's glory is so intense that a direct view of Him would produce instant death!

However, John immediately follows this observation with delightful good news. *The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* John affirms what he has emphasized throughout the first seventeen verses, Jesus' intimate and equal position with God the Father. In ancient Eastern cultures, particularly Jewish culture, "son of" commonly identified someone as another's intimate companion and equal. We need not jump into the quagmire of a mystical "eternal begetting" or try to explain how Jesus could be begotten and also be equally eternal with the Father. "Son" in this context is the same as saying that He is equal with, on intimate terms with, and in every way like God the Father. In dealing with this question in the first seventeen verses John equally rejected the soon-to appear errors of both modalism and Arianism. Modalism, the rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity in favor of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" being mere "modes" of the divine revelation (introduced by Sabellius and presently advocated by Oneness Pentecostal and other groups) and Arianism, the idea that Jesus is a lesser and created being (introduced by Arius and presently taught by the Watch Tower Tract and Bible Society, Jehovah's Witnesses) both appeared within the first three hundred years after John wrote these words. John rejects both errors and precisely develops the doctrine of the Trinity, emphasizing Jesus' full deity, full humanity, and eternity.

He hath declared him. This simple clause says more than that Jesus merely preached sermons about God. The word translated *declared* has the following meaning:

1 to lead out, be leader, go before. 2 metaph., to draw out in narrative, unfold a teaching. 2A to recount, rehearse. 2B to unfold, declare. 2B1 the things relating to God. 2B2 used in Greek writing of the interpretation of things sacred and divine, oracles, dreams, etc.¹

Our English word "exegesis" is derived from this ancient word.

¹James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996), G1834.

Dr. Tom Constable enlarges the implications of this word.

John ended his prologue as he began it, with a reference to Jesus' deity. He began by saying the Word was with God (v. 1), and he concluded by saying that He was at the Father's side. This indicates the intimate fellowship, love, and knowledge that the Father and the Son shared. It also gives us confidence that the revelation of the Father that Jesus revealed is accurate. John's main point in this prologue was that Jesus is the ultimate revealer of God.

" . . . John in his use of *Logos* is cutting clean across one of the fundamental Greek ideas. The Greeks thought of the gods as detached from the world, as regarding its struggles and heartaches and joys and fears with serene divine lack of feeling. John's idea of the *Logos* conveys exactly the opposite idea. John's *Logos* does not show us a God who is serenely detached, but a God who is passionately involved."⁶⁸

Later John described himself as reclining on Jesus' bosom (cf. 13:23). His Gospel is an accurate revelation of the Word because John enjoyed intimate fellowship with Him just as Jesus was an accurate revelation of God that came from intimate relationship with Him.²

If you have any doubts about how God thinks about something, research what Jesus said about it. Try to search the gospels to see who He is. The more you learn about Jesus the more you will know about God. This profoundly simple truth should revolutionize our thinking about God, and it should give us an incredible sense of awe and loving worship. Did Jesus care about the hurting and the helpless? So does God. Did Jesus come with purpose and design, and did He accomplish His purpose in the first Advent? God also operates with purpose and design; and He also accomplishes His purpose. Would you like to have some time with Jesus? Then you should really enjoy heaven! Why not spend more time with Him now. How can you do that? Spend more time with Scripture. Clarify your focus of life-authority on Scripture and less on any other authority, even your own emotions. You will begin to understand far more about God than you now perceive. May it be so with each of us.

⁶⁸ 68. Morris, pp. 103-4.

²Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Jn 1:18.

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