

The Image of the Invisible God

The Beginning. NO word could be altered in the first five verses of the Gospel of John—so wrought are they with extremest care—without opening the door to the gravest errors; and the first two verses are one of the exceedingly rare photographic negatives, so to speak, exposed to the void eternity of God. Now, as the curtain is thus drawn from Eternity, in the background of all worlds, the first object which strikes our eyes is Christ; the first orb shining in the primal dawn, *already there*, is the Logos. "In the beginning"—not, in the beginning *of the world*; but in the dawn behind the worlds—"was"—as a luminary already shining in meridian splendour—"the Word" (John i. 1): men are born, worlds are made, Christ *is*. The world was *from* the beginning; Christ was *in* the beginning: He was *in* the beginning, for He never *had* a beginning. Christ is the Thought or Word of God; and, as there could never be a time when God had no thought or word, so Christ must be as eternal as God. He who is before all worlds must be God. "Out of thee, Bethlehem Ephrahah"—out of the manger in the inn—"shall One come forth whose goings forth are from of old, FROM EVERLASTING" (Mic. v. 2). The Morning Star in the great Void backward is the eternal Christ. No one could tell us this but God; for no one then existed but God; *and God says that, in the primal dawn, Christ was already there.*

The Companionship But is He the solitary Orb? is He the only Godhead, so that when He came to earth, Heaven was emptied of Deity? is there no God but the Word? Another Orb of Deity co-equally fills the void, exposed on this sensitive plate set to Eternity. "And the Word was *with*"—literally, stood over against, yet for ever moved towards—"God"; two Thrones of Deity confronting one another, face to face in a co-equal blessedness, and a perpetual communion. The same responsive companionship is betrayed in a later preposition,—“The only begotten Son, who is *into* the bosom of the Father” (John i. 18): the eternal motion of Christ is Godward, and the eternal response of God is Christward; “whose *goings forth* are from everlasting” (Micah v. 2). So the Psalm, with extraordinary clearness,—“Of the *Son* He [God] saith, Thy throne, O *God*”—two Divine Persons, each addressing the other *as God*—“is for ever and ever” (Heb. i. 8); and our Lord recalls the companionship,—“And now, O Father, glorify Me with the glory which I had *with Thee before the world was*” (John xvii. 5). God is love, and *this proves it*; for love is a relationship between persons, and is impossible without plurality: so our Lord says,—“THOU *lovedst ME before the foundation of the world*” (John xvii. 24). The eternal Christ was enthroned in communion with God from everlasting.

The Deity. Now we arrive at a definite declaration of Godhead. “And the Word was *God*”: not a god, but *God*; not a lower kind of God, but *God*: and the word ‘*God*’ is put in the Greek in the place of emphasis. Christ is not the only Godhead, but He is essential Godhead: “I am *in* the Father and the Father [reciprocally] *in Me*” (John

xiv. 10); “I and the Father *are*”—here are two Persons—“*one*” (John x. 30)—for there is but one God, in nature, in essence, in kind. The oneness of the Godhead is as vital as the plurality of the Persons. Ever blessed Trinity in unity! “It is rashness to search too far into it; it is piety to believe it; it is life eternal to know it” (Bernard). But this simple, profound utterance, ringing out like a sharp, pungent oracle, forever defines the Christ of God. “In the beginning was the Word”—an eternal Christ; “and the Word was with God”—a co-equal Christ; “and the Word was God”—a Divine Christ: “in the beginning was the Word”—the eternity of Jesus; “and the Word was with God”—the separate personality of Jesus; “and the Word was God”—the Godhead of Jesus.

The Image So we arrive at the exact position of our Lord in the Deity. “Who is the *image* of the invisible God” (Col. i. 15). In the background is God invisible, “dwelling in light unapproachable, whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (I Tim. vi. 16): the *invisible* God—how dreadful is this impenetrable veil! how fathomless the mystery! For He dwells “in light *unapproachable*”: that is, all approach, all revelation of Deity, *must* come from *that side*; and *it has*. “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 i. 18). As on the depthless darkness of midnight skies the sun, coming forth out of the bosom of the heavens, reveals the burning light buried deep in the darkness, so Christ is “the effulgence”—the apocalypse—“of His glory, the very image of His substance” (Heb. i. 3): He is the outburst of God. For He was God *manifest*, long ere

He was God manifest *in the flesh*; His were the manifestations, visible and tangible, of the Jehovah Angel; and from all eternity He images forth that in God which is invisible. All the holiness that is in God, is also in Christ; all the power that is in God, is also in Christ; all the love that is in God, is also in Christ,—“who is the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His substance”; the Image, not of the Father only, but of God. “He that hath *seen Me* HATH SEEN THE FATHER” (John xiv. 9).

The Gospel. What then is the inconceivably important consequence of the God-head of Christ? That the Gospel is true, and that no man rejects it except at his own infinite peril. For what Christ was before all worlds alone reveals how He was able, and He only, to carry the vast burden of a world's guilt, and to undertake the stupendous enterprise of a world's salvation. As infinite as the Person, so infinite is the merit and the work: for “unto us *a child* is born, and his name shall be called *the Mighty God*” (Is. ix. 6); “of whom is Christ concerning the flesh, *who is, GOD OVER ALL, blessed for ever*” (Rom. ix. 5); and the Church, has thus been bought with the blood of the infinite—“the church of *God*, which he purchased with *His own blood*” (Acts xx. 28). So also we wait for the Image of the invisible God. For the Father never ‘appears’ to men in the flesh—“whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (I Tim. vi. 16); but we “look for the *appearing* of our GREAT GOD and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. ii. 13).

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