

## Chapter 6

### The Revelation of the Father

We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding  
so that we might know Him who is true.

1John 5:20a

“No One Knows the Father”

We can no more write a chapter about the true God without reference to His Son than we can write about the sun without reference to its light and heat. The sun is more than the light and heat it produces, but without the light and heat, we would not even exist to know there is a sun. Likewise, the Father is more than the Son He created, but without the Son, we would not exist to know there is a Father. We could not even look at the sun to learn about it without its light and heat showing us where in the sky to look, and we cannot see God and learn about Him without Jesus pointing the way. “No one”, Jesus said, “comes to the Father except by me” (Jn. 14:6). What Jesus taught is fundamental to the gospel, and to this book: “No one really knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone really know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son may choose to reveal Him.” It was unheard-of for a man to claim that he alone knew God and that no one else could know God unless he allowed it, but Jesus made that claim, and it is true.

God created the Son so much like Himself that as we learn about the Son, we learn about the Father even if the Father is not mentioned, and knowing the Son is the only way we will ever come to know the Father. Without the Son, there no knowledge of God, no fellowship with God, and no love for God *as He really is*. As much as people everywhere talked about God before the Son was revealed, no one knew Him. The Jews themselves did not know God, even though He had chosen them to be His people and entered into covenant with them. Not even the prophets, through whom God spoke, knew God, nor did any of the righteous men and women in ancient Israel. Knowing this, Jesus told his disciples,

Matthew 13

16. Your eyes are blessed because they see, and your ears, because they hear.

17. Truly, I tell you that many prophets and righteous men longed to see the things you are seeing, and did not see them, and to hear the things you are hearing, and did not hear them.

#### The Passion for Praise

In God’s kind of life, as we saw in Job’s story, there is a kind of humility that is beyond human experience and imagination. It is a humility that seeks the blessing of those over whom it reigns and loves them more than it loves itself. This paradoxical element of God’s character, supreme humility and supreme power, was completely out of step with the ancient world’s concept of greatness. Paul is often quoted as saying, “The love of money is the root of all evils” (1Tim. 6:10), but that is not precisely what he wrote. His actual statement was, “The love of money is *a* root of all evils.” Other roots of evil exist, as Paul well knew, and perhaps the deadliest of them all is the desire for fame, that is, the praise of men.

Paul exhorted the saints to do nothing in pursuit of earthly glory (Phil. 2:3), and those who humbly obeyed Paul found themselves strangers in the world. In classical culture, to covet worldly honor was

not considered evil; on the contrary, the pursuit of worldly honor was considered laudable.<sup>1</sup> Highly regarded figures in antiquity, both mythological and real, were comforted in their deaths by knowing they had secured lasting fame for themselves.<sup>2</sup> Deeds performed by wealthy Greeks and Romans which we might now consider charitable were always motivated by the desire for recognition and praise, never by compassion for the poor.<sup>3</sup> The rich were considered virtuous if they funded public works such as roads, temples, baths, public games, etc., thus increasing their city's stature, and with it, their own.

The passion for earthly praise became so prevalent in the ancient world that by the time of Jesus, even Israel's leaders had succumbed to it (cf. Jn. 12:42–43), and Jesus, seeing the influence of that pagan spirit on those leaders, commanded his disciples not to follow their example:

#### Matthew 6

1. Beware not to do your alms before men, to be seen by them; otherwise, you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.
2. So, whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you the way the hypocrites do in the synagogues and streets so that they might be honored by men. Truly, I tell you, they have their reward.
3. But when you are giving alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,
4. so that your almsgiving might be in secret. And then your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you in the open.

In Christian cultures around the globe, ambition for the praise of men is widely considered shameful, but that is only because of the influence of the gospel of Christ. A famous American novelist described the lust for earthly glory as “the most secret of all passions”,<sup>4</sup> but that passion became secret and shameful only because the Son of God came and revealed that the desire for earthly glory is ungodly. Even so, human nature has not changed, and often, people still pursue fame and the admiration of men as the ancients did, by making an ostentatious show of giving, though the influence of the gospel causes some to feel the shame of doing so.

#### The Mind of Christ

Far from pursuing greater glory for himself, the Son of God humbled himself and surrendered all, including his life, for the sake of others. Paul exhorted the saints to follow that supremely meek example:

#### Philippians 2

5. Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus,

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<sup>1</sup> Consider the epitaph found on the tomb of Agreophon, an ancient Roman nobleman. Among his other laudable qualities was this: “Ever since he was a boy . . . , Agreophon has shown *his love of honor* [emphasis mine]” (Zuiderhoek, pp. 124–125). The same book (p. 126) tells of a “decree of the council and people of Kyme . . . in honor of the benefactor L. Vaccius Labeo that was set up somewhere between 2 BC and AD 14: ‘Labeo, who is worthy of all honors, should further be praised for his dignified way of life, *his love of fame* [emphasis mine], and his attitude of liberality towards the city, and he should be held in the highest esteem and be most highly appreciated.’”

<sup>2</sup> Given the choice between a long life without fame and a short life with everlasting fame, Achilles chose to die young (Homer, *The Iliad*, 9.410–416). Centuries after Homer, the same sentiment was expressed by the philosopher Heraclitus when he said, “The best men choose one thing rather than all else: everlasting fame among mortal men” (Freeman, p. 26).

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 95, page 275.

<sup>4</sup> Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*, chapter 28.

6. who, although, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped after.
7. Instead, he divested himself [of his heavenly comforts], taking on the form of a slave, made in the likeness of men.
8. And being found as a man in appearance, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death – the death of a cross.

Following in Jesus' footsteps, Paul wrote,

#### Philippians 3

7. What things were gain to me, these I have counted as loss for Christ.
- 8a. But more than that, I consider all things but loss for the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of everything. But I consider *it all* garbage, that I might gain Christ.

How very strange it must have sounded to the ancient ear for Jesus to say, "I do not accept honor from humans" (Jn. 5:41). People of Jesus' time must have wondered what Jesus wanted out of life if not worldly honor. Many of them considered him deranged, as we have seen. Even his earthly relatives, including his mother Mary, thought he had lost his mind (Mk. 3:21, 31–35).

#### Two Kinds of Honor

As explained previously, the lust for fame played a part in the Temptation when Satan suggested that Jesus throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple (Mt. 4:5–6). Satan was not suggesting that Jesus commit suicide; he knew that angels would save Jesus if he jumped. What an impressive show that would have been! And Satan was not the only one who thought Jesus should put his specialness on display and put men in awe of him. Jesus' siblings also felt he should do it:

#### John 7

3. His brothers said to him, "Leave this place and go to Judea so that your disciples may also see these works that you do.
4. Nobody does anything in secret when he wants to be publicly known. Since you do these things, show yourself to the world!"

Jesus' brothers were right to think that those who desire acclaim do not perform their good deeds in secret; however, they did not understand that Jesus was doing good deeds because he felt compassion for lost and hurting souls; he never did anything in order to win the admiration of people (Jn. 5:41).

The kind of honor God gives is reserved for the lowly; the kind of honor men give is reserved for the proud. Those two kinds of honor are so different that no one can seek them both at the same time. And there is no fence between them on which one may sit; every man is after one or the other. Jesus condemned certain proud elders of Israel for seeking the wrong kind of honor: "How can you believe while receiving honor from one another and not seeking the honor that comes from God alone?" (Jn. 5:44).

#### For Selfish Reasons

None of Jesus' disciples, especially Judas, whose heart was most like Satan's, could conceive of anyone submitting to public disgrace and an ignominious death when he had a choice not to, especially if he could choose great glory instead. None of them imagined that Jesus, if forced to make a choice,

would chose to be arrested and brutalized rather than use his great power for self-gain. A disgraceful death was the opposite of the glory which all of Jesus' disciples wanted, and they assumed that Jesus wanted it just as much as they did.

Desiring to share in the worldly glory they expected Jesus at some point to seize for himself, the disciples vied with one another for his favor, competing for the highest offices. But competition breeds strife, and the disciples quarreled bitterly at times because they each wanted more glory than the other. Even at the Last Supper (Lk. 22:24) – after following and listening to Jesus for years – the disciples fell into a quarrel about who among them deserved the most prestigious offices in the kingdom they thought Jesus was about to establish (Mt. 18:1; Mk. 9:33–34).

It was for selfish reasons that the disciples wanted Jesus to reign in great glory on earth, for they knew that if he reigned, they would reign in great glory with him. The mother of James and John even came to Jesus to make the case for her sons to be given the seats of highest honor in his kingdom (Mt. 20:20–21). The disciples strove constantly to win from Jesus the most honorable positions the same way Satan strove to win from God the most honored seat in heaven. Jesus' teaching, that the kingdom of God was spiritual, not worldly (Lk. 17:21), and that it was reserved exclusively for the meek (Mt. 5:3) did not fall on ears that were deaf; they fell on ears that were altogether dead to the ways of God.

God's patience with Jesus' disciples determined their fate, just as it determined Satan's, and just as it determines ours. God's patience determines everyone's fate. Peter exhorted those whom God had chosen to “consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation” (2Pet. 3:15a). But for those “born to be caught and killed” (2Pet. 2:12), His patience is their gate to damnation.

#### Last-Ditch Effort?

In dark Gethsemane, while Jesus prayed and his disciples slept, Satan was no doubt watching Jesus as he fell on his face and cried out, “O my Father! If it is possible, let this cup pass from me” (Mt. 26:39). And if he heard Jesus later tell Peter that his Father was ready to send twelve legions of angels to rescue him (Mt. 26:53), he must have wondered if the pressure was finally getting to Jesus. During the years of Jesus' ministry, Satan had heard him speak rather boldly on a number of occasions about having to die (e.g., Mt. 16:21; 20:28; Lk. 18:31–33), and on those occasions, Jesus was not weeping and crying out to his Father for a way of escape. But now, with death at his doorstep, Jesus' resolve seemed to be crumbling, which, to Satan, would have been an encouraging sign. Was Jesus finally becoming willing to use his power to do such things as turn stones into bread, or hurl himself from the pinnacle of the temple, or fly, or do some other amazing trick to dazzle men and win Jesus the earthly glory that both Satan and those who loved Jesus wanted him to embrace?

But knowing that his heavenly Father never pursued earthly glory, and determined to follow His example, Jesus chose to suffer and die rather than to cease being like Him. Jesus told his disciples, “He who has seen me has seen the Father,” and that applies even to what Jesus suffered. The love that motivated Jesus to choose death over his own well-being was a reflection of the Father's love for us, which tells us that although the Father Himself cannot die (1Tim. 1:17), if He could have died for us, He would have.

It is possible that Judas' betrayal was a last-ditch effort engineered by Satan to compel Jesus to accept the position of god of this world. If so, when Jesus still refused and let himself be arrested, Satan could then return to heaven with the report that he had done all that he could do to save the Messiah. He had threatened Jesus with torture and death if he did not accept God's offer to be king of the world, and when Jesus would not yield, torture and death was all that was left for him, by God's own decree:

## Acts 4

24a. They lifted up their voice with one accord to God and said,

. . . .

27. “Against your holy child Jesus, whom you anointed, Herod and Pontius Pilate truly were gathered together with Gentiles and people from Israel

28. to do everything your hand and your purpose predetermined to happen.

## The Greatest Is the Humblest

Without grace from God, no one in this world would have believed in Jesus, for his perfect selflessness was contrary to human nature; it would have seemed wrong-headed to anyone of us. Nor could we have believed, without God’s grace, that when Jesus said, “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Mt. 11:29), he was revealing something wonderful about the Creator. No one could see it until the Spirit came in Acts 2, but while the Son was here among us, he demonstrated abundantly the Father’s great humility as well as His mighty power, which provided men with an undreamed-of perspective on God, to wit, the greatest One of all is also the humblest One of all.

The Father could have justly demanded all glory for Himself, but He freely shared it with the Son, and the Son then with us. The Son learned meekness and goodness by imitating what he saw in his Father, and we may learn the same from the Son’s example. The Father sends rain and sunshine upon both the good and the evil and asks nothing in return, and so, the Son suffered and died just in the hope that someone would value it. They both just love, and move on. Regardless of whether or not we love Him in return, God continually blesses us because He is by nature good, and the Son followed that example. Said Jesus, “The Son can do nothing of himself, but only what he sees the Father do, for whatever things He does, these things the Son also does, and in the same way” (Jn. 5:19).

In agony on the cross, Jesus prayed for those who were killing him because he was like his Father. And in response to Jesus’ prayer, when the Father poured out His life on the day of Pentecost, it was offered even to the murderers of His beloved Son – if they would humble themselves to the one they had just killed. Peter delivered God’s incredibly merciful offer:

## Acts 3

13. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His child Jesus, whom you betrayed and whom you repudiated before Pilate when he was determined to release him.

14. But you denied the holy and righteous one, and asked for a man – a murderer! – to be granted to you instead,

15. and you killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses!

. . .

19. Repent, then, and be converted, that your sins might be blotted out!

Without the Son, without his wondrous story, no one even to this day would believe in a God that forgiving. Before the Son came, men everywhere were saying that God is good, as men everywhere still do, but only when we perceive the mercy that God extended to the ones who denounced and killed His beloved Son can we perceive how good God truly is. He is supremely kind and loving, just as David often said:

## Psalms 36

7. How precious is your lovingkindness, O God! Yea, the sons of men seek refuge in the shadow of your wings.

Psalms 57

10. Your lovingkindness is as high as heaven, and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

Psalms 63

3. Because your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise you.

Such scriptures notwithstanding – and there are many of them – we never could have known how loving and kind God is without the Son coming to earth and demonstrating that love in a way that we could understand, once it was explained to us.

### Honoring the Son as God

One of Jesus' most astonishing revelations was that it is God's will for all creatures, not just to honor His Son, but to honor His Son *as they honor God!* Jesus said,

John 5

22. The Father doesn't even judge anyone, but has committed all judgment to the Son,
23. so that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son [as he honors the Father] does not honor the Father who sent him.

Because the apostles learned to do that, we find in their writings the Son's name appearing many times where "God" would normally be. "The Gospel of God" is also referred to as "the Gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:16; 1:16); "the day of God" is called in another place "the day of Christ" (2Pet. 3:12; Phip. 1:10); "the Spirit of God" is also called "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9); "the doctrine of God" is also "the doctrine of Christ" (Tit. 2:10; 2Jn. 1:9); "the grace of God" is also "the grace of Christ" (Acts 11:23; Gal. 1:6); "the law of God" is also "the law of Christ" (Rom. 7:22; Gal. 6:2); "the truth of God" is also "the truth of Christ" (Rom. 15:8; 2Cor. 11:10); "the Assembly of God" is also "the Assembly of Christ" (1Cor. 11:16; Rom. 16:16); and there are other such examples.<sup>5</sup> In Philippians 3:8, Paul said that he counted everything in this life as garbage just to know Christ. Paul did not say "just to know God" because he understood that to know Christ *is* to know God, for he is the perfect reflection of the Father.

Before the Son was revealed, to honor anyone as God was honored would have been sin, but now, because it has been revealed that the Father desires that His Son be honored as He is honored, it is sin not to. The apostles would never have done such a thing without a convincing revelation, but when the Spirit brought it to them, they rejoiced to know that the name of the Son should be attached to everything that is of God, for everything that is of God came through him (cf. Jn. 1:3). That there existed someone with God worthy of such honor was the most unexpected revelation in the history of salvation.

The gospel of John, for all its literary beauty, declares that astonishing revelation:

John 1

1. In the beginning, the Word was there, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2. He was in the beginning with God.
3. All things were created through him, and without him was nothing created that was created.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., "the mystery of God/Christ" (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4), "the love of God/Christ" (Rom. 5:5; 8:35), "the knowledge of God/Christ" (2Pet. 1:2; Phip. 3:8), and "the word of God/Christ" (Acts 4:31; Col. 3:16).

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Perhaps the most incredible expression of the Father’s humility is that in this new covenant, in order for a sinner to be forgiven and cleansed from sin, He requires *only* that the sinner honor His Son as God. He will receive into His eternal kingdom anyone who honors His Son as God, *regardless of what that person believes about the Father*. He may be a Trinitarian, believing that the Father is part of a triune God, the first of three equal persons of a Holy Trinity. Or he may be of the Oneness faith, believing that the Son is himself the Father. Or he may understand the truth of the matter, that there is a Father in heaven with His Son sitting at His right hand. None of that seems to matter to God at all, as far as forgiving sin is concerned, for (1) all those beliefs honor the Son as God and (2) God gives people who hold to all those beliefs the baptism of life, as proof of their faith. God never gives His baptism to those who do not honor His Son as God, regardless of how highly they speak of Him.

John wrote, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” (Jn. 3:36a), but John never wrote, “He who believes in God has eternal life.” 1John 2:23b reads, “He who confesses the Son has the Father also,”<sup>6</sup> but no verse states that he who confesses the Father has the Son also. Conversely, John also said: “Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father” (1Jn. 2:23a), but no verse states that everyone who denies the Father does not have the Son. Both Trinitarianism and the Oneness faiths deny that the Father is a real being, distinct from His Son, but God does not take that into account since they honor His Son as God. This means that if they come to Jesus, they may receive the cleansing baptism of life without acknowledging the Father, as many of them have. However, the opposite is never true. No one has ever received forgiveness of sin without acknowledging God’s Son, and no one ever will.

### The New Thing

When the terrified Philippian jailer ran into the prison and begged Paul to tell him how to be saved from the wrath of God, Paul said to him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). There was no mention of God in Paul’s reply. Of course, when Paul then went to the jailer’s house and preached the gospel (Acts 16:32–34), he told him the whole story, but the point is that Paul’s answer was all the jailer needed to know in order to be saved. No apostle ever taught that those who confess faith in God will be saved, but they did teach that those who confess the Lord Jesus will be (Rom. 10:9). In that, Paul was not saying that God does not count; he was saying that God is so incredibly humble that He does not count Himself.

Solomon declared that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9), but centuries after Solomon, God promised to do a new thing (Isa. 43:19), and in revealing His Son, He did it, putting to shame even the wisdom that He had given to Solomon. The possibility of salvation in the name of Jesus without mentioning the Father, or even believing in Him as a separate being from the Son, is the “new thing” that God did, and without grace from God, even Jesus’ disciples could not have believed it.

How could our heavenly Father possibly be any humbler and less demanding? Of all the many gods that ancient men imagined, they never imagined a God so meek that He would forgive and cleanse the worst of sinners if they would only honor someone else. That kind of humility and love is so far beyond the imagination of humans that it confused and challenged the best of them when it was revealed.

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<sup>6</sup> See footnote 9, below.

### “Many Gods and Many Lords”

Believing in God will save no one. James pointed out that even demons believe in God (Jas. 2:19). This whole world, which “lies in wickedness” (1Jn. 5:19) and is deceived (Rev. 12:9), believes in God and worships Him. But to the world, Jesus would say as he said to the Samaritan woman, “You do not know what you are worshipping.” The apostles’ mission was never to convince either the Jews or the Gentiles to believe in God; they already did. Rather, their mission was to proclaim the Son, and if men believed their preaching and repented, the Son would then sanctify them by giving them the Spirit, and thus make their worship of God acceptable (cf. Rom. 15:16). At Mars’ Hill in Athens, Paul noted the Athenians’ extremely religious mind-set, but his message to them was that their worship was in vain because they were not sanctified by God’s resurrected Son (Acts 17:22–31).

The world believes in and worships “many gods and many lords” (1Cor. 8:5), and it always has, but one of the more unsavory truths found in the Bible is that the gods whom people of this world worship are actually demons (Dt. 32:17; Ps. 106:37; 1Cor. 10:20). That was true in the ancient world, and it is true today wherever God is worshipped in a way He does not accept. As we have seen, the Son revealed how God demands to be worshipped: “God is a spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24). Yet, ignoring that most valuable revelation, Israel and all mankind continued to believe in God as they imagined Him to be and to worship Him as they thought best. But numbers mean nothing to God; what is wrong is wrong, no matter how many people believe it to be true, as Solomon said: “Every haughty heart is an abomination to the LORD; though hand join in hand, it shall not be unpunished” (Prov. 16:5). If people are not worshipping God the way God requires, their worship is of the flesh, not the Spirit, and it is demons, not God, who are honored by it.

### They Will Love Him

If in this book, we were never to mention God or the Father, but spoke only of the Son, we would still be talking about the Father because the Son is His exact representation. It would be foolish, of course, to intentionally avoid the mention of the Father, for He is there. He is the Father of the Son, and He is wonderful. We *want* to speak of Him; we *want* to extol His wonderful works and to serve Him acceptably. Nevertheless, were we to speak only of the Son and omit all mention of the Father, this book would still be about Him, whether we knew it or not.

If those who believe in Jesus but do not believe there is both a Father and a Son are judged worthy to be raised with the righteous dead when Jesus returns, then the Son whom they have loved will present them to his Father (cf. Rev. 15:2), and they will love Him, too, even if they are surprised to meet Him.<sup>7</sup> The Son told his disciples that “he who hates me, hates my Father also” (Jn. 15:23). But it is also true that whoever loves Jesus loves the Father also, *even if he does not believe that the Father exists as a person separate from the Son.*

### The Son Will Bow

To honor the Son as God does not mean that we honor God less. On the contrary, honoring the Son as God is the only way that we can honor God at all, for God made His Son “the way [to God], the truth [about God], and the life [of God]” (Jn. 14:6). Far from being provoked to jealousy, God is glorified when people humble themselves to His Son. Paul said that in the end, it will be “to the glory of God” that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phip. 2:10–11). This is true if for

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<sup>7</sup> This assumes that in the Final Judgment, God will receive into His kingdom those who deny the existence of both the Father and the Son, but the apostle John casts some doubt on that assumption (1Jn. 2:22b).



no other reason than that at the close of this age, the Son himself will bow before the Father and turn everything over to Him:

1Corinthians 15

24a. Then comes the end, when he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father.

...

28b. When all things are subdued under him, then will the Son himself submit to Him who subdued all things under him, that God might be all things to all people.

The Father and the Son do not compete for praise or glory. The Father has given it all to His Son, and the Son, being like his Father, will give it all back to Him.

### Two Camps

Jesus is the only person in the New Testament books who commanded others to have faith in God (Mk. 11:22). But in omitting the mention of God when speaking of having faith (e.g., Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4), the apostles were not saying that men should have faith in Jesus *instead* of God, but have faith in Jesus along with God, as His Son and Servant. Over time, as believers grew less spiritual, they began to analyze the gospel instead of obeying it, and so, they struggled to understand how the apostles could have spoken of Christ Jesus as they did if he were not God Himself. Consequently, they devised various doctrines to explain it and were eventually divided into the two main theological camps previously mentioned: the Holy Trinity camp and the Oneness camp. The simple truth missed by the originators of both those doctrines is that the apostles honored the Son as God only because it was the Father's will that they do so, not because the Son was equal in any respect with the Father.

When it came to John's attention that a doctrine had emerged (whether Trinitarian or Oneness in nature we are not told) which denied that there is both a Father and a Son, John responded by warning believers to refuse it:

1John 2

22b. He is the anti-Christ who denies the Father and the Son.

23. Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also.<sup>8</sup>

24. Let what you have heard from the beginning continue in you. If what you have heard from the beginning continues in you, then you will continue in the Son as well as in the Father.

### God's Humility Saved Many

In the early fourth century, those who believed that God is a Trinity of persons joined forces with the Roman Empire and imposed Trinitarianism upon civilization. But God was prepared. His love for souls had already made the way for sincere souls to be saved in spite of the darkness imposed upon them by the new, Roman Christian Empire. Even though believers were forced by Rome to live according to standards set by Christian rulers, God's standard did not change, and to be forgiven and cleansed from sin, men still needed only to honor the Son as God. Had God required people to confess the truth, that He is a separate person from the Son, few would have survived, for the Empire outlawed that truth in AD 325 at the Council of Nicea.<sup>9</sup> Thereafter, to confess the truth and resist Trinitarianism was to court

<sup>8</sup> The last half of this verse is from the UBS Greek text and is included in most translations of the New Testament.

<sup>9</sup> The Council of Nicea was convened and presided over by the Roman Emperor Constantine.

death. However, since the Trinity doctrine does honor the Son as God, and honoring the Son as God is all that God requires, sincere souls could believe that doctrine and still be saved. How good and wise God is! He made a way for His children to live in a corrupt culture run by wicked men, and yet, still please Him enough to be saved.

Jesus once commanded his disciples to do whatever the scribes and Pharisees told them to do, though he forbade them to live as they lived (Mt. 23:2–3), and the disciples who did as Jesus said found favor with God. Jesus' wise counsel served many a soul well after the gospel was twisted by Rome into the religious system called Christianity. After Nicea, many honored Jesus as God in the way that leaders of the Trinitarian culture demanded but did not live the way those leaders lived, and so, found favor with God. Thus, God's humility, His willingness to receive into His kingdom anyone who honors His Son as God, saved many, in spite of the Empire's heavy-handed perversion of the gospel.

### Higher than the Heavens

Much knowledge about God may be gained from the revelation that God began creation with a Son, for the revelation of the kind of Son that God created also reveals what kind of God that the Father is. He created the Son with such majesty that the heavens themselves cannot contain it. With the poor instrument of human language, the apostles struggled to adequately describe the glory which God bestowed upon His Son. The Son is, "a High Priest – holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). And Paul added that

#### Philippians 2

9. God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him a name that is above every name,
10. that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of heavenly beings, and of earthly beings, and of those under the earth,
11. and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When Jesus told his disciples that all power in heaven and earth had been given to him, he was not boasting. He was just telling them how good God had been to him. There cannot be a greater goodness, a more selfless act, than God (1) giving to His Son "all power in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:18; cf. Jn. 3:35) and then (2) giving him up for us. The only honor the Father withheld from the Son when this world was created was immediate recognition, and He withheld that only to bless His Son with even greater glory "in the fullness of time".

It pleased the Father very much to bless His Son with every possible blessing and to make him "most blessed, forever". The Father's happiness was to make the Son happy, and His Son was made very happy indeed:

#### Psalm 21

1. The King [Jesus] rejoices in your strength, O LORD, and in your salvation, how greatly he rejoices!
2. You have given him his heart's desire, and you have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah.
3. For you will meet him with blessings of goodness; you will set upon his head a crown of pure gold.
4. He asked life from you;<sup>10</sup> you gave him length of days forever and ever.

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<sup>10</sup> Jesus also asked for eternal life, for us. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said that Jesus, "having received from the Father the promise of the holy Spirit, has shed forth this which you now see and hear (Acts 2:33).

5. His glory is great in your salvation; you will bestow upon him majesty and honor.
6. For you will make him most blessed, forever; you will make him greatly rejoice with your countenance.
7. For the King trusts in the LORD, and through the lovingkindness of the Most High, he will not be moved.

The Son will never be moved from his happy, honored place beside the Father, and his kingdom will never end (Dan. 2:44; 7:13–14).

### The Happiest Participant

When the Son was first created, he felt how much he was loved and wanted. Trying to pass along to his disciples that sense of being loved and wanted, he told them, “Don’t be afraid, little flock; your Father is very pleased to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12:32). But at the time, his disciples did not even know what the kingdom of God was, or how God would give it to them. What Jesus was telling his bewildered disciples is that it would very much please the Father to share with them His kind of life. And though the Bible does not explicitly say so, we can be sure that when the disciples received God’s life on Pentecost morning and were born of God, the happiest participant in the event was the Father Himself. Since He was in heaven, His great joy is not recorded in the Bible the way the ecstatic joy of the disciples is recorded. Overwhelmed with the power of God’s kind of life, they staggered out into the streets of Jerusalem, drunk with joy and proclaiming God’s greatness in languages they did not even understand (Acts 2:4). But the Father in heaven was having a glorious time as well; it was, in fact, His joy that the disciples were experiencing.

### The Target of the Arrow

As we have seen, the Son spoke through the prophets many times about his hidden life with his Father. But there is something especially charming about the instance from Isaiah in which the Son described himself as an arrow hidden among other arrows in God’s quiver, waiting for his turn to be taken out and sent by God on his appointed mission: “He made me a polished arrow; in His quiver, He has hidden me” (Isa. 49:2b).

When that very sharp arrow struck its target, heaven and earth were moved, and the pent-up, holy love of God poured from His heart like a river, for the arrow’s target was not man, but God. It was His heart that was first pierced by the Son, not ours. We love God only because He first loved us, and His love touched us and changed us only because the Son’s suffering first touched God.

As I have said, the central message of the gospel is that God is a loving Father, and it was His great desire to have us as His children which moved Him to send His beloved Son into this dangerous world to rescue us who knew nothing about Him. As John famously said, “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that every one who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16). The Father loves us more than He loves Himself, and we know that because the Son is His perfect reflection, and Jesus loved us more than he loved himself. That astonishing truth means that the story of the gospel is altogether a story of love.

### Simple and Available

The revelation of the Son provides us with an escape from vain intellectualizing about an unknowable, remote God. Without that revelation, the best that any of us can do is to pontificate about how incomprehensibly great God is. But such theological blather takes men “away from the simplicity

that is in Christ” and into the realm of philosophy, which is a corrupting influence on the faith (Col. 2:8). What draws us back from the brink is the Lamb of God. Jesus Christ is not an idea. He is real, and he really was one of us. He stood where we stand, he felt what we feel, and he showed us how to live God’s kind of life in this sinful world. He came to show us that God is more than incomprehensibly great. He showed us that God is so great that He can make Himself simple and available, so great that He *can* make Himself known to us, and He will make Himself known to every soul who honors His Son as God.

It is man’s carnal nature to stress God’s inaccessibility, but men do so only to excuse their bondage to ungodliness. Eloquent expostulations about God’s “unsearchable ways” may impress, but they can never deliver from sin and death. If we declare that nobody can ever really know God, then what are we saying but that God has not sent His Son to reveal Him, or that if He did, His Son failed? Genuine faith comes by hearing the genuine word of God (Rom. 10:14–17), but if nobody knows God, then who can preach His word so that people might believe and be saved? The doctrine that God is unknown and unknowable sterilizes the ground out of which saving faith rises; it poisons the souls of men with a wrong idea.

Belief in Christ is belief that the Father is so good and so great that He found a way to make Himself known. Unbelief is the refusal to believe in a God that good and that great. Only fools are content to speak of God as extraordinarily great, and let it go at that, but to do so is what our fleshly nature wants. Following that nature, the vast majority of people in this world choose to live out their lives in self-will and die in their sins rather than to believe the simple gospel of Jesus, receive God’s gift of eternal life, and experience His goodness and greatness for themselves.

What love the Father had for us who believe, to transform us from the desperately sinful creatures we were into saints, and to re-create us as His children, able to know Him and worthy to live with Him and His Son forever! How great and good God is, to make us worthy to stand before Him “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph. 5:27) and to call us “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1Pet. 2:9). We were “dead in transgressions and sins” (Eph. 2:1), but God sent His Son to give us life so that we might know Him – and by revealing Himself through His Son, God accomplished the impossible in us.

## Remembers

### CHAPTER 6: THE REVELATION OF THE FATHER

#### “No One Knows the Father”

- God created the Son so much like Himself that as we learn about the Son, we learn about the Father even if the Father is not mentioned.
- It was unheard-of for a man to claim that he alone knew God and that no one else could know God unless he allowed it, but Jesus made that claim, and it is true.
- Without the Son, there is no knowledge of God, no fellowship with God, no kinship with God, and no love for God *as He really is*.
- As much as people everywhere talked about God before the Son was revealed, no one knew Him.
- The Jews themselves did not know God, even though He had chosen them to be His people and entered into covenant with them.

#### The Passion for Praise

- In God’s kind of life is humility that is beyond human experience and imagination, a humility that seeks the blessing of those over whom it reigns and loves them more than it loves itself.
- The passion for earthly praise became so prevalent in the ancient world that by the time of Jesus, even Israel’s leaders had succumbed to it

#### The Mind of Christ

- The Son humbled himself and surrendered all, including his life, for the sake of others.

#### Two Kinds of Honor

- Jesus did good deeds because he felt compassion for lost and hurting souls; he did nothing just to gain human admiration.
- The kind of honor God gives is reserved for the lowly; the kind of honor men give is reserved for the proud.

#### For Selfish Reasons

- Jesus’ disciples could not conceive of anyone submitting to public disgrace and an ignominious death when he had a choice not to, especially if he could choose great glory instead.
- Desiring the worldly glory they expected Jesus at some point to seize for himself, the disciples vied with one another for his favor, that they might be given the highest offices.
- Competition breeds strife.
- All the disciples wanted Jesus to reign in great glory on earth for selfish reasons, for they knew that if he reigned, then they would reign in great glory with him.
- The disciples strove to win from Jesus the most honorable positions much the same way Satan strove to win from God the most honored seat in heaven.
- Jesus’ teaching, that the kingdom of God was spiritual, not worldly, did not fall on ears that were merely deaf; they fell on ears that were altogether dead to the ways of God.
- God’s patience with Jesus’ disciples determined their fate, just as it determined Satan’s, and just as it determines ours. God’s patience determines everyone’s fate.

#### Last-Ditch Effort?

- Knowing that his heavenly Father never pursued earthly glory, Jesus chose to suffer and die rather than to cease being like Him.
- The love that motivated Jesus to choose death over his own well-being was a reflection of the Father’s love for us.

- Although the Father Himself cannot die, if He could have died for us, He would have.

#### The Greatest Is the Humblest

- Jesus' humble attitude and selflessness would have seemed extraordinarily wrong-headed to most people.
- It is the Son as the living expression of the Father's humility that makes it possible for us to believe, in a world like this one, that the greatest One of all is also the humblest One of all.
- The Father could have justly demanded all glory for Himself, but He freely shared it with the Son.
- Regardless of whether or not humans loved Him in return, God continued to bless them because He is by nature good, and the Son followed that example.
- In agony on the cross, Jesus prayed for those who were killing him because he was like his Father.
- When God poured out His life on the day of Pentecost, it was offered even to the murderers of His beloved Son – if they would only humble themselves to the one they had just killed.
- Only when men perceive the mercy that God extended to the ones who denounced and killed His beloved Son can they perceive how good God truly is.
- We never could have known how loving and kind God is without the Son coming to earth and demonstrating that love in a way that we could understand.

#### Honoring the Son as God

- One of Jesus' most astonishing revelations was that it is God's will for all creatures, not just to honor His Son, but to honor His Son *as they honor God!*
- Before the Son was revealed, to honor anyone as God was honored was unthinkable, but the Father now demands that all men honor His Son as they honor Him.
- The apostles rejoiced that God had let them know that the name of the Son should be attached to everything that is of God, for everything, everywhere that is of God came through him.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- In this new covenant, in order for a sinner to be forgiven and cleansed from sin, the Father requires only that the sinner honor His Son as God.
- The Father will receive into His eternal kingdom anyone who honors His Son as God, *regardless of what that person believes about the Father.*
- God never gives the confirmation of His Spirit to those who do not honor His Son as God, regardless of how highly they speak of Him.
- No one has ever received forgiveness of sin without acknowledging His Son, and no one ever will.

#### The New Thing

- No apostle ever taught that those who confess faith in God will be saved, but they did teach that those who confess the Lord Jesus will be.
- Solomon declared that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9), but centuries after Solomon, God promised to do a new thing.
- Of all the many gods that ancient men imagined, they never imagined a God so meek that He would forgive and cleanse the worst of sinners if they would only honor someone else.

“Many Gods and Many Lords”

- Believing in God will save no one. James pointed out that even demons believe in God.
- This whole world, which “lies in wickedness” (1Jn. 5:19) and is deceived (Rev. 12:9), believes in God and worships Him.
- The apostles' mission was never to convince either the Jews or the Gentiles to believe in God; they already did. Rather, their mission was to proclaim the Son.

- One of the more unsavory truths found in the Bible is that the gods whom people of this world worship are actually demons.
- The Son revealed how the true God demands to be worshipped.
- If people are not worshipping God the way God requires, their worship is of the flesh, not the Spirit, and it is demons, not God, who are honored by it.

#### They Will Love Him

- If we were never to mention God or the Father, but spoke only of the Son, we would still be talking about the Father because the Son is His exact representation.

#### The Son Will Bow

- To honor the Son as God does not mean that we honor God less. On the contrary, honoring the Son as God is the only way that we can honor God at all.
- Far from being provoked to jealousy, God is glorified when people humble themselves to His Son.
- The Father and the Son do not compete for praise or glory. The Father has given it all to His Son, and the Son, being like his Father, gives it all back to Him.

#### Two Camps

- Jesus is the only person in the New Testament books who commanded others to have faith in God.
- Over time, as believers grew less spiritual, they began to analyze the gospel instead of believing it.
- The apostles honored the Son as God because it was the Father's will that they do so, not because the Son was equal in any respect with the Father.

#### God's Humility Saved Many

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#### Higher than the Heavens

- Much knowledge may be gained from the revelation that God began creation with a Son, but it is the revelation of the kind of Son that God created which makes that knowledge complete.
- The Son was created with such majesty that the heavens themselves cannot contain it.
- When Jesus told his disciples that all power in heaven and earth had been given to him, he was not boasting. He was just telling them how good God had been to him.
- The only honor the Father withheld from the Son when this world was created was immediate recognition, and He withheld that only to bless His Son with even greater glory "in the fullness of time".
- It pleased the Father very much to bless His Son with every possible blessing and to make him "most blessed, forever".
- The Son will never be moved from his happy, honored place beside the Father, and his kingdom will never end.

#### The Happiest Participant

- When the disciples received God's life on Pentecost morning, the happiest participant in the event was the Father Himself; it was, in fact, His joy that they were experiencing.

#### The Target of the Arrow

- We love God only because He first loved us, and His love touched us and changed us only because the Son's suffering first touched God.
- It was God's great desire to have us as His children that moved Him to send His beloved Son into this dangerous world to rescue us who knew nothing about Him.
- The Father loves us more than He loves Himself, and we know that because the Son is the perfect reflection of the Father, and he loved us more than he loved himself.
- The story of the gospel is altogether a story of love.

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- How great and good God is, to make us worthy to stand before Him “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” and to call us “out of darkness into His marvelous light”.
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