

4. Christ, the Radiance of God's Glory

There are many views on the nature of Christ. Some say that he was only a prophet like Moses and the rest; some, that he was only a good man, not divine at all. Others say that he was a poet in the class of a Milton or Shakespeare. Those who follow the historical Jesus slant deny his divinity and the truth of the account of the Gospels, regarding both Christ and his cohorts. One cannot hold to these views and believe the New Testament, which teaches that Christ is the very radiance of God's glory.

The Radiance of God's Glory and the Exact Representation of His Being

Is Christ the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being? Or is he merely human? Hebrews 1:1-4 forever answers this question:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

There is no arguing room as to the nature of the Son. He is exactly like his father in glory and being. Philippians 2:6-11 (the passage that keynotes this series) characterizes Christ Jesus, past and present. He reflected the radiance of God's glory before he came:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
7 but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

He returned to a state of being above all else after his resurrection:

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The Life, the Light of the World

The radiance of God showed in Christ when he came into the world. This Christ Jesus was in the beginning with God; he was God. John 1:1 teaches: "1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning." Any interpretation that makes Christ less than divine contradicts this plain teaching of the scripture. It was his life that reflected the light shining to men: "4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. (John 1:4).

It was in this context that Jesus could say in John 14:9-11:

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?
10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

Whether in the beginning with God, or on earth with man, Jesus Christ reflected God's (the One and Only) glory:

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14.

No mere man, no mere poet or philosopher, no mere historical person—this Jesus is Christ who was with God and who was God, and who reflects God's radiance.

The Image of the Invisible God and the Fullness of the Godhead

The son was the image of the invisible God and the fullness of the Godhead. Colossians 1:15-20 teaches, "15 He is the image of the invisible God . . . For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." In Colossians 2:9-10, Paul wrote further, "9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity [Godhead] lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."

As Christ is the fullness of the Godhead, we have fullness in Christ. The full radiance of God's glory is in Christ, and the full radiance of Christ's glory is in the church. Paul beautifully expressed this teaching in Ephesians 1:19-23:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

That Christ should so reflect the brilliance of God's glory and so exactly represent his being was God's eternal purpose. Paul further wrote in Eph 3:9-11:

10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. .

In a very interesting way, this radiance and representation of God in Christ and in the church, return to glorify God: Ephesians 3:20-21 reads:

20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Conclusion

Christ as the radiance of God's glory leaves no room for Christ as mere man or poet, regardless of how great. Christ was and is divine. Likewise, the church is no mere substitute for a failed kingdom or for a kingdom to come in full glory after the return of Christ. The glory to God is in Christ and the church and to Christ and the church for ever and ever.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Hebrews 1:1-4: Who is the radiance of God's glory? Who is the exact representation of God's being? By what does Christ sustain all things? What did he do for sins? Where does he sit?
2. Philippians 2:6-11: In whose nature was Christ? How did he see equality with God? What did Christ reflect before he came? What did Christ make of himself?
3. John 1:1: Who was in the beginning with God? Who was God?
4. John 1:4: What was in him? What was the life of men?
5. John 14:9-11: When we see Christ, whom else do we see? Whose words did Jesus speak?
6. John 1:14: Who dwelt among men? What did they see?
7. Colossians 1:15-20: Who is the image of God? In whom does all fullness dwell?
8. Ephesians 1:19-23: Where is Jesus now sitting? What all is he above? Over what is he head? What is the fullness of Christ?
9. Eph 3:9-11: What is to make known the manifold wisdom of God? According to what purpose is this done?
10. Ephesians 3:20-21: How does glory return to God? For how long?