

NOTHING LIKE THE REAL THING!

Today's Text: Col. 1: 1-23

Extracts:

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence [Col. 1: 15-18]

*According to the Psalmist, God of old laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of His hands [Ps. 102: 25; Ps. 19: 1]. Professor Nathan Woods (1874-1961), a scientist, took up the challenge to look for the finger prints of God in His creations. After all, crime investigators check for finger prints when they are looking for criminals! What he discovered is published in a book, **The Secret of the Universe**,¹ which is now out of print. The Bible teaches us that there are Three Persons in one God- the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Wood's scientific evidence supported the triune nature of the Creator! The totality of nature is referred to as the **universe**, not multiverse, which signifies oneness, as in one God. However, **the universe consists of time, space and matter** and no more, three components as in the Godhead! **Time is past, present or future**. Interestingly, only the present is visible; we can only see today; yesterday and tomorrow are invisible. **Space is measured by length, breadth and height**, as in the copy of the Bible in your hands right now! **Matter is energy in motion producing phenomena**. The sun is one big ball that we see every clear day. Apart from giving us **light**, it also produces **heat and radiation**! Therefore, those looking for the invisible God can only know Him through the visible part of His triune nature. There is nothing like the real thing!*

Paul's letter to the Colossians provides us with a similar audacious answer: Jesus the Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. That is, if you have seen Jesus, you have seen His Father [Jn 14: 9]. How can we prove that to the skeptic? Do you yourself harbour some doubts about it? What is the significance of knowing the reality of God through Jesus the Christ? Let us find out from today's challenging study.

¹ Nathan R. Wood, *The Secret of the Universe*, 10th Edition [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1936] . See also Henry M. Moore, "The Tri-Universe," *Back to Genesis*, No. 204, Dec. 2005; <https://www.icr.org/i/pdf/btg/btg-204.pdf>

1. Background: From the obvious to the profound!

In one of His appearances to His disciples after His resurrection, Jesus opened their eyes to the Scriptures concerning Himself. He said, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the *Law of Moses* and *the Prophets* and *the Psalms* concerning Me” [Lk 24: 44]. So, if you want to have a total understanding of the Jesus of the New Testament, you have to include all of the Old Testament. For today’s study, let us take excerpts from the lives of Moses and Abraham.

After Moses’ siblings, Aaron and Miriam, had backbitten him over his Ethiopian wife, God called them out and said, “If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a dream. Not so with *My servant Moses*; he is faithful in all My house. *I speak with him face to face, even plainly, ... and he sees the form of the LORD*” [Num. 12: 1-8]. We know that when God first appeared to Moses in the burning bush, it was as a flame of fire [Ex. 3: 2]. He revealed His name as the “I AM that I AM” [v. 14]. In the wilderness, as Moses was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, God appeared to him as a pillar of cloud or a voice [Ex. 33: 9]. When Moses pleaded with the LORD to show him His way that he might know Him, God replied, “*You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live*” [Ex. 33: 20-23].

Compare that with Abraham’s experience. On his way back from rescuing his nephew, Lot, from the hands of those that had taken him captive at Gomorrah, Abraham met Melchizedek, the king of Salem, “the priest of God Most High” (*Jehovah Elyon*), who brought out bread and wine. Abraham paid tithe to him [Gen. 14: 17-20]. Psalm 110, one of the Messianic Psalms, says of the coming Messiah (Jesus), “The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek’” [Ps. 110: 4]. The Book of Hebrews confirms that that Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithe was a type of Christ [Heb. 7: 1-28]. Sometime later, Abraham entertained three men that came to his tent. It turned out that two of them were angels on the way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah while the third was the LORD. He revealed to Abraham and his wife God’s plan for their son, Isaac, to be born the following year. As the two angels turned away to go toward Sodom, we are told “Abraham still stood before the LORD” [Gen. 18: 1-22].

Why did Abraham see the LORD and still live? The answer can be found in the New Testament where Jesus had a dispute with the Jews over His Deity. He told them, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” When they challenged Him, claiming that He could not have seen Abraham since He was less than fifty years old, He replied, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham, I AM” [Jn 8: 56-58]. Therefore, the high priest, Melchizedek, and the LORD that Abraham spoke with before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah were the appearances of the Pre-Incarnate Christ! *Remarkably, God called Moses His servant and the Scriptures call Abraham the friend of God* [2 Chron. 20: 7;

Is. 41: 8] . Jesus told His disciples, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” **[Jn 15: 15]**. *To be God’s friend is to have a personal relationship with Him and that is only possible through His visible form, Jesus, the only begotten Son of God.*

That is where Paul’s letter to the Colossians becomes very handy. *He needed to deal with any lingering doubts and teachings that tended to make Jesus the Christ more of a superior angel than a genuine member of the triune God* (Gnosticism). The reason many followers of other religions find it difficult to become Christians is their unwillingness/inability to accept that God has a Son and Jesus is that begotten Son of God who is, therefore, also God. In Paul’s eloquent letter, in the portion of it for today’s lesson, he demonstrated seven superiorities of Christ to establish His divinity. Let us pay attention to just a few of them as follows:

a) *Christ as the image of God*

Paul wrote, “[Christ] is the image of the invisible God” **[Col. 1: 15]**. In other words, Christ is the *visible image of the invisible God*. An image is a mere reflection of a true object, just as your shadow is yourself as cast by the light that is on you.

The Scriptures teach us, “No one has seen God at any time. The only *begotten Son*, who is *in the bosom of the Father*, He has declared Him” **[Jn 1: 18]**. A child comes from his father’s sperm (also called seed) and his mother’s egg. We know that Mary, the young virgin betrothed to Joseph, had not yet known her husband before she conceived Jesus in her womb. Archangel Gabriel that brought the news to her said, “You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.” When the baffled young virgin asked him how that could be since she did not know a man, the angel added, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God*” **[Lk 1: 26-35]**.

In the Apostles’ Creed, we say, “He was conceived by the Holy Spirit [and] born of the Virgin Mary.” So, why is Jesus the Son of the Father and not of the Holy Spirit? The answer is obvious. A man’s reproductive organ that supplies the seed for conception is not the father of the child that emerges but the man himself! The Spirit of God is an integral part of God Himself. He it was who came upon Mary and “the power of the Highest” planted the Divine Seed into her. Rightly, therefore, the “Holy One” [the Child Jesus] is the Son of God, the visible image of the invisible God. That was why, when Jesus asserted His deity before Jewish leaders during the Feast of Dedication by saying, “I and My Father are one,” they took up

stones to stone Him for blasphemy for making Himself God [**Jn 10: 30-33**]. Indeed, Jesus is the visible image of His invisible Father.

b) *Christ by whom God created all things*

Paul wrote, “He is...the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible... All things were created through Him and for Him” [**Col. 1: 15-16**].

Let us go to the first chapter of the book of Genesis. We are told that, in the beginning, **God** created the heavens and the earth [**Gen. 1: 1**]. The next 26 verses explained how He did so. We are told that **the Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters and **God said**, “Let there be ...” [**vv. 2-3**]. Let us flip a few chapters and get to the first chapter of the Gospel of John. John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God... All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made**” [**Jn 1: 1-3**]. Later, John wrote, “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” [**v. 14**]. Therefore, the Word that God spoke at creation was the pre-incarnate Christ who became known as Jesus when He took human form thousands of years later!

This becomes clearer when we come to the creation of man. God said, “Let **Us** make man in **Our image, according to Our likeness**’...So God created man **according to His own image; in the image of God** He created him” [**Gen. 1: 26-27**]. Immediately, we see a demonstration of the triune nature of God: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit. Since the Father and the Holy Spirit are invisible, the Word (who became flesh as Jesus the only begotten Son of God) is the only one we can see and He looks like a human being, a man! Therefore, the member of the Trinity who spoke, “Let us make man” according to the image and likeness of God, was the Christ! It is indeed by Him that God created all things. That was why, when the seventy disciples of Jesus came back rejoicing that even the demons were subject to them in His name, He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” [**Lk 10: 17-18**].

The Trinity is a “best-practice” of cooperation in action The doctrine of the Trinity states that there is one God who is manifested in Three distinct Persons, namely, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit [**Deut. 6: 4; Matt. 28: 19**]. Yet, they are three distinct Persons, the Father [**Jn 14: 1-6; Jn 17: 1**], the Son [**Lk 2: 7; Acts 1: 11**], and the Holy Spirit [**Lk 1: 41**]. They speak as distinct Persons [**Ex. 20: 1; Matt. 5: 2; Acts 13: 2**]. Yet, each of them is called God [**Gen. 1: 1; Is. 9: 6; Acts 5: 3-4**]. Wherever you find One, you find the Other Two. For example, at the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove and

the voice of His Father came from heaven, saying, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” [Mk 1: 10-11]. The Father always bears witness of the Son [Jn 5: 37]; the Son is always doing the Father’s will [Jn 5: 28-29; Phil. 2: 5-11]; the Son executes the Father’s will through the Holy Spirit [Lk 4: 18-19]; and the Holy Spirit bears witness of the Son [Jn 15: 26; 1 Cor. 12: 3]. We pray to the Father [Jn 6: 6-14; Jn 14: 16] through the Son [Jn 14: 6] by the Holy Spirit [Rom. 8: 26]. *In summary, we can see that there is one God in Three distinct Persons. However, it is not the case of “one plus one plus one equals three” but “one times one times one equals one” ! That is Paul’s message in today’s study.*

2. Implications for the modern church

Paul also wrote, “He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” [Col. 1: 18]. Take your mind back to the region of Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asked His disciples what men or they saw Him as. Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus commended him but confirmed that it was not revealed to him by flesh and blood but by His Father who is in heaven. He went on to reveal that it was on such rock-solid faith that He would build His church; one that the gates of hell could not assail or prevail against [Matt. 16: 13-18].

Christ is the head of the church and it must be subject to Him [Eph. 5: 23-24]. *The church is the aggregation of true worshippers and believers in all the congregations that proclaim Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.* The church is the bride of Christ [Rev. 19: 7-9]. So, as the Head of the church, it is only Jesus that can lead us to His Father [Jn 14: 6]. Satan’s aim is to divert our attention by making us believe that what is popular is what is right. He will deceive you to give up the truth (by reward or punishment) but, always remember, there is nothing like the real thing. Jesus is the real thing, the only visible member of the invisible God. He is thus the only One who can lead us to His Father in heaven, by the Holy Spirit, on the day we are called home to eternity.

What then are the implications of the reality of Christ in the practice of true worship of God in our modern congregations? Here are some of them:

a) Put Christ before religion

God has only one begotten Son; the rest of us are His adopted children by virtue of accepting His only begotten Son as our Lord and Saviour [Jn 1: 12; Jn 3: 16; Rom. 8: 14-17]. Therefore, until you grow beyond religion (denominationalism or churchianity) to have a personal relationship with Christ, you have not seen the real thing. You are still phishing!²

² To trick somebody into providing bank or credit-card information by sending a fraudulent e-mail purporting to be from a bank, Internet provider, etc. asking for verification of an account number or password-*Encarta Dictionary: English (North America)*

Take the example of the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who tried to invoke the name of Jesus to exorcise evil spirits out of a man. The evil spirit in the man replied, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” The possessed man attacked the pretenders and they fled naked and wounded! Fear fell on the people and the name of Jesus was magnified [Acts 19: 11-17]. ***Christ is real!***

b) *Christ came in flesh as Jesus, not in fiction!*

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. His coming was foretold of old- that He will be the Seed of the woman who will bruise the head of the serpent (Satan) [Gen. 3: 15]. The woman would be a virgin and her child would be called Immanuel (‘God with us’) [Is.7: 14]. His name shall be called “Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” and of His kingdom, there shall be no end [Is. 9: 6-7]. He was born as Jesus. He had an earthly ministry from the age of thirty until His crucifixion, death and burial, as the four Gospels have recorded. He rose again from the dead and has ascended into heaven. He will return soon to judge the living and the dead. Can you afford to take the risk of believing those telling you that Jesus was a mere religious leader or that the Messiah is yet to come? There is nothing like the real thing!

3. Conclusion: Christ is your Lord and your God!

When the other disciples told Thomas that Jesus had risen and had shown Himself to them during his absence, he replied, “Unless I *see* in His hands the print of the nails, and ***put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side***, I will not believe.” Indeed, eight days later, after Jesus had challenged him to carry out his *empirical tests* on the risen Christ, Thomas replied, “My Lord and my God!” [Jn 20: 24-29].

Jesus is the empirical evidence that God exists! He is the only way to God the Father. He is the author and finisher of your faith. So look up to Him and He will lead you to your mansion in His Father’s house.

There is nothing like the real thing!