

Theanthropos—Christ Alone

“The God-Man”—Expositions of the Incarnation of Christ



Main point: Jesus alone answers the greatest problem, from the highest position, and the nearest relationship with the clearest revelation.

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

JOHN 1:18

INTRODUCTION:

Heinrich Emil Brunner was a Swiss Reformed Theologian in the late 18th and early 19th centuries who once preached a memorable sermon in which he made these three points: “Every man has a past, a present, and a future. Every man has a problem in his past, a problem in his present, and a problem in his future. The problem of his past is sin, but God has an answer to that problem. The answer is faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The problem of his future is death, but God has an answer to that problem also. The answer is hope in Christ’s return based on the fact of His historical resurrection and promises. The problem of his present is hate, and God’s answer to that problem is the love of Christ lived out in the lives of those who trust Him.”

Brunner’s preoccupation with Christ is the same emphasis that John has been making in the prologue of His gospel. And it brings before us a question that we all need to ask ourselves this morning, and that is, has Christ become the answer to the problems in your life?

We all have problems, and precisely, the issues that Brunner referenced in his message—the problem of sin, death, and hate in our hearts. Who is fit to deal with the problem of sin in our hearts? Your parents cannot, for they passed the sin nature down to you, and they are sinners themselves. The pastor cannot, for he is a mere man with breath in his nostrils and no power to save. Psychiatry and psychology will tell you that the answer lies within yourself, your will, your determination, your self-effort, or your self-awareness. Yet the prophet Jeremiah asked the citizens of Jerusalem a rhetorical question that was designed to reveal to them and us our utter need for God’s intervention. He asked in Jeremiah 13:23,

- “Can the Ethiopian change his skin
Or the leopard his spots?
Then you also can do good
Who are accustomed to doing evil.

Here is the bad news. We can no more change our hearts than a dark Ethiopian can change the color of his skin or the leopard his spots. Our problem is not skin deep; it's bone-deep and so thoroughly ingrained that we need a new nature.

Spurgeon said, "The question of the text is, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin?' The answer is no, no, no, no, no. Here is the other question—Can the Ethiopian's skin be changed? The answer to that is, yes, yes, yes, yes." The good news is that Jesus Christ and Jesus alone can give the new birth, and He is the only One who will ever answer the problems of our lives completely.

TRANSITION:

What John tells us in his summary statement in verse 18, is that Jesus stands alone as the complete revealer of God. He is the ultimate disclosure of God Himself. He is the only one qualified to exegete or interpret God to man, and therefore, He is the answer to the problems in our lives.

So, why should we look to Him and trust Him alone with our very lives today? John explains three reasons why.

- A. Jesus addresses **the greatest problem**—*No one has seen God at any time;*
- B. Jesus has **the nearest relationship**—*the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father,*
- C. Jesus provides **the clearest revelation**—*He has explained Him.*

EXPOSITION:

A. The greatest problem—*No one has seen God at any time.*

What is the greatest problem that we have as human beings? It is not social, and it is not relational. It is not educational or economic. Our greatest problem is spiritual. John begins with,

1. The fact of God's invisibility

Explained: *The invisibility of God* has been a problem for mankind from the very beginning of time when our first parents rebelled against God. How do *you* deal with that fact? How did *God* deal with that fact? Let us first acknowledge that it is a significant problem and fact. "*No one has seen God at any time.*" "**No one**" is an absolute negation—*absolutely no one*. Now by this, John means that no one has seen God in His full and complete essence.

It was a problem for **Job** who asked,

- **Job 11:7-8**—Can you discover the depths of God?
Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?
⁸ *They are high as the heavens, what can you do?*
Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?

God's depths are unfathomable. God's limits are unsearchable. There is nothing that a man can do to know Him unless He chooses to reveal Himself.

It was a problem for **Moses**, who said, "*I pray You, show me Your glory!*" And he was told, "*You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!*" (*Ex.33:18, 20*). To see God in all of His glory would bring instant death to every sinner (*Gen.32:30; Deut.5:26; Judg.13:22*). And for that reason, Moses was only allowed to see "God's back" or the trailing edge and afterglow of divine glory. Although Moses is said to have spoken with God "*face-to-face*," it was only figurative language to express the direct communication without the presence of a mediator that Moses was privileged to enjoy. But even Moses suffered from the greatest problem of the invisibility of God.

It was a problem for **Isaiah**. In the sixth chapter he was given a vision of "*the Lord seated on His throne...with but the hem of the Lord's garment filling the temple,*" and this vision was so vivid, so terrifying, and so close to the real thing that he would cry out,

- **Isaiah 6:5**—Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

It was a problem for **Philip**, who stood in the queue of all human beings through the ages. He knew that there was no higher experience, no greater good, than seeing God as He is, in unimaginable splendor and transcendent glory. So he asked Jesus for direct access or an immediate display of God Himself.

- **John 14:8-9**—Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'"

Jesus is the only One uniquely qualified and fully able to reveal and represent God—because He is God in the flesh. "*No one has seen God at any time.*" It is a universal fact and problem. During His ministry, Jesus indicted the Jews who claimed to be true followers of Moses, but they did not hear God's voice in Him or see God's glory in Him.

- **John 5:37**—And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.

Later on, Jesus said,

- **John 6:46**—Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.

I've been seeking to explain the great problem and fact of God's invisibility. No one has seen God at any time.

Applied: Children often ask, what is God like? Where is He? Why can't I hear His voice? What does He look like and sound like? We point them in a straightforward direction—Jesus! In moments of frustration, as we deal with the problems of sin and suffering—sometimes we say, "If only God will speak to me and show me what do to!" And the case that John has been making in this chapter is, there is good news in Christ! Christ is the answer; the question is, what are you doing with Jesus?

Now let us ask,

2. **What is the reason for the invisibility of God?** We move now from *the fact of God's invisibility to the reason for God's invisibility.*

Explained: It was at the well of Jacob in Sychar that Jesus revealed to a Samaritan woman who wanted to know where people ought to worship. She thought it would *either* be with the Samaritans on their holy mountain or with the Jews in Jerusalem, and Jesus' answer must have surprised her, for He said, "Neither." A new time was arriving when all such places of worship would be obsolete. Christ explained in,

- **John 4:23-24**—But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus explains the reason for this invisibility is because *God is spirit*. In this concise statement, Jesus gave us a fundamental description of God's nature or essence. Notice, Jesus does not say that God is "a spirit" like other spiritual beings such as angels. He said, God is spirit; that is, He is not a *material substance*. He is incorporeal: He has no body. Just as "*God is light*" (1 John 1:5) and "*God is love*" (1 John 4:16) and "*God is holy*" (Ps.77:13), "*God is spirit.*"

John Calvin said it this way: "His spiritual nature forbids our imagining anything earthly or carnal of Him. People may imagine God to be an old man who lives in the sky, but in reality, He is spirit."¹

Physical bodies exist in particular places and times, but God created all places and physical matter and launched time itself. He is present everywhere. "Do I not fill heaven and earth? Saith the Lord" (Jer.23:24). Bodies have dimensions, but God's being is infinite, for "the heavens and the highest heaven cannot contain Him" (2 Chr.2:6). God's invisibility means that God has no size, shape, or color that our eyes can behold in Him. God is not a blind force, but a *personal, intelligent, spirit Being* who seeks or purposes or desires true worshippers.

Now, Mormon teaching objects to this doctrine taught by Christ. Joseph Smith and Lorenzo Snow said, "As man now is, God once was: as God now is, man may be." In other words, God is a glorified man, and we can be gods too. This is nothing more than men trying to equate themselves with the living God, which is blasphemy!

Because God is spirit, He has no body, and because He has no body, He cannot be seen. He is invisible.

Paul affirms this same fact. This is not something we are forcing on the text of Scripture. It just "leaps out" of the pages of the Bible everywhere.

- **Colossians 1:15**—He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

God is invisible, and Jesus is the image (*eikon*)—the likeness or copy—of God. Sometimes an image meant an imprint on a coin or a reflection in a mirror. And this is saying that Jesus is the perfect image and the exact likeness of God.

- **1 Timothy 1:11**—Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
- **1 Timothy 6:16**—[Christ]...who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.

If He could be seen, we are not fit to see Him because we are sinners and because He dwells in unapproachable light and is inaccessible to us. God is spirit. God is invisible. And the reason for God's invisibility is God's very essence.

Applied: Now, the reason this matters for us is because if we are not clear in our theology of God's nature or character, we can begin to ask for visible signs or proof of God's presence. This was a problem for the Jews in Old Testament days. They were extremely embarrassed by *the invisibility of God*. Their pagan neighbors actually taunted and teased them for actually worshipping a God that they could not see. "You say you believe in God," the heathen said, "then where is He! We can't see Him. Come to our temples, and we will show you our gods! They have eyes and ears and feet and hair and noses; we have plenty of visible gods, come to our temples, and we will show you! But where is your God?" They laughed in derision at the Jews who worshipped a God that was invisible. A part of their reply to the heathen is found in Psalm 115:2-8, where we read,

- Why should the nations say,
"Where, now, is their God?"
³But our God is in the heavens;
He does whatever He pleases.
⁴Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of man's hands.
⁵They have mouths, but they cannot speak; (no sound)
They have eyes, but they cannot see; (no sight)
⁶They have ears, but they cannot hear; (no hearing)
They have noses, but they cannot smell; (no senses)
⁷They have hands, but they cannot feel; (no sympathy)
They have feet, but they cannot walk; (no actions)
They cannot make a sound with their throat.

¹ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, p.609

⁸ Those who make them will become like them, (lifeless and powerless)
Everyone who trusts in them.

To worship some image and someone other than the true God invisible is not only idolatrous, but it results in emptiness! This is why the prophet Isaiah would pray in Isaiah 64:1-4,

- Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down,
That the mountains might quake at Your presence—
² As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil—
To make Your name known to Your adversaries,
That the nations may tremble at Your presence!
³ When You did awesome things which we did not expect,
You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence.
⁴ For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear,
Nor has the eye seen a God besides You,
Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.

It was hard for the Jews to come to terms with *the invisibility of God*. But it is also the same way for a generation of people today. These are people who want to examine God like a laboratory rat or observe Him in some type of scientific, analytical way, and experiment. These are people, both educated and uneducated, who refuse to believe God unless they can test Him by their five senses (*taste, touch, hear, smell, and see*). But God is spirit. So how can *sinner*s believe in a God they cannot see? How can we believe in a God that we cannot see? The greatest problem and fact of the invisibility of God is answered for us in this text.

3. **How has God solved the problem of His invisibility?** The Bible answers that question with at least four answers.

God began to solve the problem of His invisibility through theophanies of the Old Testament. The Old Testament theophanies were Old Testament appearances of a Person who appeared to be human, but in the context, it was plain—that He was divine. The appearances were preincarnate appearances of Christ before He was born of the Virgin Mary. Often, this Person identified himself as “the Angel/Messenger of the Lord.” Usually, the Son made these “cameo” appearances fulfilling specific roles and communicating particular truth—but it was all in anticipation of the incarnation. These appearances were *partial* or *diminished* revelations of the glory of God. They were not full or complete. They were revelations of “His back” and not “His face.” God partially solved the problem of His invisibility through the Christophanies or theophanies of the Old Testament.

God has completely solved the problem of His invisibility in the incarnation of Jesus. This is clear in verse 14, “*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” This is why Jesus was able to say in John 14:9, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father...*” that is, all the glory of the Father is in Me. When Jesus said in John 14:11, “*Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me,*” He was explaining to us that we must believe that the Father and the Son have one life, one glory. In John 10:30, Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one,*” that is, one in essence. Distinct in personality, one in Person. I am God in the flesh.

If anyone wants to see God or know God, the Bible answers, “Look at Jesus.” He is the visible image of the invisible God. But what about now? Jesus is not here. We cannot see Him. That was 2000 years ago. Is there a way that God makes Himself visible today? Yes.

God continues to make His invisibility clear today in the love of the Christian community. In 1 John 4:12, we read these words:

- No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

The invisible God who once made Himself visible *in Christ*, now makes Himself visible in *Christians*, IF WE LOVE ANOTHER. The love between Christians is unlike any other love. Jesus said, “*By this, all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35). What a remarkable and powerful statement!

Don't try to explain it away. Jesus tells us, the same God who once made Himself known in His own Person will continue to make Himself known through the lives and love of His people. God has dealt with the problem of His invisibility. First, in the *theophanies*. Second, fully and completely, *in the incarnation of the Son*, Third, He continues to make Himself known in *the love of the Christian community*. And finally—there is one more way, not that God *has* revealed Himself, but that HE WILL reveal Himself, and that is,

God will overcome the problem of His invisibility by the final appearing of the Lord Jesus on the last day. The clock is ticking when the time will be up for human history, and history will be swallowed up in eternity. We have not seen the final revelation of the glory of God. We await the full and final disclosure when Christ returns at His Second coming in power and glory.

- **1 John 3:2**—Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

No longer will we seek to see Him as in the blurred reflection in a mirror, but then *face-to-face*. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.*" Peter says in 1 Peter 1:13, "*Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" Saving grace was brought to us in *regeneration* when we were born again. Sustaining and sanctifying and persevering grace was and is brought to us throughout our lives on this earth. But one day, in the last act of grace, glorifying grace will be brought to us when Jesus returns.

In one of the last words given to us in the Bible, when the devil has been cast into the lake of fire, along with every unbeliever who rejects the Son, then we read of God lifting the curse and restoring all things. And listen to these words:

- **Revelation 22:3-5**—There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be *any* night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

Theologians call it *the beatific vision*—a direct sight and experience of God Himself.

Application: How do we as Christians live "in the meantime, in-between time? Between the "already and the not yet?" He has *revealed the fullness of His glory in Christ*, and He shall reveal *the fullness of His being when Christ returns*. Are you ready for that day? How do we live? Remember,

- *God's invisibility prohibits fashioning idols in His image.* He forbids the use of material things to represent Him visibly or to serve as some focal point to which we direct our worship (*Ex.20:4-6*).
- *God's invisibility demands simplicity in worship and calls for sincerity and understanding of who He is.* God is not pleased with *mindless worship* or *hypocritical lip service*.
- God's invisibility calls us to deal with not only sins of the flesh but sins of the spirit like pride, envy, malice, greed, self-righteousness, and covetousness. God is to be worship through Christ in spirit and truth.

B. The nearest relationship—*the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father*

Explained: We examined this word in verse 14, so there is no need to go into detail here. **The only begotten** Son (*monogenes*), who Himself is God, means *the unique, one of a kind, One and Only*. No one can do for you what Jesus can do.

1. He is unique in His *origins*.
2. He is unique as the *channel of God's blessings*.
3. He is unique as the *source of grace and truth*.
4. He is unique as the *only One in whom you and I may see God*.

But John adds, "**who is in the bosom of the Father.**" Now, what does this mean? This phrase depicts the eternal relation of unbroken fellowship that Jesus enjoys with the Father. A similar expression is used to describe Lazarus in Abraham's bosom (*Luke 16:22-23*), and John resting on the chest of Christ at the Last Supper (*John 13:23*). It speaks of intimacy, mutual love, and knowledge. Jesus spoke of this closeness in His high priestly prayer in John 17.

- **John 17:5**—Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

When we understand this, we feel the horror of the cross when Jesus bore our sins, and He cried out, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me*" (*Matt.27:46*). It is interesting that Paul, in his description of the judgment of unbelievers, does not emphasize the fiery torment, but the eternal separation from God.

- **2 Thessalonians 1:9-10**—These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,¹⁰ when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

Applied: Oh, here, dear friends, John presents to us the unique Christ! You cannot see God on your own, but in Christ, God came to men in a way that enabled men to know Him! There is no true knowledge of God apart from Him. Do you want to know the love of God? Don't search for it in unstable feelings that shift like the wind! For "*God demonstrated His love for us in this: while we were sinners, Christ died for us*" (*Rom.5:8*). Are you searching for the wisdom of God? Stop looking to the opinion of men and look to Christ "*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (*Col.2:3*).

The greatest problem

The nearest relationship

C. The clearest revelation—*He has explained Him*

The "He" is strongly emphatic. John points his bony finger to the eternal Son. "He" and He alone. He and He singularly, solely, and sovereignly. He *preeminently and immediately*. *In other words, Jesus gives us a direct revelation of God*. He has explained Him.

What does John mean by He has explained Him? When Luke records one of the early post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, he tells us of two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus joined them, but His identity was hidden from their eyes. They were swallowed up in sorrow and unbelief, and Jesus said to them,

- **Luke 24:26-27**—Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Jesus unfolded, declared, made plain, brought out the meaning, disclosed, elucidated, interpreted, and cleared up all obscurity about His suffering and glory of His third-day resurrection.

- **Luke 24:44-45**—Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

And what has Jesus explained?

- God is more than force and intelligence.
- God is a personal Being.
- God is a Father with a heart.
- God is a God of self-denying, self-sacrificing love. (*John 3:16*)
- God is to be worshipped in spirit and truth. (*John 4:23-24*)
- God is to be known through faith in Jesus. (*John 14:6*)
- God requires a righteousness that exceeds outward righteous and repentance. (*Matt.5:20*)
- God calls you to trust in Him entirely, or you shall die in your sins.
- God will not cast out or turn away the person who comes by faith to Christ alone.

All of the cults which deny the deity of Jesus and the humanity of Jesus cannot bring anyone to God. Jesus and Jesus alone saves.

CONCLUSION:

In 1614, Guido Reni painted a beautiful fresco on the ceiling of a Roman palace. It was one of the most impressive works of his day. But visitors could not fully appreciate the masterpiece because they had to crane their necks to see it. To solve the problem, palace officials placed a large mirror on the floor beneath the painting, enabling viewers to study the reflection and more fully appreciate its beauty.

Jesus does precisely this for us when we try to get some notion of God. He interprets God to our dull hearts. God becomes visible and intelligible to us. We cannot, by any amount of searching, find God. The more we try, the more we are bewildered. Then Jesus appears. He is God stooping to our level, and He enables our feeble thoughts to get some real hold on God Himself.

If John the Apostle was a songwriter, I could imagine him agreeing with the lyrics written by Graham Kendrick:

All I once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres, and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now, compared to this
Knowing you, Jesus
Knowing you, there is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love you, Lord
Now my heart's desire is to know you more
To be found in you and known as yours
To possess by faith what I could not earn
All-surpassing gift of righteousness
Oh, to know the power of your risen life
And to know You in Your sufferings
To become like you in your death, my Lord
So with you to live and never die²

² Graham Kendrick, *All I Once Held Dear*

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