

Jesus and His Father

Yesterday we looked at the issue of images, form and spirits through the lens of a few Old Testament passages; today we have a few from the New Testament in Jesus' words, before we move on to another line of exploring. Getting right to it, we come to a verse from Matthew's Gospel that we have looked at recently:

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. (Matt. 18:10)

It was just a few weeks back, on January 4 that I posted on this section within the context of Matt. 18:10-14, the Parable of the Wandering Sheep. As you recall, this falls within a larger section in which Jesus was "discipling the disciples", teaching them about what it means to follow Him, and focusing in on His messianic mission. Remember also that this was a transitional verse that moved into the parable, and it was all about how a disciple should not disdain or diminish anyone. This transitional verse has a way of flying past us without much notice, but for our purposes have a look. Jesus speaks of the angels in heaven who "see the face of my Father" almost in passing, really as a given, as though it would be so obvious that it really didn't deserve any attention of its own, as He moves onto His larger point. Yet for our present adventure, we need to see that God has a face means that even in heaven, God has some sort of a form.

If this were simply a turn of phrase or an idiom, wouldn't we expect to see in other places? We have just completed a fairly thorough review of Matthew; we have just read every word of his text, and Jesus only used this phrase once, thus it would appear that Jesus means the words literally. Shall we try another one?

*I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. **You have never heard his voice nor seen his form**, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

John 5:36-40 (emphasis added)

This passage falls within the context of 5:1-47, beginning when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. The man told the Jewish leaders who had done the shocking deed, and beginning in verse 16 they confront Jesus about His unlawful behavior. Jesus' defense in vv. 19-30 is essentially that He is doing His Father's work when the Father sees fit to do it, and then in 5:31 ff. Jesus is citing that He has two witnesses to prove this: John (the Baptist) and the Father Himself. Contextually speaking, His words in verse 37 (*You have never heard his voice nor seen his form*) are an integral part of His defense in which the fact that the Father has both a voice and a form are understood to be facts. If this were not the case, then Jesus is making a very poor defense and opening Himself up to further accusations.

To be quite candid at this point, the first time I looked at these passages, I was a little uneasy for even though the way I had been taught never rang true for me, and I could easily see its flaws, I find myself struggling at this point because I don't understand how this works, and I am the sort who likes to understand how things work. Then, a certain statement that Jesus made, that we can all quote, came to mind; a passage that made the whole thing make sense to me. I can't wait to share it with you!

The Image of God, and the Son of Man

The Scriptures contain God's complete revelation of Himself to Mankind; everything He has revealed to us. Yet this is not to suggest that He has revealed to us everything that there is to know. When my kids were young, there was a time when I had taught them everything they knew about politics, but I hadn't come close to teaching them everything I knew about politics. At that time, I was right in the middle of the fray, and I knew things they simply were not ready for or capable of handling responsibly. God, our Creator, our loving heavenly Father has not revealed everything He knows to us, simply because He knows things that we can neither handle nor properly comprehend; He has revealed to us what we need to know.

So, for the purposes of our exploration into the image of God, there are aspects of it that we will most likely not fully comprehend, and one of those is how a spirit can have a form which, on occasion, can be seen by a person. Yet Scripture does reveal that they do, and that God, who is Spirit, has a form and that we have been created in His likeness, as we have already seen.

As I mentioned earlier, this was a tough one for me to grab a hold of, to get my brain around, until I recalled this verse:

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

John 14:9

Contextually speaking, this verse falls within Jesus' final discourse with His disciples (John 14-17) on the night of His arrest. He is giving them encouragement and guidance for the trials they lay ahead, and in this particular part of the discussion, He is telling them that He is in the Father, the Father is in Him, and that He is in us, another little concept that is not easy to comprehend the mechanics of.

So imagine you are there with Jesus that night, and He says this, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father": What do you see when you look at Jesus? (Try to picture this in your mind)

If you are honest, the first thing you will see is His physical presence, His body, but knowing who you are looking at, you will perceive much more than that, for Jesus embodied the power of God, healing the sick, making the lame whole again, giving sight to the blind, chasing out demons and bringing justice and the Kingdom to the people, and just as we cannot separate

Jesus from the Word, we also cannot separate His humanity from His divinity. When Paul said that Christ was “the image of God” in 2 Corinthians 4:4, he spoke of the complete package.

Many scholars have observed, and I think rightly so, that Jesus was the Holy Spirit in a body. You and I are earthen vessels that contain the Holy Spirit, for in Christ, we have the Holy Spirit indwelling our mortal bodies, for we have been created in the image of God, body, soul and spirit, and it is the entire package that comprises God’s image and likeness.

I think I should give you some time for reflection on this, for it truly is a really big deal to be made in God’s image. I will conclude for now by simply saying that the more I think about this, the more I realize that the implications of this are beyond huge; they are profound and vast.

The Image of God and the Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul was a Jew, in fact he was a Pharisee; everything about him was Jewish, including his mindset. He was the Pharisee who persecuted Christians, who met Jesus on the road to Damascus and who gave his life to Christ and became the apostle to the Gentiles, and in the process of all this, he wrote the largest part of the New Testament sending his writings to *Gentiles*. Ironic isn’t it?

A common theme that runs through his writings is that of the old way of life versus the new life in Christ, and in discussing this, he used several ways of explaining it. Perhaps the most common of these was his dichotomy between “the flesh” and “the spirit”, but he also described the same thing in other terms; the first man v. the second man, the old man v. the new man, the Law v. life. In all of this, Paul makes essentially the same point; we have choices to make.

On the one hand, we can continue to live according to the ways of this world, just like we did before we had a relationship with Jesus Christ, or we can live a new life in Him. We can worry about the transactional legalism of the Law, or we can be free in Christ; yes, that is our decision to make. None of that, however, tells us that our physical forms are anything other than the image of God, nothing Paul has written tells us that our bodies are bad, wicked, evil or terrible; actually the opposite is true.

If God made us with physical bodies that are evil, wicked, shameful and oozing sin, then why would using our bodies for sinful purposes be “immoral”? In such a case, we could rightly say that God made us sinful and wicked, and we just can’t help being what God made us, but Paul (not to mention Jesus) taught the exact opposite. Paul not only gave us the problems, he also gave us the solution: “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”, and “set your mind on things that are above”. Humanity’s great challenge comes not from evil in our physical bodies, but from the wrong kinds of thinking, for we start our journey with Christ thinking like everyone else around us, rather than seeing things from a more heavenly perspective. Consequently, our focus is on the things of this physical life; money, food, shelter, pleasure, entertainment, sex, luxuries, sensuality, emotions, feelings, passions and social positions... just like the pagans.

Does this kind of thinking describe Jesus?

Paul did not contradict the notion that we were created, in every way in the image of God, for it is precisely *because we were created in God's image* that this is important.

And we don't have to do this on our own... that's why we have the indwelling Holy Spirit.

If you have "your game on" today, then you have already seen the next step in our exploration, it's in Genesis 2, and we'll dive into it next time!