

## Jesus, the Visible Face of God

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Scripture: Colossians 1:15–23

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him.

17 He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together.

18 He is also the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He might come to have first place in everything.

19 For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him,

20 and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself by making peace through the blood of His cross – whether things on earth or things in heaven.

21 Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds because of your evil actions.

22 But now He has reconciled you by His physical body through His death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before Him –

23 if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it. - Holman Christian Standard Bible

One day a few years ago before the church service began, we ran pictures of members and friends on the video display. One of our members, Harvey M., noticed something for the first time: a picture of Harvey that struck him in a new way. He asked one of the other members that knew him well who he looked like. Harvey had not spotted it before but realized he looked a lot like his grandfather. Isn't that the way it is? We often look like our fathers or mothers or grandparents.

Our passage today describes Jesus as “the visible image of the invisible God.” Just as Harvey looked like his grandfather, Jesus is the face of God, His Father, that we can see. If you want to know God better, you can know Him better by getting to know Jesus better. You can do that by reading the Gospels and by fellowship with Him in prayer.

Paul wants the Colossians, and us, to know that Jesus is the face of God that we can see. So, he tells us about all God has done through Jesus--how Jesus' God nature is shown in who He is and what He has done. Paul tells us that: God created everything through Jesus. Jesus existed before everything. Jesus was born and suffered and died and rose again. Jesus had the full nature of God. All of this was by God's own decision and purpose.

Why? Because God wanted to bring everything, the whole universe, back to God! Why did we need to be brought back? Because at one time we were all far away from God, yet God did all He did while we were still far away.

On August 28, 1982, a U.S. soldier walked across the demilitarized zone from South Korea to North Korea. His friends yelled at him to come back. They were afraid he would be killed, but the North Koreans did not shoot. Later, the military determined that this young man had voluntarily defected – and the North Koreans were waiting for him. At first, his family refused to believe it, but then they were called in by military intelligence and allowed to see the evidence the Army had.

At a news conference shortly after this, the father made a statement. Wiping tears from his eyes, he said the family now accepted that their son was a defector. “He has lost his credibility with his country and with me,” he said. Then he added, “But I still love my son, and I want him back.”

The heart of that father for his son expresses very much the same love and attitude of the Heavenly Father for His children who have left Him and are far off. In our failure to seek God and the everyday things we do wrong, we have defected, but He loves us, and He wants us back.

Jesus Christ is the visible expression of God’s Love, the visible expression of the Father Himself. As Jesus said to Phillip, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” When we hear all the stuff about Jesus being God, we are so used to it, we don’t realize how important it is. That Jesus is the visible face of the Father is so important because through Jesus we best know the love of God, the forgiveness of God and God Himself. As we know Jesus, we know God.

Paul is stressing who Jesus is with the Colossians because some of them were starting to emphasize other things in their spiritual lives besides Jesus: circumcision, the worship of angels, or strict legalism and self-righteousness.

Today people who accent spirituality in their lives still often leave out Jesus. They emphasize peaceful meditation purposing to calm their souls, often without reference to God or Jesus. Others focus on angels just as they did in Colossae. Still others stress their own moral goodness. Paul points to Jesus as God because, if Jesus is God, all those other things don’t matter. If Jesus is God, then our safety is in Him alone! The hope we have is in Christ alone!

Have you ever tried to drive nails with a hammer? What do you have to look at if you want to hit the nail? Do you look at the hammer? Or your thumb holding the nail? If you do, you probably hit your thumb more than the nail. If you want to hit the nail, you must aim for the head of the nail. Similarly, if you want to find God, to live in God, you must aim for the head of the spiritual “nail” God has provided. The place we are supposed to aim is Jesus Christ.

When you believe that Jesus died on the cross for you, to take away your sins and give you a new life, God in Jesus does some amazing things. Paul says, “God has made you holy and blameless, as you stand in His presence without a single fault!” You are made holy – set apart by God to Himself. God has taken you and said, “You are mine, you are special to Me. I have a special love for you and a special purpose for you.” You are made pure and faultless because when God looks at you, he does not see your sin anymore if you believe. Instead, He sees Jesus Christ’s goodness.

Some of us have been told that when we face God’s judgment, God will review each and every detail of our lives in public for all to see and then hand down His decision. That’s like our whole life put up on the video screen here at church for all to see. How would that make you feel? That would be pretty frightening for most of us.

We all have things we've done we'd rather not have reviewed in public--things we feel guilty about, that we know we've done wrong. If you do not believe in God and trust Christ for forgiveness, then you should be afraid of that because God will review your whole life!

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However, when you believe, God's grace and forgiveness covers all your sin. God will still review your life, but when He does, you will be surprised because none of the sin will be there. Instead, only what you have done that is good and pure and holy will be reviewed. All the rest was crucified with Christ and cast into oblivion, "as far as the East is from the West."

It is Christ who makes this possible, not your good works without Christ. If you do not believe, all your good works will just appear alongside your sins, but your sins will already condemn you. When Christ takes all your sin away, then your good works done in gratitude to Him will shine out from your life, in holiness, purity and faultlessness.

"But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it," Paul says. If you want to see and know Jesus Christ, see and know God, and receive that love and forgiveness, you need to continue in the faith, which is centered in the belief in Jesus Christ as God. Continuing in the faith means that if you prayed to receive Christ but then walked away and stayed away, you aren't saved. Only if you continue or resume your faith are you saved.

"But Pastor," someone will say, "Don't you believe in 'Once saved, always saved.'" I do. I believe in the eternal security of those who are really saved. Praying for salvation just once is enough if it is sincere. In Romans 10:9, Paul says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord AND believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

Lots of people do the "confessing with your mouth" part, but it's the "believe in your heart" part that proves itself out as you continue in faith. If you really believe Jesus was raised from the dead as Lord of all, you will continue in faith. Or if, heaven forbid, you should fall away for a moment or a while, you will feel the tug of the Holy Spirit on your heart, and you will return to faith.

There was a friend of mine who came to talk to me a few years ago. She was experiencing doubts about her faith. Though I strongly believed "Once saved, always saved," I was led to read the following passage from Hebrews to her:

"There is no longer any sacrifice that will take away sins if we purposely continue on sinning after the truth has been made known to us."

I warned her that abandoning her faith permanently would mean that God's forgiveness would not apply to her. I am glad to report she took the warning to heart and continued in her faith. God did not let her go, even though she had doubts, but she needed a strong warning.

I believe “once saved, always saved,” but I’ve come to realize we tend to over-simplify the “once saved” part, probably because we want those people to be saved. Who is really “once saved?” As Paul said they need to not only confess it but believe it in their heart, and we have to know that real belief will change a person! As Jesus said, “By their fruits you shall know them.”

But what about young believers who are often worried about losing their faith? As a wise pastor once said to me when I was a young Christian, “If you are really concerned that you want to stay in God, and not lose your faith, then that’s a pretty good sign you really want to follow God and are saved.” It’s the people who don’t care as they drift away from their initial confession or become opponents of Christ who aren’t really saved. John says, “They want out from us, because they were never really of us.”

Those who have a heart and a desire to continue in faith, brought by the Holy Spirit, are the saved. Even if they fall, they do return, because they really love God and cannot bear to be away from Him for any length of time. We must remember, though, that “we love because He first loved us.” It is not our doing that we love God. It is that Jesus Christ, “The visible image of the invisible God” showed us the Father’s love first.

Jason was a 17-year-old honor student. He was an expert swimmer and scuba diver. On his Mom’s birthday, his family planned to celebrate at the local restaurant with the whole family. Mom, Dad, Jason and his little brother Christian all were planning on going. Jason figured he had plenty of time to go scuba diving in the morning. They lived in western central Florida, and there was a large spring and underwater cave that Jason had often explored there. This time he did not return. He had gotten stuck in the remote part of the cave and drowned.

When they found him, and brought him and his equipment out, they discovered he had realized he wasn’t going to make it. So, with his knife, Jason had scratched one last message to his family on his scuba tank. “Mom, Dad and Christian, I love you.”

When God sent Christ to us as His visible representative, it wasn’t on accident that He died. He died for our sins, to forgive us. But His dying message to the world, sealed in His blood on that cross is the same as Jason’s “I love you!”

If we receive that love, God forgives us and sets us free to love Him in total forgiveness and new life. It is because Jesus is God’s visible face to us that He was able to give us this gift. He is the one we need to go to in order to receive it.