

Reflection of the Father

The greatest revelation of God Himself is in the face of His Son.

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He lived before the face of God—the ultimate place of favor and responsibility. Others in Scripture had more dramatic experiences with God and did greater exploits, but no prophet ever bore the responsibility that was given to him.

John had an unusual grace for recognizing the presence of God, even before he was born. When Mary was pregnant with Jesus, she walked into a room to visit Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John. When Mary's greeting reached Elizabeth's ears, John leaped for joy while still in her womb.

Amazing—even before he was born, John was able to sense God's presence. And when the essence of Mary's words reached his undefiled heart, he rejoiced! Then Elizabeth, his mother, was filled with the Holy Spirit, enabling her to become a good steward of the gift that God had given her son until the time that he was able to watch over it himself.

John's assignment was to walk before the face of God and prepare the way for the face of God to be revealed for all to see. This was the moment that all the prophets before Him had longed to see.

WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

When we realize that John lived before the face of God and that this face was revealed in Jesus Christ, the question that needs to be asked is, what did this face look like? What was the nature of God that Christ revealed?

If I had to pick one word to describe the nature of God revealed in Christ, it is that He is .

Though most believers hold this belief as a theological value, they struggle in light of the difficulties all around them. Some will say God is mysteriously good, which is about the same as saying He's good, but not as we think of goodness. This response doesn't help to clear up the confusion over the nature of God.

One of the most important features of the gospel message is that the nature of the Father is perfectly seen in Jesus Christ. Jesus was a manifestation of the Father's nature. Whatever is thought to be in conflict between the Father in the Old Testament and the Son in the New Testament is in fact wrong.

All inconsistencies in the revelation of the nature of God between the Old and New Testaments are cleared up in Jesus Christ. Jesus demonstrated the Father in everything He did. According to Hebrews 1:3-4, Jesus is perfect theology: "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they" (NASB).

Some may ask, "What about Job?" I would respond, "I'm not a disciple of Job. I'm a disciple of Jesus. Job was the question, and Jesus is the answer." The entire Old Testament painted a picture of the problem so that it would be easy to recognize the answer when He came. The book of Job, along with all other questions about God's nature, are not meant to provide a revelation of God that would preempt the clear revelation of God through Jesus Christ.

For the believer, it is theologically immoral to allow an Old Testament revelation of God to cancel or contradict the perfect and clear manifestation of God in Jesus. I'm not denying that God displays anger and judgment in the Old

Testament, as did Jesus to some degree, but by and large Jesus came with a display of extraordinary compassion. This is the revelation of God that believers are responsible to teach and model. This was made clear in Jesus' statement, "'As the Father has sent Me, I also send you'" (John 20:21, NKJV).

The only justifiable model we have is Jesus Christ. The job description is fairly simple: "'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons'" (Matt. 10:8). If you say you are not gifted in such things, then I say, "Find out why."

Most of what we need in life will be brought to us, but most of what we want we'll have to go and get. God has made these realities available. We must pursue them. These gifts are the overflow of an intimate face of God encounter.

THE GOD OF FAVOR

I don't have answers to all the questions about the differing portraits of God throughout the Scriptures. But I have found a wonderful key for life: It's best to live from what you know to be true in spite of the mysteries that you can't explain. I cannot afford to stumble over my questions when what I do understand demands a response and commitment.

The portrait of God the Father, as seen in Jesus Christ, is wonderfully clear. He deserves the rest of my life as I learn how to imitate Him.

Jesus set aside His divinity, choosing instead to live as a man completely dependent on God. In doing so, He not only modeled a supernatural lifestyle, but He also illustrated that the ultimate quest is for the face of God. His lifestyle of both fasting and praying on the mountain throughout the night—a lifestyle He no doubt had established long before the Spirit descended upon Him (see Mark 1:10)—demonstrated His unquestionable priority to seek God's face.

To say that Jesus came both to manifest the face of God and

illustrate the quest for His face may sound a little confusing, but both are true. Remember, Jesus modeled for us what it looked like to grow in favor with God as well as with man. The heavenly Father responded to His Son by giving an open heaven, which was followed by words of affirmation, saying, "'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'" (Matt. 3:17). It was in this encounter that the Father released the Holy Spirit upon His Son, enabling Him to manifest His face to the world.

The Father, by the Holy Spirit, directed all that Jesus said and did. It was the intimacy that Jesus had with His heavenly Father that became the foundation for all the signs, wonders and miracles performed in His 3-1/2 years of earthly ministry.

The prophet Ezekiel made the prophetic declaration, "'I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out my Spirit on [them]'" (Ezek. 39:29, NASB). The face of God is revealed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The outpouring of the Spirit also needed to happen to Jesus for Him to be fully qualified. This was His quest. Receiving this anointing qualified Him to be called the Christ, which means, "anointed one."

GOD OF GLORY

In John 17 we read Jesus' prayer about how He has fulfilled His assignment in ministry, saying:

1. "'I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word'" (vv. 4-6).
2. "'I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world'" (v. 14).
3. "'As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world'" ().
4. "'And the glory which You gave Me I have given them'" (v. 22).

5. “‘I have declared to them Your name'” (v. 26).

Clearly, Jesus’ assignment was to put His Father’s name, work, glory and Word on display, particularly to this select group of disciples. But then Jesus shocked His disciples when He told them He had to leave.

Picture this—the face of God had come, and they had encountered Him and beheld His glory. Now they were hearing that this experience, which had become the ultimate encounter with God imaginable, was to be taken away from them. To top it off, Jesus said it would actually be better if He left them. “‘It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you'” (John 16:7).

Jesus manifested the face of God to mankind. But it was only when He was taken away that He could release His experience to become their experience. And so He sent the Holy Spirit to come upon them. This meant that they could have their own encounter with God’s face in a way that was not available through Jesus Himself.

In other words, Jesus’ experience was to become the normal experience of all who follow. This encounter brings us into the ultimate transformation, that we might become the ultimate transformers.

GOD OF MERCY

When Moses asked to see God’s glory, God revealed His goodness. The goodness of God is revolutionary in nature. His goodness is not a token act of kindness but is instead a picture of God’s overwhelming pursuit of humanity that He might show us His extreme love and mercy.

People get stuck on God’s ability to judge and forget that He is the One who looks for the opportunity to show mercy. Many of His own children live in ignorance regarding His goodness and therefore continually misrepresent Him.

In fact, no matter how horrible a person's sin or life was, from the woman caught in adultery (see John 8:3-11) to the tormented man of the Gadarenes (see Mark 5:1-17), Jesus revealed the face of God by showing mercy. His heart to forgive and show mercy is clear in the person of Jesus Christ.

Many will remind us that although God is good, He is still the judge of all. And that is true. But in Jesus' time that judgment was only directed at the people who claimed to know God but didn't know Him at all: the religious leaders.

They were good at rejection, punishment and restriction, but they were clueless about the heart of God. They knew little about the boundless love of God and His passion for the freedom of all humanity.

Ironically, it was the greatest sinners who recognized Jesus as the Messiah when He came. The Pharisees' lack of awareness of their spiritual need disqualified them for the call of God to salvation. But harlots, stargazers and tax collectors knew who Jesus was.

When the messenger, John the Baptist, came preaching, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make his paths straight" (Mark 1:3, KJV), his life and prophetic ministry ushered in God's face of divine favor and he prepared the way for the revelation of God and the actual manifestation of the face of God—Jesus Christ. In Christ, what had existed for centuries as types and shadows was at last brought into the open.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate gift. He brought salvation through His death and resurrection to all who believed. He also illustrated how we are to live because He lived on Earth with another world in mind.

Jesus is the clearest manifestation of the face of God that mankind has ever seen. And those who have a heart like His will be trusted with the use of His power for its intended purpose—to represent Him in all His glory and goodness.

Read a companion devotional.

Bill Johnson is the senior pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, California, and the author of Face to Face With God (Charisma House), from which this article was adapted.