

THEISM

God And His Son

A partial understanding of God's nature can be obtained by observing the life and work of his Son, Jesus Christ, who is described as "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15; see also 2 Corinthians 4:4), and as "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus himself claimed, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30), and "no one knows . . . the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). He also declared that "if you had known me, you would have known my Father also" (John 14:7). "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

The relationship of God and his Son are seen at various points in the life of Christ – from his pre-existence, throughout his earthly ministry, and after his ascension. At each point God's nature is partially revealed in the character and activity of Christ. Prior to his earthly ministry, Christ "in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" (Philippians 2:6). "The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). "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" (John 1:14). Through Christ, God "made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:2). "All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). God's creative power was manifested in his Son.

From early boyhood days, Jesus understood that he must be about his Father's business (Luke 2:49). Throughout his ministry, Jesus did the work of God. God loved the world, and sent Jesus into the world "that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). Jesus testified that he had come "to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Like God, Jesus had the ability to forgive sinners (Matthew 9:2-6; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). His intent was to build the kingdom of God (Matthew 16:13-19). To his disciples, Jesus said "I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). Because he had been given all authority in heaven and on earth, he charged his disciples to preach the gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49). After he ascended into heaven (John 20:17; Acts 1:9; Ephesians 4:8-10) he was at the Father's right hand (Acts 7:55-56; Hebrews 8:1). There, Christ "must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet," but when the end of the world comes, he will deliver "the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Corinthians 15:24-25). At that time, "God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16).

Jesus revealed God in his teaching. Sometimes Jesus explicitly portrayed God's character and activity, while at other times God's nature is only implied. When Jesus taught his disciples to "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you," his motive was that his disciples might be "sons of your Father in heaven." He explicitly revealed God's love when he said – "For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:44-45). Jesus' teaching about God was often presented in parabolic form and frequently focused on the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 8:1; Matthew 13). In the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matthew 21:33-43; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18), Jesus revealed God's judgment against those servants who killed his Son. In the parable of the loving Father and his two sons (Luke 15:11-32) Jesus reveals God's attitude toward sin. Not everyone fully understood Jesus' parabolic messages about God because they were intended to be mysterious to some (Matthew 13:11). Although Jesus' teaching was recognized as having greater authority

than that of scribes (Matthew 7:29), the authority by which he taught was not his own. He said, "The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does the works" (John 14:10; see also John 8:28; 38).

The miracles of Jesus revealed not only the power of God but also caused many to confess their belief that Jesus is the Son of God. When Jesus cast out demons, they testified that he was the Son of God (Matthew 8:29; Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41). After Jesus came walking on the water to his disciples, "those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33). When the sisters of Lazarus sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick, Jesus told his disciples that "this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). When Jesus came to Bethany, even before Lazarus was raised from the dead, Martha said to Jesus, "Lord I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27). The miracles of Jesus brought glorify to God. "The multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel" (Matthew 15:31). When Jesus raised a young man from the dead, "fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen up among us'; and, 'God has visited His people'" (Luke 7:16).

Just as Jesus revealed the Father, so also the Father revealed his Son. Before the birth of Jesus, "the angel Gabriel was sent by God" to tell Mary that "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" (Luke 1:26, 35). When Jesus was baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15), "the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are my beloved son, in you I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:22; see also Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11). When Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus responded saying, "Blessed are you . . . for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). During the latter part of Jesus' ministry, he took three of his disciples up on a high mountain by themselves where he was transfigured before them. While there, "a bright cloud over shadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" (Matthew 17:1-2, 5; See also Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; 2 Peter 1:17).

Jesus affirmed his intimate relationship with the Father when he said, "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (John 14:11). Even so, he said that "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Only the Father knows when this world will end. "Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32).

Jesus described his Father's will in a parable about fruit bearing. He said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser" (John 15:1). In this context, he said, "the Father loved me" and "I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:9-10). The message of this parable is that as he abides in the Father, so also his disciples should abide in him in order to bear fruit. God prunes fruit bearing disciples in order that they may bear more fruit (John 15:2). Even so, they are loved just as the Father loved the Son (John 15:9). But fruit barren disciples are like branches that are taken away and burned (John 15:2, 6). As the Son did the work of God and thereby glorified God, so also God expects believers in Christ to work, be fruitful in his kingdom, and thereby glorify him (John 15:8; Matthew 5:16).