

The Person of Christ the Great Representative of God and His Will

by John Owen

The person of Christ is the complete image and perfect representation of the Divine Being and excellencies, and is necessary for our understanding and worship of God.

Scripture: Exodus 33:18-23, John 1:18, John 5:23, John 14:9, Romans 1:20, Romans 1:23, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Colossians 1:15, Titus 1:16, Hebrews 1:3

Topics: "The Nature of God", "Christ as Our Mediator"

Description

John Owen emphasizes that the person of Christ serves as the ultimate representation of God and His will, highlighting that while God's essence is incomprehensible to humanity, Christ embodies the divine nature and properties. He argues that all knowledge of God is mediated through Christ, who reveals the Father and fulfills the need for a tangible representation of the divine. Owen asserts that true understanding and worship of God can only be achieved through faith in Christ, as all other attempts to comprehend God lead to idolatry and misrepresentation. The sermon underscores the necessity of Christ's incarnation for humanity to grasp the divine attributes and the importance of recognizing Him as the image of the invisible God. Ultimately, Owen calls believers to seek a deeper relationship with God through the revelation of Christ.

Transcript

What may be known of God, is, -- his nature and existence, with the holy counsels of his will. A representation of them unto us is the foundation of all religion, and the means of our conformity unto him -- wherein our present duty and future blessedness do consist. For to know God, so as thereby to be made like unto him, is the chief end of man. This is done perfectly only in the person of Christ, all other means of it being subordinate thereunto, and none of them of the same nature therewithal. The end of the Word itself, is to instruct us in the knowledge of God in Christ. That, therefore, which I shall now demonstrate, is, that in the person and mediation of Christ (which are inseparable, in all the respects of faith unto him) there is made unto us a blessed representation of the glorious properties of the divine nature, and of the holy counsels of the will of God. The first of these I shall speak unto in this chapter -- the other, in that which ensues; wherein we shall manifest how all divine truths do centre in the person of Christ and the consideration of sundry things is necessary unto the explication hereof.

1. God, in his own essence, being, and existence, is absolutely incomprehensible. His nature being immense, and all his holy properties essentially infinite, no creature can directly or perfectly comprehend them, or any of them. He must be infinite that can perfectly comprehend that which is infinite; wherefore God is perfectly known unto himself only -- but as for us, how little a portion is heard of him! Hence he is called "The invisible God," and said to dwell in "light inaccessible." The subsistence of his most single and simple nature in three distinct persons, though it raises and ennobles faith in its revelation, yet it amazeth reason which would trust to itself in the contemplation of it -- whence men grow giddy who will own no other guide, and are carried out of the way of truth. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him:" John i. 18; 1 Tim. vi. 16.

2. Therefore, we can have no direct intuitive notions or apprehensions of the divine essence, or its properties. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. Whatever is pleaded for an intellectual vision of the essence of God in the light of glory, yet none pretend unto a possibility of an immediate, full comprehension of it. But, in our present state, God is unto us, as he was unto Moses under all the external manifestations of his glory, "in thick darkness:" Exod. xx. 21. All the rational conceptions of the minds of men are swallowed up and lost, when they would exercise themselves directly on that which is absolutely immense, eternal, infinite.

When we say it is so, we know not what we say, but only that it is not otherwise. What we deny of God, we know in some measure -- but what we affirm we know not; only we declare what we believe and adore. "Neque sensus est ejus, neque phantasia, neque opinio, nec ratio, nec scientia," says Dionys. De Divin. Nomine, 1. We have no means -- no corporeal, no intellectual instrument or power -- for the comprehension of him; nor hath any other creature: Ἐπεὶαὐτὸ ὅπέρ ἐστινὁ Θεὸς,, οὐ μόνονπροφῆται,, ἀλλʼοὐδὲ ἄγγελοιεἶδον,, οὔτεἀρχάνγγελοι·αλλʼ ἐὰνἐρωτήσῃςαὐτοὺς,, ἀκούσῃπερὶ μὲν τῆςοὐσίας οὐδὲν ἀποκρινομένους·δόξα δὲ ἐνὑψίστοις μόνονᾄδόντας τῳ Θεῷ·κᾲν παρὰ τῶνΧερουβὶμ ἤ τῶνΣεραφὶμ ἐπιθυμήσῃς τιμαθεῖν,, τὸμυστικὸν τοῦἁγιασμοῦ μέλοςἀκούσῃ,, καὶ ὅτι

πλήρης ὁ
οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ
τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ. --
"For that which is God" (the essence of God) "not only have not the prophets seen, but neither the angels
nor the archangels.

If thou wilt inquire of them, thou shalt hear nothing of the substance of God, but only hear them say, 'glory to God in the highest.' If thou askest the cherubim and seraphim, thou shalt only hear the praise of holiness, 'The whole earth is full of his glory,' " says Chrysostom, on John i. 18. That God is in himself absolutely incomprehensible unto us, is a necessary effect of our infinite distance from him. But as he externally represents himself unto us, and by the notions which are in generated in us by the effects of his properties, are our conceptions of him: Ps. xix. 1; Rom. i. 20.

This is declared in the answer given unto that request of Moses: "I beseech thee, show me thy glory:" Exod. xxxiii. 18. Moses had heard a voice speaking unto him, but he that spoke was "in thick darkness" -- he saw him not. Glorious evidences he gave of his majestical presence, but no appearance was made of his essence or person. Hereon Moses desireth, for the full satisfaction of his soul, (as the nearer any one is unto God the more earnest will be his desire after the full fruition of him,) that he might have a sight of his glory -- not of that created glory in the tokens of his presence and power which he had beheld, but of the glory of his essence and being.

Through a transport of love to God, he would have been in heaven while he was on the earth; yea, desired more than heaven itself will afford, if he would have seen the essence of God with his corporeal eyes. In answer hereunto God tells him, that he cannot see his face and live; none can have either bodily sight or direct mental intuition of the Divine Being. But this I will do, saith God, "I will make 67my glory pass before thee, and thou shalt see my back parts:" Exod. xxxiii. 18-23, &c.

This is all that God would grant, viz., such external representations of himself, in the proclamation of his name, and created appearances of his glory, as we have of a man whose back parts only we behold as he passeth by us. But as to the being of God, and his subsistence in the Trinity of persons, we have no direct intuition into them, much less comprehension of them.

3. It is evident, therefore, that our conceptions of God, and of the glorious properties of his nature, are both ingenerated in us and regulated, under the conduct of divine revelation, by reflections of his glory on other things, and representations of his divine excellencies in the effects of them. So the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen, being manifested and understood by the things that are made: Rom. i. 20. Yet must it be granted that no mere creature, not the angels above, not the heaven of heavens, are meet or able to receive upon them such characters of the divine excellencies, as to be a complete, satisfactory representation of the being and properties of God unto us. They are all finite and limited and so cannot properly represent that which is infinite and immense. And this is the true reason why all worship or religious adoration of them is idolatry. Yet are there such effects of God's glory in them, such impressions of divine excellencies upon them, as we cannot comprehend nor search out unto perfection. How little do we conceive of the nature, glory, and power of angels! So remote are we from an immediate comprehension of the uncreated glory of God, as that we cannot fully apprehend nor conceive aright the reflection of it on creatures in themselves finite and limited. Hence, they thought of old, when they had seen an angel, that so much of the divine perfections had been manifested unto them that thereon they must die: Judges xiii. 21, 22. Howbeit, they [the angels] come infinitely short of making any

complete representation of God; nor is it otherwise with any creature whatever.

4. Mankind seem to have always had a common apprehension that there was need of a nearer and more full representation of God unto them than was made in any of the works of creation or providence. The heavens indeed declared his glory, and the firmament always showed his handy-work -- the invisible things of his eternal power and Godhead were continually made known by the things that are made; but men generally miscarried and missed it in the contemplation of them, as the apostle declares, Rom i. For still they were influenced by a common presumption, that there must be a nearer and more evident manifestation of God -- that made by the works of creation and providence being not sufficient to guide them unto him. But in the pursuit hereof they utterly ruined themselves; they would do what God had not done. By common consent they framed representations of God unto themselves; and were so besotted therein, that they utterly lost the benefit which they might have received by the manifestation of him in the works of the creation, and took up with most foolish imaginations. For whereas they might have learned from thence the being of God, his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness -- viz., in the impressions and characters of them on the things that were made -- in their own representations of him, they "changed the glory of the invisible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things:" Rom. i. 23. Wherefore this common presumption -- that there was no way to attain a due sense of the Divine Being but by some representation of it -- though true in itself, yet, by the craft of Satan, and foolish superstitions of the minds of men, became the occasion of all idolatry and flagitious wickedness in the world. Hence were all those illustrious appearances" of their gods, which Satan deluded the Gentiles by; and hence were all the ways which they devised to bring God into human nature, or the likeness of it. Wherefore, in all the revelations that ever God made of himself, his mind and will, he always laid this practice of making representations of him under the most severe interdict and prohibition. And this he did evidently for these two reasons:--

(1.) Because it was a bold and foolish entrenching upon his provisional wisdom in the case. He had taken care that there should be a glorious image and representation of himself, infinitely above what any created wisdom could find out. But as, when Moses went into the mount, the Israelites would not wait for his return, but made a calf in his stead; so mankind -- refusing to wait for the actual exhibition of that glorious image of himself which God had provided -- broke in upon his wisdom and sovereignty, to make some of their own. For this cause was God so provoked, that he gave them up to such stupid blindness, that in those things wherein they thought to show themselves wise, and to bring God nearer unto them, they became contemptibly foolish -- abased their nature, and all the noble faculties of their minds unto hell, and departed unto the utmost distance from God, whom they sought to bring near unto them.

(2.) Because nothing that can fall into the invention or imagination of men could make any other but false representations of him, and so substitute an idol in his place. His own immediate works have great characters of his divine excellencies upon them, though unto us obscure and not clearly legible without the light of revelation. Somewhat he did, of old, represent of his glorious presence -- though not of his being -- in the visible institutions of his worship. But all men's inventions to this end, which are neither divine works of nature, nor divine institutions of worship, are all but false representations of God, and therefore accursed by him.

Wherefore it is granted, that God hath placed many characters of his divine excellencies upon his works of creation and providence -- many [characters] of his glorious presence upon the tabernacle and temple of old -- but none of these things ever did or could give such a representation of him as wherein the souls of

men might fully acquiesce, or obtain such conceptions of him as might enable them to worship and honour him in a due manner. They cannot, I say -- by all that may be seen in them, and learned from them -- represent God as the complete object of all our affections, of all the actings of our souls in faith, trust, love, fear, obedience, in that way whereby he may be glorified, and we may be brought unto the everlasting fruition of him. This, therefore, is yet to be inquired after. Wherefore --

5. A mere external doctrinal revelation of the divine nature and properties, without any exemplification or real representation of them, was not sufficient unto the end of God in the manifestation of himself. This is done in the Scripture. But the whole Scripture is built on this foundation, or proceeds on this supposition -- that there is a real representation of the divine nature unto us, which it declares and describes. And as there was such a notion on the minds of all men, that some representation of God, wherein he might be near unto them, was necessary -- which arose from the consideration of the infinite distance between the divine nature and their own, which allowed of no measures between them -- so, as unto the event, God himself hath declared that, in his own way, such a representation was needful -- unto that end of the manifestation of himself which he designed. For --

6. All this is done in the person of Christ. He is the complete image and perfect representation of the Divine Being and excellencies. I do not speak of it absolutely, but as God proposeth himself as the object of our faith, trust, and obedience. Hence it is God, as the Father, who is so peculiarly represented in him and by him; as he says: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father:" John xiv. 9.

Unto such a representation two things are required:-- (1.) That all the properties of the divine nature -- the knowledge whereof is necessary unto our present obedience and future blessedness -- be expressed in it, and manifested unto us. (2.) That there be, therein, the nearest approach of the divine nature made unto us, whereof it is capable, and which we can receive. And both these are found in the person of Christ, and therein alone.

70In the person of Christ we consider both the constitution of it in the union of his natures, and the respect of it unto his work of mediation, which was the end of that constitution. And --

(1.) Therein, as so considered, is there a blessed representation made unto us of all the holy properties of the nature of God -- of his wisdom, his power, his goodness, grace, and love, his righteousness, truth, and holiness, his mercy and patience. As this is affirmed concerning them all in general, or the glory of God in them, which is seen and known only in the face of Christ, so it were easy to manifest the same concerning every one of them in particular, by express testimonies of Scripture. But I shall at present confine myself unto the proofs of the whole assertion which do ensue.

(2.) There is, therein, the most incomprehensible approach of the divine nature made unto ours, such as all the imaginations of men did ever infinitely fall short of -- as hath been before declared. In the assumption of our nature into personal union with himself, and our cognition unto God thereby, with the union which believers obtain with him thereon -- being one in the Father and the Son, as the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father, (John xvii. 20, 21,) -- there is the nearest approach of the Divine Being unto us that the nature of things is capable of. Both these ends were designed in those representations of God which were of human invention; but in both of them they utterly failed. For, instead of representing any of the glorious properties of the nature of God, they debased it, dishonoured it, and filled the minds of men with vile conceptions of it; and instead of bringing God nearer unto them, they put themselves at an infinite moral distance from him. But my design is the confirmation of our assertions from the Scripture.

"He is the image of the invisible God:" Col. i. 15. This title or property of "invisible," the apostle here gives unto God, to show what need there was of an image or representation of him unto us, as well as of one in whom he would declare the counsels of his will. For he intends not only the absolute invisibility of his essence, but his being unknown unto us in himself. Wherefore, (as was before observed,) mankind was generally prone to make visible representations of this invisible God, that, in them, they might contemplate on him and have him present with them, as they foolishly imagined. Unto the craft of Satan abusing this inclination of mankind, idolatry owes its original and progress in the world: howbeit, necessary it was that this invisible God should be so represented unto us by some image of him, as that we might know him, and that therein he might be worshipped according unto his own mind and will. But this must be of his own contrivance -- an effect of his own infinite wisdom. Hence, as he absolutely rejecteth all images and representations of him of men's devisings, (for the reasons before mentioned,) and declares that the honour that any should think would thereby redound unto him was not given unto him, but unto the devil; so that which he hath provided himself, unto his own holy ends and purposes, is every way approved of him. For he will have "all men honour the Son, even as they honour the Father;" and so as that "he who honoureth not the God, honoureth not the Father:" John v. 23.

This image, therefore, is the person of Christ; "he is the image of the invisible God." This, in the first place, respects the divine person absolutely, as he is the essential image of the Father: which must briefly be declared.

1. The Son is sometimes said to be "in the Father," and the Father in the Son: "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" John xiv. 10. This is from the unity or sameness of their nature -- for he and the Father are one: John x. 30. Thence all things that the Father hath are his, (chap. xvi. 15,) because their nature is one and the same. With respect unto the divine essence absolutely considered, wherein the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father, the one cannot be said to be the image of the other. For he and the Father are one; and one and the same thing cannot be the image of itself, in that wherein it is one.

2. The Son is said not only to be "in the Father," in the unity of the same essence; but also "with the Father," or "with God," in the distinction of his person: "The Word was with God, and the Word was God:" John i. 1. "The Word was God," in the unity of the divine essence -- and "the Word was with God," in its distinct personal subsistence. "The Word" -- that is, the person of the Son, as distinct from the Father -- "was with God," or the Father. And in this respect he is the essential image of the Father, as he is called in this place, and Heb. i. 3; and that because he partakes of all the same divine properties with the Father.

But although the Father, on the other side, be partaker of all the essential divine properties of the Son, yet is not he said to be the image of the Son. For this property of an image respects not the things themselves, but the manner of the participation of them. Now the Son receives all from the Father, and the Father nothing from the Son. Whatever belongs unto the person of the Son, as the person of the Son, he receives it all from the Father by eternal generation: "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given unto the Son to have life in himself:" John v. 26. He is therefore the essential image of the Father, because all the properties of the divine nature are communicated unto him together with personality -- from the Father.

3. In his incarnation, the Son was made the representative image of God unto us -- as he was, in his person, the essential image of the Father, by eternal generation. The invisible God -- whose nature and divine excellencies our understandings can make no approach unto -- doth in him represent, exhibit, or make present unto our faith and spiritual sense, both himself and all the glorious excellencies of his nature.

Wherefore our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, may be considered three ways.

1. Merely with respect unto his divine nature. This is one and the same with that of the Father. In this respect the one is not the image of the other, for both are the same.

2. With respect unto his divine person as the Son of the Father, the only-begotten, the eternal Son of God. Thus he receives, as his personality, so all divine excellencies, from the Father; so he is the essential image of the Father's person.

3. As he took our nature upon him, or in the assumption of our nature into personal union with himself, in order unto the work of his mediation. So is he the only representative image of God unto us -- in whom alone we see, know, and learn all the divine excellencies -- so as to live unto God, and be directed unto the enjoyment of him. All this himself instructs us in.

He reflects it on the Pharisees, as an effect of their blindness and ignorance, that they had neither heard the voice of God at any time, nor seen his shape: John v. 37. And in opposition hereunto he tells his disciples, that they had known the Father, and seen him: chap. xiv. 7. And the reason he gives thereof is, because they that knew him, knew the Father also. And when one of his disciples, not yet sufficiently instructed in this mystery, replied, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," (verse 8,) his answer is, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father:" verse 9.

Three things are required unto the justification of this assertion.

1. That the Father and he be of the same nature, have the same essence and being. For otherwise it would not follow that he who had seen him had seen the Father also. This ground of it he declares in the next verse: "The Father is in me, and I am in the Father" namely, because they were one in nature and essence. For the divine nature being simply the same in them all, the divine persons are in each other, by virtue of the oneness of that nature.

2. That he be distinct from him. For otherwise there cannot be a seeing of the Father by the seeing of him. He is seen in the Son 73as represented by him -- as his image -- the Word -- the Son of the Father, as he was with God. The unity of nature and the distinction of persons is the ground of that assertion of our Saviour: "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father also."

3. But, moreover, the Lord Christ hath a respect herein unto himself, in his entire person as he was incarnate, and therein unto the discharge of his mediatory work. "Have I been so long time with you, and hast thou not known me?" Whilst he was with them, dwelt among them, conversed with them, he was the great representative of the glory of God unto them. And, notwithstanding this particular mistake, they did then see his glory, "the glory of the only-begotten of the Father:" John i. 14. And in him was manifested the glory of the Father. He "is the image of the invisible God." In him God was, in him he dwelt, in him is he known, in him is he worshipped according unto his own will, in him is there a nearer approach made unto

us by the divine nature than ever could enter into the heart of man to conceive. In the constitution of his person -- of two natures, so infinitely distinct and separate in themselves -- and in the work it was designed unto, the wisdom, power, goodness, love, grace, mercy, holiness, and faithfulness of God, are manifested unto us. This is the one blessed "image of the invisible God," wherein we may learn, wherein we may contemplate and adore, all his divine perfections.

The same truth is testified unto, Heb. i. 3. God spoke unto us in the Son, who is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." His divine nature is here included, as that without which he could not have made a perfect representation of God unto us. For the apostle speaks of him, as of him "by whom the worlds were made," and who "upholdeth all things by the word of his power." Yet doth he not speak of him absolutely as he was God, but also as he who "in himself purged our sins, and sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high;" that is, in his whole person. Herein he is
ἀπαύγασμα τῆς
δόξης, the effulgency, the resplendency of divine glory, that wherein the divine glory shines forth in an evident manifestation of itself unto us. And as a farther explication of the same mystery, it is added, that he is the character or "express image" of the person of the Father. Such an impression of all the glorious properties of God is on him, as that thereby they become legible unto all them that believe.

So the same apostle affirms again that he is the "image of God," 2 Cor. iv. 4; in what sense, and unto what end, he declares, verse 6: "We have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Still it is supposed that the glory of God, as essentially in him, is invisible unto us, and incomprehensible by us. Yet 74is there a knowledge of it necessary unto us, that we may live unto him, and come unto the enjoyment of him. This we obtain only in the face or person of Christ -- ἐν
προσώπῳ τοῦ
Χριστοῦ; for in him that glory is represented unto us.

This was the testimony which the apostles gave concerning him, when he dwelt among them in the days of his flesh. They saw "his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth:" John i. 14. The divine glory was manifest in him, and in him they saw the glory of the Father. So the same apostle witnesses again, who recorded this testimony: "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us:" 1 John i. 2. In the Son incarnate, that eternal life which was originally in and with the Father was manifest unto us.

It may be said, that the Scripture itself is sufficient for this end of the declaration of God unto us, so that there is no need of any other representation of him; and [that] these things serve only to turn the minds of men from learning the mind and will of God therein, to seek for all in the person of Christ. But the true end of proposing these things is, to draw men unto the diligent study of the Scripture, wherein alone they are revealed and declared. And in its proper use, and unto its proper end, it is perfect and most sufficient. It is
λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ -- "the word of God;" howbeit it is not λόγος
οὐσιώδης, the internal, essential Word of God -- but
λόγος
προφορικὸς, the external word spoken by him. It is not, therefore, nor can be, the image of God, either essential or representative; but is the revelation and declaration of it unto us, without which we can know nothing of it.

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the express image of the person of the Father; and the principal end of the whole Scripture, especially of the gospel, is to declare him so to be, and how he is so. What God promised by his prophets in the holy Scriptures concerning his Son, Jesus Christ, that is fully declared in the Gospel: Rom. i. 1-4. The gospel is the declaration of Christ as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God," 1 Cor. i. 23, 24; or an evident representation of God in his person and mediation unto us: Gal. iii. 1. Wherefore three things are herein to be considered.

1. "Objectum reale et formale fidei" -- "the real, formal object of our faith in this matter. This is the person of Christ, the Son of God incarnate, the representative image of the glory of God unto us; as in the testimonies insisted on.

2. "Medium revelans", or "lumen deferens" -- the means of its revelation, or the objective light whereby the perception and knowledge of it is conveyed unto our minds. This is the gospel; compared unto a glass because of the prospect which we have of the image of God therein: 2 Cor. iii. 18. But without it -- by any other means, and not by it -- we can behold nothing of this image of God.

3. "Lumen præparans, elevans, disponens subjectum" -- "the internal light of the mind in the saving illumination of the Holy Spirit, enabling us -- by that means, and in the use of it -- spiritually to behold and discern the glory of God in the face of Christ: 2 Cor. iv. 6.

Through both these, in their several ways of operation, there proceedeth -- from the real object of our faith, Christ, as the image of God -- a transforming power, whereby the soul is changed into the same image, or is made conformable unto Christ; which is that whereunto we are predestinated. But we may yet a little farther contemplate on these things, in some instances wherein the glory of God and our own duty are concerned.

1. The glory of God's wisdom is exalted, and the pride of the imaginations of men is proportionally debased. And in these two consists the real foundation of all religion in our souls. This God designed in the dispensation of himself and his will, 1 Cor. i. 29, 31; this he calls us unto, Isa. ii. 22; Zech. ii. 13. As this frame of heart is prevalent in us, so do all other graces shine and flourish. And it is that which influences all our duties, so far as they are acceptable unto God.

And there is no truth more instructive unto it than that before us. It is taken for granted -- and the event hath demonstrated it to be so -- that some express representation should be made of God unto us, wherein we might contemplate the glorious excellencies of his nature, and he might draw nigh unto us, and be present with us. This, therefore, men attempted to effect and accomplish; and this God alone hath performed, and could so do. And their several ways for this end are herein manifest.

As the way whereby God hath done it is the principal exaltation of his infinite wisdom and goodness, (as shall be immediately more fully declared,) so the way whereby men attempted it was the highest instance of wickedness and folly. It is, as we have declared, in Christ alone that God hath done it. And that therein he hath exalted and manifested the riches, the treasures of his infinite wisdom and goodness, is that which the Gospel, the Spirit, and the church, do give testimony unto.

A more glorious effect of divine wisdom and goodness, a more illustrious manifestation of them, there never was, nor ever shall be, than in the finding out and constitution of this way of the representation of God unto us. The ways of men, for the same end, were so far from giving a right representation of the perfections of the divine nature, that they were all of them below, beneath, and unworthy of our own. For in

nothing did the blindness, darkness, and folly of our nature, in its depraved condition, ever so exert and evidence themselves, as in contriving ways for the representation of God unto us -- that is, in idolatry, the worst and vilest of evils: so Ps. cxv. 4-8; Isa. xliv.; Rev. ix. 19, 20, &c.

This pride and folly of men was that which lost all knowledge of God in the world, and all obedience unto him. The ten commandments are but a transcript of the light and law of nature. The first of these required that God -- the only true God -- the Creator and Governor of all -- should be acknowledged, worshipped, believed in, and obeyed. And the second was, that we should not make unto ourselves any image or representation of him. Whatever he would do himself, yet he strictly forbade that we should make any such unto ourselves.

And here began the apostasy of the world from God. They did not absolutely reject him, and so cast off the first fundamental precept of the law of nature -- but they submitted not unto his wisdom and authority in the next, which was evidently deduced from it. They would make images and representations of him unto themselves; and by this invention of their own, they first dishonoured him, and then forsook him, giving themselves up unto the rule and service of the devil. Wherefore, as the way that God in infinite wisdom found out for the representation of himself unto us, was the only means of recovery from the first apostasy -- the way found out by men, unto the same end, was the great means of casting the generality of mankind unto the farthest degree of a new apostasy from God whereof our nature is capable.

And of the same kind will all our contrivances be found to be -- in what belongs unto his worship and glory -- though, unto us, they may appear both pious and necessary. This, therefore, should lead us into a continual admiration of the wisdom and grace of God, with a due sense of our own vileness and baseness by nature. For we are in nothing better or wiser than they who fell into the utmost folly and wickedness, in their designs for the highest end, or the representation of God unto us.

The more we dwell on such considerations, the more fear and reverence of God, with faith, trust, and delight in him, will be increased -- as also humility in ourselves, with a sense of divine grace and love.

2. There is a peculiar ground of the spiritual efficacy of this representation of God. The revelations that he hath made of himself, and of the glorious properties of his nature, in the works of creation and providence, are, in themselves, clear, plain, and manifest: Ps. xix. 1, 2; Rom. i. 19, 20. Those which are made in Christ are sublime and mysterious. Howbeit, the knowledge we have of him as he is represented unto us in Christ is far more clear, certain, steady, effectual and operative, than any we can attain in and by all other ways of revelation.

The reason hereof is, not only because there is a more full and extensive revelation made of God, his counsels and his will, in Christ and the Gospel, than in all the works of creation and providence; but because this revelation and representation of God is received by faith alone, the other by reason only: and it is faith that is the principle of spiritual light and life in us. What is received thereby is operative and effectual, unto all the ends of the life of God. For we live by faith here, as we shall by sight hereafter.

Reason alone -- especially as it is corrupted and depraved -- can discern no glory in the representation of God by Christ; yea, all that is spoken thereof, or declared in the Gospel, is foolishness unto it. Hence many live in a profession of the faith of the letter of the Gospel, yet -- having no light, guide, nor conduct, but that of reason -- they do not, they cannot, really behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; nor hath the revelation of it any efficacy upon their souls.

The manifestation of him in the light of nature, by the works of creation and providence, is suited unto their reason, and doth affect it: for that [manifestation] which is made in Christ, they say of it, as the Israelites did of manna, that came down from heaven, "What is it?" we know not the meaning of it. For it is made unto faith alone, and all men have not faith. And where God shines into the heart, by that faith which is of divine operation -- there, with "open face, we behold the glory of God, as in a glass;" or have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

There is not the meanest believer, but -- in the real exercise of faith in Christ -- hath more glorious apprehensions of God, his wisdom, goodness, and grace, of all his glorious excellencies, than the most learned and wise in the world can attain unto, in the exercise of reason on the proper objects of it. So are these things opposed by the apostle, 1 Cor. i. Wherefore, faith in Christ is the only means of the true knowledge of God; and the discoveries which are made of him and his excellencies thereby are those alone which are effectual to conform us unto his image and likeness.

And this is the reason why some men are so little affected with the Gospel -- notwithstanding the continual preaching of it unto them, and their outward profession of it. It doth not inwardly affect them, it produceth no blessed effects in them. Some sense they have of the power of God in the works of creation and providence, in his rule and government, and in the workings of natural conscience. Beyond these, they have no real sense of him. The reason is, because they have not faith -- whereby alone the representation that is made of God in Christ, and declared in the gospel, is made effectual unto the souls of men. Wherefore --

3. It is the highest degeneracy from the mystery of the Christian religion, for men to satisfy themselves in natural discoveries of the Divine Being and excellencies, without an acquaintance with that perfect declaration and representation of them which is made in the person of Christ, as he is revealed and declared in the Gospel. It is confessed that there may be good use made of the evidence which reason gives or takes from its own innate principles -- with the consideration of the external works of divine wisdom and power -- concerning the being and rule of God. But to rest herein -- to esteem it the best and most perfective knowledge of God that we can attain -- not to rise up unto the more full, perfect, and evident manifestation of himself that he hath made in Christ -- is a declaration of our unbelief, and a virtual renunciation of the Gospel. This is the spring of that declension unto a mere natural religion which discovers itself in many, and usually ends in the express denial of the divine person of Christ. For when the proper use of it is despised, on what grounds can the notion of it be long retained? But a supposition of his divine person is the foundation of this discourse. Were he not the essential image of the Father in his own divine person, he could not be the representative image of God unto us as he is incarnate. For if he were a man only -- however miraculously produced and gloriously exalted, yet the angels above, the glorious heavens, the seat and throne of God, with other effects of creating power and wisdom, would no less represent his glory than it could be done in him. Yet are they nowhere, nowhere, jointly nor separately, styled "the image of the invisible God" -- "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person;" nor doth God shine into our hearts to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of them. And it argues the woeful enmity of the carnal mind against God and all the effects of his wisdom, that, whereas he hath granted us such a glorious image and representation of himself, we like it not, we delight not in the contemplation of it, but either despise it or neglect it, and please ourselves in that which is incomparably beneath it.

4. Because God is not thus known it is -- that the knowledge of him is so barren and fruitless in the world, as it manifests itself to be. It were easy to produce, yea, endless to number the testimonies that might be

produced out of heathen writers, given unto the being and existence of God, his authority, monarchy, and rule; yet what were the effects of that knowledge which they had? Besides that wretched idolatry wherein they were all immersed, as the apostle declares, Rom. i., it rescued them from no kind of wickedness and villany; as he there also manifests. And the virtues which were found among them were evidently derived from other causes, and not from the knowledge they had of God. The Jews have the knowledge of God by the letter of the Old Testament; but they -- not knowing him in Christ, and having lost all sense and apprehension of those representations which were made of his being in him, in the Law -- they continue universally a people carnal, obstinate, and wicked. They have neither the virtues of the heathens among them, nor the power of the truth of religion. As it was with them 79of old, so it, yet continueth to be; "they profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate:" Tit. i. 16. So is it among many that are called Christians at this day in the world: great pretence there is unto the knowledge of God -- yet did flagitious sins and wickedness scarce ever more abound among the heathens themselves. It is the knowledge of "God in Christ" alone that is effectually powerful to work the souls of men into a conformity unto him. Those alone who behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ are changed into the same image, from glory to glory.

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