

## God Incarnate Explains God Invisible

Dear Friends,

If God is invisible and spirit in essential nature—as opposed to material, how do we know He exists? We live in an age of extreme sentimentality that often demonstrates a sandy foundation for its beliefs, be they political, personal, or religious. Rather than pointing to specific Biblical passages and sound thinking and reasoning, Christians proudly sing, “You ask me how I know he lives; he lives within my heart.” How effective is this sentimental answer to an unbeliever? “You say he lives within your heart. Well, I don’t see conduct in you that is essentially different from my conduct or how other people act. He doesn’t live within my heart, so why should I believe you?” At the same time that rank and file Christians in sad numbers live their faith on a sentimental foundation, many effective Christian apologists have made significant advances in their interaction with atheistic advocates. Interestingly, atheists in the know have all but forsaken the “swoon theory” to explain the appearance of Jesus’ resurrection because Christian apologists have effectively taken the roof off the weakness of that argument. While a good Christian apologist will live his faith so as to demonstrate that he is living differently than the common man on the streets (a requirement of Peter in [1Pe 3:15](#)), they increasingly build their defense of the Christian faith on concrete evidence of Jesus literal bodily resurrection, not on sentimentality. In the first seventeen verses of his gospel letter John makes one of the most in-depth affirmations of the nature of God, of the Lord Jesus Christ—God Incarnate—of the full equality of Father and Son in the essential being of God, of Jesus’ full eternity, at the same time rejecting errant explanations of these truths that later appeared in Christian history. John concludes his prologue, the preface to his gospel, in [Joh 1:18](#) with a simple but powerful assertion of the practical reality of all that he has developed in the first seventeen verses. He answers the questions, “How do we know that God exists? How do we know anything at all about God?” Considering the sad excesses of emotional Christianity in our age, one wonders if such a faith would have stirred the many leading scientists of the past to embrace Christianity and hold fast to it despite its persecution of them for their “new ideas” that eventually proved to be truth, rather than the sentimental superstitions that many in the leading churches of their day embraced. One need only review a common basic science textbook to learn the names of the pioneers of modern factual science. Once you have those names research each man’s individual life. You will be amazed at the number of these men who were robust Christians. We should not ignore or reject the emotional impact of Christianity on a faithful believer, but we should clearly recognize that the emotions of the faith are secondary, not primary, to the faith. The foundation of the faith stands on factual, profoundly thoughtful works such as the first eighteen verses of John’s gospel, or on the tightly reasoned teachings of Paul in the Roman letter or in First Corinthians fifteenth chapter. I pray that this study of John’s prologue will motivate each of us to dig deeper into the teachings of Scripture and historical Christian doctrine for the sound roots of our faith, so that we will not be shaken or moved by every tiny breeze that blows contrary to it. Blessings, Joe Holder

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**No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. ([Joh 1:18](#))**

If God is "spirit" in His essential being, it means that He is not material. Thus our material eyes which can only see material things cannot possibly see God. This point is repeatedly affirmed in Scripture; "...whom having not seen ye love," "...the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen..." and "...neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son...." So how do preachers and communicative Christians know anything about God that they can speak with any authority to those who inquire about their faith? Are we left to the frustrating and futile state of being "agnostic

Christians"? People in our age, not altogether unique in this point but definitely more extreme than people in most past ages, have become intoxicated on the sentimental. If something touches "my heart," or in some way evokes a tender emotional response in me, it gets an immediate and automatic thumbs-up approval. I just listened to a fascinating discussion of the surprising impact of The Da Vinci Code on ungrounded Christians. The author-speaker is a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky; he has written an expose of The Da Vinci Code, documenting over a hundred significant factual and historical errors in the author's basic premises. His assessment is that contemporary Western Christianity is rapidly becoming an emotional religion with almost no factual, historical knowledge from which to discern such fictional and factually flawed works as this one. Thus emotional, sentimentality based Christians read or hear about anything, however non-factual, that challenges their faith, and they shatter on the spot. If a Christian wasted sufficient time to read this fictional work (acknowledged by the author as fiction, but, not unlike the LaHaye novel series Left Behind, intended to have a specific-and not healthy-influence on the Christian community) I would highly recommend that the same Christian take the time to find and read Iranaeus' Against Heresies, an old work by an ancient Christian specifically against the heretical Gnostic influence that failed in its attempt to corrupt primitive Christianity to its own designs. Since The Code attempts to build its case, albeit rather void of accurate facts, on Gnostic writings that were written long after the death of the men to whom they attributed their works, would it not be wise stewardship for the concerned Christian to read first-hand what ancient Christians really thought about Gnosticism? For that matter, you need only read John's gospel and general letters, or Paul's letter to the Colossians to get a New Testament expose and unequivocal rejection of ancient Gnostic ideas directly from the New Testament itself. Our question-and our challenge-is to move decidedly away from groundless, emotional Christianity in which the inherent final authority is personal sentiment or emotion and not Biblical fact, and to discover what we can know about God with some basis in fact and documented authority. John has devoted eighteen verses that will serve as the preface or prologue to his entire gospel to affirming the full deity and the full humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Having covered more ground-and with absolute accuracy that avoids all the errant views-on this question than has been covered clearly in multitudes of shelves of other books, John devotes the last verse of his prologue to our question. Why be so specific and so precise in dealing with the nature of God and of the Incarnation? Why indeed! Our view of God-and of what He has revealed to us, and how He has revealed it to us-will shape our whole Christian worldview, or it will expose our worldview as sentimental, or non-Christian in other ways. John begins with the obvious. No man hath seen God at any time. We have various Biblical affirmations of this point. Some might ask about those occasional Old Testament records in which God is said to have appeared to individuals in visible form? We speak of a God-appearance as a "theophany." I suggest that those Old Testament appearances are pre-Incarnate "Christ-ophanies." When Moses directly asked God to "see" Him, God responded with the alarming news; Moses, or any other human, could not see God and survive. God's glory is so intense that a direct view of Him would produce instant death! However, John immediately follows this observation with delightful good news. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. John affirms what he has emphasized throughout the first seventeen verses, Jesus' intimate and equal position with God the Father. In ancient Eastern cultures, particularly Jewish culture, "son of" commonly identified someone as another's intimate companion and equal. We need not jump into the quagmire of a mystical "eternal begetting" or try to explain how Jesus could be begotten and also be equally eternal with the Father. "Son" in this context is the same as saying that He is equal with, on intimate terms with, and in every way like God the Father. In dealing with this question in the first seventeen verses John equally rejected the soon-to appear errors of both modalism and Arianism. Modalism, the rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity in favor of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" being mere "modes" of the divine revelation (introduced by Sabellius and presently advocated by Oneness Pentecostal and other groups) and Arianism, the idea that Jesus is a lesser and created being (introduced by Arius and presently taught by the Watch Tower

Tract and Bible Society, Jehovah's Witnesses) both appeared within the first three hundred years after John wrote these words. John rejects both errors and precisely develops the doctrine of the Trinity, emphasizing Jesus' full deity, full humanity, and eternity. He hath declared him. This simple clause says more than that Jesus merely preached sermons about God. The word translated declared has the following meaning:

**1 to lead out, be leader, go before. 2 metaph., to draw out in narrative, unfold a teaching. 2A to recount, rehearse. 2B to unfold, declare. 2B1 the things relating to God. 2B2 used in Greek writing of the interpretation of things sacred and divine, oracles, dreams, etc.**

Our English word "exegesis" is derived from this ancient word. Dr. Tom Constable enlarges the implications of this word. John ended his prologue as he began it, with a reference to Jesus' deity. He began by saying the Word was with God (v. 1), and he concluded by saying that He was at the Father's side. This indicates the intimate fellowship, love, and knowledge that the Father and the Son shared. It also gives us confidence that the revelation of the Father that Jesus revealed is accurate. John's main point in this prologue was that Jesus is the ultimate revealer of God. ". . . John in his use of Logos is cutting clean across one of the fundamental Greek ideas. The Greeks thought of the gods as detached from the world, as regarding its struggles and heartaches and joys and fears with serene divine lack of feeling. John's idea of the Logos conveys exactly the opposite idea. John's Logos does not show us a God who is serenely detached, but a God who is passionately involved."<sup>68</sup> Later John described himself as reclining on Jesus' bosom (cf. 13:23). His Gospel is an accurate revelation of the Word because John enjoyed intimate fellowship with Him just as Jesus was an accurate revelation of God that came from intimate relationship with Him. If you have any doubts about how God thinks about something, research what Jesus said about it. Try to search the gospels to see who He is. The more you learn about Jesus the more you will know about God. This profoundly simple truth should revolutionize our thinking about God, and it should give us an incredible sense of awe and loving worship. Did Jesus care about the hurting and the helpless? So does God. Did Jesus come with purpose and design, and did He accomplish His purpose in the first Advent? God also operates with purpose and design; and He also accomplishes His purpose. Would you like to have some time with Jesus? Then you should really enjoy heaven! Why not spend more time with Him now. How can you do that? Spend more time with Scripture. Clarify your focus of life-authority on Scripture and less on any other authority, even your own emotions. You will begin to understand far more about God than you now perceive. May it be so with each of us.

Elder Joe Holder