

# The Glory of God in the Face of Christ

I Corinthians 4:3-6

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This morning, I simply want to talk about who Jesus is. Not in a way so that you simply accumulate facts about him: where he lived, what he did, his nature – fully God, fully man - and so on. But my aim is look at Jesus through the lens of Scripture in such a way that we are drawn to worship him, adore him, surrender to him and trust in him. That is, I want to consider Jesus in such a manner that our hearts are stirred, our affections heated and our devotion deepened as we gaze with our souls at the incomprehensible splendor of Christ.

Why speak on this topic this morning? Two reasons: First, because of last week's events, people all over our country who don't know who God is, are returning to church. Even Conan O'Brien, a late night talk show host, mentioned that he went to church for the first time since the show started. Because of this, I am compelled to speak about Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is God come to us in understandable form. To know Jesus is to know God. To not know Jesus is not to know God. To make known Jesus is to make known God. And that is the greatest most loving thing I can do at this point – Make Jesus known.

The second reason I wanted to speak about who Jesus is because many people have misconceptions about Christianity and miss Christianity's glorious heart and soul. Some think of Christianity as a moral way of conducting life, or a family tradition to be maintained, or a set of abstract disconnected dry doctrines to affirm. To think of Christianity in these ways - as simply a moral way of life, or as a family tradition to practice, or a set of abstract dry doctrines to affirm – is to miss the glorious heart and soul of the Christian faith. At the center of Christianity, at the center of morality, at the center of the tradition, at the center of doctrine is something of immeasurable glory. It is something which the eye of the soul could gaze upon and study for eons of time and still not plumb its depths nor measure the infinitude of its perfections nor comprehend its vastness. At the center of the Christian faith, at the center of its glorious salvation, at the center of its morality, at the center of its history, at the center of its future, at the center of its theology is one thing – Christ. He is the heart and soul of our faith. To miss the glory of Christ is to miss the Christian faith altogether and experience a shell of religion without its glorious soul.

This is what I wish to consider this morning. Just as one would take a telescope onto a dark mountain and gaze at the vast glories of outer space with all of its haunting blackness, its

magnificent stars, brilliant galaxies and mysterious black holes, so I would like us to open the window of Scripture this morning to behold what is infinitely more wonderful and awe-inspiring – the glory of Jesus. First, I would like simply to show that the glory of Christ is indeed the center, and then, secondly to explore his glory itself.

### ***The primacy of the glory of Christ***

The first text I'd like us to consider this morning is 1 Corinthians 4:3-6. In this text and the paragraphs that follow, Paul is speaking of his ministry – the ministry of the gospel. His ministry was to proclaim the Christian message wherever God led him – in Jerusalem, in Asia Minor, in Greece, in Macedonia and eventually Rome. What I'd like us to take careful note of is the way in which he describes the gospel message that he carries, because it identifies the very heart of the gospel; the heart of the Christian message and hence, Christianity itself.

In verse 3 Paul states that, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see **the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**” We must pause here to ponder what Paul said with reference to the gospel. He calls it the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.” According to this verse what does the gospel reveal? What is it primarily about? It is about the glory of Jesus – Jesus who is “the image of God”. Above all else, the gospel is a window through which the magnificent splendor of Jesus shines

In verse 5 we observe something similar when Paul says that the supreme lordship of Christ is at the center of his preaching. For, he says in verse 5, “we do not preach ourselves, but **Jesus Christ as Lord**, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.” To say that he proclaims “Jesus Christ as Lord” indicates that Paul's focus in his ministry was to exalt, elevate, magnify, make known Jesus Christ as Lord, as the one who is “the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth! (Psalm 47:2).

Verse 6 then, sums the fact that the glory of Jesus is the center of our faith when Paul says that God, “made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the **knowledge of the glory of God in...**” whom? Where does the glory of God shine? In “**the face of Christ.**” And God has by divine initiative taken off our blinder, called for light to dawn in our souls so that we could see, behold, and gaze upon the face of Christ and see the Glory of our God. There it is, in these verses, the “glory of Christ”, the “image of God,” the “glory of God in the face of Christ.” At the center of the gospel, at the center of salvation, at the center Christianity is the splendor of the Son of God.

The gospel is intended not merely to communicate that life without Christ is to face Hell – the negative component of the gospel (which is certainly true and necessary); but the gospel is intended also to ravish our hearts with glory, to woo us to something infinitely brighter and more satisfying than the pleasures of earth. The gospel is intended to lay before our eyes a banquet feast of divine wonders so that at their mere taste of such magnificence we would “deny ourselves” the earthly pursuits and pleasures of sin and run full bore after the glory of God in Christ. That part of the gospel, it seems to me, is rarely heard! God does not want us to cling to Jesus merely out of fear of Hell, he wants us even more to cling to Jesus out of Love which encompasses our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind, our whole strength. Certainly fear is a proper motivation, for fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but it should not be

our primary one for embracing Jesus. Love for the sheer worth of his beauty and glory should compel us.

The amazing thing is that to gaze upon and love the glory of Christ is not without effect in our lives. The last verse of chapter 3 indicates that we are transformed by such a vision of Christ. There Paul says, “we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 2:18).

### ***A taste of the glory of Christ***

We might then ask “Of what does this glory consist? What is the glory of Christ?” Certainly the word glory is a general one and one which must be explained and specified. Just as we may know generally that outer space is magnificent, the sense of awe and splendor comes by focusing the telescope on the specific facets of its greatness: its brilliant stars, some of which burn 5 million times brighter than our sun, its huge and diverse galaxies, and the even larger galaxy clusters. So also I’d like us now to turn the telescope of God’s Word to focus in on a few of the glorious facets of Christ – understanding, of course, that these are but a taste of what is infinite in both quality and quantity.

### ***The Glory of his Power***

Consider, for example, the glory of the power of Christ. The Scripture teaches us that “through him [Christ] all things were made” (John 1:3), and that “by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him” (Col. 1:16). All things have been brought into existence by the power of Christ. And not just the things that are of earth and that inhabit the earth, and not just the vast structures and mysteries of the universe but also the things of heaven and the celestial hosts which populate heaven. All things have been brought about by his power.

Not only did the might of his power bring all things into being, but the entire created world, both visible and invisible, are currently sustained by his power. The Bible declares that “in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17) and that he “sustaining all things by the power of his word” (Hebrews 1:3). The universe, according to the Bible is not sustained by a self-existent set of natural laws, but it is upheld and sustained by the power of Christ. All is dependent upon his power – the energy of the sun, the gravitational bonds that unite the universe, the life and breath of its creatures rest on his power. He is the “almighty” (Rev. 1:8).

We can’t fathom such power. We read about the power of volcanoes and we’re amazed. We see pictures of our military – the most powerful force in the world with its aircraft carriers, its destroyers, its nuclear subs, its fighters and bombers, its well trained soldiers and marines and we’re filled with a sense of awe. We contemplate the power of the sun’s energy which is able to heat up a planet millions of miles away. (To put that into perspective, think about how hot you have to get your fireplace to warm the immediate vicinity of your house). The Sun has enough heat to warm up our home planet though millions of miles away. One scientist said of the sun’s power, “In just one second the Sun emits more energy than humans have used in the last 10,000

years.<sup>1</sup> All such amazing sources of finite power in our world and in our universe are trivial and inconsequential compared to the infinite power of Christ, which is never weakened, lessened, or used up but infinitely self-existent. The book of Revelation is correct in referring to Jesus as the “pantocrator” which is translated “Almighty”! There is nothing that can overcome him, nothing that can shake him, nothing that he can not handle, nothing that he cannot due! Worship him!

### ***The Glory of his Sovereignty***

Or, let’s turn the telescope of the Scripture toward the glory of Christ’s sovereignty – meaning his rule. Jesus is, “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come” (Eph. 1:21) and “is the head over every power and authority” (Col. 2:10) There is no corner of the universe where his rule and his reign does not extend. Even in the mysterious turbulence of our times, he reigns on high working all things together according to his good pleasure. There is not a leaf that falls, a missile that flies, a decision that is made, a government that falls, a cancer that kills, nor disease that cripples, nor a piece of driftwood that is not under the sovereign control of our good God and Savior Jesus Christ. He is sovereign over all things.

### ***The Glory of his Holiness***

Or, again, let’s turn the telescope of Scripture toward the awe-inspiring glory of His holiness. The multitudes in heaven in Revelation 15:4-5 lift up their voices in worship of his holiness singing, “Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. 4 Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” He is perfectly *just*, and *holy* and all his acts are *righteous*.

There is not a sliver of malice, or speck of impurity or hint of unfairness or injustice in Him. And as such, he will and is constrained by the very nature of his holy character to deal justly with all sin. Anyone who thinks that Jesus will overlook people’s sins because of their relative goodness, fails to know the flawless perfection of his justice and holiness – a holiness that is fearful to the wicked but a object of worship to those who delight themselves in God.

### ***The Glory of his love***

Or finally, let us once again turn the telescope of Scripture to gaze upon the unfathomable glory of his love. The Scripture teaches us that “the breadth and length and height and depth” of the love of Jesus “surpasses knowledge.” No human language or intellectual examination will ever be able to capture or get its arms around the Love of Christ. It’s a love so magnificent that no one can measure its intensity, so undefeatable that “nothing can separate us” from its grip (Rom. 8:39).

Only the glory of Christ’s love can explain why he laid aside his infinite glory making, “himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave, being made in human likeness. 8 And being

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found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!" A death compelled by His great love so that our eternal debt of sin might be paid and us freed to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Only love will explain the cross, only love would travel so far and condescend so low as to bring people in darkness up above the dark haze of sin, suffering and misery to behold, adore, and worship the glorious center of all things – Christ Jesus.

What then should we worship and adore, O people? Sun, moon, stars? NO, for they are but dull reflections of the source. Should we worship our power and our technology? NO, for they are but trivial derivations of the source. The human heart longs for more, it longs for the infinite, the mysterious, the powerful – and there is only one worth worshiping, worth trusting, worth pursuing at any cost and that is Jesus. To worship or trust in anything different or pursue anything different is evidence of the fact that you cannot yet see “the glory of God in the face of Christ”!

This is the center of Christianity and of our faith, brothers and sisters. It is not simply a “moral way of life;” nor is it simply a religious tradition; nor is it simply a collage of dry and disconnected doctrines, it is about the astounding glory of Christ who has made a way through his loving sacrifice for us to experience the unparalleled joy of His glory; and to spend eternity probing the vast reaches of his inexpressible greatness. This is the Gospel. This is Christianity. Repent and believe!