

SEEING THE FATHER IN THE SON

Jesus said, "Have been with you for such along time, and have you not known Me, Philip? The person who has seen Me has seen the Father." There are plenty of things in the New Testament that prevent us from understanding this in a Sabellian way. This heresy was also known by the name "patripassianism", the foolish notion that the Father died on the cross in the person of the Son. The Father sent the Son. No one sends himself. The Father spoke to the Son. The Father loves the Son. "The Son cannot do anything by Himself, unless He sees the Father doing something. For whatever the Father does the Son also does in a similar way." "With" implies more than one. No one can be said to be with himself. The Word was with the Father from the beginning (Jn 1:1). All such statements prevent us from saying that the Father and the Son are the same person.

There are other statements in the New Testament that come close to being statements of identity, but not quite that. When Jesus said, "I and the Father are one", the word for "one" in Greek was not a masculine form. That would have meant that they were the same person. The form is neuter, which gives the meaning, "one thing", or "a unity". They are one in essence, substance, or nature, but not the same person. When the Nicene Creed was formulated in 325 AD, the statement, "of one substance with the Father" did not intend to assert that the Father and the Son are the same person, but that what the Father is, in nature, that the Son is, also. Of course, there is only one God. That was always believed. The concern at Nicea was to reject any thought of priority in "time" for the Father and any inferiority in the divine nature of the Son.

There is a group of passages in the New Testament that use the word "image" or similar words. If you look at your face in a mirror, the image of yourself in the mirror is not yourself, but in another sense you would not deny that it is you. Similarly, we find the statement, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being." Here we have an important distinction between a light source, or the radiance or light that comes from it. The Son, who is Light, reflects the Light of the Father, from which He is derived. We have impressions on coins and pictures and photographs that we can also say are "exact representations." The image on the metal or on the paper is not identical with the original, yet it reveals the form of the original. The Son is distinct from the Father, yet He is true God as the exact representation of the Father. The first comparison in the Nicene Creed for the relationship between the Father and the Son is Light. The radiance that comes from a light source is of the same nature as its source. In the phrase "Light of Light", the word for "of" in the original Greek is "*ek*", which means "derived from". In human affairs, a father is in existence before his son is born, and until his son grows up, the father is in many ways greater, stronger, and wiser than his son. However, it took a long time in the debates about the Trinity in the early church to realise that derivation did not mean priority in time for the Father, or inferiority in any way for the divine nature of the Son.

Jesus does not mean physical sight here, because no one has ever seen the Father (1 Jn 4:12). Jesus brought a full **revelation** of the Father. As the Word, He revealed that Father's mind towards us. "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is God, who is in the lap of the Father, has **made Him known**" (Jn 1:18). Seeing means believing that revelation.

The study of the nature of the three person in one God covered a good deal of ground before it reached what might be called its end-point, if there ever is an end-point, in the realisation that the three persons of the Trinity interpenetrate each other. Theologians use the difficult words, "perichoresis" and "circumincession", which actually came into Trinitarian theology from their use in the discussion of the sharing of attributes in the two natures of Jesus Christ. The truth is expressed simply, without the hard words, in Jesus question, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me?" Jesus also said, "The Father, who remains in Me, is doing His works" (Jn 14:10). Jesus again says, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me" (Jn 14:11).

The person who has seen the Son has seen the Father in important ways that affect our salvation. Jesus also said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn 14:6). As the Father loves us and gave us His Son, the Son loves us and in that love gave Himself up for us. In looking at the suffering and the death on the cross of our Lord Jesus, we see the Father's saving compassion for us. When we rely on Jesus' Words, we know that these were Words that Jesus spoke on the Father's authority (Jn 14:10). When we consider the miracles and other works of Jesus, we should understand these as works that were done with the Father's full authority. "Truly, truly, I tell you, the Son cannot do anything by Himself, unless He sees the Father doing something. For whatever the Father does the Son also does in a similar way" (Jn 5:19; 14:10)

There is a whole range of truths that affect our salvation where we can say the same things of the Father as of the Son. "As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to those whom He wishes" (Jn 5:21). We can include here all the attributes of God the Father, His almighty power, His knowledge of all things, His presence to everything in the creation, His holiness, His mercy, compassion, and grace.

No one has the Son without having the Father, and vice versa. That is why, although Jesus instituted baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the New Testament can often simply speak of baptism into Christ. The one includes the other.

The Father's and the Son's loving action toward us is a unit, and we in turn approach the Father and the Son as a unit. If we know the Son, we know the Father (Jn 14:7).

The same is true of worship of Jesus. "He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who has sent Him" (Jn 5:23). This statement could never have been made if Jesus were merely a creature, or a lesser form of

divine being. It would have been idolatry to worship anyone who is not God Himself.

The “interpenetration” of the persons of the Godhead has implications for believers. Jesus said, “On that day you will know that I am in My Father, that you are in Me, and that I am in you” (Jn 14:20). The intimate togetherness of the Father and the Son also applies to Their indwelling in the hearts of believers. Jesus said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We shall come to him and make Our home with him” (Jn 14:23). Nor is the Holy Spirit isolated from this indwelling. Believers are in the Spirit, and the Spirit is in them. Their bodies are the temple of the Spirit, in which the Spirit is worshipped as God. Jesus said, about the “other Advocate”, the Holy Spirit, “He is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see or know Him. You know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). An important truth should not be ignored, that the Holy Spirit uses the Word of the Gospel as the means of creating and sustaining faith, so that we remain in Christ as living branches remain in a vine. There is an important connection between the Father’s love, the Son’s love, and our remaining in Their love through the Word. “As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Remain in My love! If you keep My Commandments, you will remain in My love, as I have also kept My Father’s Commandments and remain in His love” (Jn 15:9-10).

What is true of individual believers is also true of Christ’s church. This unity between the Father and the Son is not visible, but truly exists. In the one Church of Jesus Christ all believers of all times and places are one in Him through the Word of His apostles (Jn 17:20). We believe that this oneness has always been so, and is now so, even when we see Christians divided into denominations and when people see the church as “sore oppressed, rent asunder by schisms, and distressed by heresies” (Hymn 191, v.3). Yet truly, it is not rent asunder. That is how men see her. Jesus’ prayer for His church has always been fulfilled, “...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. Let them also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me! I have given them the glory that You have given Me, so that they may be one, as We are one. I am in them, and You are in Me. Let them be brought to complete unity so that the world may know that You have sent Me, and that You have loved them as You have loved Me!” (Jn 17:21-23). We do not seek this unity in manifestations of love, important as they are, for they can be deceptive, but in the faithful teaching of the Gospel, and in the right use of the Sacraments, through which the Spirit works.