

Why Did God Become Flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ?

GOD is spirit (John 4:24), and he is called “the Father of spirits” (Hebrews 12:9). Jesus said that “spirit hath not flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). Although “in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28), God has his being in a different dimension than man, who is spirit in a fleshly body. That being the case, no man has ever seen God the Spirit at any time (John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16). But, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psalms 19:1). Consequently, the apostle Paul said, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead [Godhood]; so that they [men] are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). It was inexcusable for man to go into idolatry or be an unbeliever. Although we can’t see God, creation points to a Creator. We are overwhelmed by the awesome display of Almighty Power; not just erratic power, but power harnessed by Supreme Intelligence that holds everything together, making it work in clock-like precision. God, who is Spirit, is behind it all.

God Became Flesh

The message of Christianity is that God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Although Gnostics had a hard time believing it (2 John, verse 7; 1 John 4:1-3), the prologue of John reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made...And the Word was made 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 1:1-3,14). The child born of the virgin Mary would be called “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). While here, Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9; 12:45; 10:30). In a concise and summary statement, the apostle Paul later wrote, “For in him [in Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead [of Deity] bodily [in a human body]” (Colossians 2:9). Then further contemplating these great truths, he said, “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Timothy 3:16). How amazing!

Foretold in Prophecy

Although the Jews were slow to believe it, the Old Testament Scriptures had prophesied this taking place. The initial promise was expressed in terms of the seed of woman (Genesis 3:15), the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), and the seed of David (Psalms 89:3-4). The promised one would come through the fleshly lineage of these people. But as time went by, it became evident there was a more expansive dimension involved in this promise. Micah 5:2 reads, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler of Israel; *whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*" (Micah 5:2). Isaiah 9:6 is even more explicit, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, *The mighty God, The everlasting Father*, The prince of Peace." Likewise Isaiah 7:14 is chosen by Matthew to illustrate this truth with the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:23). Daniel's writings also lend themselves to this line of thought (Daniel 7:22). God would be embodied in the coming one.

The Wonder of It All

When we look out at the vast expanse of the heavens some starlit night and then think about God who is greater than all of this, it is utterly mind-boggling. And it is further mind-boggling as our brain is kicked into a befuddled turbo-mode when we try to grasp the incarnation, God emptying himself of himself to become one of his creatures on the smallest planet of our universe that is said to be on the outward fringe of the Milky Way (which is only a part of the greater expanse of the heavens). In the wonder of it all, we are made to ask: Why did God become flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth? Why did he become one of us? We herewith call your attention to three or four reasons in the light of the Scriptures.

I. TO BECOME OUR SAVIOR

The Most Simple Truth

That which seems so complex is put in the most simple terms when we open the pages of the New Testament. The angel, in announcing the coming of the birth of Christ to Joseph, stated, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). This is why "Emmanuel," God with us, became flesh. Years later in the midst of his earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus himself declared, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). John 3:16 lays it out very plainly before us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Then the apostle Paul in that which is almost like a summary statement, says "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19), and he went on to add, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (5:21). What great and marvelous truths!

The Scheme of Redemption

God is holy. He is perfection. God's command to man, made in his image, is, "Be ye holy; for *I am holy*" (1 Peter 1:16). But, beginning with Adam and Eve, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). And the response of perfect holiness to sin is wrath. We stand condemned before him. Paradise has been lost, and we are a dying race. However, "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8,16). These two characteristics of God's essence, holiness and love, if they were detached and polarized, would almost seem to be antagonistic to one another and incompatible. But by being compounded together, God has come up with his scheme of redemption for mankind. We are saved from the wrath of God through the love of God, seen in grace (unmerited favor). This has all been brought about by God becoming flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ. While here on earth as a human being he lived a sinless life, which we could not do. Although sinless, in his body on the cross he bore our sins and the sins of the whole world. Now by his resurrection from the dead he has certified our salvation and assured our resurrection. In all of this, God's sense of justice and mercy has been satisfied. This has all been accomplished in him becoming flesh. Our personal restoration to God is accomplished and realized when we accept these truths and live them out in our lives.

II. TO BECOME OUR FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST

A Faithful High Priest

The book of Hebrews highlights this second great truth as to why God became flesh. Hebrews 2:17-18 reads, "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." In the verses right before this, it tells us that Christ, like those of the Old Testament priesthood, was "partakers of flesh and blood," and that "he also himself likewise took part of the same." He was "made like unto his brethren." In other words, in becoming flesh and blood, he experienced life with its trials and

temptations just like all other human beings. Surely God who is omniscient knew all about us in every way before, but now we know that he knows because he has been one of us. We know that from our viewpoint he is understanding, sympathetic and caring when we lift our prayers to heaven.

The Throne of Grace

That being the case, Hebrews 4:14-16 enjoins and encouragingly admonishes us, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need." And, coupling with this his unchanging priesthood and sinlessness, the Hebrews writer with full assurance goes on to say, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25; consider 7:21-28).

III. TO MORE FULLY REVEAL HIMSELF TO US

So Much We Do Not Know

God being Spirit, there is so much about him that we do not and can not know, nor understand (Deuteronomy 29:29). But we have no problem believing in God. Everything points to him. In the universe and the world of nature all about us, design is glaringly evident. Where there is design, of necessity there has to be a designer. Then because nature is governed by systematic and consistent laws that can be identified, defined and verified, there can be such a thing as science. And where there are laws, even scientific laws, there must be a lawgiver. Science, considered aside from predisposed bias, implies an omniscient God (one who knows everything). The Old Testament tells us about God, but the information there is incomplete. If our impressions of God were entirely left up to nature alone, God comes through as a cold calculating scientist. And the Old Testament leaves us unfulfilled. Our hearts yearn and reach out to know more about the God who made us.

The Void Has Been Filled

The Lord Jesus Christ has filled that void. He has more fully revealed what God is like and has left us something more tangible to visualize, himself, when we think and talk about the invisible God. Jesus, being the embodiment of God in the flesh, came from

the very heart of God. Read John 1:1-3 and 14 again. Then John 1:18 states, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." And in two corresponding and complementary statements, Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9); "And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me" (John 12:45). Two parallel verses in Colossians read, "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell" (1:19), and, "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9). We see the very heart and essence of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. When you think about God the Father, think about the Son.

"In the Bosom of the Father"

Notice it said that the Son was "in the bosom of the Father." That is a very expressive statement. To get the full force of this mode of speech, i.e. "in the bosom of the Father," remember that Lazarus is spoken of as being in Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22-23) and that John is pictured as "leaning on Jesus' bosom" at the last supper (John 13:23). As they ate reclining on couches, to be in such a position close to another (and especially to one's master), projected a picture of honor and of intimate, personal closeness. And coming from such a close and favored position, without question Christ has disclosed many, great and wonderful things about the heavenly Father. Read the gospel accounts. God is much more personal and real.

IV. TO LEAVE US AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO LIVE

Christian, Being Christ-Like

Let us add one more thought as to why God became flesh and blood. It is not directly stated as a reason, but it consequently came about as a result of him becoming flesh. It is interwoven with the incarnation and our restoration to God. This truth keeps surfacing as we read the New Testament Scriptures. Since Christ lived above sin, in him we have a perfect example of how we ought to live. That is all acknowledged and implied in the very name that we wear, Christian (being Christ-like). In becoming a Christian, we "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38), being forgiven and now initially clothed in his imputed righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Having been buried with him in baptism, we arise with him to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). The apostle John wrote, "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). Now we personally take the initiative to put on the "new man" who is the image and likeness of Christ (Colossians 3:10-14,17,23; etc.). We are of Christ, and we

have committed ourselves to be like him in all godliness, goodness and benevolence; yes, this commitment is in every way. Therefore, we unhesitatingly ask the question, "What would Jesus do?"

"As I Have Loved You"

Consider the subject of love as to how we ought to live. The apostle Paul admonished the Ephesian Christians, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us..." (Ephesians 5:1-2). These verses echo words spoken by our Lord himself in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." And it further amplifies what he said in the Sermon on the Mount, having reference to loving all men, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48). In the Father, and reflected in the Son, we see perfect love (and perfection that is to be emulated by us). Therefore, fittingly Paul further admonishes, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). We are to love "as" Christ loved us.

"Leaving Us an Example"

Other Scriptures bear out the truth of the sinless Christ (Hebrews 4:15), and consequently becoming our perfect example. The apostle Peter plainly stated, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:21-22). Let us look "unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2) in every way. He is "the way [to go], the truth [to be believed], and the life [to be lived]" (John 14:6). He is our unerring and inspiring example. Let us follow him in every way. Amen.

Conclusion

We have pretty much summarized and concluded each point of this absorbing subject as we have gone along, but as we come to the end of this article we would like to leave the following Scripture with you. This will help fix the wonder, magnificence and magnitude of it all in our minds. The Scripture is Hebrews 1:1-4. It reads, "God who at sundry [various] times and in divers [diverse] manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he

had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high..." And with the apostle Paul, in the light of all of these wonderful truths, we enjoin, "Now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17).



■ *In view of this article, "Why Did God Become Flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ?" a reader in Virginia asked, "If Christ was God, how could God still be in heaven when Christ was on earth?"*

Editor's Reply:

"If Christ Was God, How Could God Still Be in Heaven When Christ Was on Earth?"

Before we attempt to answer this question, let us say that it is mind-boggling to try to understand all about God (as lowly human beings). Yes, God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4; James 2:19)). He has his being as a definite and infinite person in a definite place. We pray, "Our Father *which art in heaven*" (Matthew 6:9). The Jews recognized that God was in heaven, and it was from there that he heard their prayers (1 Kings 8:30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49; etc.), yet he was thought of as being everywhere. Read the very absorbing 139th Psalm. Also notice Jeremiah 23:24, which says, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Think of the expanse of the universe, the sprawling galaxies, and the stars beyond that fill the vastness of the heavens. And God is greater than all of this! Of this awesome Being, Paul said on Mar's Hill in Athens of ancient Greece, "In him [God] we live, and move, and have our being..." (Acts 17:28). God is in one place, and yet God is everywhere at the same time. Just the elementary thoughts about God are utterly overwhelming to our finite minds in their limited perception.

Now getting back to Christ being God and God still being in heaven: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Then verse 3 says, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." In Genesis 1 as creation reaches its climax with man, we read, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." (verse 26). The information here corresponds with the Scripture in John just referenced. At the same time the Word (Christ) is said to be with God, and then is distinctly said to be God. John 1:14 tells us that "the Word was made 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." Paul later would write, "For in him [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

How can all of this be? Explanation: God is one, but works or expresses himself through three different “personalities,” the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Some people call this the “Trinity,” a term which, as such, is not found in the Scriptures. These great truths about the triune nature of how deity works, or has his being, are seen in the Great Commission when the Lord said, “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]” (Matthew 28:19). The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit can be seen associated together in their capacity and function as deity in the following Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; etc. The Father (it seems) always is referred to as God, and the others when viewed alone sometimes are called God. Reference to Christ is generally from the viewpoint of what took place in connection with his embodiment in the flesh and resurrection (Lord, Christ—Acts 2:36; etc), although he is called God at times (John 1:1; Acts 20:28; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8).

All of these things should be taken into consideration when answering the question, “If Christ was God, how could God still be in heaven when Christ was on earth?” In the book of Job the question was asked, “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” There are many things in the realm of the spirit, which, since we presently are creatures in the flesh, are beyond our full understanding. But everything points to the reality of God. Paul stated, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead...” (Romans 1:20). Almighty Power and Supreme Intelligence are in evidence all about us. The Psalmist cried out, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psalms 19:1). The Bible fills in the particulars of what God wants us to know. Moses had a very close and personal experience with God far beyond the common man, and yet he said, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

These are our humble thoughts.—*James E. Gibbons*



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