

The Lord God Jesus Christ

A Sermon by Rev. Grant R. Schnarr

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Our idea of God is most important concept we can have. Our spiritual lives are based on this concept. Our spiritual destiny, including our homes in the other world, are formed by our view of God. Every aspect of our eternal life revolves around our understanding and our relationship with our Maker.

Developing a true and working concept of God, though, can be a challenge. We bring our own conceptions and misconceptions to this image. Historically humans have perverted or destroyed the picture of God over and over again, and used a twisted understanding of God and His will to do many twisted things. The Spanish Inquisition, Hitler, and others claimed to worship the Lord, and performed hurtful deeds in the name of the Lord. People can make up their own God to suit their own bias rather than worship the true God.

Culture and times can be biased against a true picture of God. For instance, God the judge might be popular at times, the punisher, the warrior, or a remote and uncaring Ruler. Or the opposite kind of God can be held up as an ideal: the ineffective, permissive, enabling, anything goes God, weak and unable to lead or effect change in the world. The discussion of gender in relation to God is a good example of the struggle between cultural bias on every side of the issue and a struggle to understand Revelation.

In the past history of the Christian church truth has certainly taken precedence over good. The Writings tell us that a faith alone world developed, where good did not count for much, if anything. A natural outcome was that the world became perceived as a male's world, and even as good was suppressed and put down as nothing, so were women treated the same. In a faith alone culture, male attributes have been held up as an ideal, and it can be argued that even much of the feminist movement in the western world in the past quarter century has made the mistake of joining that illusion rather than dispersing it. This has caused deep wounds in many, not to be taken lightly or overlooked as an oddity. When love, perception, gentleness, nurturing are looked upon as second rate feelings, many of them to be shunned, those who

excel in these areas receive the constant message that they are not good enough, that they do not count. From a truth dominated culture a false concept of God is created, a static God firmly entrenched in a groundwork of rules seemingly unconnected to life. God becomes a judge whose favor limits the variety of the human race to those few who hold the correct set of ideas, and punishes those who do not. God can seem to become a distant Father who is never home, or who arrives home on Sundays to lecture and scold, only to disappear again Monday morning. What would it be like to have nothing at all in common with this God and be told that this is the true God and you must worship Him? Cultural bias not only affects our view of God, but our lives, and the wounds caused by false doctrines presenting false gods are real.

And so it is that the Heavenly Doctrines come into the world to bring back the balance between truth and good, to honor both sexes in their own right, and to offer everyone with an open mind a visible image of God in a Divinely Human form for what actually is the first time in religious history. (Read TCR #787 and following.) The Writings call upon society to rethink the entire picture of religion, the entire concept of God. They present a radically different concept where love and wisdom both reign in the Divine and in life. The Writings say no to a truth alone world and firmly present the marriage of truth and good in use as the essence of perfection (DLW 28-33).

However, while acknowledging the wounds created by false doctrines of the past, how do we form a true picture of the Lord, which reflects all of humanity, without bias from past or present culture? How do we begin to heal the wounds that many have felt by cultural misconceptions of God, and at the same time not create more wounds by creating more misconceptions? We want to see God through our own eyes, but how do we do this without creating God with our own hands, in our own image?

Wounds heal over time, and there is no quick solution, but there are answers to all of life's questions that can help heal. The Writings are called the leaves of the Tree of Life, for the healing of the nations. Revelation from God is the source of healing, if one can approach it and accept it. Revelation was given to guide us to an ever growing understanding of the Lord. Revelation presents a picture of the Lord, a living picture, and through this Window into eternity we can behold the face of our Creator, and see our own face reflected therein.

What does Revelation teach us? More than we can learn in a lifetime. Truth from the Word is infinite, but we can take a few principles and apply them to this issue, to begin to build a healthy and genuine concept of God. First, the Heavenly Doctrines teach us to look to our Maker from essence to person, and not from person to essence. This is an important teaching to help us approach our Maker.

"Everyone who thinks of God from person only," the Writings say, "and not essence is thinking materially. For instance, a person who thinks of the neighbor from the form only and not the quality is thinking materially . . . Think of God from essence, and from that of His person, and do not think of His person and from that of His essence. For to think of His essence from person is to think materially of the essence also; but to think of His person from essence is to think spiritually of His person" (AR 611:7).

Thinking of God from person to essence is not helpful to us. Looking at the Lord's material body from a corporeal point of view, and translating that into the essence of God, is not helpful. In modern terms, getting hung up on the physical form of the Lord while He was on earth, and allowing the physical form of the Lord dictate how we think of the essence is not helpful. An example of this would be statements that say the essence of God is male or female. That is thinking of God from person to essence. God is the I AM, while the origin of gender, God in essence is above gender. To attribute qualities of creation to the Uncreated is like calling the Potter clay.

But that does not mean that all attributes of what we call humanity are not from the Divine. Of course they are, and that is why every human being, whether white, yellow, black, male, female, disadvantaged, disabled or healthy and whole can approach and be conjoined with the Lord.

But this is accomplished by approaching the Lord from essence to person. Through a recognition of the all encompassing God, the all loving, all wise, ever creating, ever nurturing Force, from whom all people and things come, we look to the Divine Human. We see these infinite and Divine qualities in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we do this, we allow the invisible to be visible, as the Writings say, in the air or on the sea with His arms opened inviting you into His embrace (TCR 787). This is how conjunction with God takes place,

through the visible, tangible, lovable, approachable Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed in His Word.

But we are to worship Him as the Lord as Jesus Christ and no other. To worship Divine attributes by any other name is to make God invisible. The Writings tell us, "In respect of His Divine Human the Lord is the Mediator, and no one can come to the Divine Being itself within the Lord, called the Father, except through the Son, that is, the Divine Human . . . Thus the Lord as to His Divine Human is the actual joining together. And if people cannot do this in thought how can they be joined to the Divine itself in love." (AC 6804:4)

The Writings go on to say, "He was pleased to take upon Himself human form, and this to allow people to approach Him . . . It is this Human which is called the Son of God, and this it is which mediates . . . This is why the Son of God, meaning the Human of God . . . is called the Savior, and on earth Jesus, which means salvation. TCR 135:4

And so the Lord said, "I am the way the truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known the Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." (Jn. 14:6-7)

The invisible soul of God is at once revealed and made manifest in His own Humanity, now revealed in His Word, and proclaimed to us in the Heavenly Doctrines as the Lord God Jesus Christ.

Can we see the essence of God within His person? Can we allow God to be both Divine and Human? The image of the Divine Human is a blessing to those who long to understand and be conjoined with the Lord. A newcomer of the church once said, "When I was young I heard about God, the great and powerful Almighty. He clapped His hands, the thunders roared. He batted His eyes, the lightning flashed. Boom! God? God scared me. But when I read in the Writings that this gentle shepherd named Jesus, who Himself called a lamb, who held the children, healed the sick, and taught so many loving things, that this man was God, well, that did for me." The question might be asked, "What does it do for you?"

The image of the Lord Jesus Christ as it appears in the Gospels and as it is explained in the Heavenly Doctrines, is given to the human race to bring conjunction with the Divine, the true Divine, and with that --

healing. Although it is no doubt difficult for some, because of real abuse of false doctrines in the past, to approach this image as presented in the Word will bring healing. This image when viewed from essence to person can be infilled with a variety of descriptions from the Word, which represent every aspect of humanity. Jesus does bless the children, heal the sick, feed thousands of hungry mouths, cries for His people, and calls each of us to arms of love and compassion. He says, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). He cries out to a church who has gone astray in faith alone, He says, and listen to His words, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matt. 23:37-39).

Can we say these words? Can we see our Lord and Savior as all encompassing, containing the source of all that is human and Divine? And can we worship Him as He has revealed Himself in His own Word? Then we will truly be able to see Him, and say with full hearts, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

What is the essential message of the New Church? Is the message of the New Church that God is inaccessible to some people, for no fault of their own? Is the message that if you have a hard time picturing God that you should give up and go somewhere else? The answer is NO! Is the message of the New Church that anything goes? You can make up your own God here, in any fashion you choose? The answer is NO! The message of the New Church is clear in the Writings, preached by the lips of the apostles themselves, and held as a hope for all people everywhere, from whatever background or origin, so that they may be conjoined with their Creator. This message is for everyone, to be infilled by every individual in a way that she or he must, in order to see and feel what it means to them. The message is that the Lord God Jesus Christ Reigns, and His Kingdom shall be forever and ever. Blessed are they who come to the marriage supper of the Lamb (TCR 791). The Lord promises us, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me to give to everyone according to their work" (Rev. 22:12). May our response be with open hearts and minds, and with joyful lips, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

AMEN

Lessons: Isaiah 42:1-9; John 14:1-11; AC 8705