

# If God is, then we are

You are the light of the world. Matt 5:14

As He is, so are we in this world. 1 Jn 4:17

God has arrested you for a purpose. He chose you in eternity for a specific reason, and not just out of mercy. The people of God are meant to be exactly that – people of God. The elect were chosen in eternity to manifest the character, virtues and grace of God in the physical realm. This is God’s great purpose – that the church should glorify him by manifesting his communicable attributes on Earth.

To make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Eph 3:9-11

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory. 1 Cor 2:7

Therefore each individual Christian and each local church has a heavenly calling to be what God is within the limits of human life.

## God’s communicable attributes

Now the limits of this revelation of God in men are restricted to what is called the communicable attributes of God. There are various ways that theologians classify the attributes of God and one of them is to divide God’s character into communicable and incommunicable attributes. Though imperfect (as all the classifications) there is some value in it. Those that are communicable are his virtues, such as holiness, righteousness, justice, love, truth and so on. These have an analogy in the properties of the human spirit. His incommunicable attributes are those which are part of the eternity and infinity of God which can only be held by the Godhead, such as infinity, aseity (self-existence), immensity (omnipresence), omnipotence, omniscience etc. These have no analogous properties in the creature. The elect believer never becomes ‘God’, or even a ‘little god’, but partakes of the divine nature through union with Christ.

As His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature. 2 Pt 1:3-4

While this has always been fairly obvious throughout history, in recent decades the Charismatic Movement has erred in erroneously teaching that believers partake of the incommunicable attributes. There are various strands of this rogue teaching found in different denominations. Many Charismatic churches, being influenced by Pentecostal Latter Rain theology, claim that Christians can become super-beings not mere mortals. They claim that special apostles and prophets will arise on the earth in this present age who have the characteristics of God – being able to fly, becoming immortal, being invulnerable to bullets, being able to pass through walls, being able to do without food, and

so on. This is pagan nonsense. After the return of Christ believers in the new world will have much greater powers in their spiritual body, but even then they never become God.

Another strand is found in the Word Faith churches, which were greatly influenced by occult ideas transmitted through New Thought, and the mind sciences. These blatantly teach that men can become 'little gods' through the positive application of faith in God's promises. Again this is blatant paganism and completely unbiblical. As Jesus told us, 'when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do."' (Lk 17:10). We are never more than servants, far from being God in any sense.

So, it is within strict limitations that we consider how we manifest the character of God in this world. That we are called to reveal what God is like is clearly commanded, but we do so only within the limits that God has allowed us – in terms of personality expressing the fruit of the Spirit.

### **Initial implications of this**

The first thing which this truth demands is that we should spend our time learning about God. The essence of the Christian life is theology – studying God. Believers are called to be theologians, and good theologians at that. Anyone who refuses to be a theologian is rebelling against their calling. This does not mean being a closeted, dry-as-dust academic but simply means that we are growing in our understanding about God's character and ways. David as a youth was not an academic, but understood more about God than most in Israel and was thus fearless when confronting Goliath.

So believers must grow not only in grace but in understanding, and this understanding only comes through serious Bible study. Quiet times are not simply meant to be daily encouragements to start the day but are times when we fellowship with God through his word and prayer, so that we grow in wisdom about God. Growth in grace is commensurate with growth in knowledge about God.

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 2 Pt 3:18

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge. 2 Pt 1:5

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Eph 1:17

That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Col 1:10

The second implication is that local churches must be manifestations of the character of God. The essence of God's attributes must be visible in the life of the local church or that church has failed in its witness. When we examine a church we should be able to see revelations of God's personality and the way he works, individually and corporately. For instance: if the overriding character of a local church is hierarchical authoritarianism centred on certain men, or a man, then this church has utterly failed to understand both the character of the Godhead and the way he works in his people. It is not a manifestation of God and therefore is not a true church.

God is light and thus his people are called to be light; indeed they are said to be the light of the world. The world cannot see God who dwells in glory invisible in the heavens, but they can see the church, which is the reflection of the light of God on the earth. This is how people understand about God – seeing him through his people.

The depth of this is so amazing, in the condescension of God, that we are said to be like Jesus in this world. The people of God are the ambassadors of Christ who bring a message about God not just by words but chiefly by the way they live.

For example; a Christian is wrongly persecuted or slandered and he deals with this in patience and forgiveness instead of getting angry and seeking retribution. God is revealed in this.

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 1 Pt 4:11-14

The church is light in this world because it is part of God. In the rest of this paper I want to demonstrate a few aspects of this derived glory which is seen in the Lord's people.

### **God is light**

We will begin with an aspect already mentioned; light. God is light:

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 1 Jn 1:5

And, of course, Jesus Christ is light:

I am the light of the world. Jn 9:5

Jesus is the manifestation of God's light on the Earth, the light of the world, 'A light to bring revelation' (Lk 2:32).

Because God is light, the first act of creation was to bring a physical manifestation of this light into the universe (Gen 1:3). Also, the type of God dwelling with Israel (the Tabernacle) required a manifestation of constant light in order to represent God (Lev 24:2). When God saves his people he brings them into light and makes them light:

For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. Eph 5:8

The calling of God's people is from darkness into light (1 Pt 2:9) so that they become sons of light (1 Thess 5:5). Saints are in the light (Col 1:12). Because God is light, the church is light and must act as a light to the world.

What does light represent?

Firstly it is illustrative of life, the true, eternal life that exists in God: 'the light of life' (Jn 8:12). Light is a picture of the life that is God. The fundamental characteristic of God is that he is self-existent, he is true being, true life. He exists by self-power; non-derived life; he is the one who 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty' (Rev 1:8). Saints are partakers of God in that they have been adopted into God's family by union with Christ and share this life; 'He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life' (Jn 8:12). Only believers experience spiritual life that is eternal in quality. They do not become self-existent like God but they share in everlasting life 'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life' (Jn 3:36).

Then light is illustrative of truth (Ps 43:3). God is truth and all the expressions of his character are truth (Ps 33:4); there is nothing about God that is compromise, accommodation or lie. God can only act in truth, thus his word is truth (Jn 17:17). Light also represents knowledge, the knowledge of truth. Thus light gives understanding (Ps 119:130) and divine instruction (Ps 43:3; Isa 2:5).

Finally, light is illustrative of spiritual union. Just as Jesus told us to abide in him, so we are to abide in the light (1 Jn 2:9-10). We fellowship in spiritual union with one another as we walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7).

When all is consummated and the church is fully sanctified, it fulfils its task in manifesting the light of God:

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Rev 21:10-11

The fulness of the church's calling is to manifest the light of God.

Now, all these things being true, what can we establish?

The first thing is that churches and believers who do not manifest these things cannot be of God; this is plain and simple. It is basic doctrine that true churches and believers will reveal something of the character of God in their lives. Certainly young believers have much to learn and the process of growth is sometimes slow, but even the weakest believers will manifest something of the glory of God in their repentance. The change in life triggered by conversion will certainly bring more and more godliness to the true believer.

But what of churches that are not manifesting the truth, divine instruction, or the godliness of divine union and spiritual life? Well, these cannot be of God; this too is plain and simple. If God is light and churches do not express this light, then they are not true churches at all. Those who follow God will manifest light. There will be a clarity about God in them; an openness about spiritual matters. They will be sought for their counsel and respected for their knowledge of God. Their very lives will breathe the presence of God. But churches that generate confusion or speak lies and false doctrine cannot be of God. Confusion is authored by the devil, who hates truth and speaks lies (1 Cor 14:33; Jn 8:44); churches in this position are not churches but are 'a *synagogue of Satan*' (Rev 2:9).

Now the way we understand truth is to uphold and revere the word of God. We develop in understanding as we learn more of the truth about Christ as revealed in Scripture. The Bible is God's thoughts written down by men under divine inspiration; we are to dwell on these thoughts and learn about God's will for us. This is a very clear litmus test for churches. Any church which does not have the Bible at the foundation of their life is not reflective of God and is not Christian. How can a church be of God and yet ignore the words of God? Worse still, how can a church claim to be godly and yet not only ignore Scripture, but replace it with the words of men? Whether these men are called prophets, apostles, priests, popes, bishops, archbishops or any thing else matters nothing; this is proof of a dead work. Staying in such a dead work will make you lifeless.

Mark my words, remaining loyal to a church which says it is alive but it is dead will ruin your spiritual life and result in a shipwreck of your faith. This matter is serious; just look at warnings of the Lord to the churches in Revelation who had failed to obey him.

### **God is righteous**

A perfect God can only do right; nothing he does is less than perfect or incomplete. As God is unchangeable (immutable) so there is no newness in God, no becoming. God does not alter in any way; he does not act in one way and then slowly change it to a better way. For instance, if God loves then he has loved eternally; there is no change in God's love or he could not be God. Those whom God loves were loved from eternity past and will be loved forever. Therefore, those who are hated by God in hell for their sins were always hated by him in eternity past. Thus the doctrine of unconditional election complies with God's

attribute of immutability. Because God is righteous then the decision of election is holy and perfect.

The LORD *is* righteous in all His ways. Ps 145:17

God's righteousness is manifested in all his actions. Because he is righteous he is just and impartial; there is no favouritism with God but he judges all equally, 'Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge' (Ps 50:6). The sins of everyone must be answered by divine justice and not passed over. This is why God sent his Son to be the redeemer of his people by providing an atonement to satisfy divine justice. Salvation is righteous.

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness. Rm 3:24-25

Since God only does right, he is perfect and holy. He is separated from the unholiness present in the creation and dwells in holy glory, 'You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness' (Hab 1:13).

Because he is righteous, God demands condemnation of evil and punishes it in his holiness.

In righteousness He judges. Rev 19:11

You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because you have judged these things. Rev 16:5

Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of His throne. A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about. Ps 97:2-3

There can be no toleration of sin for a righteous and holy God; sin must be condemned and put out of the way.

These are but a few expressions of God's righteousness; how are they applicable to us?

If God is righteous then the believer must be righteous. If a believer is habitually living unrighteously then he is not representing God at all. There is no concord between a holy God and an unrighteous supposed Christian. Sin cannot be trifled with. The same applies to churches; if a church behaves in an unrighteous way then it is not manifesting God and must be false. Now we all sin, since we have an old nature present, but we must repent of these sins and put them behind us, determining to follow God. The believer will never manifest the absolute righteousness of God, but he will be growing in grace and dealing with sin. Similarly churches that make mistakes must openly confess them and repent. But 'Christians' who habitually sin, who never repent, and churches that make many mistakes and never confess them publicly, cannot be of God. If there is no spiritual fruit in a convert or a church, if there is no growth in grace, then there is no life; there is no reflection of God.

Every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Matt 3:10

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away. Jn 15:2

If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? 1 Pt 4:18

Because God judges sin, we must also judge sin in our own lives. We must deny ourselves and reckon on the death of our old man. Churches must also deal with error. There must be judgment upon that which is evil in teaching and which does great harm to the Lord's people. Heresy is a satanic means of damaging the Lord's interests and it must be dealt

with. Toleration of error is a great sin and a failure of the church to judge. Righteousness will result in judgment; those who do right will contend for the faith:

I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Jude 1:3-4

Leaders who refuse to condemn heresy and tolerate errors are acting unrighteously and will earn the chastisement of God. Part of the pastor's job is to combat and defeat error, drawing the attention of the saints to the problem and providing the answer. Failure to do this is like a shepherd who allows the wolves into the sheepfold.

If we are manifesting the righteousness of God then we will be careful to properly express his character in our proclamation of the Gospel. This means that we must bear witness to the truth that God only loves the elect and not all men indiscriminately. It is unrighteous to preach a Gospel that is not based upon God's truth and righteousness. Jesus did not die for all men but only for the elect (Jn 10:11, 15). He does not love and pray for all men but only those God gave him (Jn 17:9).

This matter of righteousness, of doing right, is hugely important; we cannot underestimate the seriousness of the issue – the believer must do right.

### **God is perfect**

Ascribe greatness to our God. *He is the Rock, his work is perfect.* Deut 32:3-4

*As for God, his way is perfect.* 2 Sam 22:31 (also Ps 18:30)

What is meant by 'perfect' in these verses? It means sound, perfect, mature, fully grown, whole, complete, integrity, wanting nothing, full grown and in concord with truth. This is true both of the Hebrew word *tamiym* and the Greek word *teleios*. God is perfect because he is God; if he were not perfect he could not be God. His work is perfect because his way is perfect; he can only do perfect things because he is God.

God's perfection is usually described under his different attributes in the systematic theologies; his holiness is perfect, his justice is perfect, his righteousness is perfect, his wisdom is perfect etc. All the attributes of God are perfect because they are complete and whole, lacking nothing.

If God is perfect then churches and believers should be growing in perfection. Clearly, with the presence of the old nature, we will not be fully perfect until the return of the Lord when we are instantly perfected (Heb 12:23; Col 1:12; 1 Cor 15:49, 54); however, there should be measurable growth in perfection and we are called to it. Failure to be perfect should always lead to repentance and short accounts. Churches, being composed of many believers with a plurality of elders should be even more noticeably perfect, and they too are called to this.

God *is* my strength *and* power, and He makes my way perfect. 2 Sam 22:33 (also Ps 18:32)

The LORD will perfect *that which* concerns me. Ps 138:8

You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. Matt 5:48

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. Col 1:28-29

Let us go on to perfection. Heb 6:1

This means that there is no excuse; we must develop in perfection by growing more mature day-by-day. Failure to do this will mean severe chastisement. Notice what the risen Christ says to the church in Sardis:

**He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.'** Rev 3:1-3

Here the Lord complains that a local church was not perfect when it should have been. As a result, the Lord will suddenly come upon this church in disciplinary judgment if they fail to repent and change. To another church the Lord threatens to bring sickness, tribulation and to kill the disciples of a false prophetess leading believers into erroneous doctrine and immorality (Rev 2:18-29). This is such a serious matter; we can never let up on our growth in grace.

Now this means that church leaders who fail to take this matter seriously will be judged severely. There can be no excuse for leaders who do not see the maturation of the saints as their goal. How many times have you heard an elder say, 'But there is no perfect church' as an excuse for not obeying Biblical commands? I have heard it many times when I have confronted them upon unbiblical practices in their church. This very excuse is a means of self-condemnation in the eyes of God. Just as believers are all called to perfection, and even to being holy as God is holy, so the corporate church is also called to perfection. Woe betides those who ignore this aspect of God's character that they are called to.

### **Conclusion**

These few examples show us the great need to consider our ways and ensure that we always manifest the truth about God in our lives and churches. We must endeavour to learn more and more about God through his word and seek his grace in order to testify properly to his glory.

The modern examples of churches around the world are a shocking denial of the truth about God. Even the world can see the error that is present in some large churches and organisations that focus upon money, emotionalism, chicanery and authoritarianism. This is a disgrace that dishonours God and will justly deserve his retribution. If we are seeking to truly glorify God then we will make certain that we are following him and walking in his ways.

**Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.** Heb 3:12

**Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God.** Deut 8:11

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