

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

## The Invisibility of God

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(Genesis 32:22-30; Exodus 24:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:17)

1

### Introduction

One finds little on the subject of God's invisibility among the books on the attributes of God. Some may reason that God's invisibility is obvious. Because we cannot see God, why attempt to prove He is invisible? Another might look upon God's invisibility as a problem, an embarrassment, perhaps even a hindrance to faith and godly living. But this simply is not so. We should remind ourselves of Jesus' words concerning His departure from this earth, and thus His invisibility, as we begin our study:

18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. 20 In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him" (John 14:18-21).

7 "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged" (John 16:7-11).

16 "A little while, and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me" (John 16:16).

We might wrongly suppose Jesus is saying to His disciples that they see Him now, but shortly He will be invisible for three days, and then visible once again after His resurrection. I do not believe He is saying this at all. Jesus is saying that His disciples see Him physically at the moment, but after His death, burial, ascension, and the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, they will "see" Him in a much clearer way. He will speak to

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them clearly and openly, and they will understand (something not true of His teaching while on the earth with them—see Matthew 15:17; 16:11; Luke 2:50; 9:45; John 10:6; 20:9). And while He will be invisible to the world after His ascension, He will be very evident to those who believe in Him. They will sense His presence more surely, and He will no longer dwell *among* them but *in* them. The “invisible” presence of our Lord is better than His visible presence was. We are privileged to know God more intimately now after our Lord’s death, resurrection, and ascension, than men ever knew Him before.

2

Some may believe the Bible is self-contradicting regarding God’s invisibility. Some texts clearly indicate that God is invisible, that He cannot be seen:

18 No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him (John 1:18).

17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (1 Timothy 1:17).

But there are also texts where men claim to have seen God:

30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved” (Genesis 32:30).

11 Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent (Exodus 33:11).

14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of this people, for Thou, O Lord, art seen eye to eye, while Thy cloud stands over them; and Thou dost go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night (Numbers 14:14).

Should the Christian throw up his hands in despair? Is the Bible “full of errors and inconsistencies,” as some skeptics have alleged? We will begin by addressing these seeming contradictions. Then we will consider the invisibility of God and the visible incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, we will address some of the numerous implications of the doctrine of the invisibility of God.

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## Considering Apparent Contradictions

In light of the statements of some texts that God is invisible and others that God has been seen by men, let us lay down applicable biblical truths to help us resolve these apparent contradictions.

3

### (1) God has no physical form.

12 “Then the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice” (Deuteronomy 4:12).

37 “And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form” (John 5:37).

Both the Old Testament and the New indicate to us that God has no form, that is, God has no physical body.

### (2) God is spirit.

The reason for this is explained by our Lord in His words to the woman at the well:

24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

This woman made reference to the dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans over the place where God was to be worshipped. The Jews were to worship God at Jerusalem, and Jesus could have corrected her by pointing this out. But He did not do so. Jesus informed her that because of His incarnation, worship would never be the same. Specifically, worship would no longer be restricted to any one place. Men were to have worshipped God in Jerusalem because that is where God chose for His presence to dwell. But when God took on humanity at the incarnation (the coming of Christ to the earth), God chose to dwell not only *among* His people, but *in* His people. When Jesus ascended into heaven and the Holy Spirit came to indwell the church, the church can worship God anywhere because God’s presence among men is spiritual, not physical. God is spirit, so that He is not restricted to one place nor is worship any longer restricted to one place. God is invisible because He is spirit, not flesh.

### (3) When God appears to men, He appears in a variety of “forms.”

One might think this statement contradicts what has previously been said, but it does not. God has no physical form, but in the Bible, He does appear to men in various forms. These “forms” are both vague and various.

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When God does appear to men, the descriptions of His appearance are sometimes vague. In Genesis 32, we read the account of a very strange wrestling match. From the description of the “man” with whom Jacob wrestled, we would not expect this was other than a man:

24 Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, “Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.” But he said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” 27 So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” 28 And he said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.” 29 Then Jacob asked him and said, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved” (Genesis 32:24-30).

What changed Jacob’s mind to cause him to realize this “man” was none other than God Himself? It does not seem to be from anything unusual about this person’s appearance. It certainly does not seem due to this person’s infinite power. The only indication that this being is God is contained in the words he spoke to Jacob:

28 “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.” 29 Then Jacob asked him and said, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And he blessed him there (Genesis 32:28,29).

I can almost see the wheels of Jacob’s mind beginning to spin: “When did I ever strive with God? And how can this ‘person’ bless me but not even give me his name?” Suddenly he knew. He had been struggling with God. Here was something he would ponder for a long time. Just how had he been struggling with God?

Since we are studying the invisibility of God, the important thing to observe here is that when God appeared to Jacob, as He did, His appearance was as a man. No mention is made of glowing white garments or brilliant light. We would not have known it was God by mere appearance. But from the words God spoke, His identity becomes evident.

Other appearances or manifestations of God to men are more spectacular and show more indication of His majesty and glory. Nevertheless, the “descriptions” of God as He appeared are far from detailed:

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9 Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. 11 Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank. (Exodus 24:9-11).

5

This is indeed a most unusual incident hidden away in the middle of the Book of Exodus. Seventy-four men beheld God and ate a festive meal in His presence. There is no question that this is God and that these men all looked upon Him in some fashion. The wonder is that they lived to tell about it. But if one were to describe God solely on the basis of this description of a most unusual encounter with God, how much would you know about the way God looks? The only thing this text tells us is that when they saw God, they saw feet (verse 10). We are told more about what was under God's feet than anything else. This is surely a most vague description. God may have been visible here, but certainly not fully so.

One of the great texts of the Old Testament describing an appearance of God to men is found in the early chapters of the Book of Isaiah:

1 In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." 4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. 5 Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs (Isaiah 6:1-6).

Isaiah most certainly saw the God of Israel, and it had a tremendous impact on him. But what do we know about how God looks from this passage? How would you describe God based upon Isaiah's description of Him? Isaiah himself has more to say about the appearance of the angels than about the appearance of God. God was seated on a throne, and He wore a robe. The angels did not proclaim what God looked like, but what He was like. They proclaimed the character of God. They spoke of His holiness and of His glory. The impact on Isaiah was an enhanced awareness of his own wretchedness as a sinner. This revelation of God's character caused Isaiah to see how woefully short of God's glory

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he fell. As Isaiah grew in his knowledge of the character of God, he grew in his knowledge of himself. The picture Isaiah saw of himself was not pretty.

## (4) To see God's "face" would be fatal.

In those instances where men are said to have seen God, surprise is expressed that they lived to tell about it. Jacob marveled that his life had been preserved (Genesis 32:30). Moses noted that God "**did not stretch out His hand**" against the 74 men who are said to have seen the God of Israel (Exodus 24:10-11). God informed Moses that He could not see Him and live (Exodus 33:20). When Gideon realized he had seen the "**angel of the Lord face to face**" (Judges 6:22), he was encouraged with the assurance that he would not die (verse 23). Manoah and his wife, soon to become the parents of Samson, were amazed they did not die for having seen God as the "angel of the Lord" (Judges 13:21-23). Paul seems to be saying that men cannot see God and live when he declares that God dwells in "**unapproachable light**" (1 Timothy 6:16). Getting close to God is like drawing near to a blast furnace. It is dangerous to one's health (see also Exodus 33:2-5).

## (5) There is a difference between seeing God "face to face" and "seeing God's face."

The expression, "*face to face*" is a figure of speech. It is clear in the Scriptures that seeing God "*face to face*" is not the same thing as seeing God's face. Consider the example of Moses, where, in the early portion of Exodus 33, Moses is said to have spoken to God "*face to face*:"

9 And it came about, whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the Lord would speak with Moses. 10 When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. 11 Thus *the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend*. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent (Exodus 33:9-11, emphasis mine).

The point of these words is not that Moses actually saw the face of God but that he spoke *intimately* with God. This becomes particularly clear in the verses that follow:

18 Then Moses said, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!" 19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." 20 But He said, "*You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!*" 21 Then the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; 22 and it will come about, while My

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glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, *but My face shall not be seen*" (Exodus 33:18-23, emphasis mine).

God spoke to Moses "**face to face**," but He would not allow Moses to "**see His face**." Therefore, seeing God "**face to face**" is not the same thing as seeing God's face. Speaking "**face to face**" means speaking with someone on a personal, intimate basis as a friend speaks to a friend. A similar figure of speech is found in Numbers 14:

13 But Moses said to the Lord, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Thy strength Thou didst bring up this people from their midst, 14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of this people, *for Thou, O Lord, art seen eye to eye, while Thy cloud stands over them; and Thou dost go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night*" (Numbers 14:13-14).

God was "**seen eye to eye**" by the Israelites. In the context, this means that God made His presence known to the Israelites by the cloud which led them and which became a pillar of fire at night. It does not mean God has physical eyes and that the Israelites saw these eyes. God's presence was with His people, and He made that presence known. But nowhere did anyone see the face of God, because God has no face. God is Spirit and is not made of flesh. He is invisible to men because He has no body, and He becomes visible to men by various means. He appeared as a mere man, which was the angel of the Lord. He made Himself known by means of a cloud and through various other appearances, but none of these were the full revelation of God. And none were an occasion where men saw God's face.

## The Invisibility and Appearance of Jesus Christ

The same tensions found in the Old Testament regarding the invisibility of God and the appearances of God to men arise again in the New Testament with the appearance of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only One who has seen the Father and who now speaks for Him:

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:1-3a).

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1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will (Hebrews 2:1-4).

18 No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him (John 1:18).

46 "Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father" (John 6:46).

38 "I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father" (John 8:38).

Jesus was with the Father from the very beginning (John 1:1-2). He alone has truly seen the Father (6:46), and He spoke the things He saw when He was with the Father (8:38). He is God's final and full revelation to men (Hebrews 1:1-3a). We would do well to take heed to what He has spoken and to what has been recorded by those who saw Him, whose reliability as witnesses was confirmed by the signs and wonders God performed through them (Hebrews 2:1-4).

Jesus did take on human flesh, yet without diminishing His deity:

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives (Hebrews 2:14-15).



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This body of flesh, which the Lord in all His deity put on, was not made so physically attractive that men and women would be attracted to Him in a fleshly way, as Isaiah made clear:

1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him (Isaiah 53:1-2).

9

When the disciples finally concluded that Jesus was indeed God's promised Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus said Simon Peter, the spokesman for the disciples, was blessed because he had not come to this conclusion through "**flesh and blood:**"

17 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).

Jesus was spiritually recognized through spiritual means. It was not human deduction but divine revelation which enabled the disciples to "see" that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, for whom the Jews looked but did not see.

Even though God appeared to men in human flesh, men did not and could not "see" Him as such apart from a divine work in their hearts:

36 "But I said to you, that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe" (John 6:36).

38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" 39 For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 40 "He has blinded their eyes, and He HARDENED THEIR HEART; lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them." 41 These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. 42 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue (John 12:38-42).

44 "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be TAUGHT OF God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. 46 "Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One who is

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from God; He has seen the Father. 47 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (John 6:44-47).

65 And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (John 6:65).

For the unbelieving, seeing was not believing. They saw numerous signs and wonders, but this did not convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. Instead, they asked for more and more signs:

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” 39 But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:38-40).

It was not for lack of evidence that men refused to believe in Jesus as God’s Messiah. Their hearts were so hardened they even denied evidence that was irrefutable (John 9:18). When Lazarus had been raised from the dead, the Jews could not deny it, and so they sought to kill him (John 11:47-53; 12:9-10). Their rejection of the evidence made them all the more guilty:

24 “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well” (John 15:24).

Even those who believed in Jesus did not see His full glory. That glory was veiled in His incarnation (Philippians 2:6-7). Only occasionally were glimpses of this greater glory revealed to a few of His followers. At the transfiguration, some of our Lord’s future glory was unveiled for a moment before the eyes of Peter, James, and John:

1 And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him (Matthew 17:1-3).

But this glory seems to fall short of the greater glory which is yet to be revealed to our Lord’s followers in the kingdom of God. In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed that His disciples would see this glory:

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24 “Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

We must realize that while our Lord came to manifest God’s presence among men, He has not been seen in His fullness. Seeing Him fully, seeing His “face” as it were, is something to which we still look forward:

12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2).

One final observation must be made concerning the “visibility” of God in the person of Jesus Christ. He was visible in the flesh for but a very short period of time. Since the time of His resurrection and ascension, Jesus has no longer been visible to men. Jesus told His disciples of His return to the Father, and that this would mean that they would see Him no longer. This invisibility of the Lord Jesus held the promise of numerous benefits, however:

15 “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. 20 In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (John 14:15-20).

7 “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. 12 I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose

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to you what is to come. 14 He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you. 16 A little while, and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me." 17 Some of His disciples therefore said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling us, 'A little while, and you will not behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" 18 And so they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is talking about." 19 Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not behold Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'? 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy. 21 Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for joy that a child has been born into the world" (John 16:7-21).

The benefits of Jesus' physical absence, and His coming and presence through the Holy Spirit (as described in the verses above), can be summed up in these statements:

- (1) Jesus' physical absence results in the sending of the Holy Spirit, who will be our Helper and will abide with us forever (14:16).**
- (2) The world cannot see or know the Holy Spirit, but we can (14:17).**
- (3) While Jesus dwelt among men during His earthly life, He now dwells within every believer through the Holy Spirit (14:17).**
- (4) The Holy Spirit will bring about an intimacy with God greater than anything previously experienced by men (14:20).**
- (5) The Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth" (14:17). He will not only convey the presence of Christ in the saints and reveal to His church all that we need to know about God (16:12-15), He will convict sinners of the truths which are essential to their salvation (16:8-11).**
- (6) Although the world will no longer "see" Jesus in His physical body, He will be "seen" by His saints. This "seeing" is not physical or literal, but spiritual. We "see" Jesus by faith, being assured that He is with us and in us (14:19; 16:16).**

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## Conclusion

The God who is Spirit, and who is thus invisible, has graciously chosen to manifest Himself to men in various forms throughout history. God disclosed Himself finally and fully in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3a; 2:1-4). We worship a God whom we cannot see, a God who is invisible. This truth may seem like a theological “gnat,” a truth overshadowed by many more practical theological “camels.” But the doctrine of God’s invisibility is a truth with many very significant implications and applications. As we conclude, I would like to point out some of the practical ramifications of the invisibility of God.

### **(1) The invisibility of God is inseparably linked to our faith, our hope, and our love.**

Faith, hope, and love are the three prominent themes of the Bible. Paul speaks of these in 1 Corinthians 13:13. Notice how the New Testament writers link each of these three crucial elements of our Christian faith and life to the invisibility of God.

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.  
2 For by it the men of old gained approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible (Hebrews 11:1-3).

24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it (Romans 8:24-25).

8 And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8).

### **(2) The invisibility of God, one of the attributes of God, is a fundamental attribute to many of the blessings we possess as Christians.**

While we have already stressed this truth in this message, it certainly bears repeating. The invisibility of God is not a liability which we should seek to deny or to overcome. In Jesus’ own words, “It is to your advantage that I go . . .” (John 16:7). He is not less present among us because He is gone and not physically visible. He is more present, through His Spirit, whom He has sent to us. The Holy Spirit conveys the presence of Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells the believer and thus the church. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to remember and then record the words and teachings of our Lord. The Holy Spirit

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regenerates and converts unbelievers and He illuminates and empowers believers. We are not spiritually poorer but richer for His invisibility.

### **(3) The invisibility of God can also be a problem for the saints.**

Unfortunately, Christians do not always appreciate the benefits we have because of the invisible presence of our Lord with us through the Holy Spirit. There are times when we want to be assured that He is with us. When we lose sight (pardon the pun) of the benefits of the invisibility of God, we begin to seek Him through visible means. We may be inclined to “look at things as they are outwardly” (2 Corinthians 10:7), rather than focusing on the unseen things, the invisible things, which are eternal:

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Worse yet, we might be tempted to put God to the test, demanding that God prove His presence by performing some visible miracle, as the Israelites did in the wilderness (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 14:1-25). This is exactly what Moses cautioned the Israelites not to do (Deuteronomy 6:16). This is also what Satan sought to tempt our Lord to do (Matthew 4:5-7). And it is what Paul urged the Corinthians not to do (1 Corinthians 10:9).

### **(4) The invisibility of God indicates to us that we look to things other than those which are seen.**

I have friends who are blind. Because they are blind, they must not rely on sight; instead, they must rely more keenly on their other senses. The invisibility of God (and of much that makes up our spiritual walk and warfare) means that we must rely on senses other than our physical sight. We must, in the words of Paul, “walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). The writer to the Hebrews spells out the relationship between faith and the unseen:

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible (Hebrews 11:1-3).

7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the

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world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith (Hebrews 11:7).

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth (Hebrews 11:13).

15

What then do we base our faith upon if it is not by sight? *We base our faith on the Word of God.* This is the way it was always meant to be. It was God's word that Adam and Eve chose to disobey. They trusted in a serpent, rather than in God, and ate the forbidden fruit because it looked good. As a result, their eyes were opened, but what they "saw" was not good (Genesis 3:1-7).

The spectacular visible evidences of God's presence at Mount Sinai were not a revelation of God's form. The Israelites wanted to "see" their God, and so they made a golden image, representing God in the form of a golden calf. God, however, wanted to represent Himself through His Word. It was God's Word that was embedded in stone, not His physical image. It was the possession of God's Word that distinguished the Israelites above all the other nations, and God confirmed His Words with the mighty works which He accomplished in their sight (Deuteronomy 4:1-8). The things which the Israelites witnessed at Mount Sinai were done so that this people would trust and obey God's Word (Deuteronomy 4:9-18). God punished the Israelites for disobeying His Word in spite of the visible evidences of His presence and power and the truth of His Word (Numbers 14:22).

Interestingly enough, it was not just the visual revelation of God which demonstrated God's power and presence. It was not just getting too close or seeing too much of God's glory that would kill one who drew too near. It was also the *hearing* of God's Word. God manifested Himself through His Word, and the Israelites feared His Word—and rightly so according to God's own words:

16 "This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'" 17 And the Lord said to me, "They have spoken well" (Deuteronomy. 18:16-17).

In the context of these two verses, God is warning His people about the danger of false prophets, and He is also promising the appearance of one who, like Moses, will reveal God's word to men. This person is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. He is "the Word" (John 1:1-2), God's full and final revelation to men to whom we should pay

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attention (Hebrews 1:1-3a; 2:1-4). When the three disciples Peter, James, and John, saw a demonstration of our Lord's glory at the transfiguration, it was for a purpose, a purpose which God clearly indicated to them:

1 And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; *listen to Him!*" (Matthew 17:1-5, emphasis mine).

16

The glory of God was revealed at Mount Sinai so that the Israelites would take God's Word seriously. The glory of our Lord was revealed to Peter, James, and John, so that they would take Jesus' words seriously. And so they did:

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" — 18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19 And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1:16-21).

When the Lord Jesus neared the time of His death, resurrection, and ascension, He began to speak more openly to His disciples about those things which were crucial to them in the days of His physical absence and invisibility. We see this especially in the Upper Room Discourse and high priestly prayer of our Lord in John 14-17. The Lord Jesus constantly speaks of His Word and His Holy Spirit. Through these, our Lord will abide in His saints. And his saints will abide in Him as they abide in His Word. God has revealed Himself in His inspired and infallible Word. Here is the basis for our faith. Here is the means by which men will be saved. Here is the means by which believers will grow. Here is the standard for our conduct and the light which will guide our path. *Through His*



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*Word and through His Spirit, God is present and knowable in this world where men do not see Him.*

It is God's Word that prompts us to look not to the things which are seen, but to the things which are unseen (2 Corinthians 17-18). When we perform acts of service and worship, we are not to perform for men, to seek their approval or applause; we are rather to serve Him who is invisible:

17

2 "When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing 4 that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. 5 And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (Matthew 6:2-6).

The invisible God, the God "**who is in secret**," urges us to perform our acts of righteousness in a way consistent with His invisibility. We are not to seek a public platform from which to serve God; we are to go about our acts of worship and service as secretly as possible, knowing that the God who is "**in secret**" sees what we are doing and will reward us in His time.

Our spiritual warfare involves much more than that which is seen (Ephesians 6:10-12). Likewise, God's provision for our protection is also unseen, unless our eyes are miraculously opened to behold the invisible:

8 Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel; and he counseled with his servants saying, "In such and such a place shall be my camp." 9 And the man of God sent word to the king of Israel saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there." 10 And the king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God had told him; thus he warned him, so that he guarded himself there, more than once or twice. 11 Now the heart of the king of Aram was enraged over this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you tell me which of us is for the king of Israel?" 12 And one of his servants said, "No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." 13 So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him." And it was told him, saying, "Behold,

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he is in Dothan." 14 And he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.

15 Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" 16 So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 18 And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. 19 Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he brought them to Samaria.

20 And it came about when they had come into Samaria, that Elisha said, "O Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. 21 Then the king of Israel when he saw them, said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" 22 And he answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." 23 So he prepared a great feast for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel (2 Kings 6:8-23).

Our worship must take note of those unseen angels who are present and watching and learning (1 Corinthians 11:10). Women are cautioned against placing too much emphasis on their outward appearance; rather, they are to give priority to their hidden inner being:

1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, 2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. 3 And let not your adornment be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; 4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands (1 Peter 3:1-5).

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The unseen plays a most significant part in the life of the Christian, whose God is unseen by the human eye but seen with the eye of faith.

## (5) The invisibility of God is made visible through His church and His saints.

How is God, who is invisible, manifested to those who do not believe? In Romans 1, Paul tells us that God is revealed through His creation:

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

God is also made visible to men through the church, the body of Christ. What God began to do and to teach through His Son, He continues to do and to teach through His church (Acts 1:1ff.). The church is His body, and His means for working and bearing witness to men in this world:

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a HOLY NATION, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

It is our calling and our privilege to manifest the excellencies of God to a lost and dying world.

## (6) The invisibility of God is one of the insurmountable barriers which stands between the unbeliever and faith in God.

Many suppose that seeing is believing. They, like doubting Thomas, refuse to believe in what they cannot see (see John 20:25). The fact is that seeing is never sufficient basis for faith, for faith is rooted in a conviction concerning what is not seen (Hebrews 11:1-2). The Jews saw Jesus, who manifested God to men—God incarnate. The more signs they saw, the more they demanded (Matthew 12:38-45). Only when God opens the spiritual eyes of unbelievers will they be able to “see” Him who is unseen.

As I considered the subject of the invisibility of God and its implications for the lost, my mind turned to Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in John 3:

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; **for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.**” 3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless**

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*one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* 4 Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 *Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’* 8 *The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”* 9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and you do not receive our witness. 12 If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. (John 3:1-15).

As a Jew, Nicodemus was a man whose life operated on the basis of what he saw. Judaism was obsessed with externals and rituals and visible acts of righteousness. They did not give due importance to matters of the heart, matters not seen (see Luke 16:15). On the basis of Jesus’ signs and wonders, Nicodemus had to admit that Jesus was in touch with God. But Jesus pressed this teacher of the Jews to go beyond the visible to the invisible. Salvation is not about what is seen but what is not seen. The conception of a child is not seen, but in time the results of that event are evident in the birth of the child. So it is with salvation. *Salvation is not the result of man’s striving and effort, but the result of God’s invisible work* (see John 1:12-13).

Salvation is the unseen work of the Holy Spirit, a work accomplished in the heart of man. If Nicodemus was ever to “**see the kingdom of God**” (John 3:3; see also verse 5), God must accomplish the new birth in his heart, an event not visible to men and most certainly not the work of men.

Jesus likened this miraculous but unseen work of God to the effects of the wind. No one ever sees the wind, but neither does anyone question its existence. We know the wind is present because we can behold its effects. So it is with the Holy Spirit. We cannot see the Holy Spirit, but we can see the evidences of His work in the lives of men, men like Peter and Paul, and—if you are a born again child of God—you. This teacher of the Scriptures should have known from his study of the Scriptures that the outward works of men do

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not save them, but the inner renewal of the Holy Spirit, an unseen work, the effects of which will soon be evident.

We may be thinking this prominent teacher of Israel should have known better, but before we become too smug, let us consider the matter in light of our own thinking and practice. Are we guilty of implying (if not stating it) that people are saved by filling out a card, raising their hand, going to the front, or being baptized? Let us be very clear that the work of salvation is the invisible work of the invisible God, the effects of which are visible.

I often hear Christians talk as if their unbelieving friends and loved ones would believe if only God would reveal Himself to them in some spectacular way. This simply is not so. What more could the Lord Jesus have done to prove He was the Messiah, the Son of God? As Jesus said, only those whom the Father draws to Himself will believe. For those of us who have an undue confidence in our apologetical skills, our ability to convince men and women of the truth, I would remind you that it is the Word of God and it is the Spirit of God who convinces and converts men. Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that if we but make the gospel clear or compelling enough men will believe. This ignores the doctrine of the depravity of men, the invisibility of God, and the inability of any to “see” God apart from divine enlightenment.

Speaking is our responsibility as Christians, and seeing is God’s work:

15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians. 1:15-23).

May God open our spiritual eyes to behold the wondrous things He has in store for us:

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6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God (1 Corinthians 2:6-10).

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