

## CHRIST THE EXACT IMAGE OF GOD - STEPHEN KAUNG

*John 1:1-3, 14, 17-18—In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things received being through him, and without him not one thing received being which has received being...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father), full of grace and truth...For the law was given by Moses: grace and truth subsists through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

*Colossians 1:15-17—Who [the Son of God's love] is image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation; because by him were created all things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities: all things have been created by him and for him. And he is before all, and all things subsist together by him.*

*Hebrews 1:1-3—God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly to the fathers in the prophets, at the end of these days has spoken to us in the person of the Son, whom he has established heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds, who being the effulgence of his glory and the expression of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, having made by himself the purification of sins, set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high.*

May we have a word of prayer:

*Dear Lord, as we gather together here this morning we want to thank Thee for what Thou hast done during the past few days. We thank Thee for speaking to us, and we believe that Thy Spirit is working in us. We thank Thee for Thy presence with us, and Lord, we just want to give Thee glory from the very start of this meeting. We do praise and thank Thee that Thou are the same yesterday, today, and forever. We believe that Thou will be with us as Thou has been with us during the past few days. Dear Lord, there is nothing more precious to us than Thy very presence. We only pray, Lord, that Thou will remove any veil that may be upon our heart. We pray that Thou will turn our hearts toward Thee with unveiled face, that the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ may be seen. Dear Lord, we do realize that unless Thy glory appears to us we are totally hopeless and helpless. So it is the prayer of our hearts that Thou will show us Thy glory, show us Thy glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Oh Lord, we believe that if Thou should show Thy glory, everything will be fulfilled. May the glory of the Lord fill this place. Lead us into Thy very presence to behold Thy beauty and to hear Thy voice. Oh Lord, we pray that Thou will bring us in our spirit even to heaven, and Thou will accomplish that which no man can do. It is for Thy purpose; it is for Thy glory. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*

We believe that the Lord has put in our hearts something that is very dear to His heart, and it is something that He desires for us. So the theme of this conference is *Conformed to the Image of God's Son*. This is God's eternal will. We find in the word of God, even before the foundation of the world, God purposed in His heart. He purposed it according to His good pleasure because this is what pleases Him. That purpose is concerning His beloved Son, that all things, whether in heaven or on earth, will be gathered together,

summed up, headed up in Christ Jesus. And as God purposed that purpose He further purposed in His beloved Son that He should have a bride, His counterpart, His like, and that is the church, the body of Christ. In God's purpose, Christ Jesus is the center of His will, and yet it is the purpose of God that there will be something in union, in one with Christ, and that is man, those who are redeemed of the Lord. So we find in the purpose of God that we who are being chosen, have been chosen even before the foundation of the world in Christ Jesus. "And whom He has chosen He has called, and whom He has called He has justified, and whom He has justified He has glorified" (see Romans 8:28-29). And to be glorified simply means to be conformed to the image of His beloved Son. What a glorious purpose God has purposed in Christ for us!

I often feel that among God's people we are so need-oriented. For instance, what is the purpose behind our coming to this conference? Are we coming that we may get something? Are we coming that our problems may be solved? If that is our purpose in coming, then we are need-oriented, and if we are need-oriented, then we are self-centered. But this is not God's perfect will. God wants us to be purpose-oriented, and being purpose-oriented delivers us from being self-centered. We want God's purpose to be fulfilled; therefore even to be conformed to the image of His Son is for His sake. Then we will be God-centered; we will be Christ-centered. So at the very outset we need to be clear that we are not here for ourselves. We are here for our God, our beloved Christ. We want to be conformed to the image of God's Son because this is what He wants, and we want Him to have what He desires.

### IMAGE

During the past few days, we have been fellowshipping on this very subject. My responsibility is very simple. As a matter of fact, during the past few days the whole thought about this matter of being conformed to the image of God's Son has already been spoken. But because my responsibility is on the image of the invisible God, I have to go back to the very beginning. (Those who have been with us during the past few days, you have to excuse me because I am leading you back to the beginning.)

To be conformed to the image of God's Son, first of all we need to have a clear concept of what image is. If we do not know what image is, how can we be conformed to that image? Unfortunately, among God's people there is not a clear understanding of what image means in the word of God. When we see a statue, we say it is an image. When we see a picture, a photo, we say it is an image. But whether it is a statue or a photo, according to the word of God, they are but shadows. It may give some of the original concept, but there is no life in it. Image in the word of God is derived likeness, not only a likeness but it is a likeness that is derived from the original. Therefore it is something living. It is not only that they look the same outwardly.

As we have already mentioned, when a skilled photographer takes a picture of a person, he is not only able to bring out the outward features of that person, he is even able to bring out some of the character of that person. That kind of picture is very lively, but even though it is lively it is lifeless, so it cannot be considered as an image according to the strict meaning in the Scripture. Therefore, an image is a derived likeness. It has to be born; it is not something made. So when we consider being conformed to the image of God's Son, it is not something just outward; it is intensely inward. It is not something that you can imitate; it is something that you have to be conformed to. So with that in mind,

we are able to find out what is meant by being conformed to the image of God's Son.

### **THE INVISIBLE GOD MADE KNOWN**

We have fellowshiped on this matter of how the invisible God is made known. God is invisible because He is Spirit. But even though He is invisible, He is not unknowable, because from the very beginning of human history God used all kinds of ways to reveal Himself. If God should keep to Himself, we would never be able to know Him. He would be the greatest mystery in the whole universe. We cannot penetrate into Him. He is far, far beyond us. But thank God, He is the God who reveals Himself; so all that we know about God is from revelation. If you know anything about God which is not from revelation, you may know about God but you do not know God Himself. This is very simple because before we were saved, before the Lord met us, that was our condition, even though we might have been brought up in a Christian family.

I was brought up in a Christian family. I do thank God for that because, originally, our family was not Christian at all. By the grace of God, when my father was young, my grandfather sent him to a mission school. My grandfather was a builder, and he wanted to do business with Westerners. Because my father was the firstborn, he sent him to a mission school to learn English so that he could help him with business. But thank God, when my father was in that mission school, he got saved. At that time in China, if anyone believed in so-called Christianity, they would be called a rice Christian because only those poor people who needed help would go to the missionaries and say, "I believe in Jesus." So people looked down upon these so-called Christians.

When my father got saved, my grandfather was so ashamed, he kept him from going to school. He thought if he could be separated from the foreigners he would be all right. But thank God, my father's faith was real, and because of this, out of our big family, when I was born I was born to a Christian home. My father loved the Lord. In my family, every evening before supper we had prayer together. My father would gather the whole family, and there would be a big Bible there, and he would read from the word of God. Then we all knelt down and he would lead us in prayer. So from my childhood I knew about God. I never doubted about God. I never doubted about Jesus as the Savior. I knew the Bible stories. As a matter of fact, before I was saved I preached, and I led prayer meetings, but I did not know Him. I thought He was distant, far, far away. I knew He was there, and I knew that Jesus is the Savior of the world, but I felt that I was okay. Let Jesus save the sinners; I really do not need Him. That was my situation. So if there is no revelation from above, not only do you not know God, you do not know yourself. That was my situation. But thank God, it pleased Him to reveal His Son in me, and that was the beginning of my Christian life. And brothers and sisters, do not forget our first lesson because that first lesson is the lesson that guides us all through our life.

How do we know God? It is by revelation. Unless God reveals His Son in us, we do not really know Him. We may know a lot about Him, but there is no relationship. Because of that, there is no life, and because of no life, there is no conforming to the image of God's Son. So we find throughout the Bible, even before the coming of our Lord Jesus to this earth, God tried in many different ways to reveal Himself. He tried to make people know about Him, the invisible God, by the visible things, by what He has created. Then we began to understand His eternal power, and His divinity.

Then we find that God is at the back of human history. He spread the people all over

the world and determined the nations and their boundaries and their times. And if we really think about human history, we cannot help but say that it is *His* history because He is in control. He is really God.

Then we also find how He spoke to some people. In the Old Testament He appeared to people. Sometimes He appeared as an angel. Whenever you see the angel of the Lord in the Bible, the angel of Jehovah, you know it is the second Person of the triune God, sometimes in angelic form, sometimes in human form. God was always trying to show Himself to man.

God not only created man, He wanted to have a relationship with man, so He gave the Law to the nation of Israel. By the Law He revealed something of His inner character, that He is holy and righteous. Because He is holy He wants us to be holy. He is righteous; therefore we need to be righteous.

And through the prophets of the ages, in many parts and many ways, He spoke to us. He used all kinds of types and figures to reveal His heart. Even through those holy men of God, He revealed something of His character. But in spite of all these, God was still unknown because there was nothing that could be His own image, and through that image that He might be fully known. So in the fullness of time, He sent His only begotten Son into this world. No one has ever seen God, but the One who is in the bosom of the Father He has declared Him.

### THE WORD

Christ is the exact image of the invisible God as we find in Colossians 1:15, “He [the Son of His love] is the exact image of the invisible God.” In order to understand this we have to go back to the very beginning. That is why you find in the gospel according to John he said, “In the beginning was the Word.” Now this beginning is further back than Genesis 1:1 which is the beginning of creation. God began to create. But the beginning in the gospel according to John is the beginning of all beginnings. God is the beginning. Aside from Him there is nothing. In the beginning there was God, the supreme One, the I AM that I AM, the self-existing One. John begins by saying, “In the beginning was the Word.” We would say, “In the beginning was God.” But John said, “In the beginning was the Word. The word *logos* simply means “speech, expression, utterance.” In the beginning was the expression. In the beginning was the utterance. In the beginning was the speech. Does it tell us something? It tells us that in the very beginning God, who is invisible, has a speech; He has the word.

How do we know people? If a person is silent we do not know what is within him, but once he opens his mouth you begin to see what is in him because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. If God is silent, if He never says a word, who would know Him? But thank God, God is such that He is the Word. So from the very beginning God wanted to say something. He had a speech. There is an expression that would reveal what He is.

Now in our human mind our word is connected with our person. Our word and our person are one because it is I who speaks, and my speech will reveal what I am. But the wonderful thing is that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God. In other words, here is the difference. There is the Word, but the Word is another Person. The Word is with God, but even though it is another Person, the Word is God, is one with God. So that is the mystery of the Godhead. But what we need to see is that in the very

beginning, even though God is Spirit, even though He is invisible, He does want to reveal Himself. This is within Him. So you find that the Son is the Word. The Son of God's love is His speech. The Son of God's love is His representation. The Son of God's love is His manifestation. And this representation and manifestation are full because they are one. So whatever God is, that is what the Word is. There is nothing more, nothing less. The Son and the Father are one. That is our God.

Dear brothers and sisters do not think that God is unknowable. According to the human mind, even the best human mind, thinks that if there is a God He is the unknown God. The Athenians were famous for their philosophy, and they believed that there must be someone beyond them. But they could not penetrate, so they had an altar *to the unknown God*. How we have misunderstood God altogether because our God is a God who reveals Himself! And the way He reveals Himself is by His word. That was from the very beginning. That was the very nature of God. So if we do not know Him, it is not because God does not want us to; it is because we do not seek for Him.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." But all these are transcendental. It is there. The representation is there; the manifestation is there, but it is in heaven. But thank God, one day the Word became flesh and tabernacled among men, full of grace and truth. In other words, when the Word became flesh, then what is transcendental becomes what is imminent. What had remained in heaven now appeared on earth.

### **CHRIST TOOK ON ANOTHER FORM**

Originally, our Lord Jesus was in the form of God. Philippians 2:5 says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, subsisting in the form of God..." Here we find that Christ subsists in the form of God. Now again, the form here is not something outward. The form here in the original means something inward. It means the essence, the substance. So our Lord Jesus as the Son of God was in the form of God. He has all the essence, the substance of God. As the Bible says, "All the fullness of the Godhead was in Him." Whatever God is, the Son is. There is nothing more, nothing less.

In Hebrews it says, "He is the out-shining of the glory." We cannot look at the sun. If we look at the sun we will be blinded. But in the out-shining of the sun, we see the light, and by seeing the light we know the sun. So our Lord Jesus was in the form of God. All the essence, the substance of God was in Him, and because He is God, so all the glory, the power, and the authority are His. With Him, to be equal with God was not something to be grasped at because this is what He is. Now in order to come into this world He had to lay aside, as it were, that form for a time. The Bible tells us that He emptied Himself. He could not empty Himself of His deity because this is what He is, but He was able to empty Himself of all the honor and glory attached to God. He could lay aside His right as God for a time in order that He might take up the form of a bond slave.

### ***The Form of a Bond slave***

Brothers and sisters, in incarnation we need to see the emptiness. Subsisting in the form of God, the Lord Jesus lays aside or hides that form for a time so that He could take up another form. It is the form of a bond slave, and that form is not an outward appearance. That form is an inward reality. So when Christ came into this world, from the form of God He took the form of a bond slave. So far as His inward mind is concerned,

He was God. He was in authority; He was sovereign, all-powerful. He was the supreme will. No one could tell Him what to do because He was the One in command, and yet He laid aside that form. He hid that form and He took up another inward mind, and it is the mind of a bond slave. Now a bond slave has no rights whatsoever. He has no right even to his own life because he is somebody's property. A bond slave is to obey, to listen. He is not to command and to order. So think of it: when our Lord Jesus came into this world, how He emptied Himself, and in His inner heart there was the form of a slave. Outwardly, He took a human fashion. You look at Him and He is a man. But inwardly, He is a bond slave. That is His mindset. That is the emptiness.

When God first created man, he was supposed to be a bond slave to God. Man was not created to be his own master. You remember when the Lord appeared to Saul of Tarsus, He said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? Don't you know it is hard for you to kick against the goads?" Why did the Lord say that? Saul thought that he was his own master and he was to command. But the Lord reminded him that he was created to be a bond slave; like an ox under yoke, he has to obey his Master. If he did not listen to his Master, the Master will warn him with the goads, but if he kicks against the goads he will hurt himself.

Man was created to be over all but under One. Man was given dominion over all things, but he was not the owner. He was to obey his Creator and do God's will. That is the real man. So when our Lord Jesus came into this world, He was the Man after God's own heart. He was the Man that God first created to be—outwardly a Man, inwardly a bond slave. He can fully represent and manifest God.

### ***Full of Grace and Truth***

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth." Here you find, as a Man our Lord Jesus is full of grace and truth. What is grace? What is truth? If you read the whole gospel of John, you find that His life upon this earth manifested two things. He manifested what grace is and He manifested what truth is. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth subsist in Christ Jesus. We know that God is grace; we know that He is truth, but this truth and grace was in heaven. But now, with the coming of our Lord Jesus into this earth, He brought grace and truth into this world. He showed us what grace is; He showed us what truth is.

Oftentimes, we think if there is grace, there is no truth, and if there is truth, there is no grace. These two things seem to be opposite to each other. If I am going to be gracious, how can I be truthful? If I want to be true, how can I be gracious? Everything has to be just right, and whatever is not right has to be judged. But the Word tells us that grace and truth subsist in Christ Jesus. He is both grace and truth. Grace and truth are one. All His deeds are grace; all His words are truth. And grace and truth work together as one. That is the way the gospel according to John is written. When our Lord Jesus was on earth, He did something gracious, and then He said something truthful. Grace and truth subsist in Christ Jesus. For the first time in the world you really see what grace is and what truth is.

What is grace? According to that word in the original, grace includes three things. Number one, grace is an object or a person that is so beautiful, that when you look at it, it gives you pleasure. Number two, grace is something that is given freely and universally. Third, those who receive grace will take up the character, the nature of grace to be gracious to other people. And that is what our Lord has brought into this world. He is so

beautiful that He really attracts our heart. We find that He is so gracious as to give universally and freely, and He causes us to be gracious.

What is truth? Again and again you find in the gospel according to John, “Verily, verily, I say unto you...” Why? He is Amen and Amen. Whatever He says is truth and eternally true. That is what we notice in His life.

When you look at His life on earth full of grace and truth, what will be your reaction? If you are not prejudiced, then when you see a person who is full of grace and truth, you will say, “He is a great man. He is Elijah, or he is Jeremiah, or he is one of the prophets.” If you are Chinese, you will say Confucius has come to life. He is the greatest man in the world. That is the verdict of the world.

### **SEEING THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST**

In John 1:14, there is a sentence within parentheses, “(And we have contemplated His glory, a glory as of the only begotten with the Father.)” In other words, when you look at the life of Jesus, without revelation you will find that He is a great man, and that is the verdict of the world. One day our Lord Jesus asked His disciples, “What does the world say about Me?” Now the disciples, in order to please their Master, would not tell Him anything bad, even though many bad things were spoken of our Lord. They only brought to Him the best comments. And to the Jewish people, who is a greater prophet than Elijah? And because our Lord Jesus wept, He must be Jeremiah, or He may be *the* prophet that Moses talked about: “One day God will send among you brethren a prophet, and you must listen to him. If you do not listen to him you will die.” Oh, he must be that prophet because He spoke with authority.

Brothers and sisters, the world does not know Him. He came to His own and His own received Him not. But thank God, we have contemplated. In other words, if we really receive revelation and we really think about it, we will find that He is something more than just a man. Behind a life full of grace and truth, behind that kind of life, you see the glory, and that glory is the glory as of the only begotten Son with the Father. Only in Him can you see the glory of God. People may receive His act of grace, or even hear His word of truth, and yet they do not see the glory because that glory, in a sense, is hidden. When our Lord Jesus came into this world, He came incognito. You know, sometimes a king wanted to know the situation of his people, so he changed his dress. He pretended to be somebody else so that he could know the real situation of his people. Now when our Lord Jesus came into this world, He put aside temporarily the form of God and He took upon Himself the form of a bond slave, and He came in the fashion of a man. He came incognito, so people only see Him as a man, the perfect man. They are unable to see His divine glory. If you really contemplate, then you will see the glory, and that glory is the glory of an only begotten Son with the Father.

### **REVELATION**

Brothers and sisters, thank God we do see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but that needs revelation; that means pondering before Him. What we have seen and heard, we lay it in our heart, just like Mary the mother of Jesus. How she pondered within her! She thought about it and would not let what she saw or heard fade away. So as we see the life of our Lord Jesus on earth, we need to ponder over it, not just hear and then forget or see and then forget. Then we will only see that He is a man full of grace and

truth; we cannot see the glory of God. Actually it is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He is the full representation and manifestation of the invisible God, not only in His life but in His death.

What do we see on the cross of our Lord Jesus? What do we see in His death? Do we only see His sufferings? And even when we see His sufferings, do we only see His physical sufferings? The truth is that His suffering on the cross is more than just physical. The greatest of His suffering was when He cried out, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” But behind all the sufferings of the cross, there is the glory of God. The cross is a symbol of shame, but to us the cross is glory because on that cross we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. There He manifested the love of God to the fullest, and at the same time He manifested the righteousness, the justice of God to the fullest. Even though He is the Son of God, the only begotten Son, when He took upon Himself the sin of the world, the Father would not spare Him. When God crushed Him on the cross, God turned His face away. Even God could not bear to see Him. It shows the perfect righteousness of God—perfect love, and perfect righteousness, full representation and full manifestation of the invisible God.

We need to be conformed to the image of God’s beloved Son because He is the exact image of God. God has revealed Himself to us in His Son. During that last night before His crucifixion, while He was having that Passover feast with His disciples, you remember that Philip asked the question: “Show us the Father and it suffices us.” How the heart of our Lord was hurt! “Philip, you have been with Me for so long, and you still ask Me to show you the Father. Don’t you know the Father is in Me and I am in Him? If you see Me, you see the Father. There is nothing less, nothing more.”

Dear brothers and sisters, have we seen the glory of God? We cannot look at His glory directly, but we have seen His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and this glory is the Father’s glory. May the glory of the Lord appear to us. It has already appeared in Christ Jesus, and may we see that glory today. I often feel that if only we see the glory of God, nothing matters anymore. May the Lord have mercy upon us.

Ponder over these questions.....

1. Fellowship on John 1:1 in relation to Christ being the exact image of God.
2. Fellowship on John 1:14 and explain the difference of Christ as the exact image of God in eternity past vs. in the flesh.
3. Why is Christ’s death imperative to His being the exact image of God?