

Athanasius of Alexandria (296 – May 373) wrote, “For in speaking of the appearance of the Savior amongst us, we must needs speak also of the origin of men, that you may know that the reason of His coming down was because of us, and that our transgression called forth the loving-kindness of the Word, that the Lord should both make haste to help us and appear among men. For of His becoming Incarnate we were the object, and for our salvation He dealt so lovingly as to appear and be born even in a human body.”¹ Athanasius called this a *reasonable consistency*² for God is reasonable—even when it comes to our sin. He saw Calvary as a plan “...reasonable with respect to God, i.e. what is involved in His attributes and in His relation to us.”³

An argument from simplicity might proceed thus: Because He is eternal, and as Prof. Vidu maintained, “all of His actions will exhibit a unity and consistency worthy of **perfect** agency”⁴ God would never leave Adam and Eve in a Fallen condition, since it was not the completion of His eternal plan for them. Calvary was His answer to returning us to the Garden. From a Divine perspective, simplicity maintains that what God does is always a single event that cannot fail. God said of His Word, “it will accomplish what I please.” (Isaiah 55:11). There can be nothing God envisions or purposes that is not, in His eyes and thoughts, at the same moment completed. So Adam and Eve’s fall triggered a plan—planned before the earth was called into existence (Revelation 13:8; 17:8)—as an act of extreme and necessary mercy, to send Jesus to the Cross. For this His incarnation was a reasonable act of Divine justice.

Adam And Eve

Then God said, “Let us make man in our *image*, according to our *likeness*...”⁵ (Genesis 1:26) Athanasius argued, “God made man for incorruption, and as an image of His own eternity.”⁶

Likeness means similitude or resemblance, which, indeed, speaks to the external appearance of one person compared to another. Seth did look like Adam, his dad. Seth was “in (Adam's) own likeness, after his image.” (Genesis 5:3) If this, however, means that a father-son relationship could be established in their genomes (and indeed it could) the Biblical terms “image” and “likeness” must be expanded⁷ to explain Adam in God's image because “God is a Spirit.” (John 4:24) To paraphrase the rest of the Savior's words: We relate to Him, to God, on a spiritual—not a physical—level.

1 Athanasius. 10

2 Athanasius. 62 *Si peccatum sic dimittitur impunitum, similiter erit apud Deum peccanti et non peccanti* (If sin is left unchecked, it will be the same with God the guilty and not guilty).

3 Ibid. 7 cf. Rom. iii. 26, cf. Anselm, ib. i. 12.

4 Ibid.

5 □The Christian understanding of the plural “us” references the trinity נְעִשָׂה אִדָּם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ

6 Athanasius. 12

7 cp. Isaiah 13:4 “Listen, a commotion on the mountains, *like* that of a mighty people .” where “likeness” is simply “like referencing anone aspect of comparison—in this case the level of noise. It is within the meaning of this word to make a comparison between God and Adam on another, non-physical-level,

According to Athanasius: Man is “..the impress of His (God’s) own Image, a share in the reasonable being of the very Word Himself, so that, reflecting Him and themselves becoming reasonable and expressing the Mind of God.”⁸ Man was made for fellowship with God, so on some level of closeness and intimacy Adam might know Him. God equipped him with a “reasonableness,” the ability to have such fellowship.⁹ “...why did God make them (humankind) at all,” reasons Athanasius, “(if) He did not wish to be known by them?”¹⁰

Adam and Eve were capable of apprehending a “knowledge of good and evil.” (Genesis 2:9) In direct terms, we, who are made spiritually “like” God, are conscious of righteousness, the concept of judgment, and sin (John 16:8). There is something about us that has a built in consciousness of right and wrong even if we deny it. Adam was made in God’s image in order to make him (and Eve and humankind) capable—before the Fall—of perceiving, understanding, and appreciating God’s holiness. His moral goodness. We have an innate consciousness of God’s holiness.¹¹

John Stott simplifies, “men and women, unlike the animals, are morally responsible beings.”¹² It is this simple condition of the heart that thru repentance, and the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) we are brought back to the purity and sinlessness of Adam and Eve before the Fall and made capable of understanding and appreciating God. His Holiness is the ultimate “likeness” God is working toward in us (Romans 8:28-29).

“...how could they (humankind) be rational without knowing the Word (and Reason) of the Father, in Whom they received their very being?” argued Athanasius. “For there would be nothing to distinguish them even from brute creatures if they had knowledge of nothing but earthly things.”¹³

Athanasius concluded, “He (God) gives them a share in His own Image, our Lord Jesus Christ, and makes them after His own Image and after His likeness: so that by such grace perceiving the Image, that is, the Word of the Father, they may be able through Him to get an idea of the Father, and knowing their Maker, live the happy and truly blessed life.”¹⁴

When a snake in the grass pushed the narrative that somehow knowing evil was an important piece of knowledge, he lied! “And, in a word,” said Athanasius, “everything was full of irreligion and lawlessness, and God alone, and His Word, was unknown.”¹⁵

We needed to be rescued from an evil which was now systemic in a depraved nature. (Philippians 2:15: crooked and perverse) Even our basic physiological needs

8 <https://ccel.org/ccel/athanasius/incarnation/incarnation.ii.html>

9 John Stott sees this as human responsibility which justifies a discussion of punishment for sin. C.S. Lewis in his essay, “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment” bemoans the tendency of replacing retribution by humanitarianism, a penal system that turns into a social reform. Punishment, however severe, is deserved if the offender is to be treated as a responsible (conscious of sin) human person made in God’s image. cp. Stott. 103-104

10 Athanasius. 24

11 The greek terms for beauty (καλος) and moral goodness (αγαθος) overlapped in meaning during the Koine period. Being made in God’s image, like God, gives us also an appreciation for beauty in nature, in art, and in music.

12 Stott. 102

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid. 25

became addictions; feelings overwhelmed sense. We were only one generation from our first homicide. We needed to be rescued from ultimate death. So, Jesus went to the Cross. And for this to happen, He came as the incarnate Son of God.

Jesus Identifies with Fallen Humanity

Dr. William Craig affirms, *“In virtue of Christ’s incarnation (and, I should say here, his baptism, whereby Jesus identified himself with fallen humanity), Christ is appointed by God to serve as our proxy before Him. The Logos, the second person of the Trinity, has voluntarily consented to be appointed, by means of his incarnation and baptism, to serve as our proxy before God so that by his death he might satisfy the demands of divine justice on our behalf.”*¹⁶

*“The Word (the Logos) was God,”*¹⁷ John proclaimed (John 1:1).¹⁸ Did Jesus see Himself as deity? According to Matthew, Jesus confirmed, *“I am the Son of God.”* (Matthew 27:43) John recalls that His Jewish “opponents” (John 10:31) attempted to stone Him because, as they told the Savior, *“for blasphemy, because you — being a man — make yourself God.”* (John 10:31) Jesus replied, *“You say, ‘You are blaspheming’ ... because I said: I am the Son of God?”* (John 10:36)

So when Paul affirmed, *“We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks”* (1 Corinthians 1:23) Paul was saying far more than just a reference to the hanging of a good man. Jesus was, according to Paul’s teaching, the Jewish King and He was first and foremost deity. Both ideas stirred much scorn and mocking.¹⁹

Hebrews 3:1 *who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his **substance**,*

Hebrews 2:9 *But we behold him who hath been **made a little lower** than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man.*

A Unique Gospel

Greek thought²⁰ saw the Word, the Logos, as a universal source of knowledge in all nature, not as the physical presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ. *“Classical antiquity was dominated by the difficulty of merging a philosophical-impersonal idea of God with an existential-personal idea of God.”*²¹ The thought was similar to Solomon’s wisdom. *“Wisdom calls out in the street; she makes her voice heard in the public squares.”* (Proverbs 1:20)

Professor Stephen Prothero, professor of religion at Boston University tells us that

16 Craig, 206

17 Jehovah Witnesses incorrectly translated “a god.” The grammar as well as the context does not require or warrant the indefinite article. cp. A.T. Robertson, 767 (i) (also see discussion of The “God-Word” Godet, *The Commentary of the Gospel of John* Vol I. 248).

18 The Greek reads “God was the Word.”

19 Luke 23:37, 39 *“If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself! ... Then one of the criminals hanging there began to yell insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”*

20 <https://inters.org/jesus-christ-logos>

21 cp. NTERS – Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion and Science, edited by G. Tanzella-Nitti, I. Colagé and A. Strumia, www.inters.org

even our concept of 'a faith' is unique to Christianity:

*"It is often a mistake to refer to a religion as a "faith," or to its adherents as 'believers.' As odd as this might sound, faith and belief don't matter much in most religions. ... As the term Christianity implies, this faith revolves around the person of Jesus, whom Christians have traditionally regarded as Son of God, Savior, and Christ ...the coming king who will remake the world."*²²

The God-Man

Christ, according to Paul, is "*the image of the invisible God.*" (Colossians 1:15) How are we to explain this most informative Biblical idea: Jesus was in the image, as well as, the form of God and at the same time during His sojourn here, the likeness and fashion of a man. It is little wonder controversy surrounded this "mystery of Godliness." (1 Timothy 3:16) Jesus was, indeed, the manifestation of God in the flesh (incarnate).

The message of Calvary is encapsulated in Paul's exhortation to all who would follow our Lord. "*Christ Jesus... existing in **the form of God**, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he **emptied** himself by assuming **the form of a servant**, taking on **the likeness of humanity**. And when he had come **as a man** (in the fashion of a man), he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.*" (Philippians 2:5-8)

First and foremost, there is much to learn about the words used. Verses 7 and 8 have three words worth studying: form, likeness and fashion.²³

"Form" must be differentiated from "fashion."²⁴ Searching through a number of dictionaries for the best definitions for these two terms, we find form "always signifies (that) which truly and fully expresses the being which underlies it."²⁵ Form according to Bishop Lightfoot "has a more important function in making the thing what it is."²⁶ Or as my own Bible School Greek teacher taught, "*Being in the form of God* says Jesus is God." Jesus being in the "form" of God meant that in every sense, metaphysically, quintessentially, and by nature²⁷ Jesus is totally God.

In addition, while form is unchangeable, fashion is changeable. The dictionary calls fashion an "external bearing" (behavior or appearance) as distinguished from form which is "essential and permanent."²⁸ Paul taught that Jesus was "*fashioned as a man*" (KJV) He was in a physical body in order to experience death. His earthly body (as distinguished from His glorified body) was necessary to experience temptation, suffering and, ultimately, crucifixion for our Salvation.

22 Prothero. 69-70

23 These words are all in verse 7 in the original Greek. Translated often number verses differently.

24 cp Lightfoot. *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Philippians*. 127ff.

25 Moulton & Millgan. 417

26 Lightfoot. *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Philippians*. 129

27 Ibid. 128. Parmenides, born c. 515 BC, considered the founder of metaphysics or ontology, according to Lightfoot used the term "form" to explain the essence or unchanging nature of the universe.

28 Moulton & Millgan. 619

This basic distinction bears true even with the composite uses of the terms:²⁹ fashion and form. The fashion of this world is passing away according to Paul (**1 Corinthians 7:31; Romans 12:2**). It seems appropriate that the word “world” in the Greek originally meant adornment, decoration, or ornament. The Greek term “kosmos” gave us both cosmology and cosmetic showing how this world, its cultural, social, and governmental embellishments are but the latest fashions that are not eternal.

We, on the other hand, are being conformed to the image of His Son (**Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 4:19**). Our minds are being transformed (**Romans 12:2**). Our new birth is who we essentially are. The new birth is not a behavioral change but an eternal transformation, a new creation, now capable of developing deep and abiding fellowship with God.

It remains to define the word “likeness” which means according to the dictionary “*not mere resemblance but conformity.*” Jesus was not just fashioned as man with two arms, two legs, etc., but He was sinlessly, yet totally human. He partook of our humanity with all its challenges and temptations.

- Arius believed that Jesus had to be created as the Son of God. He couldn’t just ‘be’ God.
- Nestorius thought Jesus couldn’t be God because He was obviously human. Nestorius never recognized Mary as the ‘Mother of God.’ That was illogical to him.
- Apollinaris believed the Jesus was God’s mind in a human body. Jesus had one nature not two.
- Eutyches maintained that Christ had a human nature but it was unlike the rest of humanity.
- Serapion who probably was the one who introduced docetism believed that Jesus’ body was an illusion. (Docetism comes from the Greek word, *dokein* meaning ‘to seem to be’)
- Sabellius couldn’t buy into the idea of a trinity. He believed that God was not three persons in one but three characteristics in one.
- Marion didn’t believe that Moses’ God was Jesus’ God. The God of the Old Testament was, according to him, vengeful; Jesus was love. Marion was a docetist.
- The Patripassians³⁰ and Theopaschism³¹ (God suffered). claimed that Christ’s divine nature suffered as well as His human nature during the Passion.³²

29 In English the verbal form for fashion, the noun, is the verb fashion (cp transfigure, Phil 3:21) whereas form has 2 terms to employ, transform and conform. Unfortunately the translations, in an effort to explain, may unintentionally not hold to this clear distinction.

30 Monarchianism is a set of beliefs that emphasize God as being one person, in direct contrast to Trinitarianism which defines God as three persons coexisting con-substantially as one in being.

31 a 6th-century heretical doctrine maintaining that Christ had only one nature, the divine, and that this nature suffered at the Crucifixion

32 This becomes a question of *passibility* or capable of feeling suffering.

Passibility

The dictionary defines *passible* as incapable of feeling pain. [Physical pain?] It adds, “only the humanity of Jesus is regarded as passible.” This word comes from the Latin *impassibilis* meaning “incapable of suffering.” The early Greek fathers maintained that the incarnate Son suffered on the Cross ... but not God, Himself. Ignatius of Antioch (108/140 AD) thought God “who cannot suffer, accepted suffering (in Christ).”³³ Irenaeus affirmed that through the incarnation the invisible was made visible.. The impassible, passible.”³⁴ Believing that God could not repent because He could not lie or change His mind, feelings of love, pity, sorrow, jealousy, or wrath were only anthropomorphisms not descriptive or real emotions.³⁵ God was said to be changeless and nothing could disturb Him.

God is not passive, He cannot be tempted (James 1:13) or mocked (Galatians 6:7) or deceived (Jeremiah 11:20; John 2:24). He is never unwillingly coerced into any action. He is free from what William Temple called “gusts of feelings.”³⁶ But to say that God is incapable of suffering misrepresents the Old Testament representation of His dealings with Israel. To say God’s feelings are not human—we can accept—but not that they are not *real*. Martin Luther’s phrase “God striving with God” is a realistic description of His pain, especially while His Son hung in silent agony on the Cross. We need to confess that our language is weak in explaining Heaven’s truths, but we have a glimpse (Exodus 33:21-23)—and that is sufficient for faith (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Philippians 2:7-8

I like to see this scripture as God doing three things that cannot be done, since they fault human logic showing how unnatural it would have been for human reasoning to draw up such a plan.

1. Being in the form of God, Jesus took upon Himself the form of a servant. Though being God He lowered Himself to serve the Father’s plan for our Salvation. God, in the person of Jesus, becomes a servant not as a superficial act of service but to give His life. God is above all but not while incarnate which defies our logical understand of the order of things. The word “emptied” must mean that to be man, He relinquished His omnipotence and, other than on the Mount of Transfiguration, gave up the glories of heaven to suffer the scorn of sinful man.
2. He was made in the likeness of sinful man, of humanity (yet sinless). He grew up (Luke 2:40). He learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8). He was tempted (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus' incarnate life was filled with all the

33 Stott. 321 cp. Ignatius Ad Polycarp 3, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol I, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

34 Ibid. cp. Irenaeus *Adversus Haereses*

35 John Stott (321. fnt., 39) writes, “a useful survey of patristic quotations and references is given by J. K. Mozley in his *Impossibility of God: a Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1926).

36 William Temple, *Christus Veritas* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 269. cp Stott. 322

drama associated with being a member of humanity. But our understanding of God—to this point—was of a being above human suffering, weakness, and temptation.

3. He died. God is eternal! God cannot die. So thought the logical mind. Athanasius argued from reason, “For if He took a body to Himself at all, and—in reasonable consistency, as our argument shewed—appropriated it as His own, what was the Lord to do with it? or what should be the end of the body when the Word had once descended upon it? For it could not but die, inasmuch as it was mortal, and to be offered unto death on behalf of all: for which purpose it was that the Savior fashioned it for Himself.”³⁷

A Reason to Believe

But why must He be both God *and* man?

John Stott said it this way, “*The incarnation is indispensable to the atonement. In particular, it is essential to affirm that the love, the holiness and the will of the Father are identical with the love, holiness, and the will of the Son. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.*”³⁸

Dr. William Craig explained, “*It is Christ’s deity that makes his sacrifice uniquely efficacious for the expiation of the sins of mankind.*”³⁹

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5)

When Jesus rose again, man rose. Jesus is proof of the reality of our coming resurrection. “But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the (first) of those who have fallen asleep. (The general resurrection of all the saints).” (1 Corinthians 15:20)

“*He was overcome by a sense of God’s wisdom,*” explains John Stott, “*To devise such a costly plan of salvation that both meets our needs and also **satisfies His own character.***”⁴⁰

Why did my Jesus have to die?
Was I the reason? Was it I?
That hung Him there! Oh! Wondrous grace
That bore the shame of my disgrace.

37 Athanasius. 62-63

38 Stott. 159

39 Craig. 95

40 Stott. 219-220