

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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A Real Savior with a Real Body

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)

Since the ancient Gnostics disdained all things material, they fiercely rejected the Bible truth of God Incarnate. When Paul makes this statement, he is driving to the heart of the Gnostic error. First John deals with this point at great length. Notice John's emphatic confrontation of the Gnostic rejection of Jesus' literal physical body.

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (1 John 4:2-3)

Given the weight of John's point, it seems impossible for a person to deny Jesus' coming in a literal, physical human body and logically think of himself as a New Testament Christian. Paul's reference to this point in our study verse makes it likely that this blasphemous idea formed part of the earliest Gnostic belief.

Later quasi-Gnostic ideas made yet another attempt to invade the Christian community in the third century modalistic teachings of Sabellius.

Definition: Think of a being that can "morph", "shape shifter" from one form into another. There is only one being at any one time. Modalism views God as a being that has three different forms. Sometimes God exists in the "form" the "Father", sometimes the "Son", sometime the "Holy Spirit", BUT NEVER ALL THREE AT THE SAME TIME. The essential difference between Modalism and the Biblical trinity, is that in Modalism, the three members of the Godhood never exist at the same time and in Trinity, they always co-exist at the same time. Hence Modalism is defined in relation to Trinity as "Trinity where only one person of the Godhead exist at any one time" If the three modes of God are able to co-exist AT THE SAME TIME, then there is no essential difference with Modalism and Trinity doctrine. Now some Modalists, will disagree with our definition pointing to the fact that all three

modes did indeed manifest themselves at the baptism of Jesus. Modalists do not consider such triadic manifestations as normal but exceptions. Modalists do, however, openly admit that the "role/mode" of the "Son" did not exist before the incarnation and it will cease at the second coming as per 1 Cor. 15:23-28. Modalists do teach that generally, God took the role of Father in the OT, the Son during Jesus life on earth, and the Holy Spirit during the "church age". We merely ask Modalist one question to prove the point: "Who was Jesus praying to?" Modalism, therefore, not only contradicts the Bible, it assaults common sense by destroying the utterly obvious distinction in persons between the Father and the Son.¹

The chief critic of Sabellianism was [Tertullian](#), who labeled the movement "[Patripassianism](#)", from the Latin words *pater* for "father", and *passus* from the verb "to suffer" because it implied that the Father suffered on the Cross. It was coined by Tertullian in his work *Adversus Praxeas*,²

How sadly error begets error. What began as a non-Christian philosophical idea made repeated attempts at legitimizing itself as a genuine Christian belief.

The Geneva Bible footnotes this verse with a concise statement.

- l.** By these words is shown a distinction of the natures.
- m.** This word "dwelleth" notes out to us the joining together of those natures, so that God and man, is one Christ.
- n.** These words declare that the perfect Godhead is in Christ.

¹ Copied from <http://www.bible.ca/trinity/trinity-modalism.htm>.

² Copied from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabellianism> .

- o. The union of God and man, is substantial and essential.³

What is Paul's point in this verse? First, he makes it quite clear that the core of Jesus' unique, one and only one of a kind, being brings full Godhood, and full humanity together in one being. He is fully--and bodily--God, and He is fully man.

Jesus affirms that God, as to His essential nature or being, is spirit and not material.

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24)

Thus, we should not expect to see a physical form for God when we get to heaven. The only physical form related to God is the physical, but now glorified body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul affirms here that Jesus is not one of an endless number of intermediaries between God and men. He is the one and only such Mediator.

This text declares Christ to be the embodiment of the entire completeness of the Godhead. He is in no sense a lower-level deity. All that makes God **God**, resides fully in Christ. We should not think of quantities here, or the entirety of deity being in Christ would mean that the Father ceases to exist. Yet the claim is no doubt intended to affirm that Christ is unique and does not stand as one of a number of intermediaries between God and human existence. In a practical and pastoral sense, the assertion of verse 9 means that as Christians see and appreciate all they have in Christ, they will not be distracted by teachings that pretend to offer more exciting things.⁴

Sometimes preachers overstate the Bible case in their sincere desire to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ as God's one and only Savior of sinners. Have you ever heard the idea that God viewed us with intense hostility, ready at the drop of a hat to vaporize us with holy indignation? And the Holy Spirit likewise stood ready and eager to execute the sentence, but then Jesus, meek and mild, high and holy, stepped into the breach and pleaded our case. Jesus indeed stepped into the breach that separated God's chosen people from Himself, but He did so with the goodwill and full agreement of both Father and Holy Spirit. There was no debate in the Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit did not engage in a bare-knuckle fisticuff to see what

³ Copied from SwordSearcher Bible Software. (Colossians 2:9)

⁴ Ernest D. Martin, *Colossians, Philemon*, Believers church Bible commentary, 110 (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1993).

would happen to us. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were fully and ever agreed. What did Jesus say regarding His coming as that coming related to the Father's will?

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. (John 6:37-38)

Jesus' coming and dying for our sins wholly fulfilled the Father's will. When Jesus began to prepare the disciples for His imminent exit (John chapters 13-16), He did not tell them that He would create another "Comforter." He rather told them that He would send another of the same kind and quality as Himself, who would protect, instruct, and guide them in His absence. That other "Comforter" is the Holy Spirit.

While neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit possess a material or physical body, Paul teaches us here that they joined Jesus, the eternal Word, in the literal, material, human body that He inhabited during the Incarnation. It was not some mystical Gnostic emanation that took on a non-material appearance of a human body. It was rather that eternal Word that existed eternally with God and as God's full equal, who agreed to be "...made flesh, and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14)

Nothing in Scripture suggests that a perfect, a perfectly holy man, could atone for anyone else's sins. God in holiness required a sinless offering, but He also required more than a mere sinless human offering. Only if full deity joined full humanity could Jesus atone for our sins by dying a truly substitutionary death for all of those whom the Father gave to Him in eternal covenant. No, God did not die at Calvary. God was not buried in Joseph's tomb for three days and nights. But God indwelling Jesus sanctified Him and His sacrifice so that it became fully and wholly acceptable to the Father for the sins of His people.

Another effect of the Gnostic presence in the early church appears in Paul's First Corinthian letter. If all things material are despicable, there can be no physical, literal, bodily resurrection. Denial of the resurrection has taken many forms across the centuries, all of them insidious denials of a central and essential Bible truth. From Job, quite likely the oldest book of the Bible in terms of the date of its writing, to Revelation, the Bible consistently affirms this truth. How could one twist Job's words to teach anything else? "...yet **in my flesh** shall I see God...." (Job 19:26)

Elsewhere, Paul writes that because Hymenaeus had shipwrecked his faith, Paul

handed him over to Satan (I Tim. 1:19–20). With Philetus, Hymenaeus denied the doctrine of a bodily resurrection and destroyed the faith of some believers (II Tim. 2:17–18).³⁵ We are not sure how many people in Corinth questioned this doctrine, what influence they exerted in the church, or who they were. In view of the lengthy discourse on this particular doctrine, we assume that these Corinthians were influential.³⁶

Influenced by Greek philosophy, these church members argued that the soul (which is immortal) returns to God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7) but that the body is mortal and at death descends into the grave. The soul, they believed, is raised to be with God and enjoys eternal life but the body is annihilated. This is a truncated view of the resurrection, for God created Adam with body and soul as a complete human being. The soul and the body are God's creation and share in Christ's resurrection. Christ rose physically from the dead, as Paul proves with his list of Jesus' appearances (vv. 5–8). Over against the Greek philosophical view of some Corinthians, in chapter 15 Paul develops a scriptural perspective. In the next verse, he presents an argument that shows both contrast and logic.⁵

In our time denials of the resurrection demonstrate similar creativity and equally blasphemous rejection of this essential Bible doctrine. John affirms that the Gnostics of his day rejected that Jesus ever possessed a literal physical body.

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have

³⁵ ³⁵ Refer to George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), pp. 109–12, 413–14; J. N. Vorster, "Resurrection Faith in 1 Corinthians 15," *Neotest* 23 (1989): 287–307.

³⁶ ³⁶ Consult Harris, *Raised Immortal*, p. 15; *From Grave to Glory*, p. 190; R. A. Horsley, "How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? Spiritual Elitism in Corinth," *NovT* 20 (1978): 203–31.

⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, vol. 18, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary, 540 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001).

heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (1 John 4:3)

Apparently, these Gnostic teachers advocated that Jesus appeared in a non-material "spirit-body," but never possessed a literal physical body. John adopts some of the strongest language in the New Testament to reject this error, generally known as Docetic Gnosticism.

Similar ideas surface even in our time regarding both Jesus' body and our body that shall rise from the grave. Rather than accept the literal meaning of words and the simple language of Scripture, advocates of Gnostic heresy today claim that a non-material, vaporous "spirit body" shall arise from the graves at the Second Coming. The founder of Calvary Chapel, Chuck Smith, advocates that at death God "gives" each individual a new body, wholly rejecting the New Testament's teachings regarding the miracle that the same body that fell in death shall arise in glory and see God, precisely as Job described this truth in the words cited above.

If John wrote such pointed rejection of this Gnostic heresy, calling it "antichrist" and affirming that any such idea "...is not of God..." Bible believers today should be no less repulsed by the same teaching. The Christian faith is not a tangent of Greek philosophy or of ancient Gnosticism. It stands apart from every other worldview. Every effort to compromise and ally it with these pagan ideas has led followers of the efforts to abandon Biblical Christianity.

The fullness of God, of essential, true, and eternal deity, dwelling in Jesus, the Jesus who was conceived of a virgin and born in His physical, material body in Bethlehem, makes Him the one and only conduit of all the fullness that God purposed and covenanted to bestow upon His chosen people from the "days of eternity." (Marginal reading of Micah 5:2) This essential truth explains why Paul made this point so powerfully in his confrontation of Gnostic error in the Colossian church, and it equally directs our opposition to similar error in our day. The true Jesus of Scripture is too holy--too everything good and godly--to be regarded as anything less. We thus bow before Him in adoring worship.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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