

# The Person of Christ the Most Ineffable Effect of Divine Wisdom and Goodness

by John Owen

---

*The person of Christ is the most glorious and ineffable effect of divine wisdom and power, and it is the foundation of all acceptable religion and worship.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9:6, John 1:14, Acts 20:28, Romans 1:18-22, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Colossians 1:17-18, 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 1:1-3, Hebrews 11:1, 1 John 2:1-2

**Topics:** "The Person of Christ", "Divine Wisdom and Goodness"

---

## Description

John Owen emphasizes that the person of Christ is the most profound manifestation of divine wisdom and goodness, serving as the foundation of true religion and worship. He explains that while God is the ultimate object of worship, it is through the person of Christ that this divine essence is revealed, obligating rational beings to honor God. Owen highlights the mystery of Christ's incarnation as a miraculous union of divine and human natures, which surpasses all other acts of creation and providence. This union not only restores humanity but also establishes a new foundation for the relationship between God and man, making the Christian faith uniquely glorious. Ultimately, Owen calls believers to admire and embrace this mystery as the source of their faith and salvation.

---

## Transcript

The Person of Christ the most ineffable Effect of Divine Wisdom and Goodness -- Thence the next Cause of all True Religion -- In what sense it is so.

The person of Christ is the most glorious and ineffable effect of divine wisdom, grace, and power; and therefore is the next foundation of all acceptable religion and worship. The Divine Being itself is the first formal reason, foundation, and object of all religion. It all depends on taking God to be our God; which is the first of his commands. For religion, and the worship performed in it, is nothing but the due respect of rational creatures unto the divine nature, and its infinite excellencies. It is the glorifying of God as God; the way of expressing that respect being regulated by the revelation of his will. Yet the divine essence is not, in itself, the next and immediate cause of religious worship. But it is the manifestation of this Being and its excellencies, wherewith the mind of rational creatures is immediately affected, and whereby it is obliged to give that religious honour and worship which is due unto that Being, and necessary from our relation thereunto. Upon this manifestation, all creatures capable by an intelligent nature of a sense thereof, are indispensably obliged to give all divine honour and glory to God.

The way alone whereby this manifestation may be made, is by outward acts and effects. For, in itself, the divine nature is hid from all living, and dwelleth in that light whereunto no creature can approach. This, therefore, God first made, by the creation of all things out of nothing. The creation of man himself -- with the principles of a rational, intelligent nature, a conscience attesting his subordination unto God -- and the creation of all other things, declaring the glory of his wisdom, goodness, and power, was the immediate ground of all natural religion, and yet continues so to be. And the glory of it answers the means and ways of the manifestation of the Divine Being, existence, excellencies, and properties. And where this manifestation is despised or neglected, there God himself is so; as the apostle discourseth at large, Rom. i. 18-22.

But of all the effects of the divine excellencies, the constitution of the person of Christ as the foundation of the new creation, as "the mystery of Godliness," was the most ineffable and glorious. I speak not of his divine person absolutely; for his distinct personality and subsistence was by an internal and eternal act of the Divine Being in the person of the Father, or eternal generation -- which is essential unto the divine essence -- whereby nothing anew was outwardly wrought or did exist. He was not, he is not, in that sense, the effect of the divine wisdom and power of God, but the essential wisdom and power of God himself. But we speak of him only as incarnate, as he assumed our nature into personal subsistence with himself. His conception in the womb of the Virgin, as unto the integrity of human nature, was a miraculous operation of the divine power. But the prevention of that nature from any subsistence of its own -- by its assumption into personal union with the Son of God, in the first instance of its conception -- is that which is above all miracles, nor can be designed by that name. A mystery it is, so far above the order of all creating or providential operations, that it wholly transcends the sphere of them that are most miraculous. Herein did God glorify all the properties of the divine nature, acting in a way of infinite wisdom, grace, and condescension. The depths of the mystery hereof are open only unto him whose understanding it infinite, which no created understanding can comprehend. All other things were produced and effected by an outward emanation of power from God. He said, "Let there be light, and there was light." But this assumption of our nature into hypostatical union with the Son of God, this constitution of one and the same individual person in two natures so infinitely distinct as those of God and man -- whereby the Eternal was made in time, the Infinite became finite, the Immortal mortal, yet continuing eternal, infinite, immortal -- is that singular expression of divine wisdom, goodness, and power, wherein God will be admired and glorified unto all eternity. Herein was that change introduced into the whole first creation, whereby the blessed angels were exalted, Satan and his works ruined, mankind recovered from a dismal apostasy, all things made new, all things in heaven and earth reconciled and gathered into one Head, and a revenue of eternal glory raised unto God, incomparably above what the first constitution of all things in the order of nature could yield unto him.

In the expression of this mystery, the Scripture doth sometimes draw the veil over it, as that which we cannot look into. So, in his conception of the Virgin, with respect unto this union which accompanied it, it was told her, that "the power of the Highest should overshadow her:" Luke i. 35. A work it was of the power of the Most High, but hid from the eyes of men in the nature of it; and, therefore, that holy thing which had no subsistence of its own, which should be born of her, should "be called the Son of God," becoming one person with him. Sometimes it expresseth the greatness of the mystery, and leaves it as an object of our admiration, 1 Tim. iii. 16: "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." A mystery it is, and that of those dimensions as no creature can comprehend. Sometimes it putteth things together, as that the distance of the two natures illustrate the glory of the one person, John i. 14: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." But what Word was this? That which

was in the beginning, which was with God, which was God, by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made; who was light and life. This Word was made flesh, not by any change of his own nature or essence, not by a transubstantiation of the divine nature into the human, not by ceasing to be what he was, but by becoming what he was not, in taking our nature to his own, to be his own, whereby he dwelt 47among us. This glorious Word, which is God, and described by his eternity and omnipotence in works of creation and providence, "was made flesh," -- which expresseth the lowest state and condition of human nature. Without controversy, great is this mystery of godliness! And in that state wherein he visibly appeared as so made flesh, those who had eyes given them from above, saw "his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." The eternal Word being made flesh, and manifested therein, they saw his glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father. What heart can conceive, what tongue can express, the least part of the glory of this divine wisdom and grace? So also is it proposed unto us, Isa. ix. 6: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." He is called, in the first place, Wonderful. And that deservedly: Prov. xxx. 4. That the mighty God should be a child born, and the everlasting Father a son given unto us, may well entitle him unto the name of Wonderful.

Some amongst us say, that if there were no other way for the redemption and salvation of the church, but this only of the incarnation and mediation of the Son of God, there was no wisdom in the contrivance of it. Vain man indeed would be wise, but is like the wild ass's colt. Was there no wisdom in the contrivance of that which, when it is effected, leaves nothing but admiration unto the utmost of all created wisdom? Who hath known the mind of the Lord in this thing, or who hath been his counsellor in this work, wherein the mighty God became a child born to us, a son given unto us? Let all vain imaginations cease: there is nothing left unto the sons of men, but either to reject the divine person of Christ -- as many do unto their own destruction -- or humbly to adore the mystery of infinite wisdom and grace therein. And it will require a condescending charity, to judge that those do really believe the incarnation of the Son of God, who live not in the admiration of it, as the most adorable effect of divine wisdom.

The glory of the same mystery is elsewhere testified unto, Heb. i. 1-3: "God hath spoken unto us by his Son, by whom also he made the worlds; who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, upholding all things by the word of his power, by himself purged our sin." That he purged our sins by his death, and the oblation of himself therein unto God, is acknowledged. That this should be done by him by whom the worlds were made, who is the essential brightness of the divine glory, and the express image of the person of the Father therein who upholds, rules, sustains all things by the word of his power, whereby God purchased his 48church with his own blood, (Acts xx. 28,) is that wherein he will be admired unto eternity. See Phil. ii. 6-9.

In Isaiah (chap. vi.) there is a representation made of him as on a throne, filling the temple with the train of his glory. The Son of God it was who was so represented, and that as he was to fill the temple of his human nature with divine glory, when the fulness of the godhead dwelt in him bodily. And herein the seraphim, which administered unto him, had six wings, with two whereof they covered their faces, as not being able to behold or look into the glorious mystery of his incarnation: verses 2, 3; John xii. 39-41; ii. 19; Col. ii. 9. But when the same ministering spirits, under the name of cherubim, attended the throne of God, in the administration of his providence as unto the disposal and government of the world, they had four wings only, and covered not their faces, but steadily beheld the glory of it: Ezek. i. 6; x. 2, 3.

This is the glory of the Christian religion -- the basis and foundation that bears the whole superstructure -- the root whereon it grows. This is its life and soul, that wherein it differs from, and inconceivably excels, whatever was in true religion before, or whatever any false religion pretended unto. Religion, in its first constitution, in the estate of pure, uncorrupted nature, was orderly, beautiful and glorious. Man being made in the image of God, was fit and able to glorify him as God. But whereas, whatever perfection God had communicated unto our nature, he had not united it unto Himself in a personal union, the fabric of it quickly fell unto the ground. Want of this foundation made it obnoxious unto ruin. God manifested herein, that no gracious relation between him and our nature could be stable and permanent, unless our nature was assumed into personal union and subsistence with himself. This is the only rock and assured foundation of the relation of the church unto God, which, now, can never utterly fail. Our nature is eternally secured in that union, and we ourselves (as we shall see) thereby. "In him all things consist;" (Col. i. 17, 18;) wherefore, whatever beauty and glory there was in the relation that was between God and man, and the relation of all things unto God by man -- in the preservation whereof natural religion did consist -- it had no beauty nor glory in comparison of this which doth excel, or the manifestation of God in the flesh -- the appearance and subsistence of the divine and human natures in the same single individual person. And whereas God in that state had given man dominion "over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth," (Gen. i. 26,) it was all but an obscure representation of the exaltation of our nature in Christ -- as the apostle declares, Heb. ii. 6-9.

There was true religion in the world after the fall, both before and after the giving of the Law; a religion built upon and resolved into divine revelation. And as for the outward glory of it -- the administration that it was brought into under the tabernacle and temple -- it was beyond what is represented in the institutions of the gospel. Yet is Christian religion, our evangelical profession, and the state of the church thereon, far more glorious, beautiful, and perfect, than that state of religion was capable of, or could attain. And as this is evident from hence, because God in his wisdom, grace, and love to the church, hath removed that state, and introduced this in the room thereof; so the apostle proves it -- in all considerable instances -- in his Epistle to the Hebrews, written unto that purpose. There were two things, before, in religion; -- the promise, which was the life of it; and the institutions of worship under the Law, which were the outward glory and beauty of it. And both these were nothing, or had nothing in them, but only what they before proposed and represented of Christ, God manifested in the flesh. The promise was concerning him, and the institutions of worship did only represent him. So the apostle declares it, Col. ii. 17. Wherefore, as all the religion that was in the world after the fact was built on the promise of this work of God, in due time to be accomplished; so it is the actual performance of it which is the foundation of the Christian religion, and which gives it the pre-eminence above all that went before it. So the apostle expresseth it: (Heb. i. 1-3:) "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

All false religion pretended always unto things that were mysterious. And the more men could invent, or the devil suggest, that had an appearance of that nature, as sundry things were so introduced horrid and dreadful, the more reverence and esteem were reconciled unto it. But the whole compass of the craft of Satan and the imaginations of men could never extend itself unto the least resemblance of this mystery. And it is not amiss conjectured, that the apostle, in his description of it, 1 Tim. iii. 16, did reflect upon and condemn the vanity of the Eleusinian mysteries, which were of the greatest vogue and reputation among

the gentiles.

Take away the consideration hereof, and we despoil the Christian religion of all its glory, debasing it unto what Mohammedanism pretends unto, and unto what in Judaism was really enjoyed.

50The faith of this mystery enables the mind wherein it is -- rendering it spiritual and heavenly, transforming it into the image of God. Herein consists the excellency of faith above all other powers and acts of the soul -- that it receives, assents unto, and rests in, things in their own nature absolutely incomprehensible. It is "The evidence of things not seen" -- that which makes evident, as by demonstration, those things which are no way objected unto sense, and which reason cannot comprehend. The more sublime and glorious -- the more inaccessible unto sense and reason -- the things are which we believe; the more are we changed into the image of God, in the exercise of faith upon them. Hence we find this most glorious effect of faith, or the transformation of the mind into the likeness of God, no less real, evident, and eminent in many, whose rationally comprehensive abilities are weak and contemptible, in the eye of that wisdom which is of this world, than in those of the highest natural sagacity, enjoying the best improvements of reason. For "God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom:" James ii. 5. However they may be poor, and, as another apostle speaketh, "foolish, weak, base, and despised;" (1 Cor. i. 27, 28;) yet that faith which enables them to assent unto and embrace divine mysteries, renders them rich in the sight of God, in that it makes them like unto him.

Some would have all things that we are to believe to be levelled absolutely unto our reason and comprehension -- a principle which, at this day, shakes the very foundations of the Christian religion. It is not sufficient, they say, to determine that the faith or knowledge of any thing is necessary unto our obedience and salvation, that it seems to be fully and perspicuously revealed in the Scripture -- unless the things so revealed be obvious and comprehensible unto our reason; an apprehension which, as it ariseth from the pride which naturally ensues on the ignorance of God and ourselves, so it is not only an invention suited to debase religion, but an engine to evert the faith of the church in all the principal mysteries of the Gospel -- especially of the Trinity and the incarnation of the Son of God. But faith which is truly divine, is never more in its proper exercise -- doth never more elevate the soul into conformity unto God -- than when it acts in the contemplation and admiration of the most incomprehensible mysteries which are proposed unto it by divine revelation.

Hence things philosophical, and of a deep rational indagation, find great acceptance in the world -- as, in their proper place, they do deserve. Men are furnished with proper measures of them, and they find them proportionate unto the principles of their own understandings. 51But as for spiritual and heavenly mysteries, the thoughts of men for the most part recoil, upon their first proposal, nor will be encouraged to engage in a diligent inquiry into them -- yea, commonly reject them as foolish, or at least that wherein they are not concerned. The reason is that given in another case by the apostle: "All men have not faith;" (2 Thess. iii. 2;) which makes them absurd and unreasonable in the consideration of the proper objects of it. But where this faith is, the greatness of the mysteries which it embraceth heightens its efficacy, in all its blessed effects, upon the soul. Such is this constitution of the person of Christ, wherein the glory of all the holy properties and perfections of the divine nature is manifested, and doth shine forth. So speaks the apostle, 2 Cor. iii. 18: "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory." This glory which we behold, is the glory of the face of God in Jesus Christ, (chap. iv. 6,) or the glorious representation which is made of him in the person of Christ, whereof we shall treat

afterwards. The glass wherein this glory is represented unto us -- proposed unto our view and contemplation -- is divine revelation in the gospel. Herein we behold it, by faith alone. And those whose view is steadfast, who most abound in that contemplation by the exercise of faith, are thereby "changed into the same image, from glory to glory" -- or are more and more renewed and transformed into the likeness of God, so represented unto them.

That which shall, at last, perfectly effect our utmost conformity to God, and, therein, our eternal blessedness -- is vision, or sight. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is:" 1 John iii. 2. Here faith begins what sight shall perfect hereafter. But yet "we walk by faith, and not by sight:" 2 Cor. v. 7. And although the life of faith and vision differ in degrees -- or, as some think, in kind -- yet have they both the same object, and the same operations, and there is a great cognation between them. The object of vision is the whole mystery of the divine existence and will; and its operation is a perfect conformity unto God -- a likeness unto him -- wherein our blessedness shall consist. Faith hath the same object, and the same operations in its degree and measure. The great and incomprehensible mysteries of the Divine Being -- of the will and wisdom of God -- are its proper objects; and its operation, with respect unto us, is conformity and likeness unto him. And this it doth, in a peculiar manner, in the contemplation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and herein we have our nearest approaches unto the life of vision, and the effects of it. For therein, "beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory;" which, perfectly to consummate, is the effect of sight in glory. The exercise of faith herein doth more raise and perfect the mind -- more dispose it unto holy, heavenly frames and affections -- than any other duty whatever.

To be nigh unto God, and to be like unto him, are the same. To be always with him, and perfectly like him, according to the capacity of our nature, is to be eternally blessed. To live by faith in the contemplation of the glory of God in Christ, is that initiation into both, whereof we are capable in this world. The endeavours of some to contemplate and report the glory of God in nature -- in the works of creation and providence -- in the things of the greater and the lesser world -- do deserve their just commendation; and it is that which the Scripture in sundry places calls us unto. But for any there to abide, there to bound their designs -- when they have a much more noble and glorious object for their meditations, viz., the glory of God in Christ -- is both to despise the wisdom of God in that revelation of himself, and to come short of that transforming efficacy of faith in the contemplation hereof, whereby we are made like unto God. For hereunto alone doth it belong, and not unto any natural knowledge, nor to any knowledge of the most secret recesses of nature.

I shall only say, that those who are in conversant with these objects of faith -- whose minds are not delighted in the admiration of, and acquiescence in, things incomprehensible, such as is this constitution of the person of Christ -- who would reduce all things to the measure of their own understandings, or else wilfully live in the neglect of what they cannot comprehend -- do not much prepare themselves for that vision of these things in glory, wherein our blessedness doth consist.

Moreover, this constitution of the person of Christ being the most admirable and ineffable effect of divine wisdom, grace, and power, it is that alone which can bear the weight of the whole superstructure of the mystery of godliness -- that whereinto the whole sanctification and salvation of the church is resolved -- wherein alone faith can find rest and peace. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ:" 1 Cor. iii. 11. Rest and peace with God is that which we seek after. "What shall we do to be saved?" In this inquiry, the acts of the mediatory office of Christ are, in the Gospel, first presented unto us -- especially his oblation and intercession. Through them is he able to save unto the uttermost those that

come to God by him. But there were oblations for sin, and intercessions for sinners, under the Old Testament; yet of them all doth the apostle affirm, that they could not make them perfect that came unto God by them, not take away conscience condemning for sin: Heb. x. 1-4. Wherefore, 53it is not these things in themselves that can give us rest and peace, but their relation unto the person of Christ. The oblation and intercession of any other would not have saved us. Hence, for the security of our faith, we are minded that "God redeemed the church with his own blood:" Acts xx. 28. He did so who was God, as he was manifested in the flesh. His blood alone could purge our consciences from dead works, who did offer himself unto God, through the eternal Spirit: Heb. ix. 14. And when the apostle -- for our relief against the guilt of sin -- calleth us unto the consideration of intercession and propitiation, he mindeth us peculiarly of his person by whom they are performed, 1 John ii. 1, 2: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." And we may briefly consider the order of these things.

1. We suppose, in this case, conscience to be awakened unto a sense of sin, and of apostasy from God thereby. These things are now generally looked on as of no great concernment unto us -- by some made a mock of -- and, by the most, thought easy to be dealt withal -- at time convenient. But when God fixeth an apprehension of his displeasure for them on the soul -- if it be not before it be too late -- it will cause men to look out for relief.

2. This relief is proposed in the gospel. And it is the death and mediation of Christ alone. By them peace with God must be obtained, or it will cease for ever. But,

3. When any person comes practically to know how great a thing it is for an apostate sinner to obtain the remission of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified, endless objections through the power of unbelief will arise unto his disquietment. Wherefore,

4. That which is principally suited to give him rest, peace, and satisfaction -- and without which nothing else can so do -- is the due consideration of, and the acting of faith upon, this infinite effect of divine wisdom and goodness, in the constitution of the person of Christ. This at first view will reduce the mind unto that conclusion, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible." For what end cannot be effected hereby? What end cannot be accomplished that was designed in it? Is any thing too hard for God? Did God ever do any thing like this, or make use of any such means for any other end whatever? Against this no objection can arise. On this consideration of him, faith apprehends Christ to be -- as he is indeed -- the power of God, and the wisdom of God, unto the salvation of them that do believe; and therein doth it find rest with peace.

---

Source:

<https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-owen/the-person-of-christ-the-most-ineffable-effect-of-divine-wisdom-and-goodness/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**