

Exegesis

Vs. 8 – Unlike Thomas who asked for clarification, Philip had a request: “Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.”¹ The Greek word used here for “show” is **δεικνύω** (*dike-noo'-o*) and means to, metaphorically, “give proof” (cf. Ja. 2:18; 3:13), or, in a literal sense, it means to “reveal,” even “expose” something to view (cf. 20:20; Mar. 1:44). Philip used the word *literally* and so wanted Jesus to bring God before them so that they might actually see him with their eyes (cf. vs. 7).

In theological terms, the apostle was requesting what we might call a “theophany,” or a visible manifestation of God.¹ For instance, the Greeks in Delphi used to hold a festival called the “*Theophaneia*,” in which they would display a statue of Apollo to mark the beginning of spring.² Admittedly, Philip wasn't asking Jesus for a statue of the “Father.” He likely had in his mind the burning bush of Exodus 3 or how God appeared as a cloud to the Israelites encamped around Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:9). Or maybe he was thinking of Isaiah's vision where said he saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isa. 6:1). Whatever OT passage inspired this request, it is clear that Philip wanted a *visible* manifestation of God. And this, he thought, was a modest request since he confidently asserts that they would finally be satisfied (“it sufficeth us”). It was as if he were saying, “Reveal God to us, Lord. Just do this last thing, and then we'll be content.”

Vs. 9-10a – Jesus' response to Philip isn't nearly as cordial as those to Thomas: “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?” Notice how, unlike his words above (vs. 1-4, 6-7), these are explicitly directed to Phillip. He betrayed such a profound ignorance that he ended up offending the Lord. Though the first “you” is plural, and so all eleven men share in this rebuke, Philip, nevertheless, becomes the focal point.

Before rushing to Philip's defense, we should consider if Jesus' hurt feelings are unreasonable. The masses might be forgiven for not comprehending Jesus' identity.³ But what excuse could Philip give? Or, for that matter, how could any of the disciples justify their ineptitude at this

¹ For more on this topic, see Poythress, Vern, “Theophany,” *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/theophany/>, [accessed September 20, 2023].

² General Editors, “Theophany,” *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theophany>, [accessed September 20, 2023].

³ However, sadly, even this is not true (cf. Mat. 10:15; 12:38-42).

point? Naïveté is excusable in children, not adults; the apostles were supposed to have grown over the years and miles as they followed Jesus, not remain immature in their understanding. They were the closest *to* him. They walked the longest *with* him and saw the most *from* him. They—more than any other—heard everything that Jesus said and likely listened to those same things over and over again as they traveled from town to town. How could Philip make such a request? Did he not know who Jesus was yet? The Lord's sadness is warranted. Phillip and the others don't have a leg to stand on.

Admittedly, Jesus' unity with God is a complex and complicated concept. Trying to wrap one's head around the idea that "he that hath seen [Jesus] hath seen the Father" is no easy task (cf. 12:45; 13:20). Or, believing that as Jesus is "in the Father" so the Father is in Jesus, while not impossible, is hard to accept (cf. 6:60; Ac. 26:27-29). But, surely, after being with the Lord for "so long" (as he so poignantly pointed out), the Apostles, *of all people*, should've been able to grasp this principle, right? They were there when, after being confronted for healing a man on the Sabbath, the Lord said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (5:16). Did they not see that Jesus made himself equal with God at that moment? Even Jesus' enemies could make that connection (cf. 5:17). Did they not hear Jesus declare, in no uncertain terms, "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58)? Do they not remember how he doubled down on this in 10:30 when he said, "I and my Father are one"? Were they not the ones who picked up the leftovers after Jesus provided bread for thousands in a desert (6:1-15) as God did with the manna in the wilderness (Ex. 16)? And above all else, they witnessed a man who had been dead for *four days* walk out of a tomb at the word of Jesus (11:43-44)! From his perspective, the Son of God could not be any clearer than he has already been. Thus, we can understand why he took such offense at Philip's request. The disciple had asked to see God when God incarnate already stood before him.

Vs. 10b-11 – Jesus says, "...the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." With Jesus' return to plural pronouns, and much to Philip's relief, no doubt, he begins to address the whole group again. That Jesus' words and works are not his own, but God's, is a point that John goes to great lengths to highlight (cf. 3:34; 5:20, 23-24, 36; 8:18, 28, 38, 47; 9:3-4; 10:25, 32, 37-38; 12:49).⁴ The Father speaks through the Son; Jesus' words are God's. But if that's a bridge too far, the Lord contends that the disciples, at the very least, ought to "believe...for the very work's sake." The disciples lived in a unique age wherein they saw the miracles of Christ with their own eyes. And even though

⁴ Köstenberger (2008), p. 432.

believing without seeing is faith in its purest and best form (cf. 20:29; Heb. 11:1), believing on account of the signs was still preferable to not believing at all. Sometimes, Jesus' words might be hard to understand, but his works were self-evident. Who else but God could do the things that Jesus did (cf. 9:30-33)?

A word of caution is in order. We must be careful not to conclude that Jesus was a mere puppet of God, acting thoughtlessly without a will of his own. Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man *at the same time*—i.e., the hypostatic union.⁵ To deny that Jesus had a will is to veer off the well-trodden and secure road of orthodoxy, ending up in the ditch of heresy. For example, Apollinaris the Younger, a fourth-century bishop in Laodicea (modern-day Turkey), taught that like gray is neither black nor white, Jesus was neither man nor God but a mixture of human and divine nature. In asserting this, Apollinaris denied that Jesus, the man, had a true will of his own, for, he reasoned, wherever "there was free will, there was sin."⁶ This would later be called "Apollinarianism," after its namesake, and outright condemned in the First Council of Constantinople in AD 381. After this, all of Apollinaris' works were carefully collected and burned.

But why go to such lengths? Why is maintaining that Christ had his own free will so important? The Scriptures teach us that though Jesus was aligned with God's will, he nonetheless had a mind of his own (cf. 6:38; 8:29; Lu. 22:42). We must not unify God the Father and God the Son to such an extent that we "obliterate all distinctions between them."⁷ If Christ was without his own agency, he would be unable to redeem our natures, particularly our fallen free will. How could he show us the way if he did not live the way himself? Jesus Christ, like us, was tempted in every way, but, unlike us, he never sinned (cf. Heb. 4:14-16). The testing of Jesus was not theatre but real-life trials. Though the things he was tempted with might be hard for us to relate to, the substance of those temptations was all too familiar to the human experience. For instance, only Jesus could be enticed to turn stone into bread (Mat. 4:3), but who cannot relate to the pull of self-gratification or self-preservation? Without Jesus demonstrating for us how he brought his will under that of the Father (cf. Mat. 4:4), we would have no hope of following God (cf. 3:3-7; Rom. 6:4-8; 7:17-25; Gal. 2:20; 5:24). The death and denial of self is the *primary* prerequisite for the follower of Jesus (cf. Mat. 16:25) and *no one* better illustrated that for us than the Lord himself (cf. Phil. 2:5-8).

⁵ General Editors, "What is the hypostatic union?" *Got Questions*, <https://www.gotquestions.org/hypostatic-union.html>, [accessed September 20, 2023].

⁶ Walter, V. L., "Apollinarianism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Second Edition, edited by Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 81-82.

⁷ Carson (1991), p. 494.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 47

Text: John 14:8-11

Did you ever ask a question or make a comment that accidentally offended someone? If so, you're in good company with the disciples, particularly Phillip. Tonight, we'll explore why a simple request like "show us the Father," was so offensive to Jesus. Here's a clue: it wasn't that the request itself was particularly disrespectful; instead, it was who was doing the asking that made it so rude.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: