

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Number:	41		Gary L.W. Johnson
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THE MAJESTIC SON

In the most recent issue of *Modern Reformation*, Nick Batzig has an article entitled, “The Role of The Spirit In Current Trinitarian Controversies,” in which he examines the historical background of the debate and rightly concludes this debate has serious implications, and of this much we can be sure, “While there are a number of biblical doctrines that are of a secondary or tertiary nature, the doctrine of the Trinity is not one of them. There is no greater truth with which we may fill our minds than that which concerns the one true and living God who has revealed himself to us in his word as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we turn to his word, we find that blessed truth that has been articulated and defended by the church throughout the centuries – that each member of the Godhead is ‘the same in substance, equal in power and glory.’ We must stand against any insistence of subordination among the persons of the Godhead in his being. Not to do so is to jeopardize the self-revelation of the one true and living God.”¹ Historically Evangelicals have *always* been Trinitarians. Kermit Zarley, however, claims otherwise. Who is Kermit Zarley? He was a professional golfer for many years, but now he claims to be a top-notch Biblical scholar and has written a book denouncing in the strongest language the doctrine of the Trinity, especially the deity of Christ. His book, *The Restitution of Jesus Christ*, was originally published under the penname “Servetus The Evangelical” (after the 16th century heretic Michael Servetus). Zarley has a B.A. degree in business, and, he tells us, *one* year of New Testament Greek. Zarley declares up front that although God indwelt Jesus in a unique way, Jesus was not the eternal Son of God, he did not preexist, he certainly was not eternally begotten – he was simply a man.²

Zarley’s book is anything but original – he simply rehashes the same old heretical interpretations that have plagued the church down through the centuries. Why then am I even bothering with this book? Because Zarley and I share a common link to the late S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. On his website, Zarley claims Dr. Johnson as one of his mentors. I studied under Dr. Johnson at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the mid-1980’s and served as his teaching assistant. In addition to taking his classes in New Testament exegesis (Romans, Galatians and Hebrews), systematic theology, I have listened to hundreds of his sermons on tape from Believer’s Chapel, where he preached for over 40 years. Dr. Johnson mentioned Zarley often, since he helped Zarley start Bible studies on the PGA tour back in the 70’s and 80’s. Dr. Johnson died in 2004, and Zarley’s book was not published until 2008. This much I know for sure: Dr. Johnson would have totally repudiated Zarley’s book were he alive today. Zarley’s handling of the epistle to the Hebrews is a case in point. Look at this convoluted reasoning by Zarley: “One thing seems to rule out the actual preexistence of Jesus in this Hebrews letter. For Jesus to be both Savior and High Priest, He had to be like us in every way except sin. The author of Hebrews explains concerning Jesus, ‘He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest’ (Heb. 2:17). Again, this requires that Jesus did not literally preexist since the rest of us humans did not. It thus seems that God created the world ‘through’ Jesus simply by having Him in mind.”³ Consider this absurdity:

“Although Jesus had never possessed an ontological status, the NT often states that He obtained such when He ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God on God’s throne. No authors of Scripture emphasize this heavenly exaltation of Jesus more than does the author of Hebrews (Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). And, like other Scripture writers, he explains that Jesus’ heavenly exaltation fulfills Ps. 110:1. This brings us back to the prologue in this epistle, which states that Jesus became superior to the angels through His heavenly exaltation. Why did God exalt Jesus? Again, it was because of His righteous life and the fulfillment of His divinely-appointed mission. Neither the author of Hebrews nor any NT writer ever indicates that when Jesus sat down at God’s right hand, He reclaimed a position He previously had held. Jesus’ exaltation signified that it was something new He acquired which He had not previously possessed. In conclusion, *God rewarding Jesus for His obedient life by inviting Him to sit with Him on His throne is one of the strongest evidences that Jesus cannot be God.*”⁴

H. P. Liddon, in his classic work on the deity of Christ, accurately captures the meaning of the epistle: “The angels are ministers of the Divine Will; they are engaged in stated services enjoined on them towards creatures lower than themselves, yet redeemed by Christ. But He, in His glory above the heavens, is invested with attributes to which the highest angel could never pretend. In His crucified but now enthroned Humanity, He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high; He is seated there, as being Heir of all things; the angels are themselves but a portion of His vast inheritance. The dignity of His titles is indicative of His essential rank. Indeed He is expressly addressed as God; and when He is termed the Son of God, or the Son, the full sense of that term is drawn out in language adopted, as it seems, from the Book of Wisdom, and not less explicit than that which we have been considering in the Epistle to the Colossians, although of a distinct type. That He is One with God as having streamed forth eternally from the Father’s Essence, like a ray of light from the parent fire with which it is unbrokenly joined, is implied in the expression *apangasma tas doxas*. That He is both personally distinct from, and yet literally equal to, Him of Whose Essence He is the adequate imprint, is taught us in the phrase *hypostaseōs*. By Him (*archēgos*), He is now set down in endless rest and infinite glory, able (as faith’s *teleutas*) to save *eis to panteles* all who follow Him in the same way of faith. Thitherwards, then, to ‘*fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore*,’ ‘*at God’s right hand*’ (Ps. xvi. 11), our course is to be directed after Him.”⁵ The noted 19th century Biblical scholar Franz Delitzsch wrote a massive two-volume commentary on Hebrews. Regarding the nature of the throne, he writes, “The meaning is not (any more than at ch. iii. 1) that our Lord’s throne is placed at the right hand of the throne of God, but that He sits on the right hand (of God and with God) on the same throne.”⁶ This is a very implicit affirmation of Christ’s full deity. Guthrie observes that the only other place in the New Testament where the term *majesty* is used is in Jude 25, where it occurs as a description of God.⁷

CONCLUSION: Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664) wrote a number of theological works, but he is best known for his book *Looking Unto Jesus*, which is a detailed exposition of the text in Hebrews 12:1, 2. “What is this right hand of God? I answer, 1. Negatively, It is not any corporal right hand of God; if we speak properly, God hath neither right hand, nor left hand; for God is not a body, but a Spirit, or a spiritual substance. 2. Positively, the right hand of God, is the majesty, dignity, dominion, power, and glory of God. ‘The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly,’ Ps. 118:15. ‘Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power, thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy,’ Exod. 15:6. ‘Thou hast a mighty arm, strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand,’ Ps. 89:13. Mine hand hath laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens,’ Isa. 48:13. I know some of our divines make this right hand of God something inferior to God’s own power, but others speak of it as every way equal, and I know no absurdity to follow on it. What is it to sit at the right hand of God? I answer, it is not any corporal session at God’s right hand, as some picture him with a crown of gold on his head, sitting on a throne, as if he had no other gesture in heaven but sitting still; which Stephen contradicts, saying, ‘I

see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God,' Acts 7:56. The words sitting or standing, are both metaphorical, and borrowed from the custom of kings, who place those they honor, and to whom they commit the power of government, at their right hand; more particularly, this sitting at God's right hand implies two things. 1. His glorious exaltation. 2. The actual administration of his kingdom. Christ is exalted, 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,' Phil. 2:9. This session is the supreme dignity and glory given by the Father unto Christ after this ascension; this session is the peerless exaltation of the Mediator in his kingdom of glory. But how was Christ exalted? I answer, 1. In regard of his divine nature, not really, or in itself. Impossible it was, that the divine nature should receive any intrinsical improvement, or glory, because all fullness of glory essentially belonged unto it: but declaratorily, or by way of manifestation; so it was that his divinity, during the time of his humiliation, lay hidden and over-shadowed as the light of a candle is hidden in a dark and close lantern; but now in his session that divinity in glory which he had always with his Father, was showed forth and declared, 'He was declared to be the Son of God with power,' Rom. 1:4, both at his resurrection and at his session. 2. In regard of his human nature; and yet that must be understood soberly, for I cannot think that Christ's human nature was at all exalted in regard of the grace of personal union, or in regard of the habitual perfections of his human soul, because he possessed all these from the beginning: but in regard of those interceptions of the beams of the Godhead, and divine glory: and in respect of the restraints of that sense and sweetness, and feeling operations of the beatifical vision during his humiliation; in these respects Christ was exalted in his human nature, and had all the glory from the Deity communicated to it, which possibly in any way it was capable of. There was a time, when the office which Christ undertook for us made him a man of sorrow, but when he had finished that dispensation, then he was filled with unmatchable glory, which before his session he enjoyed not; there was a time when the natural consequence and flowings of Christ's glory from that personal union was stayed and hindered, by special dispensation, for the working of our salvation; but when that miraculous stay was once removed, and the work of our redemption fully finished, then he was exalted beyond the capacity or comprehension of all the angels of heaven: 'To which of the angels said he at any time, sit at my right hand?' Heb. 1:13, in this respect it is said, that God highly exalted him; exalted he was in his resurrection, ascension, but never so high as at his session; in his resurrection he was exalted with Jonah from the lower parts to the upper parts of the earth; in his ascension he was exalted with Elijah above the clouds, above the stars, above the heavens; but in his session he is exalted to the highest place in heaven, even to the right hand of God, 'far above all heavens, that he might fill all things,' Eph. 4:10."⁸ Dr. Johnson and I often discussed the value of the Puritan writers like Ambrose. Zarley, on the other hand, completely ignores them. What a pity.

ENDNOTES

¹N. Batzig, "The Role of The Spirit In Current Trinitarian Controversaries," *Modern Reformation* (Vol. 27/No. 3/May-June 2018), p. 57.

²The book was self-published. On Zarley's website his ego is on full display, claiming his book to be the most scholarly and comprehensive refutation of the dogma of the Trinity ever written. I do not share that grandiose assessment.

³Zarley, p. 481.

⁴p. 482.

⁵H. P. Liddon, *The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1979), p. 326. Dr. Johnson highly recommended this book. Zarley makes no reference to it.

⁶F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on The Epistle to the Hebrews II* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 306.

⁷Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1983), p. 170.*

⁸Isaac Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus* (rpt. Sprinkle Publications, 1986), p. 501.