

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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CHRIST PREEMINENT TO THE PROPHETS; GOD'S LAST WORD TO MEN

The first few verses of ch. 1 give a brief summary of the epistle's main subject: The finality of the absolute Revelation of God in Jesus Christ as in bold contrast to that of the Old Testament Revelation. As Hughes remarks, "The author plunges straight into the exposition of the grand theme, the truth of which he is intent on communicating to his readers."¹

OUTLINE:

The first three verses may be divided into two parts;

- (1.) The contrast between the Old Revelation and the New (vv. 1-2)
- (2.) The nature and work of the Son (v. 3)

I. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW REVELATIONS (vv. 1-2) (contrasted in three aspects)

- A. METHOD—The Old Revelation was made "in many portions and in many ways", (incomplete); the New Revelation is made in Him who is His "Son" and this is completed (cf. Jn. 1:14, 18).
- B. TIME – one is "long ago" and the other is "in these last days"; the stress is only on what God has now said once, and once for all, and in One.
- C. MESSENGERS – Those by whom God spoke long ago were "the prophets"; there were many. God's final Revelation is by the One, His only begotten "son". In both cases, however, it should be noted that it was God who was speaking. The Greek word LALESAS is being used in the completed sense (aorist).

II. THE NATURE AND WORK OF THE SON (v. 3)

"Immediately on speaking of the Son," comments Griffith-Thomas, "the Epistle bursts out into a description of His glories."²

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE SON

1. Christ the Heir (v. 2)
2. Christ the Creator (v. 2)
3. Christ the Revealer (v. 3)
4. Christ the Sustainer (v. 3)
5. Christ the Redeemer (v. 3)
6. Christ the Ruler (v. 3)

B. THE THREEFOLD WORK OF CHRIST

1. Prophet (v. 2)
2. Priest (v. 3)
3. King (v. 3)

NOTE: We must understand that when the Scriptures speak of Christ in this threefold capacity, it refers not only to His state of humiliation, but also His state of exaltation.

1. PROPHET –

- a. The Scriptural idea of a prophet – The prophet is one who speaks forth from God. There are two elements involved:
 - 1). PASSIVE (RECEPTIVE) – the receiving of divine revelation (dreams, visions, verbal communications). Without receiving, the prophet cannot give out the revelation.
 - 2). ACTIVE (PRODUCTIVE) – the passing on the received revelation to the people.
- b. The duty of a prophet – to reveal the will of God to the people, whether it was a promise, exhortation, instruction, or rebuke. (cf. Deut. 18:18; Isaiah 6; Jer. 1:4-10; I Pet 1:11)
- c. The prophetic office of Christ -- He is the fulfillment of Deut. 18:15; so says Acts 3:22-23. He calls Himself a prophet (cf. Luke 13:33). He has a message from God (cf. Jn. 8:26-28; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24)

2. PRIEST --

It is to this aspect of the work of Christ that the book of Hebrews speaks so fully. As Berkof has written, "In the New Testament there is only a single book in which He is called priest, namely, the Epistle to the Hebrews."³

- a. The Scriptural idea of a Priest – Whereas the Prophet was appointed to be God's representative to the people, the Priest was man's representative with God. However, both were appointed by God. A Priest had basically a twofold work;
 - 1). offering gifts and sacrifices for sins
 - 2). Intercession for the people (cf. Heb 5:1; 7:25; Lev. 9:11)
- b. The work of Christ as Priest
 - 1). Offering gifts and sacrifice for sins. The sacrifice of Christ for sin in Scripture is regarded as that of atoning or as expiatory and vicarious (not personal). Christ's sacrifice was one of propitiation (cf. Rom. 3:21-26).

NOTE: Berkhof remarks, "The striking thing in the Scriptural representation of the priestly work of Christ is that Christ appears in them as both priest and sacrifice."⁴

- 2). The work of Christ in intercession. This aspect is based upon His work of atoning for the sins of the people.

NOTE: "The sacrificial work of Christ and His intercessory work are simply two different aspects of His atoning work, and, therefore, the scope of the one can be no wider than that of the other. Now Christ very definitely limits His intercessory work, when He says, "I pray not for the world, but for those whom Thou hast given Me." (Jn. 17:9) Why should He limit His intercessory prayer if He had actually paid the price for all?"⁵

- a.) The characteristics of Christ's intercession
 1. Constant (Rom. 8:33-34; Heb. 7:25)
 2. Authoritative (cf. Jn. 14:16; 16:26; 17:9, 15, 20)

NOTE: The Son never petitions the Father like creature to Creator; rather He, as a Son, requests. As Trench has said, "The consciousness of His equal dignity, of His potent and prevailing intercession speaks out in this, that often as He asks or declares that He will ask anything of the Father, it is always EROTO, EROTASO, an asking that is, as upon equal terms (Jn. 14:16; 16:26; 17:9, 15, 20), never AITEO or AITASO."⁶

3. Efficacious The prayers of Christ have never, nor will ever fail, for the Father always hears Him (Jn. 11:42). In this we may take great comfort.

3. KING --

Note the emphasis our text places on Christ's role in creation. Letham observes, "The Son is creator and ruler of the universe, in all its multi-faceted diversity (verse 16). 'All things' is a comprehensive statement, excluding nothing. Tangible and nontangible, spiritual and material, angels and human beings: Everything owes its existence to the Son. The universe was created in him. Not only did he originate it, but it was made in union with him as its head. All things were made through him, as the agent in the actual work of creation. This is paralleled in Hebrews by the comment that God made the ages through the Son (Heb. 1:2). In the background is the Genesis account where God shaped and structures the dark, watery and empty world by his word (cf. Heb 1:3). Moreover, the Son is the goal of creation: Everything was made for him. The reason the universe exists is found in Christ. The goal to which it is directed is conformity to Christ. Its unity is in him."⁷

CONCLUSION:

Our good friend Rick Phillips has an excellent summary of our text: "What this passage tells us about Christ reminds us not merely that we must hold to him in faith, but also how to draw near to him in faith. This comes through our understanding of his three offices as prophet and priest and king. Jesus is our King. We need to be ruled and governed, protected and led. Let us therefore bow before him and crown him Lord of all, flying his banner at the gates of our hearts and forsaking all other kingdoms and rulers. Jesus is our Prophet. We need truth; he is the Truth and he speaks the truth. Let us therefore come to his Word seeking light and forsaking all the false prophets who would lead us astray. Jesus is our Priest. So we should readily come to him for cleansing, for forgiveness, for interceding prayers, and for a full and loving reconciliation with God the Father. Let us therefore confess our great need for his blood and for his ongoing priestly intercession in heaven. Let us lay hold of the cross, forsaking all claim to any merit of our own. In all these ways, through his three offices, let us commit ourselves to Jesus Christ alone, who is able to save us to the uttermost, to the glory of God the Father."⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 35, 36.

² W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Hebrews, A Devotional Commentary*, (Zondervan, 1961) p. 22.

³ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1938) p. 362.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 395.

⁶ R.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1953) p. 145.

⁷ Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, (ivp, 1993) p. 200.

⁸ Richard Phillips, *Hebrews: Reformed Expository Commentary* (P & R, 2006) p. 24.