

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Revelation		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	40		Gary L.W. Johnson
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LOOKING BACK AT A PORTRAIT OF THE COMING KING (Part 2)

We are once again examining the symbols used to depict the glorified Jesus. There are eight symbols in Revelation 1:9-17 that give us a portrait of Christ. “The symbols seen by John in the vision reveal not what Jesus looks like but what he is like – his identity as the searcher of hearts, full of consuming holiness and boundless wisdom, the perfect priest standing for his people before the Father, the perfect king defending them against the devil by his invincible Word. Revelation’s visions show us how things are, not how they look to the physical eye.”¹ I’ve looked at the first four in Part 1 of this study. Today we turn our attention to the remaining four.

5. **THE THUNDERING VOICE OF THE KING OF KINGS (1:15).** Throughout the Book of Revelation, John makes repeated reference to the ocean/sea. The description of His voice like the sound of many waters. The roar of the waves of the Aegean sea is something John was accustomed to on the Isle of Patmos. The exact language, however, is taken from Ezekiel 1:24, 43:2. The Bible repeatedly likens the power of God’s word to the surging sea (Ps. 93:3-5 and Rev. 14:2, 19:6).

6. **THE STARS IN THE HAND OF JESUS (1:16).** The right hand in Scripture symbolizes power and authority (see Psa. 110:1; Matt. 26:64). The image of holding the stars signifies both possession and protection. The glorified Christ is in complete control. In this military context, the emphasis likely is more on power than on protection. The seven stars in verse 20 are the angels of the seven churches. Stars are often used in the Old Testament as symbols for angels, and in the ancient world were often identified with the powers that controlled the world.²

7. **THE SHARP SWORD OF CHRIST (1:16).** Of all the symbols used to describe Christ in this passage, this strange symbol certainly banishes any idea that what John was seeing is to be understood in a natural, physical way. “A sharp two-edged sword proceeds from the mouth of Christ. In the letter to the church at Pergamum, Christ warns that unless they repent, he will come and war against them with the *sword of [his] mouth* (2:16; cf. comm. on 2:12). Chapter 19 pictures the return of Christ from whose mouth issues a sharp sword (19:15, 21). The sword in these vignettes symbolizes the irresistible power of divine judgment. The authoritative word of Christ is to be understood over against the fraudulent demands of the imperial cult. It is the word of Christ which will ultimately prevail.”³

8. **THE BRILLIANT FACE OF JESUS.** John was one of the disciples who witnessed the Transfiguration of Christ (Mark 9:1-8). “Mark tells us that the garments of Jesus became radiant. The word he uses (*stilbein*) is the word used for the glistening gleam of burnished brass or gold or of polished steel or of the golden glare of the sunlight. When the incident

came to an end a cloud overshadowed them. In Jewish thought the presence of God is regularly connected with the cloud. It was in the cloud that Moses met God. It was in the cloud that God came to the Tabernacle. It was the cloud which filled the Temple when it was dedicated after Solomon had built it. And it was the dream of the Jews that when the Messiah came the cloud of God's presence would return to the Temple. (Exodus 16:19, 19:9, 33:9; 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Maccabees 2:8.). The descent of the cloud is a way of saying that the Messiah had come, and any Jew would understand it like that."⁴

Taken together, these symbols give us a glorious picture of our Lord. These remarkable features recall the vision of Daniel 10:5-6.

The Son of Man in Revelation 1:13-16

a golden sash round his chest (*perieōsmenon* . . . *chrysan*)

his eyes were like a flame of fire (*hoi ophthalmoi autou hōs phlox pyros*)

his feet were like burnished bronze (*chalkolibanō*)

his voice [*phōnē*] was like the roar of many waters

his face [*hē opsīs autou*] was like the sun shining in full strength

The heavenly Man in Daniel 10:5-6

a belt of fine gold . . . round his waist (*periezōsmenē en chrysiō*)

his eyes like flaming torches (*hoi ophthalmoi autou hōsei lampades pyros*)

his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze (*chalkou*)

the sound [*phōnē*] of his words like the like the sound of a multitude

his face [*to prosopon autou*] like the appearance of lightning⁵

CONCLUSION: H. P. Liddon, in a work that I have made reference to many times over the years, has a very compelling analysis on the differences between *admiration* and *adoration* of Christ. "The early Christian Church did not content herself with *admiring* Jesus Christ. She adored Him. She approached His glorious Person with that very tribute of prayer, of self-prostration, of self-surrender, by which all serious Theists whether Christian or non-Christian, are accustomed to express their felt relationship as creatures to the Almighty Creator. For as yet it was not supposed that a higher and truer knowledge of the Infinite God would lead man to abandon the sense and the expression of complete dependence upon Him and of unmeasured indebtedness to Him, which befits a reasonable creature whom God has made, and whom God owns and can dispose of, when such a creature is dealing with God. As yet it was not imagined that this bearing would or could be exchanged for the more easy demeanour of an equal, or of one deeming himself scarcely less than an equal, who is intelligently appreciating the existence of a remarkably wise and powerful Being, entitled by His activities to a very large share of speculative attention. The Church simply adored God; and she adored Jesus Christ, as believing Him to be God. Nor did she destroy the significance of this act by conceiving that administration differs from adoration only in degree; that a sincere admiration is practically equivalent to adoration; that adoration after all is only admiration raised to the height of an enthusiasm. You will not deem it altogether unnecessary, under our present intellectual circumstances, to consider for a moment whether this representation of the relationship between admiration and adoration be strictly accurate. So far indeed is this from being the case, that adoration and admiration are at one and the same moment and with reference to a single object mutually exclusive of each other. Certainly, in the strained and exaggerated language of poetry or of passion, you may speak of adoring that on which you lavish an unlimited admiration. But the common sense and judgment of men refuses to regard admiration as an embryo form of adoration, or as other than

a fundamentally distinct species of spiritual activity. Adoration may be an intensified reverence, but it certainly is not an intensified admiration. The difference between admiration and adoration is observable in the difference of their respective objects; and that difference is immeasurable. For, speaking strictly, we admire the finite; we adore the Infinite. . . . Certainly admiration may lead up to adoration; but then real admiration dies away when its object is seen to be entitled to something higher than and distinct from it. Admiration ceases when it has perceived that its Object altogether transcends any standard of excellence or beauty with which man can compare Him. . . . One Only Being can be rightfully adored. To *admire* God would involve an irreverence only equal to the impiety of adoring a fellow-creature. It would be as reasonable to pay Divine worship to our every-day associates, as to substitute for that incommunicable honour which is due to the Most High some one of the tranquil and self-satisfied forms of a favourable notice with which we greet accomplishments or excellence in our fellow-men. *When I saw Him*, says St. John, speaking of Jesus in His glory, *I fell at His feet as dead*. That was something more than admiration, even the most enthusiastic; it was an act, in which self had no part; it was an act of adoration. If Jesus Christ had been only a morally perfect Man, He would have been entitled to the highest human admiration; although it may be questioned, as we have seen, whether He can be deemed morally perfect if He is in reality only human. But the historical fact before us is, that from the earliest age of Christianity, Jesus Christ has been adored as God. This adoration was not yielded to Him in consequence of the persuasions of theologians who had pronounced Him to be a Divine Person. It had nothing in common with the fulsome and servile insincerities which ever and anon rose like incense around the throne of some pagan Caesar who had received the equivocal honour of an apotheosis. It was not the product of a spiritual fascination, too subtle or too strong to be analyzed by those who felt its power, but easy of explanation to a later age. You cannot trace the stages of its progressive development. You cannot name the time at which it was regarded only as a pious custom or luxury, and then mark this off from a later period when it had become, in the judgment of Christians, an imperious Christian duty. Never was the adoration of Jesus protested against in the Church as a novelty, derogatory to the honour and claims of God. Never was there an age when Jesus was only *invoked* as if He had been an interceding saint, by those who had not yet learned to prostrate themselves before His throne as the throne of the Omnipotent and the Eternal. In vain will you endeavour to establish a parallel between the adoration of Jesus and some modern *devotion* unknown to the early days of Christendom, but now popularized largely in portions of the Christian Church; since the adoration of Jesus is as ancient as Christianity. Jesus has been ever adored on the score of His Divine Personality, of Which this tribute of adoration is not merely a legitimate but a necessary acknowledgement.”⁶

ENDNOTES

¹D. E. Johnson, *Triumph of The Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (P&R, 2001), p. 60.

²G. R. Osborne, *Revelation Verse By Verse* (Lexham Press, 2016), p. 38.

³R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation: The New International Commentary On The New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 79.

⁴Wm. Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark: The Daily Study Bible* (The St. Andrew Press, 1975), p. 210.

⁵B. J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone* (IVP, 2019), p. 50.

⁶H. P. Liddon, *The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1979), pp. 367-371.