

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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THE GLORY OF THE SON (Part 2)

In this series we have been seeking to answer the perennial question: Who is Jesus Christ? Jesus Himself forced this question on every man with His penetrating questions: “What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is He?” Both the New Testament and the historic Christian church have declared that He is the divine Son of God who, as God’s ordained Messiah, became flesh for us men and for our salvation and paid the penalty for sin on the cross. Jesus’ question, interestingly, has to do with thoughts. Note the exact wording: “What do you *think* of the Christ?” Thoughts are all-important in this world. They determine every human action, either directly or indirectly. And thoughts about Christ, I suggest, are of paramount significance. Whatever else one may think of Karl Barth’s total theological edifice (and I find much in it with which I must disagree), he was absolutely right when he declared that what a man thinks about Christ will determine what he ultimately thinks about everything else. Jesus even declared that a man’s eternal destiny would be determined by his thoughts about Him (John 8:24). Jesus’ question is also eminently *existential*. Again, note the wording: “What do *you* think of the Christ?” It is very easy for one to immerse himself so deeply in the “community of men” that he lets that “community” think for him without realizing it. But when it comes to thoughts about Christ, this is a perilous path. I personally think the advocates of the eternal subordination of the Son (ESS) are susceptible to this very thing. They say things like, Since the Son is sent by the Father, that demonstrates that the Son is in subordination to the Father eternally. As I have already pointed out, this entails the concept of *two* wills, each with a different nature. Wayne Grudem states this when he writes, “In fact, the idea of headship and submission *has always existed, for it is part of the eternal nature of God Himself*. The Father has always had a leadership role as He relates to the Son. In addition, the Father and Son have eternally had a leadership role or an authority with respect to the Holy Spirit. Since all members of the Trinity have equal attributes and perfections, such leadership and submission is not based on gifts or abilities; it is just there. It is a fundamental difference between the Father, Son, and Spirit.”¹

Long ago the great church father Augustine in his classic work on the Trinity insisted that God is one, the Persons of the Trinity are *homoousia*, one in nature and therefore of one will. He especially debunked the notion that because the Son is sent by the Father (and the Spirit by the Father and Son), that this implied some kind of lesser status in the Son.² The Holy Trinity, in the words of Gregory of Nyssa, “fulfills every operation [...] not by separate action according to the number of Persons, but so that there is one motion and disposition of the good will which is communicated from the Father through the Son to the Spirit.”³ It is very tempting for one to “feel out” which way the theological wind is blowing in the modern church and to conclude that, enlightened as the modern church must be, surely the numerous voices within her venue must be right in urging upon men a “modern Christ” different in kind from the two-natured Christ that the New Testament and the Christian church have confessed (as put forth in the Chalcedonian Creed) for centuries “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isaiah 9:6). Who is this Son? He is Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). He is “God-with-us” and His name is Jesus (Matthew 1:21-23). The epistle to the Hebrews

begins by declaring the grandeur and greatness of God's Son. Hebrews is, in many ways, a unique book. It is, for example, the only New Testament book that calls Jesus Christ a great High Priest. The writer,⁵ throughout the book, uses what is known as a *a fortiori* argument. This phrase simply signifies "all the more," and means that something must be admitted for a still stronger reason. In other words, the logic in one argument follows with even greater necessity than another already accepted argument ("if this is true, and it is, then how much more so this!" cf. Hebrews 2:1-3).

I. **THE FINAL REVELATION.** The opening sentence of this grand epistle is so abrupt that it surprises us. There is no formal introduction. The author plunges straight into the exposition of the major theme, namely the uniqueness and finality of the revelation of God in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The writer has what G. Vos has called an intense concern with the subject of *the progressive character of revelation*.⁶

A. **The Method of Revelation** (Hebrews 1:1). The method is one of contrast. Two great revelations are contrasted – the prophets and the Son. Note *how* these are contrasted.

1. Like the Old Testament prophets, Christ spoke the Word of God; but *unlike* them, He is the Eternal Word who became the Word Incarnate (John 1:1-14). He is God's unique Son – the prophets were not. This puts Him in a *different* class.
2. There were *many* prophets. There is only *one* Son.
3. The contrast between the *fragmentary* and *incomplete* character of the prophets on the one hand and the *finality* and *completeness* of the word spoken by God in Christ on the other.
4. Finally, note the contrast on "in former times" (in the past, NIV) with "in these last days." That the revelation in the Son is superior is implicit in the elaborate statement of the qualifications of the Son for revealing divine truth.⁷

NOTE: The authoritative character of the word previously spoke through the prophets "to our fathers" and of the word now spoken "to us" through the Son is established by the fact that in both cases it was none other than God who was speaking.⁸

II. **THE UNIQUE ORGAN OF THE FINAL REVELATION.** The author states *seven* facts which demonstrate the greatness of God's final revelation in his Son. These serve to demonstrate the Son's supremacy over all the created order and illustrate the Son's ability to effectively and finally "exegete"⁹ the Father. Note how this unfolds: from His past glory through the incarnation on to the majesty of His exaltation.

- A. **"Appointed Heir of all things"** (cf. Psalm 2:8). The word "appointed," by virtue of its position in the series of facts that antedate the exaltation of the Son, is timeless in force and refers to His appointment in virtue of His eternal Sonship. In fact, Sonship and heirship are closely linked. There was never a time when the Son was not the heir (cf. Matthew 11:27). The entrance upon the inheritance by the Son will occur at the second advent of Christ (Hebrews 2:8; Revelation 11:15).
- B. **"Through Whom also He made the world."** The term "world" (Greek *aion*) literally means "ages." Note the clear implication – the priority of Christ to the whole created order can only also mean Christ's pre-existence and co-existence with the Father.¹⁰
- C. **"And He is the radiance of His glory."** He is co-essential with the Father. The noun "radiance" (*apaugazo*, to emit brightness, cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4) has both an active sense (radiance) and a passive sense (reflection). In this context it is used in the active sense. The Son radiates the Father's Glory (cf. Colossians 1:15; John 1:14; 14:9). Note also that it is in the present tense – denoting his eternal nature.¹¹

- D. ***“The exact representation of His Being.”*** This expression means that the Son is the exact replica of the essence of God. “Being” (some translate this “substance” or “essence”) refers not to his bare essence, but His whole nature with all its attributes; and by “exact representation” we are to understand a correspondence as close as that which an impression gives back to a seal.¹² The language here is so plain that only “a virtuoso in exegetical evasion,” to quote James Denny, could hope to avoid the conclusion that the Son is very God of very God.¹³

NOTE: Lee Irons has made a very compelling case for understanding the *monogenēs* in the traditional sense *only begotten*. He writes, “In spite of the modern consensus that the Johannine *monogenēs* ought to be rendered *only* or *one and only*, thereby eliminating the notion of begottenness, the lexical evidence for *only begotten* is actually quite compelling. The five occurrences of the term in the Gospel and first Epistle of John thus provide part of the exegetical basis for the traditional doctrine of the eternal begetting or generation of the Son, which is in turn a crucial linchpin for the pro-Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. This is not to say that patristic exegesis relied solely on the Johannine *monogenēs*. Many other important texts informed their thinking on this issue. Nevertheless, the importance of the Johannine *monogenēs* for the construction of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son cannot be underestimated. While modern exegetes may need, in some cases, to provide legitimate correctives to elements of patristic exegesis, this may turn out to be one case where the church fathers had it right all along.”¹⁴

- E. ***“He sustains all things by the word of His power.”*** This marks the Son out as the Governor of the Universe. The word “sustains” (NIV) or “upholds” (NASB) is *pheron te* and is not used in a passive sense (like Atlas supporting dead weight on his shoulders), but in the sense of One causing all things forward on their appointed course.¹⁵ The Son is directing all things towards the consummation (cf. Revelation 11:15).
- F. ***“When He made purification for sins.”*** The NIV translation is completely unwarranted. The word the NIV translates “provided” is *poiesamenos* and *never* means “to provide.” It means to actually make or accomplish in a very definite sense. The middle voice of this Greek word (a participle in form) also emphasizes when He had *BY HIMSELF* made purification for sins. He does so as a Priest. The emphasis is on what the Son actually *does*. This will be developed as one of the major themes in Hebrews.
- G. ***“He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”*** This is the climax and looks at the finished character of the Son’s work. “He sat down” (literally this is “He took His seat”) suggests the formal solemn act of assuming a position of dignity and authority. The Son is *the Prophet* through whom God has finally and completely spoken. He is *the Priest* who has finally and completely made atonement. And He is *the King* who sits in the authority of enthroned omnipotence.

III. ***THE SUPREMACY OF THE NEW REVEALER.*** Verse 4 is transitional. The contrast with the prophets is completed and the contrast with the angels will occupy vv. 4-14. The participle translated “he became” (NIV) “having become” (NASB) indicates that the writer is moving in the orbit of the Son’s humanity. “What was proposed in the eternal counsel (cf. v. 2, “appointed”) is realized in His resurrection and ascension. His inheritance of the title of Son is by the Father’s eternal appointment. In that sense, that is, as Mediator, He entered into His inheritance of Sonship. And the name *Son* is a measure of His superiority to angels, who are merely messengers (cf. 1:14).¹⁶

CONCLUSION: Contemporary Christianity, busy accommodating itself to the mindset of modern culture (modernity), puts little emphasis on theology and even less on doctrinal preaching. Rather, contemporary Christianity simply uses the Bible merely to corroborate the validity of what is already found within its own religious consciousness which, says David F. Wells, “is another way of saying that we are putting

ourselves in the place of the Bible.”¹⁷ Many people do not realize that the popular expression, “Christianity is life, *not* doctrine!” was coined by 19th century theological Liberalism. The writer to the Hebrews thought differently. He begins with one of the most masterful theological statements ever made! Contemporary Christianity, for the most part, simply ignores such statements. Instead of a hearty doctrinal feast for hungry souls, most of what we see in contemporary Christianity is popcorn and fizzy drinks, peanuts and marshmallows, colored balloons, vain repetitions, and a general overall emphasis on entertainment. The emphasis is on personal fulfillment, and as Erroll Hulse has noted, “There is also a concern that we should be seen as the happiest people on earth rather than the holiest.”¹⁸ How tragic. If we would give the Lord Jesus His due, let us carefully note *who* He is. Let us *consider* the Son. Later in time, *Behold* He comes! The beloved Son, the only begotten of the Father, has come. Listen to Him! (Matthew 17:5).

ENDNOTES

¹ W. Grudem, *Countering The Claims of Evangelical Feminism* (Multnomah, 2006), p. 28.

² *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of The Christian Church III: St. Augustine on The Trinity*, ed Philip Schaff (rpt. Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 40-42.

³ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of The Christian Church V: Gregory of Nyssa, On Not Three Gods*, ed. Philip Schaff (rpt. Eerdmans, 1980), p. 336.

⁴ I have digested the substance of this analysis from the late Robert Reymond, *Jesus: Divine Messiah. The New Testament Witness* (P & R, 1990), p. 323.

⁵ The author is unknown. You may have a KJV that calls this an epistle of Paul, but *none* of the early Greek manuscripts did. The book nowhere identifies the writer by name. Jerome’s Latin Vulgate (404 A.D.) was the first translation to attach Paul’s name to this epistle. We simply do not know for sure who the author was and can only surmise that Paul or Apollos or Barnabas (the three most popular choices) penned this epistle. This does NOT affect its inspiration.

⁶ Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), p. 68. Note his words: “The unity and continuity of the Old and the New revelation are strictly maintained. In both *God spoke*, the participle *having spoken* is a preparation for the finite verb *hath spoken*. The whole organism of revelation lies in these words. Whatever diversity may exist, still it is all a divine word. The responsibility of people under the New Testament may be greater, but this is not because the New Testament has more authority or more of God in it than the Old Testament.” Pp. 70-72.

⁷ *ep’ eschatou ton hemeron touton*, literally, “at the (latter) end of these days.” This expression is found in the Septuagint and corresponds to the Hebrew *be’ aharity hayyamim* (cf. Genesis 49:1) and Daniel 10:14). It “expresses the notion never merely of a simple future which is to follow the present in the course of ordinary historical development, but always that of the end or final period which is to conclude all history and forms the utmost boundary of the speaker’s circle of vision.” Cf. Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary On the Epistle to the Hebrews I* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 40. Philip Hughes also notes this and adds that the expression “designates the eschatological time of the Messiah.” *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 37N. The word “*eschatological*” is derived directly from the Greek word *eschatou* in 1:2, and is used theologically to refer to “last things” or “end times.”

⁸ “The past tense of the verb *spoke* indicates further, that God’s speaking is complete.” Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁹ The word “*exegete*” refers in Biblical studies to someone who does “*exegesis*,” from the Greek word *exegeomai*, to explain, interpret, declare. This term is used in John 1:18 in reference to the Son making God (the Father) known.

¹⁰ “In light of this teaching it is not surprising that the title *Son* itself implies the consubstantiality of Christ with the Father,” Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹¹ “He only,” comments Thomas Goodwin, “is the brightness of His Father’s glory; we all are but stars shining with a borrowed light.” *The Works of Thomas Goodwin V* (James Nichol, 1863), p. 547.

¹² Cf. B. B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory* (rpt. Baker, 1974), p. 279.

¹³ James Denny, *Jesus and the Gospel* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), p. 40-41.

¹⁴ C. L. Irons, “*A Lexical Defense of The Johannine Only Begotten*” in *Retrieving Eternal Generation* eds. F. Sanders & S. R. Servain (Zondervan, 2017), p. 116.

¹⁵ Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1979), p. 6.

¹⁶ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., *Believers Bible Bulletin: Special Christmas Message: Hebrews 1:1-14*, December 23, 1979 (Dallas: Believers Chapel).

¹⁷ D. F. Wells, *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Eerdmans, 1992), p. 229.

¹⁸ E. Hulse, *The Believer’s Experience: Maintaining the Scriptural Balance Between Experience and Truth* (Zondervan, 1978), pp. 22, 134.