

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

*...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)*

Hebrews 1:2b-3

*...in these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...*

Thus far in our study of the book of Hebrews we have seen how the author purposely presents the Son of God before his readers as supreme and superior to the great and magnificent revelation of the prophets of the Old Testament. We must be reminded that the revelation of the prophets in the Old Testament is nothing short of marvelous and spectacular. How the LORD God communicated His truths through such men over the span of thousands of years who lived in differing countries and circumstances, while perfectly maintaining the theme and purpose of His communication is nothing short of a miracle.

Now sometimes we are asked about the theme of Scripture. What is the Bible about and of who does it primarily speak? I know that it may seem a simple question, but the truth is we often get sidetracked and forget that the primary theme of Scripture is the person and glory of Jesus Christ. Lest we forget, the Scriptures puts forth Jesus as the Conquering Savior, promised of God in Genesis 3:15 –

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*

And further revealed by God in Luke 24:27, 44.

*27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*

*44 Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”*

It is interesting to most who approach the Scriptures that the very opening words of Genesis 1:1 simply state a fact, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...”* No proof for the existence of God is given. It is assumed that the readers will, by the mere fact of creation, understand that there

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is a Creator. This would be the very argument of the apostle Paul in Romans 1:20 where he says,

*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

While it may be true that the Bible does not seek to prove the existence of God, it does constantly set out to prove that although God is one in essence, He exists in three Persons, each of which is equally God. And, while there is much contained in the Scriptures revealing the deity of each person of the Godhead, the New Testament focuses predominately upon proving the deity of Christ, the Son of God. The Gospel of John was written to show forth the deity of Jesus so that all who believe in Him might have life in His name (John 20:31). Many references may be cited showing that one of the key purposes of Scripture is to prove the Deity of Christ and one of those references is right before our eyes, here in Hebrews 1:1-3.

Already in this passage, we have seen the author set Christ up as supreme over the prophets. He does this by presenting a seven-fold description of God, each of which actually portrays or proves the deity of the Son, showing us that the Son is indeed God. In verse 2 we noted that the Son is the Heir of all things, which means all things are moving toward and will find their ultimate meaning and purpose at the direction and will of the Son. We also noted that the Son was the active agent in creation. Only God can create, and yet we saw the author use terminology which reveals that it was not that God used the Son as a passive tool in making all things, but rather that the Son was the active and primary agent of creation, making the Son not less than God, but actually equal to Him.

This morning we will look at the next two depictions of the Son which are also set forth to show both the supremacy of the Son, but also His Deity. We take these two together because they represent in effect two sides of the same coin. – namely that Christ is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature. Taking these two one at a time we will see first then that the Son being the radiance of God's glory pictures His ETERNALITY of the Son as God. Second, that the Son being the exact representation of His nature reveals the ESSENCE of the Son as God.

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## I. The Eternality of the Son as God (1:3a)

*“And He is the radiance of His glory...”*

We begin then by reminding ourselves that the author of Hebrews wants his readers to see the supremacy of Christ over the prophets. It is very clear in the Greek of this text how the author sets out to do this, by saying *“And He is...”* Please note that this is not a statement of the past. We do not read here, *“And He was the radiance...”* but rather *“And He is”* or more literally, *“Who being...”* It is in the present tense meaning this – that the Son was, continues to be and always will be the radiance of God’s glory. This shows us the timeless existence of Him who is the Son. In other words, the Son has always existed being always the Heir of all things, always the Creator of all things, always the radiance of God’s glory, always the revelation of His nature or character.

There are many today who either actively or ignorantly deny the eternity of the Son - and it is not just the Jehovah Witnesses. There are other groups more inline with mainstream Christianity who deny the doctrine of the Trinity especially by not recognizing the truth of such a passage before us. The Son has always had His being. He is neither created nor can He be destroyed. He has always existed in the past as God and will always continue in the future as God. This very idea is expressed in the Gospel of John in the very opening verse;

*John 1:1*

*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

The word for “was” here speaks of what we might call the eternal status quo, meaning that the Word, who is God in the flesh, has always been. The word “with” here speaks of being “face to face” so that we might rightly understand and read these verses, *“In the beginning has always been the Word, and the Word has always been face to face with God and the Word has always been God.”* When the author of Hebrews writes, *“Who being the radiance...”* he is expressing a similar idea, proving then the deity of Christ.

### “Radiance”

But what of this idea of *“radiance”*? Some have taken this to present Christ again as something less than true God - that Christ is at best a mere reflection of God. The term *“radiance”* literally means “the light sent forth or radiated.” Some refer to this as the effulgence of Christ. Effulgence speaks of a ray from an original body of light as simply opposed to a reflection of such light. The moon

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can only reflect the light of the sun, but the sun itself actually “radiates” light because it is the source of the light.

Let me give you an example. This new video projector uses a technology called DLP or Digital Light Processing. The way this works is that a semiconductor chip within the projector contains a rectangular array of up to 1.3 million hinge-mounted microscopic mirrors; each of these micromirrors measures less than one-fifth the width of a human hair. When this chip is coordinated with a digital video or graphic signal, a light source, and a projection lens, its mirrors can reflect an all-digital image onto a screen or other surface. As wonderful as a process as is, this image that you see is not the original image itself, but merely a reflection of it and as the image is bounced from mirror to mirror, it actually loses some of its brightness.

The Son is not like DLP, taking the original image of God and reflecting it back to us, ever so impressively, but still at the expense of at best a slightly diminished picture. Rather, the Son is the original radiance or picture of God Himself. Let me give you another example. We do not generally look at the sun, but even when we do with the naked eye, what we really see is the “brightness” or radiance of the sun. The sun however does not exist part from its brightness and the brightness does not exist apart from the sun. Now in application of what is being communicated in our text, *“Just as the sun was never without and cannot be separated from its brightness, so God was never without and cannot be separated from the glory of Christ.”*<sup>1</sup> So then, the Son is to be known as the outshining of God. He is the result of God – because God exists – The Son exists – and because the Son exists, God exists.

Many people struggle to see the full glory of God in the person of Christ, but the author of Hebrews wants his readers to understand and behold that even though an earthly vision of the Son may seem to reveal Christ in a diminished state, He is nonetheless the eternal God. We sing a song at Christmas time that depicts this tension between what Isaiah 53:2b says, *“He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him”* and this statement in Hebrews 1:3, *“Who being the radiance of His glory...”*

*Christ by highest heav'n adored, Christ the **everlasting** Lord  
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the Virgin's womb  
**Veiled** in flesh **the Godhead see**, Hail Incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with men to dwell, **Jesus our Emmanuel***

C. Wesley, 1739

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John *Hebrews Commentary*, p. 15

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So then, we have seen that radiance speaks not simply of manifesting or reflecting the characteristics of God, but actually being or possessing such characteristics. In John 10:30 Jesus makes the statement, “*I and the Father are one*” meaning “one in essence or nature.”

## “Glory”

Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory. The word glory here, *doxa* from which we get the term doxology, is from a verb meaning “to think.” It means then to think highly or to have the proper opinion about something or someone. In reference to God, the glory of God refers to all that God is in His Being, nature, character, power and acts. So, if the Son is the radiance of His glory, we are being told that the Son shines forth the only proper opinion of all that God is. In other words, to behold the Son is to behold God.

This has some intense implications. First, the perfection of this glory. If the Son is the only one who shines forth a proper opinion and picture of God, then apart from Christ, we could not perceive the brightness of God’s glory. God is made adequately and perfectly known through the Son. This is the express commentary of the word of God according to John 1:18 which says,

*No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has **explained** Him.*

Or, as the NIV reads,

*No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, **has made him known**.*

God is only made properly and rightly known in the person and work of the Son. This is why Acts 4:12 can so confidently assert, “*And there is salvation in **no one else**; for there is **no other name** under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*” This is why Jesus could be so exclusive of all other so-called paths to God by saying in John 14:6, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*” And this is why, when Jesus was presented with the request, “*Show us the Father and it is enough for us*” (John 14:8) that Jesus could answer, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father...*” (John 14:9). Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory, that is all that makes God – God. To behold and know Jesus is to behold and know God.

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Second, the eternal nature of this glory. There has never been a time in which God was not completely glorious. 1 Peter 5:10 speaks of God calling us into His “eternal glory” in Christ. So, if God’s glory is eternal, and the Son’s Deity is being proved, we should expect to see something about the Son’s glory also being eternal. And in fact we do see a connection between the Son being and reflecting the very essence of God and the Son’s eternal glory in John 17 –

*John 17:5-6*

*Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. 6 I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.*

*John 17:24*

*Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*

If we are to truly and fully know God, we must know Jesus Christ. The best the prophets could offer is but a partial picture of God but here we see that the Son is the radiance of His glory.

## II. The ESSENCE of the Son as God (1:3b)

*“and the exact representation of His nature...”*

Again, let us remember that these phrases employed by the author of Hebrews has as its purpose to reveal the supremacy of Christ as well then as His deity. Now we are told that the Son is *“the exact representation of His nature.”* There are some wonderful translations of this verse that clearly portray the point of the author. The Phillips translation reads that He is the *“flawless expression of the nature of God.”* And even the Living Bible does well to say, *“all that God’s Son is and does marks him as God.”* In short, we are being told here that the Son possesses all the substance of God. No prophet, angel or priest could claim this. So then, how is this expressed?

First, let us look at the phrase, *“exact representation.”* This is just one word in the Greek, *“charakter”* from whence we derive our word “character.” Now I find the use of this word absolutely fascinating and wonderful. In the original use of this word in classical Greek, it referred to the actual engraver who minted coins by use of a die, a stamp or branding iron. Note this, it originally referred to the person who made an engraved image on a coin. By the time of Christ, it had

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also come to be used then of referring to the actual image or impression itself. The impression or mark, along with its distinguishing features, was considered to be the exact representation or copy of the engraver's die or cast. Yet, although the image on the die and on the coin were regarded as being the same in substance, they were yet distinct and existed separately from one another.

In application to the Son, we see something incredible. We see that Son is called the "charakter" of His nature. Does this mean that the Son is the engraver of the image of God or does this mean that the Son is simply the image or impression of God Himself? While I do believe that primary thought here in our text is that the Son is the impress of the die, perfectly representing the features of the die, it also could rightly carry the idea of being the "engraver" in the following sense. Jesus is Christ is the way and means by which a person comes to know God. It is Jesus who must and does accurately communicate the Godhead to man. In other words, Jesus is the one who has engraved upon Himself what man needs to know and understand about God. Again, John 17:25-26 provides us with a bit of insight into this.

*25 O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 26 and I have made **Your name known to them, and will make it known**, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.*

Here Jesus says that He "made Your name known to them, and will make it known." It is by the work and word of Jesus that we know rightly about God. Whatever makes God divine, Jesus is the perfect expression of these things and has engraved such information upon His own life for us to behold. So, in effect, Jesus is both the engraver and the object engraved for He is both the eternal God and God made flesh. To be sure, both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit were active agents in the life of Christ, but remember that the point here is to present the readers with the proof of the deity of Christ. Only God can rightly make Himself known and He did so through the perfect representation of the Incarnate God, the Son. This lines up perfectly with other Scriptures. In Colossians 1:15 we read, "He is the image of the invisible God."

The second phrase here simply reinforces the first, for the Son is said to be "the exact representation of His nature." The word for "nature" here first referred to the ground or foundation upon which something is built. It came to speak of substance – the things that make up something. To put it in somewhat crude terms, this word means "the stuff of existence." What makes human life, human life? It is made up of both material and immaterial items. We have a body that is

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made up of cells, and blood and bone. We also have a mind and spirit that motivates and drives us. This is the stuff which makes us human.

In similar fashion, we are told that the Son is the exact representation of the stuff of God. In the Son we find the very substance, the nature and the essence of God. So then, in the Son is the exact visible manifestation of the very substance or foundation of God. I know this is circular reasoning, but what makes God – God is the Son and what makes the Son God, is God. The Son is such a revelation of the Father that when we see Jesus, we see what God's real being is.

The Son is not just an Heir, but is the Heir, the true executor of all things. He is not just a passive instrument in the hands of a Creative God, but is actually the active agent in creation, the Creator Himself. The Son is not simply a wonderful, but slightly diminished picture of God, but is rather the direct result of God, radiating the original light of God. And finally, the Son is not some imperfect although impressive copy of God, but is rather very God of very God. As Colossians 2:9 says, *"For in Him all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form."*

As we close, I would like you to consider these truths as revealed by our text this morning. Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God. If you want to know God, you must know Him through the Person of Christ. Do you truly know that to see Jesus is to know what the God of all the universe is like? To know Jesus is to know how God thinks, to know how God talks, and to know how God relates to people. Do you know Him? Is your vision of the Son and of God diminished by willful neglect of His revelation? May we desire to know God and know His Son more. Let us pray that we may truly grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ – that we might by this know our God.

Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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