

Heb. 1:2-3 The Supremacy of the Son (part 3)

In the 4th Century, there was a man named Arius, a professing Christian and a man of great learning and influence. And he began to teach that the Son was not of the same essence of the Father, but instead was created. According to Arius, He was “begotten” (to Arius “created”) before time as we know it and He was the greatest being under God as the “Son of God.” For Arius, to give Christ the same glory as God, or to know Him as essentially God, was mistaken because if this were so, God would be vulnerable to suffer, and even change (Barrett, *Simply Trinity*, pp. 45 ff.) So, at the beginning of the 4th Century in 325 A.D. the bishops called for Christians all over the world to come together in the City of Nicea (modern day Turkey) to decide the right doctrine, to decide together, what had been handed down to them by the Apostles, that which was according to the Scriptures. They found the teaching of Arius heretical. And they formed what is called the Nicene Creed. Let me read part of it concerning the person of the Son.

“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten not made, one in being with the Father.”

There are some places in the Scriptures where we see this teaching (eg. John 1; Col. 1: Phil. 2). But, v. 3 must be one of the clearest expressions of the deity of Christ found in the Bible. In this verse we have two statements that communicate that the Son is of the same essence of the Father. To put it another way, the nature of the Son is of the same nature as God. And if this true, as God is supreme, SO, in the same way, the Son is supreme. So let’s think about the supremacy of Christ found in these two statements.

1. Jesus is supreme because He is the radiance of the glory of God. At the root of the word radiance is the concept of “light,” and together with the current word it is “light that shines.” The word “radiance” is used in the ESV. In the KJV it is “brightness” of his glory. The NAS uses the old word “effulgence.” The meaning has to do with “brilliance” or “shining.” So, in some kind of way, Jesus “brilliantly” and “radiantly” shines forth the glory of God. Now, when we go back to our history on Nicea and Arius, he believed Jesus was a created being. And as a created being, He certainly “radiated” the glory of God. BUT, his radiance was of a lesser degree than God. In other words, to him, *“If God is one (which He is) and the Son is different than the Father, He cannot radiate the exact same glory as God.”* But, let’s go back to the Nicene Creed for a moment. Notice their understanding of Heb. 1:3. He is “Light from Light,” “true God from true God,” “one in being with the Father.”

Let me use an old illustration. Think of about our sun. There is one sun that gives us light and heat and radiation, etc. to our solar system. Though it is 93 million miles away, it is so powerful and so hot and so bright that it gives us everything we need to help sustain life on the earth. Well, let me ask, *“How does this great power come to us?”* It comes through the rays of the sun. Those rays shine forth from their source. Well, *“Are those rays different in essence from the sun?”* NO! They are the same. There is no such thing as an independent light that comes from the sun that is

not connected to the sun. ALL the rays radiate from the source and are of the same essence (nature).

In the same way, the Son is the radiant light that shines forth the glory of God. One more time, think back to the Nicene Creed. He is "*Light from Light,*" "*true God from true God,*" "*one in being with the Father.*" This is our first expression about the person of the Son. And since the Son IS the radiance of the Glory of God, by nature, He is supreme, and this not less than God. Now, let's move to our 2nd expression.

2. Jesus is supreme because He is the exact imprint of his nature. As the truth above was focused on the fact that Jesus shines forth the glory of God, now the focus is on his nature. (Though, I believe the author is saying pretty much the same thing from two different perspectives.) There are TWO words worth nothing in this sentence in the Greek: "*character* and *hypostasis.*" The word hypostasis is used in the NT to mean "nature," "essence," or "substance." The first word means to "engrave" or "inscribe" or to "stamp" or to "image." So, putting these terms together, the ESV says, "**He is the exact imprint of his nature.**" The NAS says: "**He is the very image of his substance.**" The KJV says: "**He is the express image of his person.**" The NIV says: "**He is the exact representation of his being.**" None of these translations are bad in my opinion. The 2nd word is really clear. He is speaking about the being, the essence, the nature, the substance of God. He is speaking about God, apart from his creation, WHO God IS.

One of the descriptions of God is that He dwells in thick darkness (1 Kings 18:12). Only God can dwell there! Do you remember when the people of Israel were in the desert. And the presence of God came down upon the mountain. In Exod. 20:21 we read: "**The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.**" This is his essence, which is why Moses could not see his face and live. God dwells in thick, or deep darkness, as ONLY He can. (And this is merely a picture used by language.) God is spirit. God is light. All of these things speak of his nature, which is unique to HIM. This is the meaning of this 2nd word.

Now, when we move back to that first word, its root is to "engrave" or to "stamp." We can understand what a stamp is. We open the ink box and we take a stamp, press it into the ink and stamp the image onto a piece of paper. The same substance from the stamp box is now imprinted, or stamped, onto the paper as an exact image. In the OT God told Aaron to make a plate of pure gold saying, "To Jehovah" also meaning: "holiness to Jehovah." And then, Aaron would wear that plate on the front of his turban (on his forehead). All this was to picture that He, as the high priest, would represent the people before a holy God (Exod. 28:36 ff.). This was the name of God that denoted his ESSENCE, which represented his holiness and his glory before the people. What a beautiful picture of the author of Hebrews! He was showing the Jews of his day and us today that the Son is the fulfillment of this engraving. And more, He is the exact imprint of his nature. He is not merely a stamp that is like God; As the Nicene Creed says, He is "Light from Light," "true God from true God," "one in being with the Father."

Aaron was a man as we are. And, as mankind, we are made in his "likeness." We are created in his image. But, we are not the very STAMP of his nature. But the Son is of the same substance! Consider the words of Isaiah: "**To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me,**

that we may be alike?” (Is. 40:25, 46:5). We are created. The angels are created. But the Son is the BRIGHTNESS OF HIS GLORY, and the EXACT IMPRINT OF HIS NATURE! Jesus is the *“ray of his glory and the stamp of his substance”* (Turner, quoted in Owen, 87 note). And, as sinners, we cannot get to the stamp; we cannot get to the substance, we cannot get to the essence. We cannot see his face and live!

With this in mind, let’s me move to the main application. Only in Christ is the Father revealed! Turn with me to 2 Cor. 4:4-6. **“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”** This is the Gospel!

Do you remember Isaiah 6. He . . . **“saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”** (Is. 6:1-3). In John 12:41 John says that **“Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.”** Which glory? Christ, who the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

Brothers and sisters, God is Holy! He dwells in thick darkness. He is unapproachable to us as sinners. And Jesus comes and says, **“If you’ve seen me you’ve seen the Father”** (John 14:9). And in John 17:24 Jesus prays: **“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”** This is why Jesus came! He also says in John 17:22: **“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.”** This is why Peter says the most amazing words. **“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature . . .”** (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

How can this be? It is because the **“word became flesh and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14). It is because the Son who is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of his nature . . . **“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”** (Phil. 2:6-8). And the writer of Hebrews says next, **“after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high”** (v. 3). And now God has highly exalted Him!

What a glorious gospel! Oh the depths of the knowledge and wisdom of God! How beautiful are the ways of God! This is why the writer of Hebrews says in 8:1-2: **“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the**

throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.” Or in 2:3: “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation.”

EVERYTHING that God is, Jesus is. He is love. He is power. He is good. He is patient. He is kind. He is long suffering. He is jealous, etc. The deity of Christ may be veiled by his humanity, nonetheless He is still the “radiance of his glory” and the “exact imprint of his nature.” What a mystery! The author of Hebrews is merely showing that Jesus is worthy as God, and because He is worthy, He is able to atone for our sins. He is able to be our high priest. This also means:

Jesus is the ONLY way. The Only way we get the sun is through the rays. Jesus is the ONLY way we get God. If the rays of light from the sun were not to make it to us, we would not know the sun existed. In Christ, revealed to us, we find the infinite perfections and excellencies of God. I think the author’s intent here is to show that since the Son is these things, then what a great work is the incarnation, that ONLY in his incarnation are these things revealed to us. **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29).

As of now, we see only the rays (which nonetheless are God). But, one day we will see Him as He is. It doesn’t mean we are seeing less than God. We are seeing EVERY bit of Him, but what waits us is fullness, one day. I believe this is why the Church Fathers wrote so much on the divinity and humanity of Christ. They could not get over these truths. For there is NOTHING higher to contemplate than the Triune God who is ONE. Therefore, brothers and sisters, dwell on these things. Meditate on these truths in Scripture. Pray about them. Ask the Father for wisdom. Go back and look at the church councils. Read Augustine on the Trinity, etc. Read good books written today (See Matthew Barrett). Everything we know or understand is bound up in this great mystery . . . which has been revealed to us. Jesus is supreme!