

Psalm 45

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Now be my heart inspir'd to sing
The glories of my Saviour King;
Jesus the Lord; how heav'nly fair
His form! how bright his beauties are!

O'er all the sons of human race
He shines with a superior grace,
Love from his lips divinely flows,
And blessings all his state compose.

Dress thee in arms most mighty Lord,
Gird on the terror of thy sword;
In majesty and glory ride
With truth and meekness at thy side.

Thine anger, like a pointed dart,
Shall pierce the foes of stubborn heart;
Or words of mercy kind and sweet,
Shall melt the rebels at thy feet.

Thy throne, O God, for ever stands,
Grace is the scepter in thy hands;
Thy laws and works are just and right,
But grace and justice thy delight.

God, thine own God has richly shed
His oil of gladness on thy head;
And with his sacred Spirit bless'd
His first born Son above the rest.

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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

The Opening of Hebrews, Part 2

Charles A. Hauser, Jr (with Kevin T. Bauder)

Last week we previewed Charles Hauser's commentary on Hebrews 1:1–2. Here are his comments on Hebrews 1:3 along with his preliminary remarks on Hebrews 1:4.

³And 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, ⁴having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they (Hebrews 1:3, NASB)

The writer has already shown the superiority of the Son to the Old Testament prophets. Instead of dropping the subject, he launches into a near-poetic description of the excellence of the Son. The description begins with observations about the eternal Son but then proceeds to a discussion of the incarnate Son.

Verse 3 opens with a participle that emphasizes the state or condition of the Son. It looks at the Son's absolute, timeless being. The writer begins by describing not what the Son became but who He always was. This description takes the form of two word pictures.

First the writer says that the Son is the "radiance of His [God's] glory." In this word picture, *radiance* is a reference to light rays and *glory* is the light source. As the writer describes it, the light source is God's own divine nature, fully manifested. The light ray is the Son. The verse is saying that Christ puts fully on display all that God is.

The second image envisions a die minting or stamping out a coin. God is like the die; the Son is like the coin. But the image on the coin is identical to the image on the die. Christ exactly displays who God is; no one could be more like God than He is. Indeed, Christ *is* God in His being, putting the full divine essence on display (John 1:18; Col 2:9).



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Having looked at the eternal Son, the writer now turns to the incarnate Son. In discussing the incarnate Son, the writer directs attention to the works that the Son has accomplished within space and time. The writer is especially interested in three works that the Son has done.

First, the Son upholds all things by the word of His power. The verb *upholds* means to carry or support: the Son carries or supports all things. This activity is related to His preservation and government of the universe (Col 1:17). Through His powerful word, the Son is moment-by-moment holding the universe together.

Second, the Son has provided a means of cleansing from sin. Here, the author chooses a verb tense that emphasizes this cleansing as a finished work (see Titus 2:14). Later in the book he will contrast the sacrifice of Christ with the sacrifices that were offered under the Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 10:4), pointing to the once-for-all nature of the cleansing secured by Christ.

Third, the writer mentions the exaltation of the Son. This exaltation is a result of the cleansing that the Son secured. Because He has cleansed our sins, He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Scripture teaches elsewhere that Jesus is seated beside the Father *in the Father's throne* (Rev 3:21), not upon His own throne or the throne of David. As the writer will later emphasize (Heb 10:11–12), the seated posture of Christ demonstrates that His work of providing salvation is now complete (see Eph 1:20). The contrast is with the Old Testament priests, who could never sit down in the tabernacle because their work was never finished.

In sum, the writer is strongly emphasizing the superiority of the Son to the Old Testament prophets. He does not denigrate the prophets: they were great men of God who delivered God's message to humanity. They could not be ignored, and they were disobeyed at one's own peril. Great as the prophets were, however, the Son is immeasurably greater. None of the Old Testament prophets compares with Jesus Christ, the Son through whom God has now spoken to us. If Old Testament saints were obligated to listen to the prophets, we are much more obligated to listen to Christ.

Verse 4 functions as a transition from the discussion of the prophets in verses 1–3 to the discussion of angels in 1:5–2:18. To interpret this section of Hebrews rightly one must grasp yet more difficult teaching. This teaching has to do with the Triune nature of the Godhead, or what Christians call the Trinity. Scripture distinguishes three persons who are God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is possible to view the relationship between these persons from two perspectives.

On the one hand, we might ask how these persons are eternally related to each other in view of their common divine essence (the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but they together are only one God). If we view their relationship this way, we are looking at what theologians

call the *ontological* or *immanent* Trinity. The ontological relationships within the Trinity are eternal; they never change.

On the other hand, we might ask how these persons relate to each other as they carry out the plan that God has made for the created order, which includes the human race. To accomplish God's plan, the Son voluntarily took on the role of a subordinate to the Father. He came to do the Father's will. What He did during His humiliation represents a change from the eternal communion that He had enjoyed with His Father. His *person* did not change, but the relationship *for the purpose of carrying out God's plan* did. When we look at the relationship between the Father and the Son in this way, we are looking at what theologians call the *economic* Trinity (the word *economic* has the idea of *administrative*). In their work in the world, the members of the Trinity assume economic or administrative relationships that do not alter their eternal or ontological relationships.

The distinction between the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity is very important. In fact, neglecting this distinction will result in an incorrect view of Christ's person. The difference between the ontological and the economic Trinity is also quite important in one other way. It stands behind the contrast between Christ and the angels that the writer to the Hebrews is about to draw.

Dr. Hauser's commentary continues, of course. We hope that these excerpts have given you a taste of his exposition and a desire to read more of it.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
