

## “Mic Dropped (Part 2)”—Hebrews 1:1-4

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take your Bible or the one in the pew in front of you and meet me in Hebrews 1...

Today is the third sermon in our series and we will finally get through the opening sentence. We have seen some marvelous truths so far. We began by observing the fundamental reality that while God has spoken in various ways in the past, He has spoken definitively in one way in the last days—by His Son. When God’s Son took on our humanity, we received God’s fullest and final Word of revelation. No greater word is coming and no greater word could come. You might say that God sent His Son and then He dropped the mic.

One of the reasons He was the definitive Word of revelation was because He was God in the flesh, which we will see today. As we sing about in one of Charles Wesley’s most famous hymns, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,”

Christ, by highest Heav’n adored;  
Christ the everlasting Lord;  
Late in time, behold Him come,  
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
Hail th’incarnate Deity,  
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,  
Jesus our Emmanuel.

Let’s take a look at one of the biblical texts that celebrates that very reality. I’ll begin reading in chapter 1, verse 1. Follow along as I read. This is God’s Word...

*“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” (Hebrews 1:1-4)*

We don’t have time to recap everything we have said in the first two sermons. Suffice it to say that the main idea of this prologue is that God has spoken by His Son in a definitive way. The author then begins to describe some of the accomplishments and activities of the Son, which demonstrate that He is superior to all and in particular that He is the supreme Word of revelation that God has given. There are seven such assertions about Christ in these verses. Last week we got to three of them.

**The Son Is the Father’s Inheritor**  
**The Son Is the World’s Creator**  
**The Son Is the Active Sustainer**

Why does the Son share the creative and sustaining power of the Father? Because He shares the nature of the Father. That's the point of the first half of verse 3—*“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...”* We might summarize that statement with a fourth assertion...

### **The Son Is the Divine Displayer**

For a Jewish audience, *“the glory of God”* imagery would have called to mind certain events in the Old Testament, where God's presence manifested among the people. This glory is sometimes referred to as *“the shekinah.”* So, for instance, many of you will recall from our Exodus sermon series that the *“glory of the LORD”* would manifest among the people of Israel as a cloud or fire concealed in cloud (e.g., Exodus 16:10; 24:16-17; 40:34). This was a picture of the presence of God among them. Similarly, when the temple that King Solomon built was dedicated, we read, *“a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD”* (1 Kings 8:10-11). So the glory of the Lord again appeared as a cloud that filled the temple, another picture of God's presence among the people. Not surprisingly, then, in Ezekiel 10 that same cloud of God's glory appeared and then departed from the temple, a tragic picture of God's presence departing because of the wickedness of Israel.

But it's interesting that the glory of God in the Old Testament was so often connected to a cloud. It's as if the people could not really look upon the glory of God so there was a cloud that shielded their senses from God's true brilliance. Think of the cloud as a buffer, something to blunt the impact of God's glory. It protected the person from the trauma of full exposure. Imagine the brightness of the sun in the sky. You cannot look directly into the sun for long without averting your eyes or shielding them with sunglasses because, if you look too long, it will destroy your eyes. It will literally fry them and you'll go blind. The glory of God is infinitely brighter than that. That's why when His glory appears in the Old Testament, even in its muted form, people fell down, people died, people perished.

Yet now the writer of Hebrews says that, in these last days, God's glory has manifested among us in His Son, who is described as *“the radiance of God's glory”*. This is an incredible statement. When we look at the Son of God, we are beholding the glory of God. There's no cloud. When God became man, the cloud was replaced by human flesh. Jesus was therefore the greatest possible manifestation of God's glorious presence because unlike a fire or a cloud, we can relate to Him. We can literally have a relationship with Him. We can have contact. He can enter our lives and He can change us.<sup>1</sup> Make no mistake: to encounter Jesus is to encounter God.

The term *“radiance”* is key.<sup>2</sup> Here again an analogy to the sun (in the sky) is helpful, though keep in mind that every analogy comparing God to some created thing will break down at some point and even distort the truth if pushed too far. God's being is unique and without any true analogy. But the language used here in Hebrews is as good as we can do. And it calls to mind light, like the daylight outside those windows.

When you look in the sky and you see the sun, what you are seeing is the radiance of the sun. You're seeing radiant beams of light. You're feeling radiant heat. As Karen Jobes explains, *“Just as we know the sun from the radiant energy it provides through heat and light, the Son embodies and radiates the glory of God, which otherwise without him would remain unrevealed.”*<sup>3</sup> When the writer of Hebrews says God's Son is *“the radiance of God's glory”*, he is reminding us that *“Without the Son we remain in the dark regarding the glory of God.”*<sup>4</sup> But because God has spoken to us by the Son, we can, in Paul's words, encounter *“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Corinthians 4:6).<sup>5</sup> To encounter Jesus is to encounter God in the flesh.

Just to make this point even clearer, the writer of Hebrews adds that the Son is “*the exact imprint of [God’s] nature*” (Hebrews 1:3). Some of your translations may say “representation.” That’s legitimate, but “imprint” may bring out the imagery a bit more because this is the word used for the impression left by a die or seal. Think of a coin imprinted with a president’s face. In a similar way, Jesus is “*the image of the invisible God*” (Colossians 1:15). This is why Jesus Himself said, “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9). The writer of Hebrews is making the same claim. As one commentator explains, “The point is the trustworthiness with which Jesus reveals God to us. There is an exact correspondence between what we see in him and what is true of God.”<sup>6</sup> Why? Because Jesus shares the divine nature fully.

Don’t miss how strong this language is. This language could not be used of anyone else. It could not be used of a mere human. It could only be used of the God-man, the one fully God and fully man. In fact, this is the only place where this imprint language is used in the entire New Testament. You and I may have been created in the image of God, but that does not mean that any of us could ever be described as “*the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of his nature.*” Al Mohler, the president at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, captures this distinction well when he writes,

“This is where the divine Son is different from a human son. No human son is the exact representation of his father. There is a close relation, but not an exact representation. Christ, however, is an ‘*exact representation.*’ He and God are of the same divine essence.”<sup>7</sup>

To see Jesus is to see God.<sup>8</sup> You want to see and understand what God is like, then you must look to Jesus. He is the exact representation of the divine nature. Or as the Christian Standard Bible translation puts it, “the exact expression of [God’s] nature.”<sup>9</sup>

So think about how this text has expressed Christ’s divinity. He is the creator of all things that exist, which means He is not a created being and must be divine. He sustains everything in existence, which is an activity reserved for God. He is the heir of all things, because all things were created for Him. And now we are told that in Him we see the divine glory and nature in the fullest way possible. All of the information about the Son, to one degree or another, points to His divine nature. The Son is the divine display because the Son is God in the flesh.

You remember Arius? The guy who tussled with Saint Nicholas? His followers tried to get rid of the book of Hebrews on these basis of statements like this. If you’re trying to deny the eternal preexistence and deity of Christ, you can’t have books like Hebrews in your Bible, so they just ignored the book or denied its authenticity.<sup>10</sup> How convenient. And, by the way, modern Arians do the same thing, denying biblical teachings like the ones we see here. For example, the Jehovah Witness cult is basically just a revived version of Arianism. They deny the deity of Christ. They believe Jesus was an angel, specifically, Michael the Archangel, who became a man, and then after dying, not on a cross, but a “torture stake,” was brought back to life, not bodily, but as Michael the Archangel again, an invisible spirit creature.<sup>11</sup> Not biblical!

But they are not the only cult that believes that the Son is not the eternal God. Mormonism also teaches the same thing. But if you ever say to someone of the Mormon persuasion that Mormons do not believe divinity of Jesus, they’ll deny it. Because they do believe that Jesus is God, or better, a god, but certainly not in the biblical sense. They’re polytheistic, though they might deny that as well, some preferring to characterize themselves as henotheistic, that is, worshiping one God, though many others exist. But they are not monotheists by any recognizable definition of the word.

And Joseph Smith, their “prophet, seer, and revelator,” didn’t claim to be. Here are his own words: “I will preach on the plurality of Gods...I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods.”<sup>12</sup> So what do they believe about deity?

They believe that the gods were once men, like you and me, who eventually attained godhood. You heard that right. Joseph Smith wrote about this very thing. He taught that God the Father and Jesus were just like us once, inhabiting a planet and earthly body, until they attained godhood. In other words, the gods and mankind are “the same species, the former being merely an exalted instance of the latter.”<sup>13</sup> I’ll footnote some of his very words on this subject in the transcript, if you don’t believe me.<sup>14</sup> They also teach that Jesus’ spirit brother was Lucifer, the devil, both of whom descended from the same heavenly father and mother. Blasphemy! All of it. Top to bottom heresy.

But here’s the thing... Someone can believe all of that nonsense that contradicts the clear teaching of God’s Word and still claim that he worships one God, that he believes Jesus is God, and still claim that he’s a Christian follower of Jesus, all the while using words like “gospel,” “salvation,” “repentance,” “baptism,” “monotheism,” etc.... So let that be a lesson: Just because biblical language is used doesn’t mean that biblical ideas stand behind that language. We can use the same words and mean entirely different things.

But there is one thing that we agree with the Mormons on—the kind of Jesus they believe in, one that was not eternally and fully God, cannot save you fully from your sins. As it turns out, the Mormon teaching doesn’t teach that Jesus redeems us from all our sins. It teaches that Jesus redeems us from Adam’s sin and the rest is up to you. So Jesus is needed for salvation, in their thinking, but not Jesus alone. It’s Jesus plus something you bring to the table. One of their apostles puts it this way, “Jesus Christ redeemed all from the fall; he paid the price; he offered himself as a ransom; he atoned for Adam’s sin, leaving us responsible only for our own sins.”<sup>15</sup> So, in their words, Jesus death makes possible a “general salvation” that every person shares in, which includes a resurrection, but one can only experience a “special salvation” by applying the teachings of Mormonism. So full salvation is based not only on Christ’s work, but also your efforts.<sup>16</sup> And when someone claims that salvation rests on Jesus plus anything, they are not talking about the true Gospel.

That, friends, is works-based salvation, just like every other religion on the planet, except Christianity. That is not the message of the true Gospel. And that is not the Jesus I worship, nor is it the Jesus described in the Bible or even here in Hebrews 1. This Jesus, the true Jesus, can atone for all sins. Why? Because...

### **The Son Is the Sin Purifier**

Verse 3 claims that Jesus has, in the past, made “*purification for sins*”. How did He do that? Well, the book of Hebrews is going to go into great detail answering that very question (especially in chapters 9 and 10). But the short answer is at the heart of the Gospel message. God the Father sent the Son to seek and to save the lost. The Son laid His perfect life down on the cross as our Substitute. It was a substitution because He took upon Himself our sin and incurred the wrath that sinners deserve, but He in turn offers us complete forgiveness of sin and eternal life with God. His Resurrection announced His victory over sin, death, and Satan. He offers for us to share in that victory. This offer is free, apart from anything we do, which is why it is said to be “by grace,” and it is received “through faith” in Christ, trusting in Him alone to save us. We find in Christ the answer to our guilt, shame, and isolation from God. God became man that He might bring us to God. The Gospel is “good news” because it announces that there is a guilt remover—Jesus Christ. And the writer of Hebrews is announcing that God, in Christ, made “*purification for sins*.”

But the writer of Hebrews wants us to see, however, that it is necessary for such a Savior to be, not only fully human, but also fully God. In response to the question, “Why was Jesus’ deity necessary?”, Wayne Grudem writes,

“...it is crucially important to insist on the full deity of Christ..., not only because it is clearly taught in Scripture, but also because (1) only someone who is infinite God could bear the full penalty for all the sins of all those who would believe in him—any finite creature [like the Jesus of the cults] would

have been incapable of bearing that penalty; (2) salvation is from the Lord (Jonah 2:9 NASB), and the whole message of Scripture is designed to show that no human being, no creature, could ever save man—only God himself could; and (3) only someone who was truly and fully God could be the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), both to bring us back to God and also to reveal God most fully to us (John 14:9). Thus, if Jesus is not fully God, we have no salvation and ultimately no Christianity.”<sup>17</sup>

Also, notice, it’s not “he is making purification for sins.” It’s “*After making purification for sins, he sat down...*” That means Christ’s purification effort is finished. There is no sacrifice for sin coming in the future. It’s already been offered up in the past, on the cross, where our Savior bled and died. His work is finished. Don’t think, “Well God forgave me when I became a Christian, but I’ve sinned a lot since then, I sure hope He will forgive me for all my sins one day. I’ll try to be really good for the rest of my life just in case.” Don’t think like that, church. Believe the Gospel. His blood atones for all the sins of His people. Even those sins the believer commits on his dying day. It’s finished. Jesus said as much while on the cross.

This is the awesomeness of the Gospel. And, yes, it is the scandal of the Gospel too. Can this doctrine be abused? Of course! Paul dealt with some of those abuses, didn’t he? “*Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*” (Romans 6:1). But, as another preacher put it, Paul “was willing to risk it. So was the writer of Hebrews. Jesus has made purification for sin. It’s finished. A decisive thing happened to all your sins at Calvary. It doesn’t get repeated...”<sup>18</sup> This is one of the writer of Hebrews favorite thoughts to put before our eyes. A couple examples will suffice.

*“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,<sup>28</sup> so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”* (Hebrews 9:27-28)

Then, a bit later, he says,

*“...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.<sup>11</sup> And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.<sup>12</sup> But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,<sup>13</sup> waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.<sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”* (Hebrews 10:10-14)

Do you see? Finished! And this actually ties into the next assertion about Christ...

### **The Son Is the Exalted Ruler**

According to verse 3, what did Christ do after He made purification for our sins? “*He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...*”

A couple things to mention here. First, the “Majesty on high” is a reference to God the Father. And to be seated at His right hand is to be seated at the highest position of honor. This is another way of saying that Christ, after the incarnation and resurrection, was exalted to the highest place.<sup>19</sup> This is almost certainly an allusion to the beginning of Psalm 110, which describes the power and authority the Son will exercise over His enemies, who will be made His footstool.<sup>20</sup> He is seated as Ruler over all.

Second, there is a relationship between His work of purification and His enthronement at the Father's right hand. He sat down *after* He made purification for sins. This is priestly language, because it was the Jewish priests who offered up sacrifices and carried out the purification rituals. But there's a twist here.

“There were no seats in the temple at Jerusalem. The priests offered sacrifices for the purification of the people day and night without ceasing because the problem of sin had not yet been solved. They never sat down. But when God's Son, the true priest whom the old covenant priests merely represented, shed his blood for us, his atoning sacrifice was the one to which all the others had merely pointed. He sat down, because there was no more sacrifice to be made, God's Son having offered his infinitely holy and precious blood once for all.”<sup>21</sup>

Isn't that awesome! Even God's sovereign rule reminds us of the finished work of Christ.

And there is one final thing that the opening sentence tells us about the Son...

### **The Son Is the Superior Messenger**

Look at verse 4. The Son has become “*as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*” That's the seventh statement about Christ in this opening sentence. But it's also a bridge to the next section, the rest of chapter 1, where we find seven quotations from the Old Testament that prove that Christ is more highly exalted than the angels. Of course, we don't have time to look at all that today, so we will table that discussion until next time.

But take a look at these seven lessons about the Son all together...

1. The Son Is the Father's Inheritor
2. The Son Is the World's Creator
3. The Son Is the Divine Displayer
4. The Son Is the Active Sustainer
5. The Son Is the Sin Cleanser
6. The Son Is the Exalted Ruler
7. The Son Is the Superior Messenger

That's quite an introduction, isn't it? We are meant to walk away recognizing the superiority of the Son to everyone and everything. There's no comparison. So how should we respond to the cumulative effect of all of this? We don't have to wonder. The writer tells us. Turn the page and look at how chapter 2 begins...

*“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. <sup>2</sup>For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, <sup>3</sup>how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup>while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” (Hebrews 2:1-4)*

What a warning! If the consequences of ignoring the messengers of God in the past were so devastating, how much more devastating would it be to reject God's final and climactic messenger, His Son? What hope is there for us, if we reject Christ? This is the sobering word the author is driving us toward.

So it's fitting for us to ask, as we close, how should we respond to the Son? Before I answer that, I wonder, did you notice that these seven statements about the Son also pertain to the three anointed offices in the Old

Testament—prophet, priest, and king? He is the ultimate Prophet, revealing God to man and communicating God’s final and fullest Word. He is the ultimate Priest, representing us before God and making purification for sins. And He is the ultimate King, reigning as God over all His creation. Prophet, Priest, and King. All of these descriptions have to do with those offices that the Son fulfills on our behalf and for our good and His glory.

Perhaps then this recognition should shape the way we respond to Him this morning. Let me close with these words from Richard Phillips:

“What this passage tells us about Christ reminds us not merely *that* we must hold to him in faith, but also *how* to draw near to him in faith. This comes through our understanding of his three offices as prophet and priest and king.

Jesus is our King. We need to be ruled and governed, protected and led. Let us therefore bow before him and crown him Lord of all, flying his banner at the gates of our hearts and forsaking all other kingdoms and rulers. Jesus is our Prophet. We need truth; he is the Truth and he speaks the truth. Let us therefore come to his Word seeking light and forsaking all the false prophets who would lead us astray. Jesus is our Priest. So we should readily come to him for cleansing, for forgiveness, for interceding prayers, and for a full and loving reconciliation with God the Father. Let us therefore confess our great need for his blood and for his ongoing priestly intercession in heaven. Let us lay hold of the cross, forsaking all claim to any merit of our own. In all these ways, through his three offices, let us commit ourselves to Jesus Christ alone, who is able to save us to the uttermost, to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>22</sup>

And all God’s people said? Amen.

Pray with me...

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, “Christ: The Final Word,” preached on February 6, 2005, and accessed through Logos Bible Software in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013). Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

<sup>2</sup> Peter T. O’Brien points out that “The word may be understood in either an active sense, ‘radiance or effulgence’, that is, of light radiating from a source, or the passive sense of ‘reflection’, that is, of brightness shining back.” Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 54. Most commentators seem to favor the active sense, though Wisdom 7:25f is sometimes cited as possible support for the passive sense. Despite the mention of the “mirror” in that passage, one could still argue that the same ambiguity is present so the comparative text is by no means definitive. The difference between the active and passive meanings would not alter the meaning significantly, if at all, for, as Luke Timothy Johnson remarks, “Reflection becomes radiance, and radiance is what is reflected.” (Thomas Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation Commentary; Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 56-57; quoting L. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 69).

<sup>3</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 84; John Piper gives further elaboration of this point, stretching the analogy to its capacity: “[the Son] relates to God the way radiance relates to glory, or the way the rays of sunlight relate to the sun. Keep in mind that every analogy between God and natural things is imperfect and will distort if you press it. Nevertheless, consider for example, (1) There is no time that the sun

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exists without the beams of radiance. They cannot be separated. The radiance is co-eternal with the glory. Christ is co-eternal with God the Father. (2) The radiance *is* the glory radiating out. It is not essentially different from the glory. Christ is God standing forth as separate but not essentially different from the Father. (3) Thus the radiance is eternally begotten, as it were, by the glory—not created or made. If you put a solar-activated calculator in the sunlight, numbers appear on the face of the calculator. These, you could say, are created or made by the sun, but they are not what the sun *is*. But the rays of the sun are an extension of the sun. So Christ is eternally begotten of the Father, but not made or created. (4) We see the sun by means of seeing the rays of the sun. So we see God the Father by seeing Jesus. The rays of the sun arrive here about eight minutes after they leave the sun, and the round ball of fire that we see in the sky is the image—the exact representation—of the sun; not because it is a painting of the sun, but because it *is* the sun streaming forth in its radiance.” Piper, “He Sat Down at the Right Hand of the Majesty,” a sermon preached on April 7, 1996, to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, and accessed as of December 3, 2017, through the following website: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/he-sat-down-at-the-right-hand-of-majesty>.

<sup>4</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews* (REC; Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., Luke 9:32; John 1:14; 2:11; 17:5; Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 2:8; Philippians 3:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:14.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, 20.

<sup>7</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 11.

<sup>8</sup> “For the Son to be the kind of direct, authentic, and compelling expression of the Father described in these phrases...he must participate somehow in the being of God itself, that is, he must himself be deity to accomplish the wonderful mission described here.” Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews* (UBCS; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 24.

<sup>9</sup> But notice the balance of these two statements. There’s a correspondence. We have to read them together because in isolation they can both be misunderstood. Indeed the being of God is easily misunderstood because, as I stated earlier, He’s a being without analogy. God is Trinity and nothing is exactly like the Trinity.

Perhaps you have heard it said that the Trinity exists as “three persons” but “one essence.” Think of “essence” as the answer to the question “what are you?” and “person” as the answer to the question “who are you?” If it helps you remember, think of the Trinity as one “What” (God) and three “Who’s” (Father, Son, and Spirit). The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Spirit. The Spirit is not the Father. Yet everything “that is necessarily true of God is true of Father, Son, and Spirit,” as Erik Thoennes notes. “Within God there is both unity and diversity: unity without uniformity, and diversity without division” (Eric Thoennes, *ESV Study Bible*, “The Trinity,” (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2514). These statements capture this “unity and diversity” (or, if you prefer, “Tri-unity”), which emerges from the biblical text and is at the heart of Trinitarian theology.

So, for example, when the Apostle John introduces us to Jesus, calling Him “*the Word*,” he makes two complementary statements, side-by-side. He says, “the Word was *with* God” and “the Word *was* God” (John 1:1). The Son being “with God” conveys the distinction of persons between the Son and the Father. The Son is not the Father. The Father is not the Son. They are different persons of the one Triune God. But when John then says that the Son “was God,” he is communicating the unity of the Father and Son, who share the same divine essence. So, together, those statements “*the Word was with God, and the Word was God*” express and embody Trinitarian theology. Thoennes offers four essential ideas that capture the Trinitarian theology:

1. There is one and only one true and living God.
2. This one God eternally exists in three persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
3. These three persons are completely equal in divine attributes, each sharing the same divine nature.
4. While each person is fully and completely God, the persons are not identical (Thoennes, 2513).

In short, there is one God who exists as a Tri-unity. Unity and distinction. This is the historic Christian view of the God of the Bible.

Some have argued that this same balance—of unity of divine essence and distinction of divine persons—is captured in the two statements in Hebrews 1:3 as well. So when we read that the Son is “*the radiance of the glory of God*” perhaps we are meant to think of the unity of the Father and Son, they share the divine nature. Just as the sun does not exist without radiant sunlight, so also the Father has never existed without the Son. Everything God is, the Son is.

And then, when we are told that the Son is “*the exact imprint of [God’s] nature*,” perhaps we are meant to see something of the distinction between the Father and Son. If this is truly the intent of the author of Hebrews, we should probably see that unity expressed in the first statement to operate with an implied (or more subtle) distinctiveness and the distinction emphasized in the second statement to also imply the unity that is more emphasized in the first statement. Cf. Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 31; R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (PWS; Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 29-31. One may also benefit from an article I wrote for the *Illinois Baptist* years ago in the Trinity, which as of the day of preaching could be accessed online here: <http://images.acswebnetworks.com/1/1830/030413IB.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Wells, *Person of Christ*, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Alan W. Gomes, “The Deity of Christ and the Cults,” in *The Deity of Christ*, eds. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 240-241.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1912), 6:464. Also cited in Gomes, 234.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.



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<sup>14</sup> Please note that what follows is blasphemy and provided merely for the sake of exposure: “I will go back to the beginning, before the world was, to show what kind of a being God is. What sort of a being was God in the beginning?...God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted Man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens. That is the great secret....I say, if you were to see him to-day, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves, in all the person, image, and very form as a man....I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and will take away and do away the vail [*sic*], so that you may see....God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on all earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did.” *Journal of Discourse*, 6:3 (cited in Gomes, 235). Similarly, Brigham Young, applies that same progression to faithful Mormons: “After men have got their exaltations and their crowns—have become Gods, even the sons of God—are made Kings of kings and Lords of lords, they have the power then of propagating their species in spirit.” *Journal of Discourses*, 6:275 (Gomes, 235).

<sup>15</sup> LaGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), 98.

<sup>16</sup> Gomes, 248. He adds, “Brigham Young took their teaching to its logical conclusion. He states clearly that there are sins so serious that the blood of Christ could not possibly atone for these. He even went so far as to say that the sinner must atone for such sins by shedding his or her own blood! ‘It is true that the blood of the Son of God was shed for sins...yet men can commit sins which it can never remit’ [*Journal of Discourses*, 4:54]. ‘There is not a man or woman, who violates the covenants made with their God, that will not be required to pay the debt. The blood of Christ will never wipe that out, your own blood must atone for it’ [*Journal of Discourses*, 3:247].”

<sup>17</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 553. He continues, “It is no accident that throughout history those groups that have given up belief in the full deity of Christ have not remained long within the Christian faith but have soon drifted toward the kind of religion represented by Unitarianism in the United States and elsewhere. ‘No one who denies the Son has the Father’ (1 John 2:23). ‘Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son’ (2 John 9).” *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> John Piper, “He Made Purification for Sins,” a sermon preached to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on April 4, 1996, and accessed at the following web address: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/he-made-purification-of-sins>.

<sup>19</sup> This is a common New Testament theme. Cf. Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:15-18; Ephesians 1:15; 1 Peter 3:22.

<sup>20</sup> “The right hand signifies power (Exodus 15:6, 12), protection (Pss 16:8; 73:23; Isa 41:10), and triumph (Pss 20:6; 21:8). Indeed, it signifies that Jesus shares the same identity as God, as Bauckham argues. The ‘potent imagery of sitting on the cosmic throne has only one attested significance: it indicates his participation in the unique sovereignty of God over the world.’” Schriener, 58-59, drawing on Richard Bauckham, “The Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. R. Bauckham, D. R. Driver, T. A. Hart, and N. MacDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 32-33.

<sup>21</sup> Phillips, 22. Cf. Hebrews 10:11-14; Brown, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Phillips, 24-25.