
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...

Satisfaction – ah, what a word is satisfaction. What comes to your mind as you think of that word? What does it mean to be satisfied? Webster's defines satisfy as "to fulfill the needs, expectations, wishes or desires of." We are a people who long to be satisfied and we often use the concept of satisfaction in connection with many things. We seek for satisfying relationships, or a satisfying marriage. We speak of being satisfied (or not) with our jobs. We can wonder if we will be satisfied with our retirement. And of course we might even say that a meal was particularly satisfying.

Yes, we look for satisfaction in so many things, people and places. And if we are honest with ourselves, we must come to the conclusion that things, people and places do not ever truly satisfy. We are satisfied with a meal, only later to want more or something else. We are satisfied with a job, only perhaps to grow weary and tired of it. And even being satisfied in a marriage implies a continual effort to keep it satisfying. I have never heard of a couple what said, "Yes, I was satisfied with my spouse on the day we got married and we have done nothing since, yet I am still satisfied. To be satisfied then requires a constant inflow and influx. Satisfaction, in this sense, is constantly in need of more to remain satisfied. In a word, to remain truly satisfied requires an infinite supply. In this regard, it can be seen that true satisfaction will always be wanting or needing more.

However, I submit to you this morning that there is a supply of resources by which a person may continually be satisfied. That resource is the Person of Jesus Christ. And I ask you, "Are you truly satisfied with Christ?" You see, true satisfaction for any person, and creature, will only be found as one comes to know his Creator and as we have already learned from the book of Hebrews, the Creator is the Son of God Himself, Jesus Christ. As we learn to know Christ, to savor Christ, and to treasure Christ, our level of satisfaction will also grow. Christ must become to us as an inexhaustible treasure chest, where day-by-day we find new jewels to marvel at and display to others. Such a view of Christ is developed within us as we come to more clearly and more accurately come to know Christ – to see Him as He truly is. So, as your view of Christ increases,

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your level of genuine satisfaction in life also increases. If your view of Christ is waning, your level of satisfaction will also fade and diminish.

Let us remember that the author of Hebrews has a purpose and intention in these opening verses of chapter 1 to expose us to and increase our knowledge of the very person of Jesus Christ. He is writing to a community of people, some of whom were not finding Christ to be satisfying and some who were ready to abandon the life of Christ to pursue their former way of life in the world. These were a people who rather than admit that their understanding and vision of Christ was deficient, assumed that somehow Christ must be deficient. And so, the author sets out to prove to us not only Christ supremacy over all things and people, but also His very deity, the truth that the Son Himself is very God of very God.

So, we have already seen four of seven descriptions that in truth reveal the Son's possessing the attributes of God. The Son is the heir of all things, which as we noted means not simply that the Son will inherit all things, but also that He is the executor of all things – meaning that all things are moving toward the Son and He will be the determiner of the purpose and direction of all things. We have seen the Son as the Creator, not just of things physical, like the heavens and the earth, but also of all the ages, the very times and circumstances in which people move and live and have their being. Additionally we have seen that the Son is the radiance of God, the very outshining and visible manifestation of the person of God, thus making the Son God. And we have seen the Son as the exact representation or very image of God, meaning that the Son possesses all the substance of God.

Now this morning, I intend to present to you the next two descriptions of the Son. It is my prayer that these descriptions may open your hearts to a higher vision of our Lord, so that as your level of knowledge, understanding and experience of Christ increases so will your level of satisfaction in He who is Savior. For a simple outline of these two descriptions I submit to your thinking the following three titles. For we see the Son as both the SUSTAINER, and the SACRIFICE in the phrases, *“and [He] upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins...”*

I. The Sustainer

“...and upholds all things by the word of His power...”

To understand the significance of this, the fifth description of the Son, we must begin with a definition. This statement pictures for us the DIVINE PROVIDENCE of God. By divine providence I mean, the work of God to direct all things to their divinely appointed goal. When we think of God's providence,

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we think of what God does to support and move all things to their intended end. While it is true that this is a work of God, the author of Hebrews points out that this too is a specific work of the second person of the Trinity, namely the Son, as he writes of the Son being He who, “*upholds all things by the word of his power.*” Here then we learn of the Son as being the Sustainer and therefore agent of divine providence.

The word “*upholds*” is perhaps not the best translation in order to give us a clear understanding of what is meant here. The word for “*upholds*” literally means “to bear or carry some kind of weight or responsibility in order to move it to some end.” This word is used in 2 Peter 1:21 to speak of the Holy Spirit’s work in the recording of God’s Word. There we read this,

for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved [carried] by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The key idea here is that although God used men as active participants in the recording of His Holy Word, the main responsible person was not man himself, but the Holy Spirit of God. We find a similar idea of carrying the weight of responsibility in this word as it is used in Numbers 11:14 of the Greek translation of the Old Testament where we find this word used again by Moses who was under danger of buckling under the responsibility of leading God’s people. There we read,

I alone am not able to carry [bear the responsibility of] all this people, because it is too burdensome for me.

To be sure, many of us have felt like Moses before as we contemplate the great responsibility we have to follow God and be examples to others of the work of God in our life. The point of looking at these references is show that the word “*upholds*” carries this idea of responsibility. So, in our Hebrews passage, we learn that the Son has the reasonability to carry or sustain “all things.” I have used the word “*sustains*” in place of “*upholds.*” Another word that may give a more clear understanding is “*maintains.*” It is the Son’s responsibility to maintain all things in the universe, to move them to their appointed ends, to execute the decrees of God’s divine providence. This activity is given to us in the present tense, meaning that the Son sustains now and will continue to sustain into the future this world.

As seen in this light, we must conclude that only Deity can carry the weight of sustaining and maintaining all things. It is the Son who holds all things

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together and keeps them in their proper relationships to each other by His own power. The oceans are held in their beds, the rivers in their courses, the stars in their orbits and even men are sustained and maintained in their lives by the work of the Son. So then, the author of Hebrews not only pictures the Son as the active agent of creation, having already referred to Him as the One *“through whom He made the ages”* but also now as the One who bears and moves all time, all matter and all space toward the fulfillment of the divine plan.

What application does this have for us? This teaches us the vanity of being or pursuing self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction. All of mankind is absolutely dependent upon God, and specifically upon the Son, not only for salvation, as Acts 4:12 tells us that *“there is salvation [deliverance from the condition of sin] in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among be by which we must be saved”*; but also for the basic necessities of life.

Psalms 145:15-16

15 The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due time. 16 You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Matthew 5:45

...for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Our daily existence is said to depend upon the work of God's providence and Hebrews 1:3 tells us that such providence, such work to direct all things to their divinely appointed goal, is found in the one who *“upholds”* all things. This is the testimony of Colossians 1:17 which says,

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

So then, the Son is the Sustainer, the maintainer, and the governor of all things. But now a question must be raised. By what power does the Son so uphold all things. We read our answer in as we continue on in verse 3, *“by the word of His power.”* Here, my beloved, is yet another proof of the Deity of the Son. For we are told here that the Son sustains all things by the word of His power. Many are familiar with the Greek word “logos” which means “word” and is used as a reference for Christ. In John 1:1 we read, *“In the beginning was the Word [logos] and the Word [logos] was with God and the Word [logos] was God.”* And also in John 1:14, *“And the Word [logos] became flesh...”* The word “logos” or word here means a full revelation, concept, or idea. But in our

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Hebrews passage, we find a different word for “word” namely “*rhemati*” which means spoken word, command or declaration.

This then speak of the fact that the Son “*upholds all things*” by the mere utterance of His mouth. Is this not amazing! Men fight, toil and strive with all sorts and types of efforts to keep things together and yet all the Son must do is speak a word and it is so. In Hebrews 11:3 we are told,

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word [rhemati] of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

The same authoritative word used by God to create the heavens and the earth is used by the Son to also maintain and sustain all things. So, in answer to the question, by what power does the Son uphold all things, we have the answer, “*by the word of His power.*” The Son’s word is full of power, power that sustains and keeps things going. We often speak of a person needing to backup his statement with action (usually when such a person is more talk than action). We will say things like “Don’t say it unless you mean it?” Or, “Don’t say it unless you can prove it?” But the Son’s word is not like the word of men. Men’s words need action to support it; the Son’s word is action. In other words, when the Son speaks, action always takes place. Let me give you some examples.

- **The Son speaks and the world is created** (Hebrews 1:2; 11:3, Genesis 1:3; Psalm 33:6).

Psalm 33:6

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

- **The Son speaks and His sheep both hear and follow Him** (John 10:27).

John 10:27

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me

- **The Son speaks and His enemies are laid flat** (John 18:6).

John 18:4-6

4 So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, " Whom do you seek?" 5 They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying

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Him, was standing with them. 6 So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground.

- **The Son speaks and the dead come forth from the grave** (John 11:43-44).

John 11:43-44

43 When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." 44 The man who had died came forth..."

- **The Son speaks and the world is sustained and maintained** (Hebrews 1:3).

Hebrews 1:3

"Upholds all things by the word of His power"

The Son upholds all things by the power of His word. Are you listening to this word? Are you obeying this word? Are you trusting in this word to sustain you no matter what the circumstances or trials. The universe was created out of nothing by the word of Christ and it is kept from reverting back to nothingness by the same word of Christ. Do you find satisfaction that Christ sustains and maintains your life for the glory of God? May we truly trust the Son and His word as He sustains all things for divine providence.

II. The Sacrifice

"When He had made purification of sins..."

From this statement we learn that Christ is not only the Sustainer, but also the Sacrifice by which purification for sins is obtained. Where before we considered the work of divine providence, we learn here of Divine Purification. Divine purification is "the work of God to call out and cleanse for Himself a people to bring Him glory."

Now, let us consider some thoughts here. To begin with, we are told that the Son "had made purification." We have come across this word "made" already in our passage. In verse 2 we learned that the Son "made" the world. Remember that the word for made there is from the verb "poeio" meaning to make or fashion. In Ephesians 2:10 we have the noun form of the verb, poema, meaning masterpiece – we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works. Here in Hebrews 1:3 we are told that the Son "had made purification" – this is in a tense in the Greek that means a once for all completed action. The

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Son, one time, on that cross, made purification for sins. Some of the readers of this letter had not remembered or seen the Son in this light. Their vision of Christ as the Sacrifice to provide divine purification was diminished and they became dissatisfied with Christ. This serves as a lesson for us, that when we stop learning about Christ, stop striving to know Christ, our satisfaction with not only Christ and God will fail, but also our satisfaction to fellowship with God's people.

Now, before we look at how this divine purification is carried out, let me first make this important, but easily overlooked observation. The idea of divine purification for sins, reveals to us the gravity of man's condition or situation before God. Man is not found to be in some neutral or nebulous state. Man, not simply in action, but in his very being, to his core, has been found in a state of sin. The state of sin renders every human being incapable of making his way back to or satisfying the judicial requirements of God for being in such a state. As the prophet Isaiah so clearly indicates (Isaiah 64:6),

6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Now, whereas all of the religions of men have people "making" purification for their sins by some manmade means, be it through penitence, repetitious prayers, or legalistic rituals, Christianity points man to see the work of Christ as the only genuine means of being cleansed from sin.

Now let us consider how divine purification carried out? The word "purification" in our text has a rich Jewish flavor that would not have been lost on the first readers. In the book of Leviticus, concerning what the Jews called the annual Day of Atonement, a day where the national sins of the people of Israel were sacrificed for and mercy and forgiveness received, we read in 16:30 these words,

30 for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse [purify-katharizo – to clean by cutting off] you; you will be clean [purified] from all your sins before the LORD.

The sins of the people not only brought desecration to the body, soul and spirit of the people, but also death. This process of purification by means of a sacrifice brought cleansing and life. In the Old Testament, only a priest could carry out this process, yet the priest himself also had to make daily and yearly sacrifices for himself because of his own sin.

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Yet our text tells us that the Son, who has already been revealed as perfect God, has made [once for all] purification for sin. Christ made only one sacrifice because He was the “unblemished and spotless” lamb (1 Peter 1:18-19). The Son is said to have done something here that now Old Testament priest or sacrifice could do. Look with me at Hebrews 9:12-14 which presents this very idea;

12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

And now look just down at Hebrews 10:1-4 which says,

1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

God had to do something to deal with man’s sin and so we are told that He made purification. Why did the awesome and majestic Person of God become man? He became man to cleanse us of our sins! Why did God become man? Was it to shine forth in majestic glory? Which He did! Was it to show off as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe? Which all creation does reveal? Was it to be seen as the Heir of all things? No – God became man to make purification for sins – to purge and cleanse those who by faith, trust solely on His work to make them clean before God. These are those who have become truly satisfied with the means that God brought about salvation for man – not by the multiplicity of the work of man’s hands, but by the greatest and singular work of the Son who, one time, once and for all, made purification for sins. This is truly a divine purification – and are you not glad? We could never have done so well and so complete of a work.

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So, in reality, the rest of the book of Hebrews is in large part a revelation of Christ's work as the great High Priest, cleansing sinful man of his sins. And I ask you, are you satisfied with His work? Where are you looking for cleansing? Where are you looking for purpose and meaning in your life? What brings you satisfaction? Have you yet grow weary of seeking satisfaction by yourself? Perhaps you think you are too young and must yet come to learn such satisfaction by trying everything else. But beware, your life may well be required of you this day. Youth is no guarantee against death. Today I call you along with the Psalmist to "delight yourself in the Lord" for He alone will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4). Others of you may think it is perhaps you think it is too late to seek full satisfaction in Christ alone. You have seen too much and have done too much evil to find such satisfaction in the holy ways of God. But remember the penitent thief upon the cross, who upon his dying moment asked Jesus to remember him as He entered into the kingdom God. And Jesus said unto him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Can you think of anything more satisfying than paradise? "Hallelujah! He has found me!"

Father God, you know our hearts longing. Some hearts in here yet long for the things of this world. We pray Father that you would open their eyes, that they may gaze upon the beauty of Christ and come to long for Him. Some heart in here do long for your Son. We are tired Lord of feeding only on the filth of this world and we long for something better. Let not our hearts Lord crave this world's possessions. May we see such things only as dust which amounts to nothing. Lord, we pray that we may come to Him who possesses the well of water that is ever springing forth the Bread of Life so rich and free. May we see our Redeemer as the only wealth that never fails, as the only satisfaction for our souls as the only remedy to our longings and as the only sacrifice for our salvation.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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