

“THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST”

**I. Introduction**

- A. We often hear people claim that one thing is superior to something else.
  - 1. This is a common technique in the world of advertising.
  - 2. One product is touted as being better than other similar products.
  - 3. If you are a discerning consumer, you will look for proof to support such claims.
  - 4. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews provides ample proof to support his claim that Jesus Christ is superior to all other mediators between man and God.
- B. In the verses that we have just read, the writer sets forth three reasons why Christ is superior, and these will serve as the three points of tonight’s sermon.
  - 1. First, Christ is superior because he is the culmination of revelation.
  - 2. Second, Christ is superior because he is fully God.
  - 3. And third, Christ is superior because he is the supreme Mediator.

**II. Background**

- A. Before we delve into this passage, I want to say a few words about the background of this letter.
  - 1. As you may know, one of the things that makes Hebrews unique is that, unlike the other books of the New Testament,

we do not know who wrote it.

2. While some have thought that it was written by the apostle Paul, there are several factors that argue against this.
  3. The author of Hebrews does not name himself, which is something that Paul always does in his letters.
  4. The writer of Hebrews also says that the gospel “was attested to us by those who heard,” but in Galatians 1:12 Paul says, “I did not receive [the gospel] from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”
  5. And then there is the fact that a number of the church fathers (key leaders who lived just after the apostolic age) admitted that they did not know who wrote Hebrews.
  6. The most popular guesses today are that Hebrews was written by Apollos, Luke, Clement, or Barnabas, men who were close associates of the apostles.
  7. Even though the early church did not know who wrote Hebrews, the book was recognized as having apostolic authority and was thus included in the New Testament canon.
- B. As far as the recipients and purpose of Hebrews, the content suggests that it was written to Christians who came from a Jewish background in order to warn them not to return to Judaism.
1. This was something that they were tempted to do in the face of the persecution they were beginning to experience for their faith in Christ.
  2. Many scholars have pointed out that Hebrews is more like a sermon than an ancient letter.

3. It does not contain the typical greeting that is found in ancient letters.
4. It does contain numerous biblical quotations and explains them in light of the coming of Christ, which makes it sound like a sermon.
5. It is also like a sermon in that it has frequent transitions from explanation to application (you can see these transitions by looking for the word “therefore”).
6. As we work our way through this book, I am confident that we will find many ways in which the truths contained in it apply to our lives as God’s people today.

### **III. Christ Is the Culmination of Revelation**

- A. Hebrews opens with the writer declaring that Christ is the culmination of revelation.
  1. The doctrine of divine revelation is basic to the Christian faith.
  2. The only reason why God is knowable to us is because he has made himself known.
  3. Theologians speak of two types of revelation: general revelation and special revelation.
  4. General revelation is the non-redemptive knowledge of God that is available to all people through the light of nature.
  5. And special revelation is the redemptive revelation that is given through prophets and other agents and is both necessary and sufficient for salvation.
  6. This passage is clearly talking about special revelation.

B. The writer presents Jesus as the culmination of revelation by setting a series of contrasts.

1. In contrast to the revelation that was given “long ago”, God has spoken to us in Christ “in these last days.”
2. This tells us that there have been two eras of divine disclosure of the message of redemption.
3. All that was spoken before Christ belonged to the age of promise.
4. Now that Christ has come we are in the age of fulfillment.
5. Jesus is the culmination of all that was revealed before.
6. He is God’s final word.
7. This point is at the heart of the message of Hebrews.
8. As J. Gresham Machen explains, “The progressiveness of the divine revelation... is the master thought of the Epistle. Christ is the culmination of the long succession of lawgiver and prophets. They existed for his sake; they were preparation for him.” [cited in *Ryken’s Bible Handbook*, 582]

C. The reason why the writer refers to God’s revelation through his Son as taking place in “the last days” is because these are the days of fulfillment.

1. We are living in the last days that were foretold by the prophets.
2. This is what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 10 when he says that we are those “on whom the end of the ages has come.” (v. 11)
3. The most decisive events in history have already taken place.

4. Christ has come and has accomplished our salvation.
  5. All that remains is for his finished work to be applied by the Holy Spirit to all of those who have been appointed to eternal life.
- D. One important implication of this is that special revelation has ceased.
1. Jesus appointed the apostles to give the foundational testimony about him, and that testimony has been set down for us in the New Testament.
  2. Now that this Spirit-inspired testimony has been given, there is no longer any need for further revelation.
  3. God has spoken his final Word to us in Scripture.
  4. The canon of Scripture is complete because the New Testament is God's authoritative report and interpretation of the revelation that he gave in Jesus Christ.
  5. As Calvin explains, "when [the writer of Hebrews] speaks of the last times, he intimates that there is no longer any reason to expect any new revelation; for it was not a word in part that Christ brought, but the final conclusion."
- E. God still speaks to us today, but he only does so through the Scriptures.
1. The Holy Spirit helps us apply the teaching of Scripture to various circumstances and concerns.
  2. But God does not give us any new revelation.
  3. As one of my favorite hymns asks, "What more can he say than to you he has said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

4. The clear implication is that there is nothing more that God could say to us.
  5. He has spoken his final, all-sufficient word to us in his Son.
- F. Another difference between the word that God spoke in the past and the word that he has spoken in his Son is that the former was spoken at various times and in various ways.
1. Old Testament revelation was fragmentary.
  2. There were long stretches of time when there was no word from God.
  3. Old Testament revelation was given in a variety of ways.
  4. God spoke to our fathers through dreams, theophanies, oracles, and visions.
  5. But now God has spoken his complete word to us by one who not only shares fully in the divine nature but who also took upon himself our own flesh and blood.
- G. Another contrast between Old Testament revelation and New Testament revelation is that the former was given by prophets while the latter was given by God's Son.
1. The prophets were only servants, but the Son is the heir of all things.
  2. When the writer says that Jesus was "appointed heir of all things", he is referring to Jesus' exaltation in his office as Mediator.
  3. Jesus has always ruled over all creation with regards to his divine nature, but this passage is talking about what he achieved within history as the one Mediator between God and man.

4. Jesus has inherited what Adam failed to inherit by his own efforts.
5. As Calvin explains, "God had at the beginning constituted man, as his Son, the heir of all good things; but through sin the first man became alienated from God, and deprived himself and his posterity of all good things, as well as the favour of God. We hence only then begin to enjoy by right the good things of God, when Christ, the universal heir, admits us into an union with himself; for he is an heir that he might endow us with his riches."
6. The fact that Jesus is the heir of all things is significant for us because it means that those of us who are united to him share in his inheritance.

#### **IV. Christ Is Fully God**

- A. We turn now to the second reason that this passage gives for the superiority of Christ: Christ is superior because he is fully God.
  1. The writer makes this point by stating that God created the world through Christ.
  2. Keep in mind that this letter was originally written to Christians from a Jewish background.
  3. The Jews fervently believed that there is only one true God, that this one true God is Israel's God Yahweh, and that Yahweh is the maker of heaven and earth.
  4. By identifying Jesus as the agent of creation, the writer is clearly saying that Jesus is a member of the unique divine identity.
  5. It was passages like this that led the early church to the conclusion that there is one God in three distinct yet fully equal persons.

- B. The writer further describes Jesus' divine nature by saying that he is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature."
1. The phrase "radiance of the glory of God" compares Jesus to the beams that shine from a light source.
  2. Jesus reveals God to us.
  3. We cannot see God's glory until it shines forth in Christ.
  4. And as the rays of the sun share in the sun's essential substance, Jesus is of the same substance as God.
  5. This is why we confess in the Nicene Creed that Jesus is "of one substance with the Father."
- C. A slightly different point is made by the phrase "exact imprint of [God's] being."
1. The Greek term that is translated as "imprint" is *charakter*.
  2. It describes the impression that is made by a die when it is stamped onto a piece of metal.
  3. As Alexander Whyte explains, "The Son is thus the Father's character stamped upon and set forth in human nature." [*The Characters in Pilgrim's Progress*, 1]
  4. This points us to the fact that the Father and the Son are two distinct persons.
  5. It is not as though the Son is merely a particular manifestation of the Father.
  6. The Father has stamped his image onto the Son.
  7. The Son is distinct from the Father, and at the same time he shares fully in the divine nature along with the Father and



the Holy Spirit.

- D. The writer also says that Christ upholds the universe by the word of his power.
1. Paul says the same thing in Colossians 1 when he writes that all things hold together in Christ (Col. 1:17).
  2. Nothing in this world is autonomous.
  3. Everything, at every moment, is completely dependent upon God for its continued existence.
  4. The universe would cease to exist if it was not sustained by God's preserving power.
  5. And the fact that the writer of Hebrews says that Christ is the one who upholds the world tells us that Christ is God.

## V. **Christ Is the Supreme Mediator**

- A. We turn now to the third reason that the writer gives to support his claim that Christ is superior to all else: Christ is the supreme mediator.
1. This passage shows us how Christ fulfills all three of the Old Testament's mediatorial offices.
  2. He is the supreme prophet, the supreme priest, and the supreme king.
  3. We saw in verses 1 and 2 that he fulfilled the role of prophet by being the agent through whom God spoke his final word.
  4. Here in verse 3 we see that Jesus fulfilled the office of priest by making purification for sins.
  5. This is priestly terminology.

6. Notice what this tells us about the effect that sin has upon us.
  7. Sin defiles us.
  8. It makes us unclean, unfit to come into the presence of God.
  9. We need to be cleansed of this defilement in order to be made fit for communion with God.
  10. Jesus has provided that cleansing for us by dying as our substitute on the cross.
  11. If our faith rests upon him, we are washed and made clean.
- B. After he made purification for sins, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.
1. This is referring to Jesus' ascension back to heaven, which took place forty days after he was raised from the dead.
  2. When he ascended into heaven, he sat down at the place of honor.
  3. He has all authority in his hand.
  4. He governs the world from the throne of God.
  5. He is king of all creation.
- C. Christ's priestly and kingly offices converge in this image of him sitting at God's right hand.
1. Unlike Israel's priests, Jesus ministers in the true heavenly sanctuary, not in an earthly copy of that sanctuary.
  2. As the writer says in chapter 9, "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the

presence of God on our behalf.” (Heb. 9:24)

3. Also unlike Israel’s priests, Jesus is no longer standing.
4. He is seated, because his work is done.
5. This point is emphasized in chapter 10, where it says this: “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Heb. 10:11–14)

D. This brings us to the statement that the writer makes in verse 4: Christ has “become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”

1. This might seem like an odd thing to say, but it makes perfect sense when we understand the original context of this letter.
2. Jews had a high regard for angels as mediators.
3. They saw them as playing a key role in the giving of the law at Sinai and in the exodus from Egypt.
4. It is certainly true that angels are God’s servants and that they do many important things.
5. But Christ is superior to angels.
6. This is a point that is developed in much greater detail in the remainder of chapter 1, which we will study next week.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. Unlike the first recipients of this letter, we are not tempted to return to Judaism.
1. However, we are often tempted to turn to things other than Jesus Christ to find joy, rest, comfort, and security.
  2. And even if we are not tempted to renounce Christ altogether, we are often tempted to supplement Christ with other things.
  3. This is why it is so important for us to keep the message that is proclaimed in these verses in our hearts.
  4. Christ is superior to everything else, because it is only in Christ that we have God's final Word, God's provision for our purification, and God's benevolent rule over his people.
- B. Don't look elsewhere for what only Christ can give.
1. Don't add anything to Christ.
  2. The fact that Christ is superior means that we need to rest in him alone for our salvation.
  3. As Edward Fisher so powerfully put it, "Christ Jesus will either be a whole Saviour, or no Saviour; he will either save you alone, or not save you at all." [*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 112]