

Christ is Superior to the Prophets

Hebrews 1:3

Part Six

People are concerned about all kinds of things. If they are a young person they are concerned with having friends, having something to do, having fun. If they are an adult they will be more concerned about finding a way to make a living or finding a way to make a better living or perhaps finding a wife or husband or having children or raising a family, etc. etc. etc. People are concerned about all kinds of things, but one thing that people in general are not typically concerned about, as much as they should be, is making sure that the wrath of God is not abiding on them.

And why is this? Why is it that so many people are not as concerned about this as much as they probably should be? One reason might be that they are able, in the midst of their unrighteousness, to deny the obvious.

And what is the obvious that so many people will deny? The obvious is that the wrath of God has in fact been revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. But even though this should be obvious to everyone, that the wrath of God has been revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, the ungodly and the unrighteous will invariably suppress this truth or in other words they will deny the obvious.

And how do we know this to be true? Let me read for you **Romans 1:18**. **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”** So should it be obvious that the wrath of God has been revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men? Yes! Absolutely! Why? Because it is a fact! But there is also another fact revealed to us in this verse. And what is that fact? That even though the wrath of God has been revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, the ungodly and the unrighteousness will invariably, apart from the grace of God, suppress this truth in unrighteousness.

And why would they do this? They would do this because they love what God hates. In other words, they love their sin and they are therefore more afraid of changing their sinful lifestyles than they are of God and His wrath.

Hopefully this is not true of us. Hopefully we are afraid of God, in a healthy way, and afraid of His wrath, in a healthy way, and this healthy fear of God and of His wrath would hopefully lead us to give thanks to God for what He has done for us when He propitiated or satisfied His wrath against us through the death of His Son.

This thought brings us back to our study of Hebrews, which was written by an unknown author to a group of Hebrew Christians living in Rome around 67-69 AD in order to strengthen their faith in the midst of a great persecution so that they in the midst of that persecution would not be tempted to turn from Christ back to Judaism.

So how did the author of this letter seek to strengthen the faith of these struggling Hebrew Christians by his letter? He sought to strengthen their faith by showing them throughout his letter that Christ was superior to anything that they might have left behind in Judaism, which led us to the question that we are now seeking to answer as we continue our study of this book. And what is that question?

How did the author of the book of Hebrews see Christ as superior?

First of all, the author of the book of Hebrews saw Christ as superior to the Old Testament prophets (Hebrews 1:1-4). So in what way did the author of Hebrews see Christ as superior to these prophets?

The author of the book of Hebrews saw Christ as superior to the Old Testament prophets because he believed that Christ, being God's Son, was the culmination of divine revelation (Hebrews 1:1-2a).

In other words, the author of the book of Hebrews saw the Old Testament prophets simply as an opening act of divine revelation sent to prepare the way for the true headliner, who was Christ the only begotten Son of God. We saw this in **Hebrews 1:1** through the first part of **verse 2**.

But the author of Hebrews was not satisfied with simply having made this point. He wanted to drive this point home to his readers even further. So how did the author seek to accomplish this?

The author of Hebrews continued to drive home the magnitude of Christ's superiority to the Old Testament prophets by providing a seven-fold description of Christ (Hebrews 1:2b-4). And where did the author record this seven-fold description? He recorded it for us in **Hebrews 1:2-4**. So now let me quickly review for you that parts of this description that we have already covered.

So, what was the first part of this seven-fold description? The author of Hebrews described Christ as God's appointed heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2b). We saw this description in the middle of **verse 2**. So, what was the second part of this seven-fold description?

The author of Hebrews described God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the one through whom God made the world (Hebrews 1:2c). We saw this description at the end of **verse 2**. So, what was the third part of this seven-fold description?

The author of Hebrews described God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the radiance of His Father's glory and the exact representation of His nature (Hebrews 1:3). We saw this description at the beginning of **verse 3**. And what was its purpose? It was to describe Christ's relationship to His Father. So, what was the fourth part of this seven-fold description?

The author of Hebrews described God's Son as the One who upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3b). We saw this description near the middle of **verse 3**. And what was its purpose? It was to describe Christ's relationship to the universe. We are now coming to the fifth part of this seven-fold description of Christ.

So now let us go back and read our passage until we get new descriptive phrase. And beginning with **verse 1** of **Hebrews 1** let us read. **“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, (2) in these last days 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. (And now we come to the author's next descriptive phrase, which we will be considering this morning. And what is that next phrase?) When He had**

made purification of sins.” So how else did the author of Hebrews describe Christ?

The author of Hebrews described Christ as having made purification of sins (Hebrews 1:3).

So, what is my hope for this morning’s message as we explore the meaning of this particular descriptive phrase? My hope is that once we have explored the meaning of this particular phrase, we might better understand the centrality of the death of Christ in respect to the eternal redemptive plan of God and that our better understanding of its centrality might help us to appreciate and to love Christ even more than we already do.

So let us now begin to look at this phrase. But even before we look at this phrase, let us first of all look at how this phrase fits into the flow of the passage and this means that we will have to take a look at how the author, just prior to this phrase, had described Christ.

And how had he just described Christ? He had just described Christ as upholding all things or in other words as upholding the universe and everything in the universe. That is how he had just described Christ.

So, what did we conclude last week that he meant when he described Christ in this way? This is what we concluded: When the author described Christ as upholding all things or in other words, as upholding the whole of this universe, we concluded that the author primarily meant that Christ was carrying “**all things**” forward; or in other words that Christ was carrying the whole of this “**universe**” forward; in a manner consistent with God’s eternal redemptive plan. This is what we concluded.

And I believe that this conclusion is reinforced by this new descriptive phrase that we are now considering, that provides us a description of an event, that Christ did in fact carry forward and which is at the very heart of God’s eternal redemptive plan.

And what was that event? It was when Christ “**made purification of sins.**” And when did Christ do that? Let me give you a clue. What do the Scriptures teach us? The Scriptures teach us that without the shedding of blood there is no remission from sin. So based on this clue, when did Christ

purify sins? Christ made purification of sins when He on our behalf offered Himself up to God on the cross of Calvary as an atoning sacrifice thus paying the debt of our sin.

So is this purification of sins that this author is referring to and that took place at the cross of Calvary a big deal? Absolutely, if someone has not taken advantage of this purification of sins, spoken of here by this author, they are spiritually dead or in other words they are cut off from God, for the Scriptures are clear that the wages of sin is death. And because they are cut off from God, they will not only be unable to enjoy a personal relationship with God in this life and the life come but His wrath that is presently abiding upon will continue to abide upon them upon even into eternity. So if taking advantage of Christ's purification of sin or in other words His work on the cross of Calvary a big deal? Absolutely!

In fact, there is no other way for someone to be purified from their sins other than by taking advantage of this purification of sins that Christ Himself was able to accomplish on the cross of Calvary. There is no other way.

What does **Acts 4:12** tell us, **“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”** There is no other way to be purified from our sins. This is God's plan. There is no other plan. And it has always been at the heart of God's eternal redemptive plan. So now let us to examine how much at the heart of God's eternal redemptive plan Christ's atoning death has been and continues to be. And where will we begin? We will begin in eternity past!

When God chose us for salvation in eternity past He did not choose us based on our future personal righteousness but rather He chose us based on Christ's future atoning death and His purification of sins (Ephesians 1:3-7).

Let me read for you **Ephesians 1:3-7**. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (4) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love (5) He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the**

Beloved. (7) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.” So when we look back at eternity past and when God chose us in Christ do we see Christ’s atoning death and His purification of sins? Absolutely!

So now let us go from eternity past to the beginning of time. And as we do this will we still see Christ’s atoning death and His purification of sins very much still at the heart of God’s eternal redemptive plan? Yes! Absolutely!

When Adam was deceived by Satan and sinned against God, and Adam found his fellowship with God broken, God gave a promise to Satan that prophesied Christ’s future atoning death and His purification of sins (Genesis 3:15).

This promise that He gave to Satan is recorded in **Genesis 3:15**. And what is that promise? **“He [referring to the future Christ] shall bruise you on the head [referring to a fatal wound], and you will bruise Him on the heel [referring to less than a fatal wound or in other words to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ].”** So shortly after the beginning of time do we still see Christ’s atoning death and purification of sins very much at the heart of God’s unfolding eternal redemptive plan? Absolutely! And this is impressed upon us even further when we consider what God immediately did after He had given this promise. So, what did God do?

After God promised Christ’s future atoning death and His purification of sins, it would appear that God immediately established the sacrifice of animals as a picture of what He had just promised (Genesis 3:21, cf. Genesis 4).

Why would I say this? First of all, after giving this promise to Satan and also after He had finished speaking to Adam and Eve, God immediately provided them garments made of animal skins, which of course would have required the shedding of their blood.

But there is more. After God had sacrificed these animals in order to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve, God then very shortly thereafter gave them instruction about the proper way to approach Him, which of course required what? It required the shedding of blood or in other words a death.

How do we know that God had most likely given them this instruction? We know this based on the story of Cain and Abel recorded for us in **Genesis 4** where we are told that Abel's sacrifice, which involved a death of an animal, was acceptable to God but Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable. There would have been no way for them to know what was acceptable or not acceptable if God had not given them instruction about what was necessary in order to approach Him.

So did God after He promised Christ's future atoning death and purification of sins in **Genesis 3:15** go on and establish the sacrifice of animals and the shedding of their blood as a picture of what He had just promised? I believe He did.

And therefore because Christ's future atoning death and His purification of sins was continuously being pictured long before Christ was actually crucified, Christ's future atoning death was continuously being displayed as the heart of God's eternal redemptive plan.

So who were some of those who were painting this picture of Christ's future atoning death and purification of sins prior to the Mosaic Law?

Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job all offered animal sacrifices prior to the Mosaic Law (Genesis 8:20; 12:7-8; 13:18; 15:9-17; 22:2-14; 26:25; 33:20; 35:3 Job 1:5; 42:7-9).

And of course beyond their recorded sacrifices we have all the sacrifices that were offered under the Mosaic Law.

The Mosaic sacrifices consisted of two kinds, animal (also referred to as bloody sacrifices) and vegetable (also referred to as non-bloody sacrifices).

And which of those sacrifices was the most important? Obviously the animal sacrifices were the most important.

May God give us the grace to better understand God's hatred of sin and therefore a greater appreciation of having been purified of our sins by Christ through His death.