

## 5. THE DIVINE SON: EXPLORING MESSIAH'S DEITY IN HEBREWS 1

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**And he is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature ... [NASB] (Heb.1: 3).**

This phrase — which forms part of the long introductory sentence of the first four verses to the epistle to the Hebrews — is a Greek grammarian's paradise. It contains two words which are used but once each in the entire New Testament (NT) — **radiance** and **representation** — and a third word ( **nature** ) which has been the cause of theological debates over millennia. So this fact alone should prepare us for some 'interesting' discussion!

**David Wilber** (who has been our representative voice for trinitarian commentators) believes he finds rich nuggets of gold for Christ's putative Divinity here. However, we shall soon see that, "all that glitters is not gold!"

### The Son Shares the Father's Divine Essence ( <sup>1</sup> )

The author of Hebrews, writes **Wilber**, goes beyond describing the Son's divine *actions*; he also describes the Son's divine *person* ... [for] "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb. 1:3).

**Wilber** then goes on to define the three critical words where he digs for the gold looking to find Christ's alleged "*divine person*". He does a good job in his word studies, but it's his conclusions from those definitions which I shall question ...

#### 1. THE RADIANCE

The first word found only here in the NT describes the Son of God as **the radiance** of God's glory. ( <sup>2</sup> ) **Wilber** comments;

The word translated as "radiance" (ἀπαύγασμα) is "ambiguous and may be understood either actively as 'radiance' or passively as 'reflection.'"[25] ... the main point conveyed by this image is that the Son embodies God's glory ...

Although the word **radiance** may indeed carry either an active or a passive sense, I hope to show that the basic idea is that, just as the radiance of the sun reaches the earth bringing light, warmth and life-giving rays, so too the glory of God shines forth upon men, illuminating the world through His Son — that is, passive as to origin.

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<sup>1</sup> This is **Wilber's** own heading for this section at [davidwilber.com/articles](http://davidwilber.com/articles)

<sup>2</sup> ἀπαύγασμα/*apaugasma*

## HEBREW VERSUS GREEK THEOLOGY

**Wilber** however, prefers the active nuance where the Son innately — in his own *person* — possesses the quality of light in, and out from, his own “Divine Nature”. Thus, he makes the rays of the Son to **be** the sun itself.

This interpretation sits squarely in line with post-apostolic trinitarian speculations about metaphysical distinctions within the “Godhead”. From the Second to the Fifth Centuries the Church Councils hammered their “orthodoxy” out.

Whereas Gentile summits veered off into philosophical speculations concerning the nature of the “inner Being of God” with all sorts of gnostic distinctions about *eons* and *emanations*, the Jewish Jesus, and his Jewish apostles, maintained that God could only be known by His words and actions in history. For Jewish believers, God was not known metaphysically, but metaphorically — God is like a strong fortress, like a shepherd, like a father, like a mother, like a landowner, like a warrior, etc.

And whereas the Western (Roman) & Eastern (Constantinople or Orthodox) Churches became increasingly severed from their Hebrew moorings, the faith of Israel has always stood in contrast to all speculative thought about God’s inner being. The Hebrew mind was not engaged in metaphysical considerations as to whether God was one Being in Three Persons, whether Jesus had “two natures”, etc.

Jews, grounded in their Bible history, understood that Yahweh God can only be known by His words and by His works — whether through Israel and her prophets or supremely through the mighty acts He did through His Son’s preaching and miracles, and consummately through his death, burial and resurrection. ( <sup>3</sup> )

So, sadly, the post-apostolic church was dragged into metaphysical mud distancing itself from its Jewish roots. The Gentile church talked about *consubstantiality*, *homoousios*, *theosaner* (the god-man) and other extra non-biblical words and terms. This tragic shift can be traced as a direct result from pagan Gentile and Hellenistic influences. ( <sup>4</sup> )

Resultant post-apostolic **Church Councils** did not quote a single Bible verse in their creeds, but it is fair to say that the words **and he is the radiance of His glory** would, in all likelihood, have formed the basis for their pronouncement in **The Constantinople Creed** of 381 AD which states in part:

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,  
Eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,  
True God from true God, begotten, not made, one Being with the Father ...

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<sup>3</sup> Eg. “I am the LORD your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt ... (Ex. 20:20. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel (Ps. 103: 7). And supremely in the NT, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5: 18). See *They Never Told Me This in Church!* pp 101-105 (Second Edition)

<sup>4</sup> For an easy-to-read and informative discussion of this development I recommend **Kegan Chandler’s The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma: The Recovery of New Testament Theology**, Restoration Fellowship, 2016, pp 116-122.

This **Nicene-Constantinople** creed is the only ecumenical creed that is accepted as authoritative by Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and major Protestant denominations. It's the basis for today's "orthodoxy" — the Trinity.

But does **the radiance** of the Son really mean Christ in his very nature *is God from God, Light from Light*? This switches the meaning entirely. It makes the Son himself the source of his own radiance and glory — the Son **becomes** the sun — an oxymoron, surely?

This cannot be what **Hebrews 1: 3** is saying at all. There the Son is **the radiance of His** (ie., of **the God's**) **glory**. The glory originates from **God** — not the Son. The Son mediates that glory, or in the words of the text itself, he reflects that radiance so we may share in it too.

It would be tautology to say that Christ as God reveals the glory of God! Nor would it make any sense to say that Christ as God is **the exact imprint** of God's very substance!

In the Bible there is the primary and unique glory that belongs solely to God the Father. But He shares it and endows various parts and members of His creation with varying degrees of that glory. For example, the heavenly angels reflect Yahweh's incomparable glory. Adam, as originally created in the **likeness** of God, was the image-bearer of his Creator's glory. Even the inanimate heavens **declare the glory of God**.

Jesus' own testimony is that **the glory which You (Father) gave me, I have given to them that they may be one just as we are one (Jn. 17: 22)**. He tells his Father that his **desire** is **that they whom You gave me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which You have given me ... (Jn. 17: 24)**.

So, Jesus' glory is a derived glory. It's the glory God has given to him to pass on, to radiate out. It's subsequent, secondary, relative. And he promises that when he returns to reign over the earth that **the Son of Man** (ie., a human being!) **will come in the glory of his Father ... (Matt. 16: 27; Mk. 8: 38)**. So yes, Jesus does have his own unique glory — the glory given to no-one else in all of creation — the glory as God's Son and Messiah.

We may truly say that the basic idea is that Jesus Christ as **the radiance of God's glory** brings to men the full revelation of God and that he alone enables us to enter the very presence of God. His radiance is passive.

## **AN IMPORTANT CLUE**

We have a strong clue as to how this unique word "**radiance**" probably would have been understood by the Hebrew believers in the day when this epistle was first written.

The inter-testamental book *The Wisdom of Solomon* has the only occurrence of this word in the Septuagint. There, *Lady Wisdom* is called **the brightness (*apaugasma*) of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness (7:26)**.

Notice how the outshining “radiance” of the glory of God is *defined metaphorically* as being like the reflection from a mirror and also as bearing the image or stamp of the goodness of God, as any number of NT verses clearly say. ( <sup>5</sup> )

I don’t think there can be much doubt at all that **Lady Wisdom** (i.e. wisdom personified) in this text from the LXX was in the mind of the Hebrew’s author when he wrote his Letter, for he also goes on to speak about our second unique word.

## 2. THE CHARACTER OR EXACT IMAGE

**Wilber** continues ...

Regarding the description of the Son being “the exact imprint” of God’s nature ... the word commonly denotes the impression made upon a coin or seal.”[28] The Son is the exact imprint, or replica, of God’s “nature.”

The Son then, **is the exact representation** (or, **bears the very stamp**) of God’s nature. Jesus is the **character** (**χαρακτήρ**), the “seal”, “stamp”, or “impression” of God’s very essence. ( <sup>6</sup> )

In the OT God’s glory overshadowed and dwelled in the Tabernacle. It also dwelled in the cloud that followed Israel’s journeys. In the NT God’s glory overshadowed and dwelled in the human Jesus. **The Gospel of John** puts it this way; **The word became flesh** (ie. was a true human being) **and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1: 14)**. John states that Christ’s glory was **from the Father**, ie., *derived*.

In NT understanding then, this word **character** conveys that which is a copy, a reproduction which portrays the original it represents. The idea is that the Son of God is the perfect “replica” of God’s nature. Just as a seal leaves its very imprint on the wax, producing in every detail the shape of the original dye, the writer to the Hebrews says Jesus is **the exact representation** of God’s essential nature.

Clearly then, the Son is **not** the Original Who is none other but the one and only God Himself.

All of God’s *communicable* attributes become manifest in Christ. If we wish to see God we must look at Jesus Christ. So much for the trinitarian charge that unitarian monotheists make Jesus into a “mere man”!

As the Messianic agent Jesus stands in the place of God to speak and do God’s will. He is authorised to act on behalf of his God and Father. When God raised His Son, He committed to him all judgment and the administration of the coming new world government (**Acts 17: 31**).

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<sup>5</sup> e.g. **1 Cor. 11:7** where Christ is said to **be the image and glory of God** and **2 Cor. 4: 4** where Christ is described as **the image of God**. See also **Col. 1: 15**.

<sup>6</sup>**χαρακτήρ/charaktēr** ... the idea for modern readers is that of a **facsimile**, a precise reproduction or copy of the original. But to NT readers the idea was “stamp”, “imprint”, “impression” produced by a dye or engraving stylus.

We saw in our previous article that Jesus is God's fully endowed executive **upholding all things by the word of his power** ... all authorities, all rulers, all thrones and all dominions, whether in the heavens or on the earth are subject to his word of authority. What a man! What glory God has given to a man!

As unitarian monotheists we are very happy to confess that the Son of God is the perfect representation of God. **"He who has seen me has seen the Father"** (John 14: 9). When we see Jesus we see God perfectly reflected. When we hear Jesus we hear God precisely represented.

Using a NT *simile* we learn that Jesus is the image of God. Being an image does not make him any more God Himself than saying Christians who are being conformed to the image of Christ are themselves becoming the Messiah (Rom. 8: 29)!

### 3. THE SUBSTANCE

The third challenging word **hypostasis** (though not unique in the NT) is variously translated as "substance", "being", "nature" or "essence" ... **the exact representation of His nature**. (I will not initially include more recent translations of "person" for reasons soon to become clear.) ( <sup>7</sup> )

In ancient medical texts, the word was used for a sediment that collects at the bottom of a solution. It literally means to 'stand under'. Understandably (!) then, **hypostasis** came to refer to whatever underlies a particular phenomenon — its most basic or fundamental "reality", "substance" or 'essence'.

Later in the book of **Hebrews** the word is translated to mean a "conviction", "an assurance", a "solemn profession". Which is to say, standing underneath our Christian faith is a solid basis for our assurance and convictions ... what God has done and promises yet to do in Messiah His eschatological Son. ( <sup>8</sup> )

You may wonder how it is that some of our English translations substitute the word **"person"** (eg., NKJV) for **"substance"** in **Hebrews 1: 3**? It seems a long way from an impersonal substance, essence or nature, to becoming a person. So let's briefly see how **"substance"** (a what) switched its meaning to being an individual (a person).

#### THE Gnostic Hypostases ... Woops, I Mean Persons!?

I am sure you have heard the trinitarian mantra, **"God is Three Persons in one essence"**. But what is not generally known is that this 'orthodox' confession contains a massive contradiction.

The actual formula hammered out over post-apostolic centuries states: **"God is three hypostases (they mean individuals) in one substance"**.

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<sup>7</sup> ὑπόστασις/**hypostasis**"

<sup>8</sup> eg. Heb. 3: 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our **confidence** (**hypostasis**) steadfast to the end. Heb. 11:3 "Faith is the **assurance** (**hypostasis**) of things hoped for ...

Can you spot the tricky wordplay? The word **hypostasis** from **Hebrews 1:3**, as we have seen, literally means **substance**. Consistency demands the creed should say, “**God is three substances in one substance**” or, three whats in one what.

And here is something else; It’s a trinitarian ‘sin’ to “**confound the persons and confuse the substance**”. Every time someone confesses “**God is three Persons in one essence**” they actually condemn themselves as a heretic by their own “orthodox” conciliar creedal pronouncements, for they confound the persons by confusing the substance! (I will explain this in more detail shortly.)

We see then, that the word **hypostasis** was re-defined by later post-apostolic church councils. The substance (or nature) had now become a “person” — three Persons, in fact! And it all originated in Gentile pagan creations.

Observe how drastically this alters what the author to the Hebrews actually wrote. Whereas **Hebrews 1: 3** states God has **one hypostasis, one substance or one essential nature**, later church dogmaticians (especially the **Cappadocians** who had the final say for all subsequent Roman and Eastern theology) pronounced that God exists in **three hypostases**, now meaning three **persons!** *Three whats in one what!?*

The well-known trinitarian apologist **James White** describes God as being **three “whos” (persons) in one “what” (substance)**. And **Millard Erickson** candidly admits that a good trinitarian should be prepared to say of God that “**He are one, and they is three**”!

So, it should come as no surprise that, according to ancient sources, the most fundamental orthodox delineation of God’s triadic nature, “*three hypostases (persons)*”, was already manufactured and in use by the Gnostic heretics before any of the Catholic councils had ever convened. ( <sup>9</sup> )

**Kagan Chandler** correctly notes that **the doctrine that God is three “hypostases” is damaged by the NT reference to the one “hypostasis” of “God” in Heb. 1:3.** ( <sup>10</sup> )

## **WATCH THE MAGIC!**

Trinitarians propose that one of their members (who eternally existed as God) became the so-called God-man. This means *one of the persons in the ‘Godhead’ now has two natures forever!*? The Son allegedly has *two hypostases*. So, the logical question is: *If the ‘eternal’ Son of God took on flesh, how many natures does the Trinity now have?* ( <sup>11</sup> )

**Bill Schlegel** devastatingly responds to this *hocus pocus* (euphemistically called “mystery” by our trinitarian friends) when he asks this question; **Is God one Being, or two Beings? Trinitarian doctrine insists that the Three Persons of God are one because**

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<sup>9</sup> **Kagan A. Chandler** *The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma: The Recovery of New Testament Theology*, Restoration Fellowship, 2016, p.116. ( I recommend **Chandler’s** careful examination of the history of this gnostic development within the Catholic church’s formulation of the Trinity in pp 116-122.). My shorter version is on pp 75 in *They Never Told Me This in Church!* And also demonstrates this little known fact in the religions of Egypt, Babylon, and Rome as well as the Greeks.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p118 (Footnote 415)

<sup>11</sup> The doctrine of the two natures of Jesus is technically called “the hypostatic union”.

they are one Being. One Being? But wait a second, doesn't trinitarian doctrine also insist that one of the "God Persons" became a human being? That makes two Beings.

And if they are only "one being", does that not eliminate the human being, Jesus of Nazareth? So, they directly contradict their other core belief that God became flesh! For **if God, or any person of the one God became flesh, then God has two natures. Trinitarianism has created a contradiction between its two core doctrines.**

1). God is one because they (it) are one essence.

2). God became a second essence.

Trinitarians insist their god has only one nature, while at the same time insisting their god has two natures. Which is it? Are we to believe God has one nature or two natures? Theology should not be a magical trick — "Look! One nature. Now look! Two natures! Look! One essence. Now look! Two essences!" (<sup>12</sup>)

Or, we may put it in **Carlos Xavier's** way, If God is "one in nature" hence "one God", and if Jesus has two natures, then [surely] that is two Jesuses! (<sup>13</sup>)

It is the glory of our God that He has stamped His **exact imprint** on a real flesh and blood human being — Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the picture of what Adam (the son of God) and all humanity was made to be and will soon be at his appearing.

We are not quite there yet. The Kingdom has not yet arrived. We await the day when we shall see him and be conformed to his likeness. **But** (by faith in the meantime) **we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour ... We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ who is the image of the invisible God (2 Cor. 4: 4; Col. 1: 15; cf. Heb. 1: 3). (2 Cor. 4:4-6)!**

Jesus is the brilliance shining out from the sun to all who would see the beauty and glory of his Father. He's **the exact representation of God's nature.**

All that Jesus is, is backed up by the glory and power of his Father and our Father, his God and our God!

Now that's real gold!

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<sup>12</sup> I highly recommend **Bill Schlegel's One God Report** podcasts.

<sup>13</sup> This observation by **Carlos Xavier** is from one of his many thought-provoking posts on **The Human Jesus** F/Book page.

