

## 7. THE MESSIAH'S DIVINITY: EXPLORING THE SON'S DEITY IN HEBREWS 1 (The Son is Worshiped)

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After he had made purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much superior to the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than theirs. For to which of the angels did He ever say, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten you" ... And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship him" (Hebrews 1: 3-6)

The writer to the Hebrew Christians goes to great lengths to prove Jesus' superiority over the angels. In **chapter 1** he marshals seven quotes from the OT to make the point that the Son **has become so much superior** to even those glorious Intelligences. However, before citing the first of his seven proof-texts, he introduces this subject with the statement that God gave this exalted status to His Son **after** he **had made purification for sins**.

He adds that the Son's superior status at God's right hand was given to him as an **inheritance**. Which is to say, Jesus's exalted name and rank is **not** attributed to him because he himself *is* God, or to use **David Wilber's** preferred description, because he is **the preincarnate Son**. No. Jesus' surpassing status is the reward for his atoning sacrifice for our sins on the cross. Jesus' death, burial and resurrection thus guarantee the coming triumph of the Kingdom of God.

If the author's aim was to prove Jesus is himself God, then all he had to do was to say so; "The Son is above the angels because he himself **was** all along, and still **is** God in his very being." Nothing more needed to be said! End of story.

However, he does not say this for, as we saw in a previous article, the Son is **the radiance of God's glory and the exact replica of His nature**. An equally acceptable translation is to say the Son **bears the exact stamp of God's nature**. We could summarise the idea in the parallel expression, **Christ is the image of the invisible God (2 Cor. 4: 4)**. A radiated light, a reproduction, a stamp, or an image are not the originals they reflect, replicate or copy!

This is a telling fact. Whenever the apostles preached that Jesus was the Christ they never once appealed to any OT verse to say, "Well, there you go. Jesus is fully God." But they did appeal to their Hebrew Bible to prove that the Son was indeed the promised one, the Messiah, the King of Israel. ( <sup>1</sup> )

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<sup>1</sup> **Gabriel** announces that the promised **Son of the Most High** will be given the throne of his father David and **he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end**" (Lk. 1: 32-33). Thereafter, the NT consistently links Jesus' sonship to rulership — definitely not to Godhood. Jesus is God's Son precisely because he is David's heir!

## GOD GIVES EVERYTHING ... MEN RECEIVE EVERYTHING

A fundamental tenet of Christianity is that the God of the Bible is self-sufficient. He needs nothing to be given to Him ... **for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11: 36).** This God Who made the world and all things in it ... is neither served by human hands, as though He needed anything ... **for in Him we live and move and exist (*literally, we are*) ... (Acts 17: 24-25,28).**

In contrast, there is nothing we creaturely humans have which we have not received from Him: **A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven” (Jn 3: 27).** **What do you have that you did not receive? If you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it (1 Cor. 4: 7)?**

There is not a single thing that you or I have that didn't first originate from God. **Every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights ... (James 1:17).** To “receive” anything proves we are not God.

Now ask yourself: **Does Jesus have anything at all that he did not first “receive”?** Can we find a single statement in all of Scripture saying Jesus possesses anything that he first did not “receive” from God?

My trinitarian friends will immediately say, “What about Jesus’ seven “I am” statements in the Gospel of John? You know, **“I am the light”, “I am the way”, “I am the life”, “I am the living water”, “I am the truth”, and especially “Before Abraham was, I am”?**, etc. Don't these statements prove Jesus is all-sufficient?

I will let Jesus himself answer: **“All things have been handed over to me by my Father” (Matt. 11: 27).** **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28: 18).** **“Just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in himself, and He has given him authority to execute judgement because he is the Son of Man” (John 5: 26-27).** The Father **has given all judgement to the Son (Jn. 5: 22)** and the Father shows him **all things (Jn. 5: 20).** **“I live because of the Father” (Jn. 6: 57).** I can do nothing on my own initiative (Jn. 5: 30) but my words and my works are not mine, but the Father's dwelling in me. Other such texts abound.

Everything Jesus was, is, and has, or will ever be is from God, thus proving Jesus is not God, but a man. This includes the coming Kingdom ... **“My Father has granted me a Kingdom” (Lk.22: 29).** When asked if he would please grant James and John to sit on his left hand and on his right hand in the coming Kingdom our Lord Jesus admitted that this was not in his power to give. That prerogative was His Father's alone **(Matt. 20: 20ff)!**

The inescapable truth is that every single privilege, power and ability the Son of God has is his because God has given it to him. There is nothing he has not first received from heaven, **from the Father of lights.** He can therefore say, **“I am ... whatever the Father God has made me to be”.**

And do we know that right now in heaven Jesus still depends on God for his life? Don't believe me? How about this: **For indeed he was crucified in weakness, but he lives (present tense) by the power of God (2 Cor. 13:4)**. Therefore, the Son is a human being fully endorsed, enabled and empowered by the Almighty.

In fact, **even in heaven right now, Jesus continues to pray and intercede as he did during his life on earth (Heb. 7:25; Rm. 8: 34; I Jn. 2:1)**. This is another convincing proof that Jesus is not God. There is no instance in Scripture where God prays to somebody else. Only men need to pray, and Jesus prays to this very day!

## **BUT WHAT ABOUT GOD'S COMMAND TO WORSHIP THE SON?**

**Wilber** would strongly object to my previous assertion that whenever the apostles preached that Jesus was the Christ they never once appealed to any OT verse to prove that he was God Almighty. **Wilber** would point to a decisive 'proof' for the Deity of Messiah in **Hebrews 1**. He writes that;

In light of the Son's exaltation, the author presents God as commanding the angels to worship the Son: "And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'" (Heb. 1:6). This quotation comes from Deuteronomy 32:43, where the recipient of the angels' worship is YHWH.[37] Thus, in Hebrews 1:6, the author of Hebrews calls upon the angels to offer unto the Son the worship that belongs to God in accordance with God's command ... By his command, God shares the worship due to him with his Son." [38] ( <sup>2</sup> )

So let me get this right: According to **Wilber**, God's **preincarnate Son** (whom he alleges was the agent who created the universe in the first place) after **he took on human flesh** (an expression found nowhere in the Bible) suffered for a little while as one of lesser status than the angels (whom he also presumably had created). Then, **the incarnate Son rose from the dead and ascended [back] to God's throne, thus becoming superior to the angels in status.**

Doesn't it strike you as odd, indeed incoherent, to say that after returning to heaven, God (presumably **Wilber** means God the Father but **not** "the Triune God"?) has suddenly got to tell His angels to worship the Divine Son who was their Creator in the first place? ***Had the angels so soon forgotten who this preincarnate Son (in his essential Divine essence) was, that they needed this command?***

Does this sound right? In Australia we ask, "Does this pass the pub test?" ***If "the Divine Son" created the angels in the first place wouldn't he already be superior to them? So why would God need to command them to worship the Son?***

I will not create a strawman here. I wish to fairly represent **Wilber** who seems to anticipate this objection by correctly pointing out that the words '**Let all God's angels**

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<sup>2</sup> [davidwilber.com/articles](http://davidwilber.com/articles)

worship him' are a direct quotation from Deuteronomy 32:43, where the recipient of the angels' worship is YHWH. ( <sup>3</sup> )

In other words, no true angel of God in heaven would ever bow down and worship anyone but Yahweh. So the fact that the writer of the **Epistle to the Hebrews** applies **Deuteronomy 32: 43** with approval to the Son surely means Jesus is God?!

**Dr James White**, a strident apologist for the Deity of Christ school, spots a difficulty with this trinitarian assertion that because Jesus receives worship he must therefore be God:

We know that Jesus received worship, and only God can receive worship. That has to mean that Jesus is God. But we also know that men in the Bible, from time to time bow down and worship before other men. (Ah, now we might be onto something, for in the Bible God is not the only one who receives worship!)

The worship 'Jesus' receives is not merely that which you would bow down before an earthly leader. It is always in the context of 'religious' worship, which is reserved for God alone. The identity of 'Jesus' as 'Yahweh' on the part of the NT writers, is intimately connected with this worship, demonstrates that OT prohibition against the worship of anything in the religious context, but 'Yahweh' Himself. ( <sup>4</sup> )

And another strong trinitarian apologist who also insists on this point is **Dr Michael Brown**. He agrees that Jesus must be God because he is worshipped. He writes; That same praise, honour and glory that goes to God in the book of Revelation, goes to the lamb, to a created being! To me, the notion that it is a created being that we should bow down, call lord, worship and pray to, as based on the NT, is a heretical and dangerous notion that we need to distance ourselves from, and recover who "Jesus" truly is. ( <sup>5</sup> )

So, **Dr Brown et al** want the Church to worship "Jesus" not as a created being for this is a heretical and dangerous notion.

What is the answer to these trinitarian assertions? Well, the answer is really not at all complicated. You will note that our trinitarian apologists at least admit that men in the Bible, from time to time bow down and worship before other men. This is easily demonstrated as true. ( <sup>6</sup> )

The Greek word for worship is *proskyneō* which literally means to kiss the hand with reverence or, to bow the knee in homage. In the Bible it's used of giving obeisance to

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<sup>3</sup> Our English Bibles follow the Hebrew text in **Deuteronomy 32: 43** which reads **Rejoice, O nations, with His people ...** This is another instance where the writer to the **Hebrews** quotes the Septuagint (LXX) Greek text where, instead of the Gentile nations being invited to rejoice before YHWH, it is the angels who are now commanded to worship Yahweh.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L15VqpH-KYs>: Go to the third segment of the debate at **Jewish Voice Broadcasts** and advance 1 minute 57 seconds.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: Scroll to 10 minutes 39 secs to a debate hosted on **Jewish Voice Broadcasts** in 2010.

<sup>6</sup> (προσκυνέω) **Abraham** accepted worship (**Gen. 23: 7,12**). **Moses** gave worship to Jethro who accepted it (**Ex. 18: 7**). **Jonathan** accepted worship from his friend David (**I Sam. 20: 41**). David's general **Joab** accepted worship (**2 Sam. 18: 21**). Etc.

men or beings of superior rank and status — whether to God, to kings, to the Jewish high priest, to angels or even to demons! ( 7 )

When **Hebrews 1: 6** informs us that God is going to command His angels at the Second Coming of Christ to **worship the Son**, it's the same word *proskyneō* which we have already noted is **not** used exclusively for the worship of God, and so does not of itself prove that Jesus is God.

The following example shows that the Davidic King is worshipped in association with and alongside of Yahweh, but not **as** Yahweh Himself (as **James White** alleges above);

**Then David said to all the assembly, 'Now bless Yahweh your God.' And all the assembly blessed the LORD, the God of their fathers, and bowed low and worshipped the LORD and the king (1 Chronicles 29: 20).**

The people worshipped Yahweh and David. They did not worship David *as* Yahweh. King David is **not** God just because he was worshipped alongside or in association with Yahweh. By the same token, just because the supreme Davidic king, our Lord Jesus is worshipped in association with God does not *ipso facto* mean Jesus must be God.

## **THE REASON THE LAMB IS WORSHIPPED IN HEAVEN**

A careful reading of **Revelation chapters 4 and 5** (where **Dr Brown** is working from) actually gives the lamb's atoning death as the *raison d'être* for the worship ascribed to Jesus. Jesus is worshipped as the Lamb. Jesus is praised precisely because of his atoning death, thereby reconciling all creation to God. The Lamb is worthy to receive the honour, praise and worship *because* he redeemed mankind.

That is to say the Lamb is **not** worshipped because he is God (who is immortal and cannot die anyway) but precisely because he did die and is thus worthy of all grateful praise and worship from those he rescues.

Note that **Revelation chapter 4** introduces to us **One Who sits on the throne (4: 2-3)**. He is called **the LORD God Almighty Who was and is and is to come!** (v. 8). Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus ever called the LORD God Almighty. Note also the singular verbs and singular pronouns ascribed to this One Who is worshipped as the Almighty God. The God of the Bible is one Person. Yahweh is one LORD, a singular individual (**Deut. 6: 4**).

Heaven's hosts — who are described as being **around the throne (vs. 4,6)** worship **Him Who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "You are worthy,** (singular second person pronoun and singular verb) **O LORD our God, To receive glory and honour and power; For You created** (singular second person pronoun and verb) **all things, and by Your will they exist and were created (vs. 9-10).**

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<sup>7</sup> See **Strong's G4352** definition for *προσκυνέω/proskuneo*.



Then it's not until **chapter 5** that the Lamb is introduced. The Lamb, note, is **in the midst of the throne** where the **four living creatures and the elders** themselves are also **in the midst of the throne**. The Lamb **stands** in company with the other created beings. When seated the Living Creatures have their own thrones. The 24 elders have their own thrones. And when the Lamb is seated, he sits on his own throne at God's right hand. He is not the one sitting on the throne of the Almighty.

This creature, symbolically portrayed as **a lamb** who had been **slain**, walked up to the One sitting on the throne and **took** (the Greek word may just as equally be translated **received**) **the scroll out of the right hand of Him Who sat on the throne (vs. 6-7)**. Note, once again Jesus the glorified man receives the scroll from God.

At this stupendous moment all of heaven erupts in spontaneous song to the Lamb. They sing, **You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals, FOR you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood ... (v.9)**. This paean of praise is repeated down in **v. 12, Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!**

Simple question then: *Why* is the lamb worshipped? Because he is more than a creature and really is God Who sits on the Throne? Better read it again, for it's specifically stated he has redeemed mankind by his death and is *therefore* worthy to exercise God's authority over all creation as God's empowered agent, ruler and lord.

Just in case we miss the point the reason Jesus is worshipped is repeated; **Every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honour and glory and power be to Him Who sits on the throne, and to the lamb, for ever and ever!" (v. 13)**

Two observations: **First:** The Lamb is worshipped because he has mediated God's saving purposes on the earth. The worship of Jesus is precisely because he has been the perfect sacrifice for sins.

**Second:** The Lamb is worshipped *in association* with the God on the Throne. The lamb is not the supreme or sole object of worship. Go through the entire book and with one possible exception (which is not an exception to the rule upon closer examination) and you will see the lamb is only ever worshipped *in company* with the One Who sits on the throne. (<sup>8</sup>)

In contrast, the One Who sits on the Throne of the Almighty is worshipped for Himself alone as the creator, upholder and giver of all things. And the living creatures and the 24 elders **fell down and worshipped Him Who lives for ever and ever (5:14)**.

**Dr Brown's** statement that **the same praise, honour and glory that goes to God in the book of Revelation, goes to the lamb, to a created being is just not so**. On a

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<sup>8</sup> Eric Chang writes: It is significant that the word "worship" (*proskyneō*) is used 8 times in Revelation with reference to God alone, and *never* of the Lamb alone. In only one instance it *could*, and perhaps does, refer to both God and the Lamb *together* (5:14). Ibid p315. (Italics original.)

straight-forward reading it is obvious that the worship the Lamb receives is a *qualified* worship — it's worship of the lamb who is a creature who was slain but has been exalted next to God to exercise God's authority over all other created things. Nowhere in the Bible is God ever called a lamb!

So, Jesus is worshipped for soteriological reasons. In plain English this means Jesus is worshipped because he was God's perfect sacrifice ... **The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.** He is **not** worshipped because he *is* God, but because he is the Lamb.

## YAHWEH TEXTS ATTRIBUTED TO THE SON DEMONSTRATE THE LAW OF AGENCY

This is the very same argument **Hebrews 1** makes. In **Hebrews 1: 6** we see that God will command His angels at the Second Coming to worship the Son. But observe carefully how the Son is designated here — **the firstborn Son (Heb. 1: 6)**! In the Bible God is never called the firstborn of anything! God cannot be born! Period.

Note carefully what's written. The angels worship the Son who is **"the firstborn"**. To be **"firstborn"** defines a created being. The angels of God are not confused on this point even if some of us are!

**God has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is the Lord Messiah, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2: 9-11).**

All of this is simply to say that modern readers of the Bible usually fail to understand that **in Ancient Judaism, God could empower his agent to wield His full power and authority, precisely because any figure so empowered always remained by definition subject and subordinate to the one empowering him, namely God. ( 9 )**

The apostle Peter expressed this principle on the **Day of Pentecost**: David says; **"The LORD said to my lord, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah — this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:32-36).**

The Hebrew Bible thus distinguishes between *two Lords*. David's descendant (his Lord Messiah) has been granted to sit down at Yahweh's right hand. Distinguishing these two 'Lords' in the Bible is critical to understanding that there is only One Who is the LORD (**Adonai**) God Almighty, and only one who is the Lord Messiah (**adoni**)— Jesus **the firstborn** Son.

**Dunn** correctly summarises the significance of **Psalm 110:1** as quoted by Peter on the **Day of Pentecost**: **The worship of the one God is now to be expressed by confessing Jesus as Lord. ( 10 )**

<sup>9</sup> **Dunn, Ibid.** Footnote 34, p.107. For a fuller treatment of the Jewish Law of Agency see *They Never Told Me This in Church*.

<sup>10</sup> Observe the "Divine passive" verbs here: **Having been exalted; having received.** God's actions have elevated the Son.

In another prophetic psalm we notice this association (but distinction) between the worship of Yahweh and that of His Son; **Serve the LORD with reverence, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son (or do homage to), lest he become angry, and you perish in the way (Ps. 2: 11-12).** We worship and serve the LORD God **by** 'kissing' (paying homage to) His Son as our Lord Messiah.

**Hebrews 1** agrees. The angels will not be paying homage to the Son **as** the LORD God, but will render to him the reverence due to him as the Lord Messiah — the Davidic King whom God has appointed to rule as His plenipotentiary. Angelic obeisance to the immortalised and highly exalted human Jesus as **the firstborn** will be given in recognition of his rightful inheritance over the new creation. Hallelujah!

## THE SAINTS WILL BE WORSHIPPED TOO

The idea that Jesus must be Yahweh God because he receives the worship of angels and men fails on another level. Jesus promises he himself **will make** the enemies of the church to **come and worship before your feet (Revelation 3: 9)**. What a day when the saints receive the worship of those who have persecuted and tormented them. Jesus finishes this promise by saying such worship from our enemies at our feet will be the powerful proof that **he has loved us!**

## JESUS PLACES HIMSELF AMONGST THOSE WHO WORSHIP GOD!

Furthermore, my trinitarian friends entirely miss the obvious point that in the NT *Jesus is himself a worshipper of the one true God!* He said to the Samaritan woman at the well, **You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews (Jn. 4: 22-23).** Jesus includes himself as a true worshipper of the Father God!

At the Last Supper our Saviour told his disciples he would **“no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God”**. But the very next verse tells us, **And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Mk. 14: 25-26)**. After singing his final hymn with the disciples, our Lord Jesus was betrayed and murdered.

But the very next time in Scripture we read of Jesus singing a hymn of praise to God is in **Hebrews 2: 12**. There the risen Lord Jesus **sings praises** to Yahweh **in the midst of the congregation!** There he again sings hymns as the worship leader of all the redeemed in that promised kingdom! He's certainly not singing hymns in praise of himself, or only from his “human nature” to God!

And see how in **Revelation 15** ***it is the Lamb himself who teaches the saints to worship (proskuneo) the LORD God Almighty (v.4)!*** This scene of worship is described as **the song of the Lamb** and in the same breath is compared to the song of **Moses the servant of the LORD**. It's a hymn Jesus has taught the great crowd to sing to God! *The Lamb worships Yahweh God with them.* **“Who will not fear, O LORD, and glorify Your Name? For You alone are holy.”**



Standing **in the midst of the congregation** Jesus excludes himself from the ultimate worship given to the one God Who **alone** is holy! Only created beings sing hymns to the LORD God.

**There is no instance in Scripture of God Almighty singing hymns of praise.**

## **THE REASON THE ANGELS WILL WORSHIP THE FIRSTBORN SON**

We are now living towards the very end of this present evil age. Since his resurrection and exaltation to heaven, Jesus has been invited to sit at God's right hand to wait until his enemies be made his footstool. When the Kingdom Age finally dawns at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ we are told, **Then comes the end, when he delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when he has abolished all rule and authority and power (1 Cor. 15: 24).**

Once the angels worship the Lamb who shed his blood to reconcile all of creation to God, we are told that then **the Son himself also will be subjected to the One [God] Who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15: 28).**

The worship given by the angels to **the firstborn Son** will be the second last universal act in the great drama of salvation. For after they bow and **kiss the Son**, the Son himself will turn to His God and Father, and bow his knee in glad adoration to the God of gods! Jesus **the firstborn Son** will himself worship the One True God. He once knelt before God in agony in the **Garden of Gethsemane**. Now in the Glory his confession will be the same: **"You Father are the only true God, and I am Jesus the Messiah whom You sent!"** O Father God, from henceforth You are "all in all" (John 17:3; 1 Cor. 15: 28 And see Zechariah 14: 9).

Jesus is **the firstborn among many brethren ... [and] Since we are children of God, we are heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17, 29).** God does not have brothers!

We will bow with the Lord Jesus Messiah as his redeemed brothers under the banner of a unitarian monotheism. The fact that the angels will worship the Son ought not surprise us. After all, are not the angels **all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1: 14)?**

If angels serve us sinners now, in this present time, **how much more** will they gladly honour and worship our God-ordained King who has inherited all things for our sakes on that great day of his universal coronation?!?

## **A CONCLUDING PRAYER**

O LORD our God, may You please hasten on that glorious day when the angels will worship Your firstborn Son and when our enemies will also fall at our feet in worship too! For then all will know Your kingdom has come. Father, we pray it will not be long

before the Son himself will bow before Your throne and lead the united chorus of praise in the great congregation.

O LORD our God, We long for the day when the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. We long for that day when Your will will finally be done on earth as it is in heaven. Bring this to pass for Your everlasting glory, we pray in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.