

Text: Heb 1.1-4

We return to the opening paragraph of Hebrews. As I mentioned, there are a lot of sermons here! My plan is to preach this message as a last look at the whole paragraph, then start breaking the paragraph into “component parts” as Communion messages for the next eight months or so.

Last week, the message focused on the meaning of the paragraph (and we won't stray far away from that today!). Today, though, I want to enhance the meaning by highlighting the structure.

Read Heb 1.1-4

The highlight of the paragraph is the description of our Lord Jesus. He is the one we follow, and the writer of Hebrews wants us to have a proper respect for him in his position as Son, as the second Person of the Trinity.

- That proper respect inspires our **worship**
- And it should inspire our **loyalty** ... which is a major theme of Hebrews

The opening paragraph is full of magnificent Christology (the doctrine of Christ), but the author makes his points by more than just the words of the text. He has a literary form as well that highlights the message he wants to communicate: Christ is everything.

In this message, I want to work through the nuts and bolts of the structure before I give you a proposition.

I. Understanding the structure

A. The first thing I want to point out is the verb tenses

1. The passage opens with three verbs in one verb tense
 - a. God spoke
 - b. God appointed
 - c. He (the Son) made
2. The passage ends with three more verbs in the same tense
 - a. He (the Son) made
 - b. He (the Son) sat down
 - c. He (the Son) “having become” (actually a participle)

3. The middle two verbs are in a different tense

- a. He (the Son) *is* ...
- b. He (the Son) *upholds*

4. These two tenses are

- a. Aorist “Past” tense
- b. Present tense

The point we are making here is that the passage clearly has a certain structure brought about by verb tenses.

- There are a couple of other more technical indicators, but they support this view of the passage

B. The next thing is comparing the concepts

1. First, I’m going to give summary labels for each phrase in the text

- a. “God ... spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets ... has spoken to us in [a] Son” → A The Son contrasted with the prophets (vv. 1–2a)
- b. “whom He appointed heir of all things” → B The Son as messianic heir (v. 2b)
- c. “through whom also He made the world” → C The Son’s creative work (v. 2c)
- d. “He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power” → D The Son’s threefold mediatorial relationship with God (vv. 3a–b)
- e. “When He had made purification of sins” → C’ The Son’s redemptive work (v. 3c)
- f. “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” → B’ The Son as messianic king (v. 3d)
- g. “having become as much better than the angels” → A’ The Son contrasted with angels (v. 4)

If you notice my labels, can anyone guess what is coming next in our analysis? (A Chiasm! A Chiasm! A lovely, lovely Chiasm!)

2. A few comments on chiasmic structures

- a. Why we call it a chiasm — from the Greek X – “chi”
- b. The literary device is a feature of Hebrew parallelism
- c. Hebrew poetry is what I call “rhymes of thought” rather than of words, usually in couplets

Pr 3.5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.

- d. A chiasm happens when the “thought rhymes” are spread far apart with internal “thought rhymes” coming inside the outer “thought rhymes”
- e. The structure heightens the emphasis on the center of the structure and on the outside points of the structure

I should note that commentaries and preachers see more chiasms than the authors intended, but in this case, I think the analysis is sound, although commentaries vary in exactly how they analyze it.

II. The superiority of the Speaking Son

Looking at the “outer markers” first...

- A. When God speaks, whether through prophets or a Son, it is equally true
 1. Made this point before, making it again
 2. Whenever God speaks, it is always true
- B. The comparison is not the speech but the speakers: the Son is the ultimate representative
 1. The Son is superior as God’s spokesman to any man (any prophet)

2. But look at the contrast at the end: The Son is also superior to the angels
 - a. Jewish tradition credits angels as delivering the message to the prophets
 - b. Even much of Moses' writings came via angels

C. Look closely at the language though

1. "having become ... better"
2. "has inherited a more excellent name"

What does this mean? Wasn't the Son *always* superior to the angels?

3. Recall Heb 2.7, "you have made him for a little while lower than the angels"

The doctrine here is that the eternal Son has always been superior to all created things, but...

- He took on a lower position, or lower form
- He has earned the highest place after what he did as a Man

The superiority of the Speaking Son!

III. The eternal nature of the Speaking Son

Now we turn our focus to the focal point of the thought poem: the center of the chiasm

A. The significance of the present tense

1. The Son became a man and accomplished his work
2. The Son *is* (and always was)
 - a. The radiance of his [the Father's] glory
 - 1) The brilliant expression of all that God is
 - 2) The light of the world
 - 3) The fullness of God's glory

During the Incarnation, the glory was partially disclosed, once: the Mount of Transfiguration

When John wrote "*The Revelation*" the glory was again disclosed, in a vision

Rev 1.12-15 ¶ Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; ¹³ and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. ¹⁴ His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

The Son is the expression of God's glory *right now*.

- b. The exact representation of his nature
 - 1) The "cookie cutter" impression
 - 2) The "God-shaped" expression of the Godhead
- c. The One who is upholding all things by the voice of his power

I already spoke of these things last week, so I need to avoid the temptation to go beyond a brief mention

B. The living God is the one with whom we have to do

1. When the Son speaks, God speaks
2. When we abandon the Son, we abandon God

The writer of Hebrews is elevating the stakes. When opponents arise, pressure comes on believers to betray their trust in God.

- Abandoning the faith for a safer option (these Jewish believers were thinking to go back to Judaism)
- Compromising the faith for a more publicly palatable option (a frequent temptation today)

How can we betray the Son?

Consider the eternal nature of the Speaking Son

IV. The appointed roles of the Speaking Son

A. Prophet: the voice of the Father

1. The center of the “thought rhyme” and the extremes of the thought rhyme present Christ as “God’s final agent of revelation”¹
2. The Son is the voice of God: hear him

B. King: the ruler of all

1. The Son is the messianic heir of all things
2. The Son rules now at the right hand of the Father

C. Priest: the bridge between the Majesty on high and weak and feeble man

1. He made us (and everything else)
2. He purified us (without which men are doomed)

Conclusion:

Proposition: Jesus Christ is so high, you should never, ever, turn your back on him.

All these themes will repeat again and again through Hebrews.

The question we have before us as today is this:

How high is Jesus for you?

¹ David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 134.