

Hebrews (Part Three): Who Was Jesus? (cont.)

John W. Ritenbaugh

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With my previous sermon I interrupted my series on Hebrews with a subject that had a tie to that subject through the circumcision issue recorded in Acts 15.

If you will remember people commonly say that such and such a doctrine is done away as a justification for their accepting the Savior, but not being obedient to keeping God's laws in their daily lives.

With this sermon I am getting back more directly to Hebrews and I think the timing is truly appropriate with Passover to be observed on Thursday evening and Jesus, with His life and sacrifice being the means of making peace between us and God and thus making possible the relationship between us and Them.

The previous sermon and this one as well, are titled, "Hebrews: Who Was Jesus?" Now maybe you did not pay attention that I used the past tense "was" in regard to Jesus rather than the present tense "is" because He was in both places there and now as it is. But I did that because I wanted my focus to be on that period of His life in which He took on humanity. He took on humanity for the multitude purposes that He created humanity for. I want us to be filled with appreciative wonderment for Him who became human and came to the earth for our eternal behalf. Humanity dies and it was within God's purposes for Him to die as our Savior.

The wages of sin is death. Unless He fulfilled that totally, He would not be our Savior. He *had* to die despite never committing a sin in His life—ever. Now Jesus drew specific attention to His death. He did it twice and both are in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 1:18 "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And [He adds, important to us] I have the keys of Hades and of Death."

People will only live beyond their natural death without Him flipping the lock open so that we can partake in that part of time.

Revelation 2:8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life.'"

I bring this up because He is the most incredible person all by Himself, as it were, but He also has a companion just like Himself but an entirely different personality. These realities are somewhat like a fairy tale story but regarding Him, that is Jesus, these are truths that evil men are constantly trying to destroy in people's minds. He has always been alive except for that one time, and He lives again forever.

The evidence regarding His teaching, as well as the acts that He did, has been attested to by men and women of excellent character in far, far greater numbers than any other ancient figure in the history of mankind. Nobody of historical importance has anywhere near the accreditation that Jesus received from other humans. These realities sound just like they are a fairy tale.

If you would like to read an orderly arrangement of some of these quotes that people in past times have given, you might want to read *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell. It is a very clearly written and I think you will see that he gives a very good account of Jesus' historical history.

During the course of that previous sermon, I gave you an overview as to how very frequently the term "son of God" or "sons of God" are used in the Old Testament. Those terms are used to identify angels, or in some cases, humans who were in a relationship with God closer than others, even though not regenerated by God's Holy Spirit. I used this illustration purposefully to show a contrast of what was coming later in that first sermon regarding the revelation we are given of Jesus in the Bible and who is also revealed in it metaphorically as "The Word" in a relationship with God who is also revered to in the same context as "the Father." I want you to see here who He is associated with as we begin this on "Who was Jesus."

The apostle John, the last of the apostles to write, made exceedingly sure in the first chapter of his gospel, that we understand that Jesus is absolutely totally unique among all who ever lived, other than the Father. Most especially, He was one of a kind as a human. This is a truly needed revelation because there is nothing comparable to what John wrote in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Jesus is also the Promised Seed of the Genesis 3:15 prophecy.

He is the Messiah, born of Joseph and Mary of Nazareth, and became through His ministry within God's purpose, our Savior, our Teacher, our elder Brother, the Head of the church, and King to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given. Nobody else who has ever lived has been given those titles in one package. He is truly unique.

In this sermon I will repeat quite a bit of information previously given because it is so vital to our salvation. It may seem strange to you that I began to delve more deeply into Hebrews by beginning in the book of John. But I felt that is where the story of Jesus' assignment to Planet Earth directly begins. It begins in the prologue to the gospel of John in the first 18 verses. Those verses establish the theme of John's gospel and the remaining 21 chapters fill in the details.

It remained though, for the apostle Paul to very concisely sum what the ministry of Jesus Christ accomplished for us personally, for each and every one of us individually. What Paul said appears in II Corinthians 4.

II Corinthians 4:6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That God who accomplished what the apostle just said was Jesus of Nazareth, the One who bears all of those titles. Now that concisely said, is who Jesus was, and remains.

Do you see what the apostle Paul did? He drew on what today is recorded in Genesis 1:1-3 in regard to the physical creation and paralleled what He says to the new creation, the spiritual creation under the ministry of Jesus Christ.

What does light do? Light reveals. In actual fact, it was Jesus who gave the revelation on *both* occasions. Jesus said what is recorded in Genesis 1, and He also said what is recorded in John 1.

Several of the key terms in the twenty-one chapters following chapter 1 in the book of John—you will see these scattered throughout the book—are life, light, witness, and glory. They are all also appear in the prologue as it establishes its theme of what follows. But the prologue's most arresting term is used twice in the book's first sentence. That is the term "Word." It does not appear in the gospel being used in the same way as it is used in the prologue. Nonetheless, the prologue's usage of it tells us the gospel of John is to be understood as a whole from the point of view of that term. It is practically the first term that hits the reader. "Word." How often do you see that term in the Bible? The Word of God. That is what Jesus was, the Living Word of God.

In that previous sermon, I was attempting to establish a more complete understanding in our minds of truths pertaining to His becoming human as a foundation supporting our relationship with Him and each other within the church. I did not finish then what I intended to say so there is more to come on this subject.

Let us first be reminded of these foundational factors.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. [That is what Paul said in II Corinthians 4:6.]

In both of these verses the term translated "only begotten" is in the Greek language *monogenes*. It is an adjective directly used of Jesus only five times. All of those usages are in John's gospel. Its most common use in Greek is, first of all, a term of endearment. But that is not all it adds to Jesus' identity and therefore His standing before mankind. The common usage of *monogenes* specifically identifies a *human* family relationship.

My emphasis here at this point is on the term, human. However, most importantly, as it was written by John in this context, it also carries the sense of *only*. We are starting to get into the unique aspect of who was Jesus. This intensifies the sense of endearment by adding the fact of His being one of a kind—He is unique. That is what John is attempting to get across through language right at the beginning.

There is nobody who has ever lived besides the Father who is like Him.

Unique is most especially true in Jesus' case. There has never been another, He is unique, distinct, and separately different from all other usages of the terms "son of God" or sons of God" in Scripture. In this context, with reference to the Father, He absolutely stands alone in this divine relationship.

I will briefly describe the simple Greek grammatical rule that John used. At one time there was a lot of arguing over this by biblical scholars but most of them seem to have given up.

We who speak English are normally not familiar with this because this usage is not used in English grammar. Here is what John did: The Greek equivalent of the English language's definite article "the" is "ho." However, "ho" is *not* used by the apostle John preceding the term "only begotten" in verse 14. Nor did he use it preceding the term "Father" in verse 18. This is a legitimate usage in Greek. Writing as John did not using definite article intensifies and clarifies the descriptive power of the term *monogenes*.

By the means of John writing it in this manner, the term *monogenes* thus pointedly and specifically states *Jesus was the sole, the only Son, and He also shares the character of the One who sent Him*. That is important.

Monogenes becomes very close to declaring, in this specific case, something we have in English—like father, like son. That makes it very clear to us, we know exactly what that means, do we not? That is what John used as a term similar to that only he got it from the Greek language and just as “like father, like son” is a good descriptor, so are the terms that John used without the definite article.

More crudely, what we also have in English is, “The son was a chip off the old block. Just like his dad,” as we would say. Thus laying additional greater glory upon all the unique characteristics listed about Him in this gospel’s opening context. Remember, this is our Savior. This is the One who died for us! The apostle John’s purpose was to demonstrate as best he could through mere words to emphasize the greatness of the level of glory he and his fellow apostles witnessed in their three and one-half years long personal relationship with Jesus.

Now there is even more involved in what John was verbally doing with these terms. He had just begun. This next section is important. The apostle John was severing Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary, by means of words, from all other sons of God set apart in scriptures, and at the same time and far more importantly, all sense of earthly human, generational relationships. Joseph did not impregnate Mary. That is basically what he said. He was generated from above by God. That alone stands Him absolutely unique above all who have ever been born! Only He was that way.

I am sure that you are aware of the Bible lists showing who generated who. Who was the father of whom, who was the son of whom. That was very important to the Jews of the time because they were looking for the Messiah to show up. They were looking for their Savior. So it was very important to those who were religiously inclined that they keep track because after all because God did not say which line He was going to be born into finally He told David it would be from his line.

Please understand that John is not accomplishing all of this regarding Jesus’ identity only with the term *monogenes* and its grammatical effects in these two verses. *Monogenes* is indeed important but there is a whole package of factors that add to Jesus’ identity throughout this entire prologue to his gospel.

With this entire description, John is establishing that Jesus’ relationship with the Father was unoriginated. It was not only originated on earth through human origination, but we are going to find out now that it was *not originated in heaven* either. This is how unique He is. God the Father is not the literal Father of Jesus, the Messiah, and our King. The Bible does not go any further to explain that, but I am going to go into that a bit so that you will see the pieces falling together correctly.

With his entire description, John is establishing that Jesus’ relationship with the Father was unoriginated. This is a very important factor to Jesus’ identity. All human relationships are originated and continue through father and mother. But Jesus’ relationship with the Father was not so.

Here is another unique factor, and this has a major impact on how we understand the Father and Son’s unity. So that we can be reminded, let us go to that verse in John 10. Jesus states:

John 10:30 “I and My Father are one.”

Here is a conclusion regarding *monogenes* radical usage. John is showing in by the totality of this description that even though Jesus is a separate personality from the Father, everything the Father is in character Jesus also is. The apostle John used this grammatical rule five times so that we could get the point.

Jesus was and is every bit as much God as the Father is God even though the family relationship between the two is unoriginated. Thus the term begotten as used for Jesus does not apply in the same way as it does for humans because it states a reality that does not truly exist for Jesus. It was used for the purpose of establishing the concept to the readers of God's truth to establish the idea, the concept, of a family relationship in our minds so that we understand *our* relationship with God more clearly. Even Jesus is distinct from us as a child in the family.

Let us add another reality in the term "only begotten." Interestingly, it appears yet again in the lives of two very well-known biblical personalities, Abraham and Isaac.

Genesis 22:2 He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Isaac was not Abraham's only son because he also fathered Ishmael through Hagar. In addition to that, he also fathered sons with Keturah that she bore after Sarah died.

Genesis 25:1 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.

Genesis 25:6 And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of his concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from his son Isaac, to the country of the east.

But you see, the Bible calls Isaac Abraham's only son. I know that I do not understand that unique term that the Hebrews used, but apparently it had legal bearing then, and today God wants us to understand that it had bearing with Him too because He *copied* it. Calling Jesus His only Son. But He has other sons now, does He not? They will be born into His Family whenever Jesus returns. So Jesus in a sense is not His only Son.

We are beginning to see the uniqueness that John is trying to bring out for our benefit so that we are impressed by what God made available to us in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

I am unsure as to the fullness of this "only" issue but apparently, it was a legal reality. But it is important enough to God that He made it an issue of Jesus being identified as His "only," His unique Son and noting in the Bible that Isaac was Abraham's only son.

Let us note some terms in the first paragraph that tie into the "only begotten" description of Jesus, so it is back to John 1.

John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. [That is going to become very interesting

in just a little bit.] All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

The Old Testament begins with the moments of creation in Genesis 1:1. The flow of time from that point moves toward the beginning of the New Testament and the beginning of the truly serious building of the Family of God following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and moves toward the completion of the building of God's Family and the eternal future to whom Jesus is absolutely critical.

We all know who the Word is, do we not? Well we are going to look at the book of Acts in chapter 17. I am going to teach you something here that we learn from ancient history.

Acts 17:22-34 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I found even an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you [listen carefully]: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' [Notice what the Greeks believed. That mankind is an offspring of God. Not every Greek believed this but Paul is using this as an entrance to their minds so that they had understood that they had something in common that could be used here.] Therefore since we are the offspring of God [He included the Greeks here.], we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them were Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Let us bring the word "Word" back into this. This is the way that I understand this term. In both Hebrew and Greek lore, they identified the "Word" as being the creative energy of the universe. Paul, knowing this similarity, makes use of these somewhat similar beliefs. However, John's approach in his book is strictly Hebrew. He did not use anything from the Greek, although there was something in common, but all of John's references in his writing in his gospel is strictly from Hebrew sources. His gospel contains absolutely no references to anything specifically Greek in origin.

In John 1 the apostle ends all carnal speculations connected to the lore of both peoples by clearly defining in reality *who the Word is*. In verse 1 of John 1, he clearly states that "the Word was with God, and the "Word" was God. Verse 2 confirms the "Word was also in the beginning with God." Verse 3 states that "all things were made through Him." And in verse 4, "the Word gave life to all

things.” John’s approach in his gospel is definitely divine reality. So the “Word” was the reality and the “Word” was and is Jesus the Christ. You can add that to His titles.

As we move along, it becomes clearer and clearer that John is identifying Jesus Christ and the Word—creative energy of the universe—that they are one and the same Person. Therefore, since He, the Word, that is Jesus, was in the beginning already with the one identified as God, and we also know Him as the Father, the Bible shows *there has never been a time that Jesus the Son and the Father ever existed apart from each other*. Jesus is totally unoriginated. He is absolutely, totally unique. The Bible reveals no such circumstance ever existed.

This is another major piece of evidence that Jesus, called the Son, is unoriginated. If I can state it another way that fits the human world, perhaps you will understand clearly. With the information given here in John 1:1-5, the context is as though the Father and the Son are the same age. That is the only conclusion we can reach with the information we are given. You figure that one out!

In addition to that revelation, John adds another in verse 3. It is that they both existed *before* anything was made and given life and therefore a purpose for which to live. This again tends to underline that the Son is unoriginated. Verse 3 is especially a glorification of the Word’s powers. The only thing that we can say that is perhaps intelligent here is it was decided in the councils of God, who would carry out the responsibility to Planet Earth and the human beings they were going to create there to begin to expand Their Family.

That should provide us with a very strong heads up that the New Covenant, since They were going to send God Himself to carry out this responsibility, is *exceedingly* more important than the responsibility God gave to Moses. He was just another human with all kinds of frailties. He sent Someone absolutely perfect in every regard. That is how important the New Covenant is that you and I have made with God, and that we reaffirm each and every Passover. Those Two will be present in Spirit. Do you believe that?

Let us summarize a few more things of verses 1-5 in this way. These are things that are easily determined and I want to be refreshed in your mind. In verse 1, “in the beginning” refers to the beginning of creation, not the beginning of God life. We do not know when that happened. “In the beginning” They were already there. They were already the Ancient of Days. This verse here in John 1, containing this fact, is therefore directly and purposefully tied to Genesis 1. John wanted to make sure we got the picture of how unique Jesus is. He was there in Genesis 1 and He is still there with the Father in heaven.

This also confirms that the Son is a distinct personality from the Father. Verses 1 and 2 tied together, unequivocally identify the Son as the Word as full deity even as the other. He has the same character as the Father—just a different personality.

Verse 3 confirms that these two Beings worked together in perfect harmony and that neither is inferior God to the Other. Jesus stated that the Father is greater than I, and under that circumstance can only be an authority issue. It is helpful to grasp that *all* things were made through Him, which is what is said in verse 3, “all things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made.” This means then all heavenly bodies, animals, vegetables, minerals, laws, forces, and energies that operate within the creation to support life and God’s purpose. And in this creation and its operations, the Word had the lead.

There is no indication of competitiveness from either of Them. Not the slightest thing was made without the Father's involvement and with the Son's involvement as well, as it is clearly stated right in the verse.

Verse 4 is a bit of an expansion on Christ's creative efforts. John is making sure that we understand that it was Christ's responsibility to be the source, the fountain, the origin, and cause of all life, except for the Father. Do you understand that? This means angels too. What a brilliant mind this Being has!

I was really pleased that this begin to work out that I was going to be giving it right before Passover. I think God arranged that because God wants us to *appreciate* Jesus, and what He did, in one sense, He gave up being God! He gave up being the One who did all these things and put Himself into the hands of someone He trusted absolutely and totally, implicitly, would resurrect Him. You think He does not have faith? Oh yes, He does. He had faith in the Father, that He would rescue Him from death, the end of all men.

I mentioned this but I want to go back and run up to something that I think is really amazing.

Here is something to think about regarding Jesus importance to this creation. Now we all remember I am sure John 15:5 where Jesus dogmatically states that without Him we could produce no fruit to God's glory.

We are going to add another much, much bigger thought to this.

Hebrews 1:1-4 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Did you notice what it said in verse 3? "Upholding all things by the word of His power." He brought it into being, but, it says, He continued upholding it—what He made—preserving, and sustaining it. In other words, it is telling us that He is keeping it going, as it were. I want you to think about that. He made it and it is massive, it is huge. It took an awesome amount of power to make this creation. Yet this is indicating that He is upholding it, preserving it, and sustaining it, keeping it going as it were. That is not a fairy tale. He to this day keeps all alive and functioning as created. Our very lives depend upon Him, and this in turn gives the impression that the universe itself is not self-generated, it must be managed. He keeps it going.

What is He? How much power is residing in Him that He keeps everything going as He made it to function? That is mind boggling! That is what it says in the Greek. That is what those terms mean. He keeps it going.

We know when we do not take care of things, what happens? They stop working. They go awry, they spin off, they do not behave like they are supposed to. That is what can be made of that verse. So, He continues upholding it, preserving it, sustaining it. And brethren, this is no fairy tale. It is functioning as He created it to function, and it keeps going because He keeps it functioning.

Verses 4 and 5 taken together is a very brief reminder by means of a contrast between light and darkness to account for the reality of the sinful spiritual darkness of this world, seemingly overwhelming mankind because mankind has chosen to follow his carnality rather than the spiritual purity of our Creator God. This darkness exists despite the reality that from the beginning, Christ has not left mankind without surrounding it with an almost overwhelming witness of His existence.

I want us to go back to a scripture that we go to very often, but I want us to be reminded once again.

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed [no wonder the wrath of God is revealed!] from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness [Especially when seen in the light that Jesus Christ must very well be managing this awesome universe that He created because He upholds it, keeps it going, sustains it by the word of His power!], because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so they are without excuse.

So we are surrounded, living in the most obvious witness that there is of His existence, that of the creation itself, but it is largely ignored because mankind turns its attentions elsewhere.

These five verses all by itself must have been a stunning truth of awesome magnitude for the apostles to hold in their minds and brethren, it should be to us as well. But they had one element that we do not have. They could literally hear His voice as He taught, literally see Him as He acted, and actually reach out and touch Him, and yet, one of them still rejected Him.

They may not have known His attributes with absolute certainty from the beginning, but they learned as they continued following Him even as we should do to. These truths should tie our loyalty to Him more tightly.

John 1:6-13 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John begins in verse 6 using the physical nature of light emanating from the sun, which Jesus also created, being used by the apostle John as a metaphor representing what Jesus with His unique method of teaching, personal conduct, and spiritual help enabled before the very apostles eyes. It is the nature of light that enables us to not only have vision, but also to a measure of understanding, and light is a fitting metaphor for what Jesus in that series of verses had just done. It enables us using the eyes God gave us to perceive the things in the physical world and to put them in to constructive use for our own benefit. Things like shapes, functions, and compositions of what we observe, and light therefore gives one direction to move our activity in life into space and time. But at least some small measure of positive understanding and use.

Thus in the metaphor, the spiritual light that has its source in Jesus' words and conduct is distinctive, true, and helpful above all other light that might have ever lived. His light, when believed, accepted, and used by us enables us to comprehend the purpose for life and to use it profitably as our Creator intends, with far greater clarity than any other Being has ever given mankind.

But as John reminds us in verses 9-11, that mankind's attitude towards its Creator is so contrary, indeed so hardened, those of mankind that He personally and directly gave life to, unaccompanied by a direct and deliberate calling from God, overwhelmingly rejected Him.

God purposely sent John the Baptist, preceding Jesus' arrival, to give those Jesus was sent to an even better opportunity to listen to and accept Jesus' witness of His truths, truths only He had in a super-abundance and wanted to share. We find that only a very few accepted His message and that low level of understanding is normal for Him.

Those who rejected what He said remained in spiritual darkness as if He had never passed before them. However, not everybody rejected Him. Some individuals accepted Him and His message, and in those individual's faith, that is, trust in Jesus Himself and what He was teaching, took root and began to grow. At that very time, the Father and the Son gave them a wondrous spiritual gift. It very well was not something that they could feel, as a sensation of some kind, but was nonetheless, a spiritual reality that inclined them to pursue Jesus' teachings more deeply. It was as though the eyes of their mind were beginning to be healed.

True spiritual vision began, and they were given the right, the permission, the authority through regeneration, as the apostle Paul terms it, to start a new life. But on this time, on a spiritual foundation that permitted a transformation to begin.

This was to me interesting. I decided to look up "regeneration" in my dictionary. The first definition of regeneration was, "to cause complete moral and spiritual reformation." That just about blew me away, that a manmade dictionary would put as the first definition of the word "regeneration." It only appears in the Bible a couple of times. Paul used it to indicate the person was being converted. But it is what the world calls, being born again.