

The Purple Pulpit

Installment #6

June 24, 2018

Attributes and Essence

We have been considering the homoousian existence of the Lord Jesus Christ with God the Father relative to His Deity. Last week we cited Heb. 1:3, which, speaking of His natural identification with the Father, refers to Him as the One “Who, being the brightness of the glory and the exact image of His essence,” went on to make purification for our sins and ascend to heaven in the honor and approval of the Father. Let’s consider now what this wording has to say about the one shared Godhead of the Father and Son.

Let’s treat this in two parts. First, there is the wording, “being the brightness of His glory.” “Being” speaks of existence. Then there is the glory of God and its brightness. The early teaching writers of the church used to make much of this language in their fighting against the various strains of subordinationism (any doctrine that assigns a lower place to the Son in relation to the Father relative to essence). They would rightly argue that glory cannot exist without its brightness, and therefore the Father never had an existence that was without the Son. As brightness naturally manifests the glory (as the perceptible thing that is registered by human consciousness) and is ever-present where the glory is, so the Son of God quite naturally manifests the Father and is ever-present with the Father throughout eternity. It is such that the very glory of the Father was seen in the Son by those having been illuminated by the Father (Jn. 1:14; Mt. 16:16,17; Heb. 10:32). Just as the radiance of the sun exists along with its source, the Son exists as the Father’s Revealer throughout the eternity of the Father’s existence.

This brings us to the second swatch of wording in our passage: “the exact image of His essence.” For the Lord Jesus Christ to be the exact image of the Father’s essence, He would have to reflect each attribute of the essence of the Father’s Godhood. If one attribute of Deity was lacking to the Son, He would not be the exact image of the Father’s essence. If the Father is uncreate (uncreated), the Son is likewise uncreate. Since the Father is immutable, the Son is also immutable in His Deity. Given that the Father is omniscient, to be an exact image of the Father’s essence means that the Lord Jesus is also all-knowing. This is but a sampling of the attributes of Deity so as to make our point, but it follows that if Deity is known and defined by its attributes, and Christ Jesus has all of the attributes of that Deity, then Jesus Christ is identified as the real God. We might say that the only thing that could be said about the Father that can’t be said about the Son is that He is the Father. But that is a matter of Person and role – not attribute or essence.

To sum up, everything of the Father in real Deity is possessed of and seen in the Son. (Jn. 16:14,15) When He became incarnate, Jesus demonstrated the effulgence of the Father in a human life. He can be the exact image of the essence of the Father, because He displays that very essence that is natural to His existence. He is of the same essence as the Father!