

To God Alone Be The Glory

Christmas Day often brings a sense of relief. Have you noticed? The Christmas preparations are finally done. The presents are all shopped for, wrapped, and opened. The decorations are all in place. You finished the baking. All the Christmas cards and letters you're gonna send have been sent. Lots of people breathe a big sigh of relief on Christmas Day: "Whew. It's over for another year." Those who enjoy the preparations can find themselves a little sad that there's nothing more to do but to sit and relax in the afterglow. Plenty of people discover that they actually enjoy the afterglow of Christmas each year.

God only did Christmas once. But think about how many things God had to prepare in order to have a successful Christmas. Think of all the prophecies he had given in the Old Testament about the coming Messiah's birth. God brought them all to completion on that first Christmas Day. We don't hear God saying anywhere in the Bible, "Whew. That's finally over." But once Jesus, the Light of the world, was born and began to shine, there was definitely an afterglow of grace to enjoy as the next phase of God's saving plan kicked in.

In English we have a word we borrowed from Latin. The word means 'thoroughly completed.' This English word is 'perfect.' 'Perfect' literally means, 'totally completed so that nothing more needs to be done.' That word 'perfect' describes more than just a well decorated and well prepared Christmas in our homes. In fact 'perfect' should probably be reserved for describing what God did on Christmas.

There's a reason Hebrews 1 was chosen to be the Epistle Lesson for Christmas Day. It demonstrates how JESUS MAKES CHRISTMAS PERFECT. He does so **By Being Who He Is** and **By Doing What He Does**.

The book of Hebrews originally spoke to Jewish Christians who were being strongly tempted to abandon Christianity and go back to Judaism. They were on the verge of rejecting Jesus in favor of the Jewish religion that had developed in the four centuries before Christ was born. So the main point that the writer to the Hebrews emphasizes throughout his letter is that Jesus is better. (Hebrews is the 'Jesus is better' letter). Jesus is a better sacrifice than the animal sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem (chapters 9 & 10). Jesus is a better high priest than the Israelite high priests (ch 5). Jesus is

better than Moses (ch 3). Jesus is even better than the angels (ch 1).

How can this be? Because of who Jesus is. Our text says, ³*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.* Calling Jesus 'the Son' clarifies that he is not the same person as God the Father. On the other hand, by saying that Jesus '*is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being,*' the Bible clarifies that Jesus and the Father have the same divine essence, that they are the one true God. I know, it doesn't make sense that two equals one. But God is beyond full comprehension by us humans with our limited intellect. I don't know how, on the one hand, God can be both the Father and the Son, and, on the other hand, the Father is not the Son. Yet this is what God reveals about himself in the Bible.

Perhaps it will help us to understand God's essence a little better if we think about identical twins. They both came from the same fertilized egg. So they share the same genetic code. Adam and Eve are probably a better example. The Bible tells us that God took one of Adam's ribs (or parts) and made Eve from that rib. In all likelihood they were genetically identical. In a way that's how the Father and the Son are related. They have one and the same essence. They are the one true God.

Yet at the same time they are two different persons.

Of course, every illustration has its flaws. Before God made Eve from Adam, she didn't exist. But there was never a time when either the Father or the Son did not exist. God has always existed. Adam and Eve each had a beginning. Not only that, they were always two separate beings, never one. Because there is only one God, the Father and the Son are always only one and the same eternal, all-powerful, all-glorious being, along with the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps you've moved beyond, "How is this possible?" to, "Why is this important to believe? Come on, Pastor, I just want to look at the cute little baby Jesus asleep on the hay and know that God loves me." Ok, sometimes it's nice to keep things simple. But when it comes to Jesus, it's helpful to look deep into the facts that God has revealed about Jesus.

Think about it: how do you know that the baby Jesus lying in the manger means "God loves you?" Answer: because the baby Jesus took the actions necessary to substitute himself for us sinners. So JESUS MAKES CHRISTMAS PERFECT by more than just being who he is. He also makes Christmas perfect by doing what he

does. This teaching sets apart Christianity from all the other religions in the world. In all other world religions, humans are told they must approach God and make God happy by what they do. World religions preach that, in order to gain God's favor, you have to say certain prayers enough times, or make so many offerings, or treat others a certain way, or travel on a difficult spiritual journey.

But Christianity is different. According to the Bible God approaches us and draws us to himself because he knows our sin makes it impossible for us to approach him. So God comes to us, and God makes us happy. God did this by becoming one of us. That's how **JESUS MAKES CHRISTMAS PERFECT**. Our God is not far removed from our life. He's not some distant god who occasionally looks down from his lofty throne and has a mild interest in the affairs of this planet. No, our God became one of us. He is concerned about our everyday existence. By becoming a human, Jesus committed himself to the human race. He experienced our pains, our problems, our frustrations. Without being a sinner Jesus felt the effects of all sin. He knew the rejection of friends, the pain of hunger, the disappointment of betrayal, the discomfort of sunburns, and the

shivering bitterness of cold. Our God approached us.

Our text tells us what Jesus does. ²*In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.* ³*The Son...sustain[s] all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.* List the wonderful things Jesus did for us and does for us.

¹He speaks God's Word to us! Otherwise how would we know about God's love? ²He worked with his Father and the Holy Spirit in making all of creation. ³He's still involved in keeping creation going with his powerful Word. But best of all, ⁴he provided purification for the sins of the whole world.

That's Jesus' Christmas gift to us, the gift that always works. Sometimes our Christmas gifts don't always work the way they are supposed to. Maybe the sweater doesn't quite fit. Maybe the tie is out of style. Perfume that smelled good to the giver stinks as far as the receiver is concerned. Assembly instructions are incomplete, or a connector is missing. Batteries aren't always included. The gaming console needs an adapter. The gift card is to a store that's going out of business. Our Christmas gifts aren't always perfect.

But you never have to worry about Jesus. He is always the perfect Christmas gift, and he always does his work of rescuing sinners perfectly.

As a sinner I find that comforting! I need perfect forgiveness—forgiveness that is thoroughly complete. According to the Bible you need perfect forgiveness too. Just think of all the sins we committed this month. There's the greed of wanting stuff that has been marketed slickly so that now we feel incomplete without it, instead of having contentment in every situation. There's the philosophy that, in order to be happy, children have to have things to open at Christmas or else it's not really Christmas, that children shouldn't have to struggle the way parents and grandparents did, and therefore five presents aren't enough. There can be skewed spending: luxuries for us but little or nothing for charity or for a special mission project to help spread the gospel. Gluttony comes easy when there's so much good food available. Excess alcohol seems to pour easy, instead of stepping back when we've had enough. Some speak about Santa more than about Jesus. And these are just a few sins of the holiday. Pile these sins on top our regular heap of sins like lust, anger, pride, jealousy, selfishness, laziness, wrong priorities, superstition, disregard for God's Word, misusing God's name, reliance on self

or on worldly things more than on God... Yeah, we need lots of forgiveness.

But JESUS MAKES CHRISTMAS PERFECT by supplying us with the forgiveness we need. Imagine if Jesus provided unreliable forgiveness. What if he said, "A nasty virus requires me to maintain a distance from you—no mercy for you until a vaccine is developed. Oh, I'm sorry, my forgiveness dispenser ran out of grace yesterday, and I'm waiting for another shipment. Oops, the batteries in my 'forgive-a-ma-tron' ran out of juice today. Oh, I'm sorry, my robe of righteousness doesn't quite fit you; I'll get back to you after I do a little tailoring." We never hear Jesus say anything like that. He gives perfect forgiveness. No sin is too big for him to handle. No sin is too small for him to wash away. He forgives us again and again and again, even if we request that the same sin be forgiven for the 841st time. By being who he is and by doing what he does JESUS MAKES CHRISTMAS PERFECT. Thank you, Jesus.