

CHRIST'S HEAVENLY SESSION

John Gill (1697-1771)

THIS follows upon the resurrection and ascension of Christ to heaven. It is in this order things stand according to the Scriptures: Christ was first raised from the dead; then He went to heaven, and was received up into it; and then sat down at the right hand of God (Eph 1:20; 1Pe 3:22).....

I. It was foretold in prophecy that Christ should sit at the right hand of God. Hence, it may be thought that in prophetic language, and by anticipation, He is called *the man of God's right hand* (Psa 80:17)... because when He had done His work on earth, He should be received to heaven and placed at the right hand of God. Of [this,] there is a plain promise and prophecy in Psalm 110:1: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand" ...Angels, authorities, and powers are subject to Him Who sits at the right hand of God (1Pe 3:22), and Who is the Messiah, Christ, the Son of God, of Whom the text in the Psalms is spoken. [This] was understood by the ancient Jews and even by the Jews in Christ's time, as is clear from Matthew 22:42-45, where Christ puts a question to which they could give no answer. [They] were nonplussed and confounded; but could they have given or had they known any other sense of the words, they could easily have made answer by denying they belonged to the Messiah, but to some other person, and so have freed themselves from the embarrassment they were in. But they knew that this was the universal and acknowledged sense of their nation. The words were spoken by Jehovah the Father to His Son in the everlasting council' and covenant of grace—even to Him Who was David's Lord. Christ Himself also foretold that He should sit down at the right hand of God: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power" (Mat 26:64).

II. It is fact: Christ is set down at the right hand of God, and the above prophecies are fulfilled. The evidences of this fact are (1) The effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, after Christ had ascended and took His place at the right hand of God. The Spirit was not given until He was glorified in heaven, by His session there at God's right hand; upon which, "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see

and hear" (Act 2:33), says the apostle. And again, "And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Act 5:32), on His exaltation at the right hand of God. (2) Stephen, the proto-martyr, while he was suffering, was an eyewitness of this. He saw Christ at the right hand of God, and declared to the Jews that stoned him, that he did see Him—only with this difference: in all other places Christ is spoken of as sitting; but Stephen saw Him standing at the right hand of God (Act 7:55-56); having risen up, as it were, from His seat, to show His resentment at the usage of His servant; but this circumstance makes no difference, nor creates any objection to the thing itself, which is, Christ's being exalted in human nature, at the right hand of God. I shall endeavor to explain this article and show,

III. What is meant by the right hand of God, by sitting at it, how long Christ will sit there, and what the use and benefits of His session there are to His people.

1. What is meant by the right hand of God, at which Christ is said to sit.² This is variously expressed: sometimes by "the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2); sometimes by "the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb 8:1); and elsewhere by "the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3). By *Majesty* is meant God Himself, as it is in some of these passages. This is also clear from other passages: to God belong "glory and majesty" (Jude 1:25); "with God is terrible majesty" (Job 37:22). Majesty is not only before Him, but He is clothed with it (Psa 96:6; 93:1). By *His Throne*, heaven is sometimes meant—there He especially displays His majesty and glory. The throne represents Him that sits upon it, and God and His throne are said to be "on high," "in the heavens," and "in heavenly places." For though God is everywhere, His majesty and glory are most conspicuous in heaven. And there the human nature of Christ is—at God's right hand, and He will continue there until His second coming. The *right hand of God* is not to be taken in a literal sense, but figuratively. It signifies the power of God and its exertion (Psa 89:13; 118:16) and is such a glorious perfection of God that it is sometimes put for God Himself, even when this article of Christ's session at His right hand is expressed (Mat 26:64).

2. What is meant by Christ's sitting at God's right hand:

(1) It is expressive of great honor and dignity. The allusion is to kings and great personages, who, to their favorites and to whom they

² See FGB 236, *God's Eternal Purpose*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² This paragraph and the next have been significantly edited for modern readers.

would do an honor when they come into their presence, place them at their right hand. So, Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, when she came with a petition to him, he caused her to sit on a seat on his right hand (1Ki 2:19). In allusion to this, the queen—the church—is said to stand on the right hand of Christ (Psa 45:9). This supposes such a person, [who is] next in honor and dignity to the king, [just as] Christ under this consideration is to the Majesty on high, on Whose right hand He sits. Therefore, it is not to be understood with respect to His divine nature, abstractly considered, or as a divine person. For as such, He is Jehovah's Fellow, Who “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phi 2:6). Nor is it with respect to His human nature merely and of any communication of the divine perfections to it. For though the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him, yet this is not communicated to or transfused into His human nature, as to make it omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, or equal to God, or give it a right to sit on His right hand. This is to be understood of Him as Mediator with respect to *both* natures. In that office capacity, Christ is inferior to His Father, and His Father is greater than He (Joh 14:28) because Christ's power in heaven and in earth was given to Him by His Father. Christ was made subject to His Father, Who put all things under Him by placing Him at His right hand. There, Christ is next to His Father in His office as Mediator.

(2) It is expressive of His government and dominion over all; for this phrase of sitting at the right hand of God is explained by reigning or ruling. It follows, in the original text, as explanative of it: “Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies” (Psa 110:2), and so the apostle interprets it in 1 Corinthians 15:25. Now this government and dominion is not to be understood of what is natural to Christ and common to Him with the other two divine Persons. The kingdom of nature and providence equally belongs to Him as to His divine Father, of Whom He says, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (Joh 5:17); [He works] jointly with Him, having the same power, operation, and influence in all things He has. But [this means] His mediatorial kingdom and government, which dominion, glory, and kingdom were given to Him and received from the Ancient of days. [This is] a delegated kingdom for the administration of which He is accountable to His Father. [He] will deliver it up to Him, when completed. In respect of [this,] He may be said to sit at the right hand of God and to be next unto Him in power and authority, yet superior to all created beings of the highest form and of the greatest name, which are all subject to Him (Eph 1:20-21).

(3) Sitting at the right hand of God supposes Christ has done His work, and that to satisfaction and with acceptance, as the work of redemption, which was given Him; and He undertook, came to work out, and has finished. Upon which He “entered in once into the holy place” (Heb 9:12), that is, into heaven; and the work of making atonement for sin, reconciliation for iniquity, and full satisfaction for it, which was cut out in council and covenant for Him and He agreed to do. Having done it, [He] “sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12). And, the work of bringing in an everlasting righteousness, for the justification of His people: this He engaged to do, and for this end came into the world. [He has] become the end of the Law for righteousness, to everyone that believes; and being raised from the dead for our justification and gone to heaven (Rom 4:25), [He] “is at the right hand of God” (Rom 8:33-34), which the apostle observes for the strengthening of his own faith and the faith of others with respect to their full acquittance and complete justification before God. All which and more He has done with acceptance. God is well-pleased with His righteousness because the Law is by it magnified and made honorable; His sacrifice is of a sweet-smelling savor to God. All being done [that] He agreed to do to entire satisfaction, He was received up into heaven with a welcome; and as a token of it, placed at God's right hand.

(4) Sitting at God's right hand supposes ease and rest from labor. For Christ, upon His resurrection and ascension to heaven, came into the presence of God, in Whose presence is fullness of joy and at Whose right hand are pleasures for evermore (Psa 16:11). When He was made glad with the light of His countenance and when having entered His rest, He ceased from His works, as God did from His at creation (Heb 4:10). Not that Christ ceased to act for His people in heaven when [He sat] down at the right hand of God, for He passed into the heavens for them, for their service and good. He entered as the forerunner for them and appears in the presence of God for them and, as their high priest, transacts all affairs for them and ever lives to make intercession for them. But He ceases now from His toilsome and laborious work; for though it was His Father's business—which He voluntarily engaged in and it was His meat and drink to do—it was very fatiguing, not merely in going about continually to do good to the bodies and souls of men, but in the labor and travail of His soul when He bore the wrath of God and endured the curse of the Law in His sufferings and death. Now, being freed and eased from all this, He sits down and looks with pleasure on all that He has done. As God, when He had finished the works of creation, took a survey of them and saw they were all very good and

then rested from His works, so Christ, with pleasure, sits and sees the travail of His soul, the blessings of grace through His blood applied to His people, and a continued succession of a seed to serve Him, who, ere long, will be all with Him where He is and behold His glory. [This] is the joy that was set before Him when He suffered for them.

(5) Sitting denotes continuance. Christ sits as a priest upon His throne and abides continually: the priests under the Law did not abide continually by reason of death; but Christ lives forever and has an unchangeable priesthood. They stood daily offering the same sacrifices because sin was not effectually put away by them. But Christ, by one offering, has made full and perfect expiation for sin and therefore is set down and continues to do the other part of His priestly office as an intercessor, to see the efficacy of His sacrifice take place. He also sits King forever: His throne is for ever and ever, and His kingdom [is] an everlasting kingdom, of which, and the peace thereof, there shall be no end. Which leads,

3. To observe how long Christ will sit at the right hand of God: namely, until all enemies are put under His feet and made His footstool. It began at His ascension to heaven and not before. The Word, *the Son of God*, was with God in the beginning from all eternity, was coeternal with Him, and had a glory with Him before the world was. But He is never said to sit at the right hand of God until after His incarnation, death, resurrection from the dead, and ascension to heaven. Then, and not before, He took His place at the right hand of God, where He will continue until His second coming, when all enemies shall be subdued under Him. Some are subdued already, [such as] sin, which is made an end of; the devil, who is destroyed; and the world, which is overcome by Him. Others remain to be destroyed. All are not yet put under Him, [such as] the man of sin and son of perdition, who will be destroyed with the breath of His mouth; the antichristian kings, who will be gathered to the battle at Armageddon and slain; the beast and the false prophet, who will be cast into the burning lake. Now Christ sits and reigns until all these are vanquished and the last enemy destroyed, which is death.

4. The use of Christ's session at the right hand of God to His people and the benefits and blessings arising from thence to them are,

(1) Protection from all their enemies. Being raised and set down at the right hand of God, He has a name, power, and authority over all principalities and powers, might and dominion, in this world and that to come. All things are put under His feet, and He is given to be a Head over all things to the church. All are put into His hands, to

subserve His own interest and the interest of His people; He has all power in heaven and in earth given Him, and which He uses for their good, and for the protection of them from all evil.

(2) In consequence of this is freedom from fear of all enemies. Some are destroyed already; those that remain will be. So, there is nothing to be feared from them by those that believe in Jesus (1Co 15:25-27).

(3) The perpetual and prevalent intercession of Christ on the behalf of His chosen ones is another benefit arising from His session at the right hand of God. There He sits as their High Priest and, being made higher than the heavens, ever lives to make intercession for them by representing their persons, presenting their petitions, and pleading their cause. Though Satan sometimes stands at their right hand to resist and accuse them, Christ sits at the right hand of God as their advocate with the Father to rebuke him, answer to, and remove his charges. In view of this, every saint may say with the apostle, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom 8:33).

(4) Hence, [saints have] great encouragement to come with boldness and freedom to the throne of grace. Since we have such a High Priest Who is passed into the heavens for us, is our forerunner for us entered, appears in the presence of God for us, is on the throne of glory, and at the right hand of God to speak a good word for us, this serves to draw up our hearts heavenwards, to seek things above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God and to set our affections on things in heaven, not on things on earth (Heb 4:14-16).

(5) This raises the expectation of the saints with respect to Christ's second coming and gives them assurance of it. Christ sits at the right hand of God, expecting until His enemies be made His footstool; and they look for and expect Him from heaven, Who is gone thither to prepare a place for them. [He] has assured them that He will come again and take them to Himself that where He is, they may be also, and sit upon the same throne and be forever with Him (Heb 10:12-13; Joh 14:2-3; 1Th 4:16-18).

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