

New Testament word study: *charaktēr*: “express image”

The word *charaktēr* occurs only once in all of the New Testament, namely in Hebrews 1:3, where KJV translates it by “express image”.

It is used only about our Lord Jesus Christ.

HE is:

“the brightness of HIS [GOD’s] glory, and the EXPRESS IMAGE of His [GOD’s] person”
(Hebrews 1:3, KJV).

We also note that that our Lord is:

“the *image* of God”
(2 Corinthians 4:4, KJV).

“the *image* of the invisible God”
(Colossians 1:15, KJV).

As part of our understanding of “express image”, we see that in both Corinthians and Colossians we also have “image”, which however translates the Greek *eikōn*; “an image, figure, likeness” (we know it from the English “icon”);

[*eikon*:

(a) an image of the things (the heavenly things)

1) used of the moral likeness of renewed men to God;
2) the image of the Son of God, into which true Christians are transformed, is likeness not only to the heavenly body, but also to the most holy and blessed state of mind, which Christ possesses

(b) the image of one

1) one in whom the likeness of any one is seen;
2) applied to man on account of his power of command;
3) to Christ on account of His divine nature and absolute moral excellence – *Strong/Thayer*.

Vine notes regarding image “of Christ in relation to God, 2Cr 4:4, “the image of God,” i.e., essentially and absolutely the perfect expression and representation of the Archetype, God the Father;

in Col 1:15, “the image of the invisible God” gives the additional thought suggested by the word “invisible,” that Christ is the visible representation and manifestation of God to created beings; the likeness expressed in this manifestation is involved in the essential relations in the Godhead, and is therefore unique and perfect; “he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,” John 14:9.

“The epithet “invisible.” . . . must not be confined to the apprehension of the bodily senses, but will include the cognizance of the inward eye also” (*Lightfoot*).

Bullinger notes that *eikōn* denotes not merely the image, but also the pattern, the original (in opposition to *skia*: “the shadow”) which sets forth that likeness or resemblance which is meant to be found in the image”.

(This supplies the simplest explanation of Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10; Hebrews 10:1 and Ephesians 4:24)]

In Hebrews 1:3 we have the marvelous words:

“the express image of His [GOD’s] person”

The Greek is: “*charaktēr* of the *hypostasis* of Him”

Darby translates: “the expression of His substance”.

Young has: “the impress of His subsistence”.

Green’s Literal Translation: “the express image of His essence”.

Rotherham: “the exact representation of His very Being”.

ASV, RV, HNV: “the very image of His substance”

[Other versions have e.g.: “the exact representation of His being” – NIV; “the exact imprint of His nature” – ESV; “the exact representation of His nature” – NASB, Holman; “the very stamp of His nature” – RSV; “the imprint of God’s being” – CEB.

Tyndale, Coverdale and Bishop’s Bible all have: “very image of His substance”.

Geneva Bible then translated “the ingraued forme of His person”, thereby introducing the quite unfortunate word “person” (Latin: *persona*: “mask” *via* Old French *persone* into English) to translate the Greek *hypostasis* – which was then adopted by e.g. KJV, Wesley, Webster, NKJV, 21st Century KJV.

The Greek *hypostasis* is, however, *literally* a setting or placing under, thing put under, substructure, foundation (from *hypo*: “under” and *histēmi*: “to cause or make to stand, to place, put, set” - *Thayer*).

Hence Bullinger well observes: “...a substructure, what really exists under or out of sight, the essence of a matter in contrast to its appearance. Hence Christ, as the *logos*, is the manifestation of Deity, the means by which we recognize the glory of God, and the manifestation of the Divine Essence”.

Strong/Thayer has *inter alia*: “...that which has actual existence, a substance, real being, the substantial quality, nature, of a person or thing”.

Vine (excerpted) notes that *hypostasis* is “*literally* “a standing under, support” ... hence, an “assurance,” is so rendered in Hebrews 11:1 (by the RV, where KJV has “substance.”). It may [there] signify a title-deed, as giving a guarantee, or reality...

...in Hebrews 1:3 used of Christ as “the very image” of God’s “substance;” here the word has the meaning of the real nature of that to which reference is made in contrast to the outward manifestation (see the preceding clause) [i.e. the “brightness” – or “shining forth” of His glory”];

...[*hypostasis*] speaks of the Divine essence of God existent and expressed in the revelation of His Son. The KJV "person" is an anachronism; the word was not so rendered till the 4th century. Most of the earlier English versions have "substance;" in Hebrews 11:1 it has the meaning of "confidence, assurance" (RV), marg., "the giving substance to," KJV, "substance," something that could not equally be expressed by *elpis*, "hope."]

The word *charaktēr* occurs ONLY here in Hebrews 1:3 in the New Testament.

[According to *Vine* it denotes," firstly, "a tool for graving" (from *charasso*, "to cut into, to engross;" compare English "character," "characteristic"); then, "a stamp" or "impress," as on a coin or a seal, in which case the seal or die which makes an impression bears the "image" produced by it, and, *vice versa*, all the features of the "image" correspond respectively with those of the instrument producing it.

In the NT it is used metaphorically in Hebrews 1:3, of the Son of God as "the very image (margin 'the impress') of His substance."(RV).

The phrase expresses the fact that the Son "is both personally distinct from, and yet literally equal to, Him of whose essence He is the adequate imprint" (*Liddon*).

The Son of God is not merely His "image" (His *charakter*), He is the "image" or impress of His substance, or essence.

It is the fact of complete similarity which this word stresses..."

Vine notes, as does *Thayer*, that the Septuagint (LXX) uses the word for "the mark (of the inflammation)." or a mark or figure "burned in" (Leviticus13:28).

Vine quotes *Laidlaw* (in Hastings Bible Dictionary), who well observes:

"In John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2,3 the special function of creating and upholding the universe is ascribed to Christ under His titles of Word, Image, and Son, respectively.

The kind of Creatorship so predicated of Him is not that of a mere instrument or artificer in the formation of the world, but that of One 'by whom, in whom, and for whom' all things are made, and through whom they subsist.

This implies the assertion of His true and absolute Godhood"

Finally, both *Bullinger* and *Vine* note that the similar word *charagma*, "a mark" has the narrower meaning of "the thing impressed," without denoting the special characteristic of that which produces it, e.g., Revelation 13:16, 17.

In Acts 17:29 the meaning is not "graven (*charagma*) by art," but "an engraved work of art"].

HENCE our Lord Jesus Christ *made known* and *declared* the Father:

"No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son WHO IS HIMSELF GOD and is in closest relationship with the Father, *has made Him known*" [*exegeomai*].

(John 1:18, NIV).

[The Greek *exegeomai* is to “declare, unfold“. Hence our English word: “exegesis”. Most versions translate “declared Him” (including *Young*); NASB has: “explained Him”.

Thayer has *inter alia*: “unfold a teaching” and notes that *exegeomai* was used in Greek writing of *the interpretation* of things sacred and divine.

Vine (referring to John 1:18): “In the sentence “*He hath declared Him*,” the *other* meaning of the verb is in view, “to unfold in teaching, to declare by making known”].

Bauer: “explain, interpret, tell, report, describe”.

Regarding John 1:18, *Bauer* has: “He has made known or brought news of (the invisible God)”].

“And I **have declared** unto them **THY NAME, and will declare** it” (John 17:26, KJV).

[“declared”: *gnōrizō* (from a derivative of *ginōskō* – *Strong*) with the primary meaning of “to make known, to become known, be recognized – *Strong/Thayer*;
“to make known, declare, reveal” – *Bullinger*].

“All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the **Father**, save the SON, and he **to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him**”

(Matthew 11:27, KJV)

HENCE:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you: He that heareth MY word **AND believeth on HIM THAT SENT ME**, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life”

(John 5:24, KJV)

HENCE our Lord Jesus Christ *throughout*, completely, perfectly and tirelessly every day, every waking hour, carried out the work and will of His Heavenly Father, in words, in deeds, in thoughts - and in love, compassion and mercy, understanding and patience, and with authority and power, unflinchingly, steadfastly, with utter determination, and in all things in exact and full conformity with the Father’s will and in one-ness with the Father.

No wonder that the Father loved Him.