

98-07-24b Colossians

We are ready to resume now in Colossians chapter 1. We are looking at the transition Paul makes from his prayer for the saints and what he prays for, what constitutes a worthy walk and how we can walk it to a short summary and praise of the characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we wonder, well, why does that come about in the way that it does? Because he is talking about us having a worthy walk, being fruitful, increasing and growing, being strengthened and developing the patience and long suffering that are really the mark and the thing that should separate us. We've asked ourselves this question before, how can you be known for your hope? We saw Peter last week saying, be ready always to give an answer to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.

We were asking ourselves, what is it that makes you remarkable for your hope? How can people tell that you've got a sustaining faith in the future that permeates you to such an extent that somebody is going to come up and say, how can you be thinking this way? Well, this is one of the keys to understanding the answer to that question is that when we're strengthened according to the standard of God's power and we have extraordinary or supernatural patience and long suffering accompanied by joy, as we see Paul talking about in verse 11, that is the reflection of our hope. That's because we understand the plan of God and the outworking of these things and the purpose for these things. If you know why, it's so much easier.

That's why it's difficult to get children through a crisis because they can't wrap their mind around the why. It used to be, I don't think it's nearly as traumatic, but most of us can remember back in the late 50s and early 60s when you'd go in for your vaccination. Maybe you'd have some brothers and sisters with you and you'd go in and they'd get that great big gun and shoot your arm and you'd hear this yelp of pain and fright and disbelief.

And you'd see your friends at school and they had those little clear plastic cups taped to their arm and underneath it was all bubbly and nasty looking and it left that scar that we all have. And you'd think, why on earth do we have to go through this? You'd see the fingernail marks in the door jams leading down to where the guy with the vaccinating gun is. Of course, they were still using those herd the cattle through lines when I got to Navy and a guy, two people ahead of me, they had those air guns where it's compressed air that shoots that stuff in.

They didn't have the little needles and so forth and you'd get that. A guy flinched when they were just pulling the trigger and if you don't get a firm pressure on that gun and it goes a little bit sideways, it can tear your flesh. And this guy got a big gash and blood was spurting everywhere and guys were running around and, of course, all of us behind him thought, well, I can hardly wait to get up there.

And so then they had to stop and explain to us, you know, he flinched, you've got to stand there and not flinch and everything will be fine. But, you know, we have the ability intellectually to

understand why something not too pleasant is to be endured and the same thing happens in our spiritual life. And that's why Paul emphasizes that with the knowledge of God's will and when it's a reality in our soul, these things don't depress us and rob us of our peace and rob us of our joy.

It's like the song the Imperials Quartet used to sing, there's a reason for it all. And if you not just know that there is a reason, but it's obscure and unknowable and in the inscrutable will of God, but you actually have an idea of what that reason is. It makes it so much easier to get through something.

It is the fear of the unknown and the uncertainty and the lack of understanding. Why is this happening to me? That's what neutralizes us and prevents us from really being fruitful when we go through the episodes of life. So that is what Paul has been talking about.

We're strengthened with might, the patience and long-suffering with joy. You can see people enduring terrible catastrophes all week on the PBS channel here locally. They've had these disaster things.

Here's the tornadoes and here's the cyclones and hurricanes and all this. You see these people crawling out from under the rubble that used to be their house and their town and their life. Those people hopefully live through a lot of these disastrous experiences, but you don't see patience and you don't see joy.

How can you have those things? Well, it's a supernatural power. It's a power that comes from God. Our goal is to understand how to avail ourselves and to live in that strength that comes from God.

Too often we know that it's there and we believe that we ought to have it and we desire that other people perceive that we're operating in it, but in reality, deep in the little quiet center of our being, it's really not there. We're thinking, I know things are supposed to be a certain way. We've had all these glorious pictures painted for us of Hebrews chapter 11 and all these great heroes of the faith and we think, I don't know how they did it because I don't have a tenth.

Nobody's trying to saw me in half, but I feel like they are. I'm not having to live in a cave in a hole in the ground, but I'm just as miserable. I'd trade places with the guy in the hole in the ground in a minute.

My circumstances are just beating me up. Where's the victory? Where's all this wonderful stuff? It's doubly frustrating to be undergoing a trial and not only to be afflicted by the trial, but afflicted by the knowledge that you're not getting through it very well. It's not happening the way that victorious Christian life is just a sign on the wall and we're down here thinking, not only am I having to suffer, but I'm screwing it up as I go.

So we want to avoid that and Paul understands that this is what the Colossians... People are

saying, here's the answer, here's the key to your life and having fullness and having strength and all of these things. Paul says, no, don't listen to that. This is the key.

It's the gospel that you heard from the beginning. It's the truth that you've heard from Epaphras, that Paul himself taught to Epaphras. He says, don't be distracted.

Just come to an understanding of what you've already got. You don't need something fresh and new. This is another thing that has tended to happen in our part of the world when it comes to Christianity.

It's very stimulating and enjoyable to come to a fresh understanding of the Word of God and to get a new idea, a new way of understanding a verse or a new concept. There's joy in learning and having... People used to refer to this as a breakthrough. You've had a breakthrough.

You've got a fresh understanding that wasn't there before. Sometimes you can sort of get hooked on that. You think, I want to get that little thrill of discovery where this passage yields its secrets and something that I looked at one way now looks at another way.

Again, it's a wonderful thing. It's one of the joys that God builds into the investigation and meditation of His Word is to see those things. But we want to remember at the same time that we enjoy that, that even when we're reviewing or even when we're looking at a passage that brings out truths that we already have an understanding of, it is the exploitation of that that we already know that is really the key.

The joy of discovery in a passage isn't what sustains us in a crisis. You think about the last time you were really under it and it was really being poured on thick and hot and you're getting that kind of unstable, almost panicky feeling in your soul and dropping stuff, that you didn't think back, well, you know, three weeks ago we saw the neatest thing over in some book of the Old Testament. It was amazing that I didn't used to know what the prophecy of Balaam was about and now I do.

We don't typically go back to a little experience like that and have that sustain us. It's the fundamental truths, it's the solid reality of the plan of God that we turn to, that is our rock, that is the mast that we lash ourselves to in time of trial. When we start unraveling and falling apart in our soul, it isn't a joyful experience in the past or a stimulating thought that we had that sustains us.

It's the solid knowledge that, well, this is flying in my face, but this is the way things are, this is what I know, this is where I am, this is who I am, before God, in God's plan, I'm sustained by His grace, I'm held in His hand. Remember when we had much black and white TV days back in the 60's, I don't remember it much later than that, but they used to have the Allstate commercials on TV and it looked like an upside down picture of the praying hands. The hands would come down and say, you're in good hands with Allstate.

And you'd see your little house and front lawn and swing set there right in these two great big hands. It may be strange to think of, but that picture comes to my mind a lot in times of pressure, when I think, I don't know what's going to happen next, I don't know if I'm going to do or be or say or whatever it is that's expected and that's right and so on. Everything's kind of uncertain and in turmoil.

And then I think about that, you're in good hands, that picture just comes to my mind. We're sustained by the hands of God. We are held in His hands by His grace.

He will not suffer the righteous to be moved. We're righteous in Christ, so there is a net underneath us through which we cannot fall. It doesn't matter how bad things get, we're never going to fall out of the good hands of God.

And so that's not a revelation. Anybody in Christendom will say those words and affirm them and agree with them. Regardless of whatever wild beliefs they hold, almost anyone will say, you know, God is good and we're held in the hands of God.

But that is the kind of basic fundamental truth to which we go. That is the rock that's got the cleft in which we hide when the storm is swirling around us. And so those are the things that we want to hold on to and grow in.

That's the epinosis that Paul talked about earlier in this section. That is the truth that delivers us. That's what Paul talks about in Romans 1.16. I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

Why? It is the power of God for deliverance. The fundamental truths, the simple truths of who God is and what He's up to, why He's got us here, and why we are where we are, faced with what we face, and the things of God that are available to us. Why all of this exists, that's the gospel.

And the knowledge of that gospel, that's the power of God for deliverance. And God has delivered us out of the power of darkness. The darkness of this world, the darkness of human thinking, of short-sightedness, of self-centeredness, of evil and everyone out for himself, and I will get what I need at your expense if I have to.

That kind of thinking, that's darkness. That's the cosmos. That's the world in which we live.

That we are in but not of. And we're delivered out of the power. It doesn't say we're not in the darkness anymore, that we're not surrounded by darkness, or that we don't see it, or that we're not attacked by it, and attacked out of it by those who live in darkness, but we're delivered from the power of it.

We don't have to give in to the power. We don't succumb to the power of darkness. Why? Because he has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us.

That's those good hands. We don't run out of the darkness into the light. God conveys us into the

light.

But interestingly, it doesn't say the light. You would think that, well, darkness, light. That's the two sides of the coin.

But he's already talked about the fact that we're qualified to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. And so he does sort of an unexpected thing at the end of verse 13. He says, he has conveyed us into the kingdom of, and then instead of light he says, the son of his love.

And it's an unusual phrase. We don't see that, the son of his love, really anywhere but here. But we have these concepts associated.

What's the first verse anybody ever thinks of when they think of a memory verse? John 3.16. What do you have in that passage? God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. Outright to the stars the world was shaken while his enemies, Christ, came and died. It is God's earnest, it's his manifestation of the depth of his love that he sends the thing that is most precious to him, the person that is most precious to him, and sacrifices him on our behalf.

Christ is the son of God's love. He is the full expression of God's love. He's the greatest summation and illustration of how much God loves us.

If you want to know how much God loves you and how much God loves each of us, look at Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came to the world and did what he did and is what he is because God loves us. Jesus Christ is the son of his love.

And we are transferred into the kingdom of that son in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. We have redemption and forgiveness. Why are we no longer under the power of darkness? Because we are redeemed and forgiven.

We have the status of the redeemed and the forgiven and we have the experience of redemption and forgiveness. Every time we avail ourselves of the truth that's contained in John's first chapter, of coming back to the light, of acknowledging where we have failed, and claiming God's grace. That's why John, talking to believers in 1 John 1-7 says, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have that fellowship with him and he with us.

And the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. That cleansing power is redemption. The payment of the price.

It happens for us at the point of salvation when we are transferred and made citizens of the heavenly kingdom and made partakers of Christ and members of his body. But the experience of it, laying hold of it, and having the practical effects of it in our life is something we do day by day. We tend to think, well, everything happened at the point of salvation, now I've just sort of got to be obedient and do some things to please God.

Our salvation becomes real day by day by day. We claim our redemption. We claim our forgiveness when we go to God and cite the work of Christ and acknowledge where it is applicable in our case.

So these are real truths that ought to live, that ought to make a difference to us that we are redeemed. Every time we go to God, every time we acknowledge where we have failed, which is a pretty regular thing. And so, in looking at our status before God and all of the things that are available to us in verses 9 through 13, why are those things available? It's because of Christ.

How comprehensive is our coverage in Christ? How much of our life does it apply to? Are there any lacks? Are there any gaps? This is one of my favorite launching points for getting off into the ill wind that blows through Christian psychology. Because one of the basic tenets that often, not always, but often is found in connection with that approach is we are going to come in and help you through our discovery of what went wrong in your childhood and how many different chemicals we can get to alleviate your imbalances and so forth, so that, and I'm not trying to paint this with a broad brush, there are times when you need someone to come in and help you be objective about your problems. There are times when you might need some medicine for one reason or another.

But when the thinking is we are going to fix you up so that God can help you, your problems are so severe that we need to really get in here and fix all of your cracks and broken places here and let us come in and get you ready. The Word of God won't do you any good. You're not going to be able to enjoy any relationship with God until we come in and help you.

This is very parallel to what you have in some of the things that we recognize more readily as being wrong. Like when a church comes in and says, I will be your priest, I will be your confessor, I will be your intermediary to establish and maintain your relationship with God. We can see that.

We say, wait a minute, we are all priests before God. Christ is our high priest and we represent ourselves to the Father. Jesus said, you pray yourself.

You represent yourself to the Father. You don't need intermediaries. And yet, in our modern day, we have the equivalent.

It seems to be a common weakness in our psyche that we almost like to have somebody in between us and God. And if it isn't going to be the Catholic Church or the Anglican Church or something else where we have a little hierarchy through which we can kind of get them to do our talking to God or we can get a saint to do our talking to God, or get Mary to do our talking to God for us, we are not really all that comfortable with the idea of standing in the divine presence. Well, now today, we've got in kind of a sheep's clothing, literally, the same sort of thing.

Let your therapist or your psychologist or some other form of person become an intermediary and address your problems. And then we'll kind of fix you up and get your cosmetics and get your hair

combed and get your clothes straightened up. And then you can go have your relationship with God.

That's very bad thinking. And that is the kind of thinking that started very early on. That's the kind of thinking that's being thrown at believers in Colossae and in the whole Lincoln Valley here is that you need some other things.

You need to kind of get fixed up here and get some additional irons in the fire before you're really going to be acceptable to God. So Paul, in talking about what he prays for, for believers, as he turns to Christ, it is to remind us that these things we have in Christ, the strength that's available that he talked about in verse 11, the fruitfulness and the increase that he talked about in verse 10, the knowledge that he talked about in verse 9, they are as complete as Christ. They are as acceptable as Christ.

They are as full and as divine as Christ himself because it is through Christ that all of these things come. And to say that these things are incomplete, to say that you don't really have complete strength for your trial, that you don't have complete provision for your crisis, that you don't have enough knowledge to live your life, is to say that Christ is incomplete, insufficient, not good enough to do the job. If we look and think that what we have through God's Word and God's Spirit is insufficient to meet the need, we are saying Christ is insufficient to meet the need because we have these things in Him.

It is the action of God the Father through Jesus Christ that has given us all these things. And to say that they are insufficient is to say that God really didn't quite cover all the bases. This is the idea behind what Paul is presenting to us here.

And that's why he says that it is the deliverance in Christ that we have. The love of God is full in Christ. He has conveyed us into that kingdom of the Son of His love.

We are in the light through Christ. And it is in Christ that we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. Was it enough? Are we acceptable enough before God? Just look at how acceptable Christ is.

If Christ is acceptable enough, then you and I are acceptable enough. Because our acceptance is based on Christ. It is in Him that we have redemption.

It is in Him that we have forgiveness. And there is no 90% or there is no 75% with Christ. He is fully pleasing to the Father.

In Him the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. So if we have our redemption and our forgiveness in Him, it is good enough. There is no second best in that realm.

And so in that context now, Paul is going to turn on this pivot and address the subject of Christ directly. And there are some wonderful structural things in this next section to watch for. They are

not easy to see necessarily in English.

Especially the more modern your translation, the worse it gets. But I am going to try, I am going to endeavor to try to point these things out. So that we are going to see something really fascinating here about the differences between the divine and the earthly.

And the connection between the divine and the earthly. It begins here in verse 15. Having brought up the subject of Christ, in whom we have redemption, in whom we have forgiveness, in whose kingdom we have our life.

He, Christ, in verse 15, is the image of the invisible God. This is a wonderful Greek word for a computer guy because it is icon. E-I-K-O-N, which comes over in English as I-C-O-N.

And when you run Windows and you get a little picture there on the screen and you double click it and your program starts. Well, we call that an icon. You have got an icon on your desktop or an icon in your window there to run your word processor or run your Quicken checkbook program or whatever.

It is an icon. Well, why do we call that an icon? Why is that little picture called an icon? It is a representation on the screen. It is the way of access and it tells you that you have got that program on your computer.

If you have got a little blue W on your screen there, that means you have got Microsoft Word installed on your computer. And when you click that icon, that program comes up and runs for you, hopefully. So, it is the representation.

It is the reminder and it is also sort of a means of access on our computers. And a lot of that idea is bound up in the Greek word icon. He is the, and they translate it here, the exact representation.

He is the image. He is the icon of the invisible God. And it is a great analogy when you think about it because he is our visible reminder of what is invisible.

People a lot of times get confused about computer programs. Well, where is it? When I am running a program, how does that happen? Where does it come from? All of that is invisible. I know where it is because I am a computer guy.

But if you just look at the screen and the keyboard and the little mouse there, the difference between RAM and hard drives and all this can be very obscure. You just know you have got a little picture there and if you click on it real fast two times, this program magically appears and runs. Well, God is invisible.

We can't see him. We don't always have a grip on the workings of his plan and his power. But Jesus Christ is our visible representation.

He is the image of the invisible God. He makes what is invisible visible. He makes what is obscure and unknowable visible and knowable, understandable and seeable.

We can't take the time to explain and go back to binary math and bits and bytes and magnetic media and spinning disks and all this stuff on a computer. But we can teach people if you will click two times on that little picture there, you will get what you want. You will get your program.

You take something that is not understandable, and that is the whole supposedly the appeal of the graphical user interface on computers now, what Windows is. It is a graphical interface. You put what you can see on the screen.

In the old days of computers, you got a little blanking prompt. It said C colon backslash and you had a little blanking cursor there. Well, I wonder what this machine has on it.

I wonder if I can run a program. I wonder if I can write a letter and print it out or can I do a spreadsheet or can I do any financial calculations. And you've got this nice black screen with a little blanking cursor by the C prompt.

Well, that was not intuitive. It was difficult. So here comes Microsoft and Windows, and we're going to put something visible in front of you so that you can see what you have.

You can see where you're going and what you're doing. You can see your files and your folders, and you can manipulate these things because now you can see it. We're going to take the invisible bits and bytes on your hard drive and make it visible to you, and we're going to use icons to do it.

Well, that's what God has done in a much larger and greater sense in our lives. He's taken the inscrutable and the invisible and the unknowable things of His character and His plan and His purpose, and He's put them in visible form. He's put them in bodily form that we can see and understand, and that icon is Jesus Christ.

He is the icon of the invisible God. He is the representation. He is the visible way to understand that invisible truth.

He is the firstborn over all creation, and this He is is a phrase that's going to come up again later in this same section, but in Greek it's *hos esten*, He is, or actually, who is. To smooth it out in English it says He is, but this is really who is, because He's already said the kingdom of the Son of His love in whom we have redemption and forgiveness. Who is the image of the invisible God? In Greek this is literally how you would render it, *hos esten*, who is.

That Son of His love who is the icon, the image, the exact representation of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. So you have who is and then these two statements. He's the image of the invisible God.

He's the firstborn over all creation. Just stop and think about those two phrases. What realms do they refer to? Jesus Christ, the Son of God's love.

He is the image of the invisible God. That's the heavenly realm, isn't it? That's the realm of the divine, the invisible God up in heaven, the third heaven, the throne of God, and all of the omnies that we have trouble wrapping our minds around, the infinities that we can't understand. But what else is He? He is the firstborn of creation.

Creation is finite. Creation is visible. Creation is something we have a grasp on.

We can see and draw conclusions from creation. Christ is at the meeting place of the invisible and divine and the visible and the concrete. He is both.

It is a way of talking about this theological concept called the doctrine of the hypostatic union. Where does the invisible and divine and infinite unite with the visible and earthly and humanly understandable? It's in Christ. He is the bridge.

He is the ladder, Jacob's ladder, if you will. He is both of those things. And by being both, He can mediate between them.

He can transfer things from the earthly and the concrete into heaven. He can take the heavenly things and bring them across to us. It means a lot to say that He is the image of the invisible God, and He is the firstborn of all creation.

He is the starting point for creation. He is where creation flows out of the infinite and the divine. That's where He is.

And we're going to see a parallel as we move forward in this section. So be watching because we're going to have another Haas-Esten coming on a little bit later. Another who is.

But he goes on to expand on this idea. He says He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn over all creation because.

Hati in Greek. For. Because.

Because. It's an explanatory conjunction. We're going to explain this two-fold identity of Christ.

Because. And then we have en autu in Greek. Autu means Him.

And en is your word like in in English. But it means in. It can mean by.

Or it can mean with. And there's been lots of debate. Well, does it say in Him all things were created or by Him all things were created? Well, the answer is yes.

The answer is yes. In Him all things were created. That are in heaven and that are on earth.

And also by Him. They're by Him and they're in Him. That's why the word has that ambiguity in Greek.

Because it transmits all of that information in one little two-letter word. It means by the agency of. In the sphere of.

With reference to in some cases. He is the agency. He is the environment where these things take place.

He is the agent and He is the environment. In which all things were created. That are in heaven and that are on earth.

Now this is a big deal. We tend to think of the visible universe as creation. But there's a lot of invisible creation.

All of the angels. Whatever it is they walk on out there. Whatever it is they fly through.

If they've got wings and they're flying. They must be flying through some medium. Whatever they do.

There's some sort of an environment. In which the angelic creation lives and moves and operates. They have commerce.

You can go back to the Old Testament. And study Satan and his fall. And part of his condemnation.

In Isaiah 14 and in Ezekiel 28. And in other passages in those contexts. Talks about the trafficking.

The commerce. The trade. The exchange and the bargaining.

That Satan did with the other angels. There's a whole environment and economy and world. In the unseen realm.

That we don't have access to. Well guess what? Jesus Christ. In him and by him.

All of that was created as well. People like to speculate in science fiction. About parallel universes.

Well there is a parallel universe. That's a very real concept. That's where the angelic creation abides.

We tend to think. Well heaven is very far away. In some direction.

Maybe it's out past the north star. Or some other place in the physical universe. It's not.

It is a parallel universe right around us. That's why angels are in this room. The Lord Jesus Christ has said.

Where two and more are gathered in his name. He is present in the midst. We trust that he is in our midst.

How can that be? Well he's not 1800 million light years away. In quote unquote heaven. There is a reality that surrounds us.

That parallels and co-exists with ours. That we don't have access to. We can't see it.

But it's just as real. I'm sure an angel can bump his head. Just like we can.

On something. Well all of that was created in, out to. In and by Jesus Christ.

He is the agency. By which these things came into being. So who do you want to have your relationship with? Do you want to have it with an angel? That was created by Christ.

Or do you want to have it with Christ himself? You can ask the same question in a lot of religions today. Do you want to talk to Saint Christopher? Or do you want to talk to God? Do you want to talk to Mary? Or do you want to talk to God? Jesus Christ is God. He is the creator.

Along with the other members of the Trinity. In him all of this consists. It reminds us of what a great privilege it is to be those who are in Christ.

To be the body of Christ. To be the bride of Christ. That's a big deal.

That's not a statement that was made about Old Testament saints. They are not said to be in Christ. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

Old things are passed away. All things are become new. Being in Christ is to be in the one who created the universe.

He is the source of life. The more you think about it, the bigger deal it is. Why is he the image of the invisible God? Why is he the first born over all creation? Because in and by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on the earth.

Visible and invisible. He is the agent and the environment for everything that we see. But he is also the agent and the environment for everything we don't see.

What a wonderful thing to be in Christ and know that not only does he hold the whole world in his hands. He's got the whole world in his hands. Well, he's got the whole heavens in his hands also.

He created that just like he did this. And it consists in him just like our universe does. So when we're thinking about and dealing with invisible things, Christ is the one we want to concentrate on.

There was a big idea about getting excited over the angels in those days just like there is today. All of this excitement about angels, all of the movies and the books and the TV programs and the singers on series and everything else, Delores and the whole thing, is a diminishing of the glory of Christ. Those things are all things that Christ created.

Why not focus on Christ? Focus on Christ in our midst. Christ in you, the hope of glory. The return of Christ.

The approval of Christ. The future with Christ. Christ walking with him in white.

Having a nickname that he has just between us and him. Having a white stone that is a gift from him personally. Can you imagine receiving a personal gift from Jesus Christ? He comes up and hands you this white stone from the Lord who died on the cross.

The Lord who created the universe. He comes up to one of us personally and says, this is for you. It's one of the most incredible rewards there could be.

It's talked about in Revelation 2 and 3. Why do we want to distract ourselves worrying about demons and angels? Did we bind Satan today? Was this demonic oppression? Did an angel preserve me? Paul is saying, look, if you've got Christ, don't settle for these little intermediary things. Don't be worrying your head about invisible things and getting all distracted by it and lose sight of Christ. We can be aware of the invisible, but we're not distracted by it and make it the object of our attention and even our faith.

He says, in him and by him, all things were created that are in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. These are all references that Paul uses in other places. We think of Ephesians and Corinthians where he uses this language.

We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and rulers and so forth. This is a direct reference to the angelic creation. He says, look, Christ created all these things in him and by him.

These things came into being. All things were created through him and for him. I could give a long, wonderful speech about the Greek prepositions here, but every different preposition that you can use to relate these things is pretty much in this.

You've got in, which means in and by and with. You've got dia, which means through. You've got they were created for him.

Every different way you can say this in Greek, it all depends on Christ. It hinges on him. It originates in him.

He is the interface between the visible and the invisible. He's right at the center, Paul says. In verse 17, he is before all things.

He was there in the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God.

That was in the beginning, before any of these visible and invisible things even came into being. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, was there. And in him all things literally hold together.

This is the preposition *sun*, that means with in Greek, with *histamine*, to stand. The reason things stand together, hold together, you know, a lot has been said about the binding force of the atom and so forth, but if you get to worrying about demons or oppression from evil and so forth, just remember the only reason those things even hold together, what if Jesus let loose his binding force on those things? They would instantly disappear and vaporize. If there is a force that seems to be opposing us, the only reason it can even continue to function and exist is because Jesus Christ continues to hold it together by the word of his mouth.

And so don't worry. I mean, if it's there, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, has allowed it to continue to exist and to be where it is doing what it's doing. The only reason it even consists, the only reason it's matter, visible or invisible, even adheres, is because Christ continues to sustain it.

So he knows it's there, he's permitting it, he's holding it together and letting it operate, however evil and black and dark it may seem, the only reason it's there is that Jesus Christ hasn't said, you know what, I'm going to turn loose of that and it's going to no longer be. This sets us a perspective, doesn't it? If we're interested in the knowledge of God, if we're interested in knowledge of his will, if we're interested in those things that Paul talks about in these earlier verses, a worthy walk, fully pleasing, being fruitful, we have to know who we are. And the answer to the question, who am I, is I am in Christ.

I am united with him by the baptism of God the Holy Spirit. I am uniquely in this age a part of his body and his bride. He is the head, as Paul is going to go on to say, to the church.

In verse 18, he's the head of the body, the church. And he is the head of the body who is the beginning, the firstborn, and so forth. And we're going to have a repetition of this vocabulary that we have seen.

Paul has said that he is the firstborn over all creation. We're going to see him as the firstborn from the dead down in verse 18. We're going to see several parallels in the first section and the second section of this statement about Christ.

One section of this dwells on what Christ is relative to the creation, visible and invisible. The other section, the second section, that is going to begin here in verse 17 and 18, is what he is in the spiritual realm. We tend to think the physical realm is the visible, but Paul lumps together the visible and the invisible as one realm, and then the spiritual, as far as the church is concerned, in this second section.

Next time when we meet, we're going to lay these two things side by side and see the structure and how similar it is, and the comparison between each of these references that Paul makes. There is a comparison between the image of the invisible God and the firstborn over all creation, and the fullness of God in bodily form, and all things being reconciled in him. Our goal in observing these things and understanding them is to reach that point that we talked about in the first session, that now we've got something to grab onto when the chips are down, when we're starting to be distracted, when we're starting to unravel.

It isn't just God is great and God is good. We are going to know some specific things about where we stand because we stand in Christ, what we have access to because of who Christ is and where we are in Christ, why he is who he is to us. He gives us access to specific things in the heavenly realms, in the invisible realms, in the spiritual realms, and that's the reason God sent him.

That's why he's the expression of God's love because Jesus Christ is something. He is a person, concrete and real, and he gives us real, concrete assets and resources and the perspective on those things when we need it most. So far from just being a praise statement, this is a very motivating and encouraging statement about Christ that's going to give us ammunition and show us where our feet are planted when we are under pressure and when we need to remember who we are in Christ.

So it's an exciting passage and I'm looking forward to continuing in it next week, but let's close here in prayer. Father, we thank you for who we are before you in Christ. We thank you for his faithfulness, for his uniqueness, and for the love that you have demonstrated for us through him.

We pray that as we meditate on these things, God the Holy Spirit will make them real to us and not only enhance our appreciation for you and for our Savior Jesus Christ, but also show us the purpose for which you have revealed these things to us as we seek to walk in a way that is worthy and fully pleasing in your sight. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.