

98-07-31b Colossians

We resume now looking at Colossians 1, verse 15, where Paul is addressing specifically the subject of Jesus Christ, and he states that Christ is the image or icon of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. The word image or icon, we've already seen, for example, the first reference to this concept in Genesis chapter 1, where man as a creature was created in the image of God. And you have this helping us understand Paul's language in places like Romans, where he refers to the first Adam and the last Adam, and Adam all die and Christ all are made alive, because Christ is the fulfillment of everything God had as a hope for the human race.

He is the second Adam. It's also fascinating when you think about, and I'm going to give you what I would qualify as sort of a half-baked thought. I haven't really finished this up, but it's fascinating to me.

If you think about Jesus, what is Jesus' favorite title for himself? Son of Man. He says the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. He refers to himself more frequently as the Son of Man than by any other title.

Why does he say that? When we think of Christ, we think, well, Son of God. We think of it in terms of his divine identity as our first instinct. But Jesus referred to himself as Son of Man.

But either way you slice it, Son of Man, Son of God, we've been talking, especially in this last session, about marriage and the ideal situation. And I mean ideal in the sense of a model, not ideal in the sense that you have less than a full life if you're not in that model. But the illustration that God has put in human history is the family, the son or grandma, husband and wife and children and so forth.

When you look at that and you think, well, you've got the husband, you've got the wife, going all the way back to Genesis with Adam and Eve, and you have the offspring, and then those offspring in turn develop into couples who have offspring. But if you think about the highest level where you have God and you have the Son of God, what is the obvious missing element? There's no wife involved. You have God the Father.

It reminds you of My Three Sons. You've got Fred McMurray and you've got Chip and the other guys there, but there's no mother around. Or you look at Popeye and Olive Oil and Bluto and all that.

Olive Oil winds up with Sweet Pea there, but there's no husband. She's not married to Popeye, she's not married to Bluto. Where did Sweet Pea come from? You can lay up nights thinking, well, the spinach is all well and good, but where did Sweet Pea come from? So when you think about the great emphasis in Scripture about Christ as God's Son, and you think, well, maybe the Catholics have filled this in with the Virgin Mary and they've sort of elevated her up to a status with God, but the Bible does not do that.

Mary gets very little mention nowhere in the epistles. If it wasn't for Matthew and Luke, we'd know virtually nothing about Mary at all. So it seems like an incomplete model.

And so people have tried to fill this in a number of ways. You've got the Catholics with Mary. You also have people who say, well, and this I have a hard time even repeating as an illustration, but there are people who actually pray and instead of saying, Our Father, they call God the Father-Mother.

And so they say, and you hear people praying. I've heard this on television, on the radio, and seen it in books and things. Father, Mother, God.

And they try to put the feminine element right into God because it's nice and politically correct and one thing and another. But there's a reason why that gap exists. There's a reason why you have God the Father and you have God the Son, but you don't have God the Mother.

I mean, it's just a strange kind of a gap if you really stop and think about it objectively. Why don't you have God the Mother? You don't. Well, how do you resolve that great missing element? Well, if you stop and think about the things we do have, we have God the Father and God the Son.

Well, Jesus, God the Son, Jesus Christ, is called the Son of God and who else's Son is He? It's the Son of Man. What is His nature? It's fully human and fully divine. So in the same way that you can have an individual that has parents that are 100% Croatian and 100% German and when they get married, their offspring are going to be half Croatian and half German or half Cherokee and half French or whatever it might be.

They're going to be French and they're going to be Croatian. They're going to be a blend of those two things. And you can't separate out the French from the Indian.

You can't separate out the Croatian. I mean, it's an integrated thing. Well, if Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Son of Man, where does that put the human race in the great scheme of things in the universe? Well, God has made it pretty clear by implication.

And you think about the place that God has assigned mankind relative to the angelic creation and so forth. It's food for thought. Where does God expect us to be in His plan? Why is Israel called the wife of God? Why is the church called the bride of Christ? Both of those entities are made up of human beings.

And to look at the importance of the place that we occupy as a human race in God's plan, it's enormous. Jesus Christ is the reflection of the relationship between God and man. I mean, you can't get much closer.

You can't express dedication or love more fully for somebody of the opposite sex than if you married them. I mean, the person that you love the most, that's the person you marry, hopefully,

ideally. And that is the highest degree of intimacy that's possible in the human race, is to be married.

It's closer than brotherhood. It's closer than sibling or parent or anything else. To be married, that's as intimate as it gets with another human being.

And God has suggested to us by way of this illustration, in expressing Himself as God the Father and in Jesus Christ as God the Son, Jesus Christ who is the God-man, the place that humanity has in His purpose and in His plan. And I'm not trying to suggest that we go off on weird tangents with that, but it's a reminder to us that this language has meaning. God is the Father for a reason.

Jesus Christ calls Himself the Son of Man for a reason. He is fully divine and He is also fully human. And there's a reason why there isn't a feminine element in the Trinity.

Because God has initiated love toward man. God loved the world, gave His Son to become fully human. He, in His pre-existent form, subordinated Himself to the will of the Father and did that.

And you don't push that analogy and say, well, how can you have a son before you have a marriage and so forth? It's the idea of relationship that God is emphasizing there. It is the idea of love. We are transferred to the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Son of Man came into existence in a point in time because of God's love for man. And Jesus Christ is the full expression. And that's why it is the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Jesus Christ is the image. He's like Father, like Son. He is the image of the invisible God.

He is the firstborn over all creation. This language in Colossians 1:15 tells us to think in these terms. And sometimes we miss that.

We've just become inured to the idea that, well, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. We don't stop and think the level of love that God has for us that is manifested in His Son, Jesus Christ. And to be conformed to His image is to participate in that relationship with God that goes beyond God is my helper, God is my strength in time of trouble.

It is to partake of and to become part of divine, eternal things. We are in this life lower than the angels. We are limited and so forth.

But the place to which God is going to elevate us in Christ and through Christ is way up there. It's beyond where the angels are. And God is demonstrating something to them and to us because you look at Hebrews 1, to which of the angels has He ever said, sit down at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool? In elevating Jesus Christ, who is fully human, who is the Son of Man to this exalted place at His right hand, God is doing that for a reason.

It's not just Christ as a person that is being elevated. It's the human race of which Christ is a member and is the perfect member, the ultimate expression of divine nature and the ultimate expression of human nature. And it is to that that we are called.

When we are called to be Christlike, we are called to be what Adam was originally created to be and what Jesus Christ is. And union with Christ, conformity to His image is a wonderful, exalted thing. If you look at the statement in Hebrews 1 and verse 3 about Jesus Christ, literally it says that Christ, He is the radiance of God's glory and the very impress of His being.

It doesn't use the word icon there, but it's a parallel thought. Jesus Christ is the full expression of everything that God is. We are to be conformed to Christ.

What does that mean? We are to partake of the divine nature, to be all of the things that Christ is. And you think, oh wow, that's not even possible. He is so far, God is so far above us.

That's exactly the kind of thinking that God wants us to get past. It is not that great a gulf because Christ has bridged it. Christ is the mediator.

He is the meeting place of God and man. He embodies the meeting of God and man. He embodies relationship between God and man.

Intimate, personal relationship. That's why He's God the Son. That is the relationship with God that is available to us.

And that's why Jesus emphasizes in John 14.6 that He is the way to the Father. Sometimes in our enthusiasm for Jesus Christ, we miss the things that He is pointing us to. Just like the leper that Jesus cleansed.

The leper was so excited about what Christ had done for him that he went and told everybody what a great person Christ was and how much Christ had done for him. But he failed to be obedient and to see the picture. He failed to obey when Jesus said, go show yourself to the priest, offer the sacrifice that Moses commanded.

This would have reflected the glory of God, which was Christ's purpose and His goal here. Instead, this man made an issue of what Christ had done for him and missed an opportunity. Fortunately, we, through that missed opportunity, can recover what would have happened when you go back to Leviticus 14.

But Christ is the first one to tell us that He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father. Our goal is to come to the Father.

Jesus Christ has made a way. You read Hebrews 10. He has parted the veil that lets us enter into the Holy of Holies.

He's not the Holy of Holies Himself in that picture. He is the one that has made a way of entrance. He is the one who enables us to go boldly before the throne of grace.

And it's wonderful to dwell on that because our standing before God is in Christ. Christ is perfect. He is the ultimate man, as well as being the image of God.

All of this is summed up in Colossians 1.15. He is the image of the invisible God. That's His divine nature. He is the firstborn over all creation.

He is the ultimate expression of all creation. And the ultimate expression of all creation is not an angel. The ultimate expression of all creation is not Lucifer, who up until the time of Christ probably was the pinnacle of God's creation.

But the ultimate in creation is Jesus Christ. You can get into these big theological debates. Well, are you saying that Christ was created? Remember the statement at the birth of Christ.

It's actually the prophecy in Isaiah where it says, Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given. Have you ever stopped to reflect on that language? Unto us a son is born.

The son of man aspect is born. He comes into being at a point in time. There was time previous to the birth of Christ where there was no incarnation, no hypostatic union of humanity and divinity.

Unto us a child is born. But what's the second part of that? Unto us a son is given. The preexistent son of God didn't come into being at the birth of Christ.

The son of God is given at that point. The expression of love from God the Father in the person of Christ is given when Christ empties Himself, takes on our form and our nature and is united eternally as both the Son of God and Son of Man. It's an incredible mystery as Paul says.

But it's a wonderful truth to dwell on for the meaning of it, for the reality of it for us. Because this is how dedicated God is to relationship with us. He's not up there as a cold-hearted, impartial arbiter waiting for us to screw up so that He can discipline us and make us pay.

God loves us. He loves us as a race. He loves us as individuals.

And His goal for us is to unite us with Himself the way He's united with His Son. Because in Christ, who partakes of both natures, as we're conformed to Christ, that is the way to the Father. He's the bridge.

He is the ladder that Jacob saw between earth and heaven. And we have the opportunity to exploit and to enjoy relationship with God through Christ because of who Christ is and what He stands for. He is the Son of God's love.

He's the expression of how badly God wants us, how dearly God wants us to be in relationship

with Him. And it's very difficult for us because of the magnitude of who God is to cope with the idea that He's a person and that He desires us to have personal relationship with Him. But He does.

And we think, well, He is so far beyond us and we are so small and squalid and we start thinking about the doctrine of depravity and all this. But God says the time for that kind of thinking has passed. That point has been made.

Jesus Christ is the expression of the fact that that gap can be bridged. That gap has been bridged. And Jesus Christ is the bridge.

And to pursue relationship with God through Christ is our purpose. It's our calling. So Paul, it's amazing how much Paul says in this one little statement.

He is the image of the invisible God, the icon of the invisible God. He is undiminished deity. And then it says He is the firstborn over all creation.

And firstborn, especially in the Semitic culture, can be an acquired title. You remember back in Psalm 89 where He says... well, let's just turn there. Psalm 89, verse 27.

It's an important concept because we tend to think, well, firstborn, that's first in chronology. The first one you have, that's your firstborn. But the firstborn was a title.

It was a function. It was an assignment or a role that you could actually function as the firstborn even if you were not. So in Psalm 89, verse 27, God is talking about the Davidic covenant.

In verse 24, talking about My servant David that's mentioned up in verse 20. I found My servant David with My holy oil. I have anointed him.

Verse 21, With whom My hand shall be established, My arm shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not outwit him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him. I will beat down his foes before his face and plague those who hate him.

But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in His hand over the right hand. You see in the Old Testament the unruly forces of evil. God says His right hand, His authority, He's going to have mastery, dominance over these unruly, chaotic forces of darkness.

He shall cry to Me, You are My Father, My God, and the rock of My deliverance, the rock of My salvation. Also, I will make him My firstborn. You would think, well, how can you make somebody your firstborn if they're the firstborn, the first one to be born? They are your firstborn.

He doesn't say, He is my firstborn. He says, I will make him My firstborn. This is sort of an acquired status before God.

And that's what Jesus Christ acquires when He becomes fully human as well as fully divine. He

becomes the firstborn over all creation. What were the rights of the firstborn? The double portion.

Prior to the Levitical priesthood, the family priesthood devolved to the firstborn. The authority in the family. As the father's capacities and abilities weakened with age, the firstborn son took over the business or the flocks and herds of the property.

And the function of arbitrating disputes and taking care of the family's affairs. And this was the standard for hundreds and hundreds of years in ancient biblical times. It is a role.

The firstborn is the one to whom you give everything that's important to you. And you grant your authority. What does Jesus say? All authority has been given to me in heaven and in earth.

Because He's the firstborn. And the interesting thing is He's God's firstborn over all creation. What does all creation include? It includes all of the angelic hosts who got here first.

They were created before us. Lucifer existed before Adam was created. So in priority of creation, who ought to be up there to have this opportunity from God? It ought to be the angelic creation.

They were here first. But this is one of the reasons we have this theme of reversal all the way through the Bible. The elder shall serve the younger.

The last shall be first. Israel got there first in the plan of God, didn't they? To them belong the covenants, the promises, the oracles of God, and so forth. You go and read Romans 9, 10, and 11.

But who is going to wind up being the firstborn, so to speak, in spiritual terms in human history? It's going to be the church. The human race, although it got here last and is lower than the angels, in Christ has been elevated above the angels. And so Christ is the firstborn over all creation, and He's human.

And this, for some of the angels, is really rankles. What do Lucifer and the fallen angels think about the fact that a mere human is in rank now superior and favored above them? That's why you have that ironic reversal theme, because it's happening on the largest possible scale. The angelic creation will be subordinate.

Paul tells the Corinthians, Do you not know that we shall judge angels? To judge is to exercise authority over. He says, why can't you settle your own disputes? Don't you know that one of these days you're going to have the potential to execute even greater judgment than that? So, it's important to see that Jesus Christ, fully human, fully divine, is the firstborn over all creation. Specifically, what is this going to do to all the arguments of people that say, well, you need to pray to the saints, or you need to pray to the angels, or you need to get busy, try to bind the demons and so forth to really get ahead in life, you've got to start dealing with the angelic creation.

No, you don't. Jesus Christ, in whom we have our life and being, in whom we have our standing, in whom we have our identity before God, He's over all of that. Paul is going to go on to say, He created all of them.

Look at verse 16 of Colossians 1. By Him, all things were created that are in heaven and that are in earth. This is Christ in His God the Son capacity. The Son that was given to the human race.

Unto us a child is born. Unto us a Son is given. That Son, who in the beginning was with God and was God, according to John 1, 1 and 2, created all things that are in heaven and that are on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers.

And this language typically refers to the fallen angels, doesn't it? Paul says in another place, our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. So this tends to make us think of those as the opposing invisible creation. But Paul says here that Christ created all things, including them.

If He created them, who has the authority? He does. And He is the firstborn over all creation. So who are you going to go to? Are you going to go to an intermediary or a supposed intermediary? Or are you going to go right to the source, to the ultimate? The fullness is in Christ.

Completeness is in Christ. The ultimate expression of God's love is in Christ. The ultimate pleasing of God, the ultimate worthy walk, is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

You don't need to pursue any secondary, peripheral things. This is the implication. All things were created through Him and for Him.

We are striving to be conformed to the image of Christ, the icon of Christ in this life. And we know that ultimately that will take place, what's been called the doctrine of ultimate sanctification. We have positional sanctification, which means our position as righteous and secure before God is established at the point of our salvation.

We have experiential sanctification, or what's sometimes called progressive sanctification, which means our striving toward being less and less under the influence of sin, and more and more fruitful in the fruit of the Spirit, striving to be that church without spot or blemish or any such thing, striving to have the worthy walk we've seen in this chapter. Then we have ultimate sanctification when Christ returns, and we are fully conformed to His image. And this is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, 49.

1 Corinthians 15 is the well-known passage where Paul is talking about the resurrection. And he says the earthly can't inherit heavenly things. We have to shuffle off our mortal coil and put on the divine.

And so he says in 1 Corinthians 15, 42, So also is the resurrection from the dead. The body is

sown in corruption. It is raised in incorruption.

It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness.

It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body.

This, by the way, also lends credence to the view that we've discussed in other contexts about what happens at the point of death, and do you go and be disembodied and have an interim body and so forth. The body that we now inhabit that's got the eardrums that are currently vibrating is going to be planted for virtually all of us. It's going to be planted in the ground.

And it's going to be raised a spiritual body. And that raising is the resurrection that Paul is talking about in this context. And he's just talking about two bodies.

You inhabit this body until it dies and is buried. You inhabit the spiritual body when it's raised. And there's no mention of any intermediate body or any disembodiedness.

In fact, he goes on in this context to say we don't want to be unclothed. We want to be clothed upon. So, it's not conclusive, but it is harmonious with our understanding.

And so it is written, the first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. The life-giving spirit, the last Adam, is Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

However, he says in verse 46 of 1 Corinthians 15, the spiritual is not first, but the natural. Once again, you have this ironic reversal. The last shall be first, the first shall be last.

We start out with the natural, which is lesser. We end up with the spiritual, which is greater. The spiritual is not first, but the natural.

And afterward, the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust. The second man is the Lord from heaven.

Verse 48, as was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust. And as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, the icon of the man of dust, we bear the stamp, the impress, the icon of the man of dust, Adam.

Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return, God told Adam after the fall. We shall also bear the image of the heavenly man, which is Christ. We will bear.

Paul says in Corinthians, man is the image of God. But here he says we will bear the image of the heavenly man. And that is the perfected image of God.

The completed, ultimate, ultimately sanctified image of God. We are in the middle of a great,

great plan. A great purpose of God.

We have potential that we don't really comprehend. If we could see just a glimpse of where we figure in the great, eternal plan of God, we would be so motivated that we could hardly think of anything else. The things of this life would seem so mundane and so insignificant compared to these everlasting truths because they're real and they matter.

And Jesus Christ is the earnest of those things. He is the expression of those things. The fact that He came, that He died, that He lives, that He's seated at the right hand of the Father and that He's coming again is a reality that means something to us when we think about image of God, firstborn over all creation because we are united with Him.

We are His body. He is the head of all things to the church. So as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man.

Now this I say, brethren, verse 50 of 1 Corinthians 15, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We get involved in the flesh and blood world a lot. Paul says our warfare is not against flesh and blood.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God nor does corruption inherit incorruption. And then he goes on to talk about the mystery. We shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed.

In a moment, twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet, the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. This corruptible must put on incorruption. This mortal must put on immortality.

This is when we find our great union with Christ. This is the heritage of the saints. How do we move toward that goal? We talked about those three kinds of sanctification, the declaration of righteousness that God is able to make on our behalf because of Christ at the point of salvation.

We have positional sanctification. We know that ultimately when we put on this image of the incorruptible man that we will be ultimately sanctified. How do we accomplish that phase two portion of God's plan, the intermediate phase where sanctification is called for, where bearing the image and conforming to the image of Christ is called for? We're going to get there in Colossians, and if you turn over to Colossians 3, we'll see where it is we're going.

Colossians 3. You can see in verse 4 the same idea that we've just seen in 1 Corinthians 15. When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth.

But look down at verse 8. The corruption in which we once walked, we are to put off. You yourselves are to put off all of these anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, out of your mouth. This is sort of the antithesis of Galatians 5.22 and the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, and peace. This is sort of the fruit of the flesh passage here. Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language.

Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new, the new man. Who is the new man? It's Christ. The image of the invisible God.

How is that image renewed? How is that transformation accomplished? It tells us right here in verse 10. Put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge. This is another one of our dated locket of instrumental constructions.

In, by, or with. By knowledge, in knowledge, with, or under the instrumentality of knowledge. Same thing he stressed in the beginning of chapter 1 of Colossians.

The same thing that he stresses in Romans 12. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Our minds are renewed by the truth.

The new man is renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him. This is our friend Icahn here again. How are we renewed according to the image of the creator? By knowledge.

Just what we're doing tonight. Concentrating on the truth of the word of God. Placing ourselves, getting a perspective and a comprehension of what God's plan is and where we fit into it, what our goals are.

And the longer we meditate on these things, the more we gain objectivity about the details of our lives. How important is it really, some of these circumstances that we face, in comparison to what God has in store. And we can begin to sympathize with what Paul says when he says that this momentary light affliction is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is about to be revealed in the sons of God.

That's us. There is glory to be revealed. It's the glory that he talks about over in Corinthians when he talks about the renewal of the radiance of God's glory.

You can see it in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18. We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. What is that mirror where we behold that glory? It's Christ.

If you look at this context, that glory is not revealed in the Old Testament law because there's a veil. But the veil is removed in Christ. When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

The Lord is the Spirit. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. And we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image, the same icon, from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Jesus Christ is the express, impress, or image of God's being. We are transformed into that same

image. And if you look at chapter 4, verse 4 there in 2 Corinthians, even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing whose minds the God of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

This is our other image of God where the exact same phrase is used as in Colossians 1.15 is found. The gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. Why does it not shine? Why are their minds blinded? Because they do not believe.

The cause and effect here is the cause is lack of belief. The effect is the gospel does not continue to shine. The light is darkened.

The door to the ark is shut. The waters that are parted for salvation close in. Now is the appointed time.

Now is the day of salvation. The knowing of God and not glorifying Him as God but becoming vain in the imagination, that's what makes your foolish heart darkened. Romans 1. It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, this is 2 Corinthians 4.6, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So once again we see Christ's role as the mediator, as the way from us to God. And it doesn't get any better than that. There is nothing that completes that or adds to it.

You can't gild the lily. When you have something that is perfect and complete and full in the divine plan, anything you try to do is only going to take away. And this is the problem that we have in Christianity today and in many competing pseudo-Christian ideas and philosophies, is that we somehow are led to believe that God's plan of conformity to Christ is not enough.

That beholding His glory and being transformed as we behold it is not enough. That we've got to do, we've got to try, we've got to work, we've got to add to this in some way. Rather than realizing that beholding the glory of Christ, beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is the transforming power of God.

And being conformed to the image of God is the divine calling. It is the divine purpose. That's all there is.

And everything that we might do and become is going to flow out of that. That is the means to every other end in our lives. So our first priority has to be to observe that mechanism, that way of functioning, that method of growth.

It has to be observing the glory of God in the face of Christ. That's why we spend the bulk of our worship time looking at the Word of Truth, because that's where it all begins. That's what equips us for every good work, as the Scripture tells us.

But all of these things happen in Christ. He is the Alpha and Omega of the beginning and the

end. He is fully God.

He is the image of the invisible God. And He's fully human. He's the firstborn over all creation.

It's an incredible concept. Hebrews 10.1 is a fascinating passage, because one of the strong competitors for this understanding in that day and age was the Law. Keep the Law.

Observe the rules and the codes of behavior that were found in the Old Testament. But this very same word is used in Hebrews 10.1. We'll look there very quickly. Hebrews 10.1 says, For the Law having a shadow of the good things to come and not the very icon of these things.

The Law had a shadow and not the image. The Law is not the fullness. The Law is not the express, impress of His person.

The Law has a shadow and not the very image. Christ is the very image. And that shadow can never, with these sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach complete, mature, perfect.

Teleos. What you do, behavior that is prescribed for you, cannot make you complete. Conforming to someone else's standard cannot make you complete.

Following a path of righteousness defined by somebody other than God cannot make you complete, even when they're taking the things of God and setting them up as that standard. The Law came from God, but the Law does not perfect. It's a shadow.

Christ is the image. The Law is not. And all you have to do is put Hebrews 10.1 right next to Colossians 1.15 and it tells us that it is not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to His mercy, that we are delivered, that we are transformed, that we are enabled to fulfill the divine design.

So this is fascinating. The one other place that we find this icon language, oddly enough, is in Revelation, beginning in Revelation 13, 14 and 15. You have it again in chapter 14, verse 9 and 11, chapter 15, verse 2, chapter 16, verse 2. This is all the beast.

Remember you have the whole thing with the dragon, and then you have the beast, and the beast gets a mortal wound, and it's healed. And then there's a second beast that comes up, which is often called the false prophet. And it's fascinating if you read through this beginning in Revelation 13 and follow the career of the beast and the false prophet through chapter 14, 15 and 16.

He has an icon of his own. The beast has an icon. And he forces everybody to worship that image.

It's like you've got this false trinity there. You've got a false god with a false image mirroring

conceptually the true God and His image. And everyone is forced to worship the image of the beast, and the image of the beast has power of death over people and so forth.

But this is also the icon language. And it's fascinating as a contrast to see this take place. Man himself sets up this false image.

You can see this in Romans 1, 23, where men exchange the glory of God for the image of corruptible things, the icon of corruptible things. Christ is the icon, is the image to which we turn and toward which we grow. And that's what we seek.

That's what we strive for. There are many false images out there. And Romans 1, 23 and Revelation 13, 14 and following give us the results of pursuing some of those false alternatives.

So I hope this has given us a little bit of appreciation for this very brief statement, and yet it's so content-rich in Colossians 1, 15. Jesus Christ as the God-man, as our Savior, we are in union with Him. We are His body, His bride.

Our destiny is inextricably and eternally linked with His. And that's the basis for our confidence. It doesn't depend on us.

It depends on Him. We have the opportunity to exploit God's grace in that regard, to make the most of that opportunity, to be fully reflective of God's glory, to seize and lay hold of the inheritance of the saints in the light that Paul talks about. And he's going to go on to describe in these next few paragraphs how we do that and what that means.

And that's what we'll see next time. Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank You for the truth of these things and for the tremendous place that You have assigned us in Your plan through Jesus Christ.

We pray that these things will be a source of motivation and challenge to us. We pray that we will be able to see the meaning of these things as we live our mundane life and face our daily challenges and the situations and circumstances that engulf us from day to day. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will help us keep our eyes on Christ, the author and finisher of our faith, who Himself had the glory set before Him and lived in a way that pleased You and fully accomplished Your plan because of the joy that was set before Him.

We have a great joy set before us and we pray that it will be real to us in the hours and the days to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.