

98-08-07b Colossians

We're back now and resuming our study in Colossians Chapter 1, verses 14 through 20, actually verse 20. And once again, by trying to diagram this out, it would be difficult to just mark in your Bible, I think. You almost have to write out these verses so that you can see the key phrases that help us discern the structure in this section.

There are some scholars who think that this may have been some sort of a formal piece of early church instruction, maybe a little catechism type of thing, or even a hymn that Paul either wrote himself or adapted for use in this passage. The reason they say that, nobody really knows if it was any one of those things, but it's because it is so structured. Everybody can look at it, especially if you look at it in the original, and see that it has a great deal of structure.

I think personally that Paul, with the gifts that God gave him and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, wrote these things because God is great at packing a lot of information into a small amount of space. He's using all the channels at once. He's broadcasting on every wavelength, especially in a passage like this.

But just by way of a quick review, we saw that we're talking about the Son of His love, Jesus Christ, and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ transcends our comprehension. The fact that He is fully divine and fully human. But the miraculous part of it is that He is fully human.

That God chose to become, to unite Himself with, humanity. God did not choose to unite Himself with the angelic creation. God has not united Himself with any other portion of creation.

We as a race, as a segment of creation, are unique in the fact that God has manifested His love in such a concrete way. If you think about it, we touched on this last week, when we were, with some fear and intimidation, thinking about the family structure where you have a father and you have a son. What's the missing element? And this has come up in modern theology, you have this whole idea, well there's a feminine side to God, and some people say really horrifying things when they pray.

They say, Father, Mother, God, and this sort of thing, because they're trying to fill that blank. That blank is there on purpose, because it's supposed to stop and make us think. God the Father is fully divine.

God the Son is fully divine and fully human. So when you have a son, or any child, they partake equally of the nature of their mother and their father, right? So Jesus Christ being born of a woman, born from the human race, the human race in the picture, in the illustration, fills that place. Why does God set it up that way? It isn't for us to go all weird on the feminine nature of God.

It's to express to us how deeply God loves us, both corporately and individually. God so loved the

world that he gave his son. His son partakes equally of the divine nature and the human nature.

What kind of love is there between a husband and a wife? What kind of love is there between God and the human race? God has set that up as an equation. He says, look, here is my son. He partakes fully of my nature.

He partakes fully of your nature. And Jesus Christ, just like a child in a marriage, is the concrete or the material expression of the love that these two people have. It doesn't mean if you don't have any children you don't have any love.

What it means is that in the picture, in the scheme of things, that child is a manifestation. Right there you have the blending in a material way of these two people who have come together because they love each other and have become one flesh. The two have become one flesh in their marriage.

The manifestation of that is this child that physically partakes of the nature of each of the parents. It's worthwhile meditating on the fact that God the Father, who reveals himself by that name, also has revealed himself through his son. Hebrews chapter 1, many parts, diverse ways God in times past revealed himself, but in these latter days he has revealed himself by means of a son.

How can you take that infinity and that magnificence that's beyond comprehension and make it expressible and understandable? Who can know the things of God except the Spirit of God? Someone who partakes of the divine nature is the only one who can understand the things of God. Who can make it expressible in human terms? Somebody who partakes of human nature. Jesus Christ is the bridge.

He is the mediator between God and man because he fully partakes of both natures. Why is it that the Holy Spirit never speaks from himself? He only takes the things of Christ and presents them. Because it's Christ that is able to express these things to us because he is one of us.

He is fully human as well as fully divine. When we think of it in those terms it almost sounds a little science fiction-ish and it's not meant to be. But we've lost through repetition and through being inured from childhood of thinking about God the Father and God the Son and we've lost what that means.

Why God has set things up that way. Having that perspective helps us understand what's going on in this passage. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God.

He is God incarnate. He is also the firstborn of all creation. What takes priority in creation? What is the highest part of creation? Is it angels? It's not.

It's humanity. Jesus Christ did not partake of angelic nature. He partakes of humanity.

And the highest part of all creation right now, the firstborn of all creation, firstborn in terms of

precedence, in terms of priority, in terms of authority is Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is not an angel. He is a man as well as God.

And he is the firstborn of all creation. What does it say in Romans 8.29? Whom he foreknew, he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Who are the many brethren? It's us.

This firstborn status of Jesus Christ tells us something about him. It also tells us something about us because we are his brethren. And that's where positional truth starts being real, being in union with Christ.

Because he partakes of our nature and because he's human and we're human and we are in union with him, this is the goal. This is where God is restoring us. When God reconciles us, when God makes peace, when God establishes relationship, reestablishing relationship with the human race and establishing relationship with us individually, where does he want us to be? What's the goal? What's the purpose of our life? It's to be not only qualified but present and accounted for at the pinnacle of God's creation.

That's our destiny, if you will. That's our designation. Romans 8.29. He predestinated us, the church, to be conformed to the image of his Son.

What is the image of his Son? The image of the invisible God. Why is it important for us after salvation to bear the fruit of the Spirit? To have love and joy and peace. We think, well, it's only me I'm making miserable or at most a few people around me if I don't get in tune with the plan of God and if I kind of make a miserable wreck of my life, I really have only myself to blame and it's not a big deal.

It is a big deal because we have been saved for a purpose and bearing the fruit of the Spirit, developing the hope and the faith and the love that are the primary Christian virtues makes this happen. It fulfills our designation. We are designated as church age believers.

Our mission is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. What is the image of Jesus Christ? It's the image of the invisible God. Who is the God of peace? Who is the God of all comfort? Who is the God of love? Who is the God of joy? Who is the patient God, the long-suffering God, the gentle God, the forbearing and long-suffering God? Those characteristics are to be developed in us because they are divine characteristics and we are to manifest the divine nature.

We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds because this is where we sit. Jesus Christ, the God-man, is sitting at the right hand of God the Father. That's as high as you can get in creation.

You look in Hebrews, to which of the angels did he ever say, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool? Why is Paul bringing this particular aspect up here? One of the reasons

is there was a big focus on angels, just like there is today. And we think, oh, this is completely different. I mean, it's on TV and it wasn't on TV in those days.

It's no different. It's exactly the same. It's exactly the same.

When you look at fascination with angels today and you look at Delores and that other gal and all this touched by an angel and all these people with angel experiences and one thing and another, it's exactly what was happening in Colossae. It happened in the earliest days of the church. And what is it? It's a human experience lever to pry us away from the goal.

And Paul says, look, don't get distracted with the angels. Jesus Christ, the God-man, created the angels for himself. They serve him.

He is going to reconcile everything as the God-man to himself, including the angels. Now, I'm not talking about soteriology and is he going to cancel out their sins and so forth. I'm saying that if you've ever studied something under the heading of angelic conflict or what is the issue between God and Satan and that sort of thing, Satan and the fallen angels had an issue with God before we were created.

Our creation, in some way, makes a point that vindicates God's judgment in assigning the penalty of the lake of fire to the devil and his angels. That lake of fire was prepared ahead of time for the devil and his angels. That was its original purpose.

That's why it is out there burning as it were right now. It has already been created. It was created for the devil and his angels, but between the sentencing and the execution of the sentence, there was an appeal or a question.

It was unclear in the minds of the angels the fairness or the reason for God's harsh judgment. Nothing like this apparently ever happened in prehistory before. Our lives, our history, among other things, are a demonstration of God's righteousness and justice and the vindication of God's penalty and the execution of that penalty for the angels because now we're an object lesson.

You say, see what happens when people voluntarily separate themselves from God, when people who are separated from God voluntarily choose to remain so. What is the outcome of their life? What goes on in their soul? What is the meaning and purpose of their existence? What does it lead to? What does it tend to? Is it constructive or destructive? Is it fruitful or is it horrific? Does it tend to life or does it tend toward death? It's illustrated day by day, not only in the lives of unbelievers, but also in the lives of believers who, though they are qualified, do not pursue relationship with God and do not pursue operating under his power. It makes a point to all creation.

But that point is made and you would think, well, but the angels are superior and there's this little inferior race here that God has created to sort of lab rats. We're just rats in the maze and you

show how the rat will push the button that gives him the drugs and he'll do that until he starves to death and he'll do it in preference to sex and everything else. You know, they've done it with cocaine.

Put a little dispenser in the rat maze of cocaine and one of food and water and one that opens the door to the attractive little lady mouse over there and the male rat goes in there and he hits the cocaine button and then he just keeps hitting it until he dies. He starves to death. He doesn't want sex.

He doesn't want food. He doesn't want anything but more cocaine. And we say, well, we're the big intelligent people and here's these rats making the point.

We sometimes think when we're looking at the angelic conflict that it's similar. Well, au contraire. Jesus Christ did not, in essence, join the lab rats.

Humanity, because of Jesus Christ, has been elevated to the highest place and you see this theme of reversal throughout the Bible. Why is it that the elder shall serve the younger? Why is it that the last shall be first? Why is it that Israel, who got here first and had the law, the promises, the covenants, the prophets and all that, why is it that the church full of pagan, unclean, uncircumcised Gentiles winds up having preeminence? Why is it that the church is his body and his bride and Israel is not? All of these are that ironic reversal. You got there first but you didn't take advantage of it and this younger, seemingly inferior, has seized hold of relationship with God.

That's what makes the difference. You can be a Moabitess, you can be a Syrian, you can be a prostitute living in Jericho, but if you see the opportunity for relationship with the living God and seize hold of it at any cost, God elevates, God honors those who honor him and it's repeated in so many different ways throughout history and that's what's happening with the human race and the angels. The angels started out being preeminent.

Man is created a little lower than the angels but God has crowned him with glory and honor because God united himself with mankind and Jesus Christ is the embodiment of that love and that union. That's who our Savior is. That's why he's the focus of our attention and the object of our appreciation and our study in the word of God to understand him because he's our bridge.

He is our wisdom and our knowledge. Remember over in what Paul says that God has made him our wisdom and our righteousness and our peace and our sanctification. Jesus Christ is in Hebrews, you get over there to chapter 10 and it says he made a way for us through the veil to the holy of holies, the place where no one was allowed to go.

Jesus Christ when he's crucified and the veil is torn asunder, now there's access for mankind to the holy of holies. Now the God who loves us is free to be united with us because our disqualifying stench of sin is removed. We have been forgiven.

We have been redeemed. We have been reconciled. The three great parts of our salvation are in this passage and they're all connected with the sacrifice of Christ, the blood of Christ and that's the big bracket in verse 14 and in verse 20 that tells us what this is all about.

It took a lot for God to make this union happen. John 3.16 is an often used, perhaps overused verse but if you think about it, that's in a nutshell what Paul has explained in great detail here. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, his firstborn, the firstborn of all creation, the image of the invisible God, he gave him so that whosoever trusts him would not perish but have eternal life.

After our salvation, that's still the case. Jesus Christ is there as our mediator, as our means of understanding God the Father, as our means of experiencing relationship with him in a real way. It's a real thing.

We tend to think it's all just kind of theology and I'm saved and I know that I am, hallelujah, amen, instead of realizing that this ought to make a difference in our day to day life. It ought to be easier for us with this perspective to realize that some of the circumstances of life are really pretty petty in comparison with the glory that is about to be revealed in the sons of God. We shall be like him.

We shall see him as he is. We'll not only be able to see his humanity like they did in the first advent, but we're going to see the image of the invisible God unshielded, unfiltered on resurrection morn. Are we going to be ready? Will we have capacity to even understand it? You think about these things and think about how long many of us have gone without really stopping and thinking about who Jesus Christ is and what it means for him to be the head of the body, the church, intimately united with us.

He's intimately united with God because he's his image and he's his first born. In him all the fullness is pleased to dwell, but he is also intimately united with us, particularly in this age, the church age. What does that, like Francis Schaeffer titled his book, how should we then live? Well, to the extent that this is real to us, to that extent it is life changing for us.

Because if we ever even get a faint grip on how important this is and what God has invested in us, it's a very motivating truth. And Paul knows that it is, and that's why he presents it. Because he says, you're getting a lot of this weird stuff about follow the law of Moses and get into angel worship and get distracted with things in this life, the prosperity gospel, the emotion gospel, the holy laughter, all of these other bizarre things that are plaguing the church today.

And this is the first thing we lose. The first thing that dims from our sight is the magnitude of who Jesus Christ is and what he represents because he's the God man. It's an expression of how much God wants relationship with us.

Because he united himself with us. He's put humanity in the life position and has had a son with humanity that is the material expression of his love and the intimacy that ought to be shared

there. So Paul introduces those things and then when you look at the coming section in chapter one of Colossians, when he says that, he is the head of the body of the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that in all things he may have the preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in him all the fullness should dwell, and by him to reconcile all things to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of his cross. Now, we've had this question come up before. It came up again during the break today.

And it's a legitimate question. You saw the parallels between part A and part B of this big comparison. Part A being verses 14 through 17.

The crux of it being he is the head of the body of the church in 18A. Then 18B through 20, you see the part B here. Part A is from the divine standpoint looking at creation.

Part B is from the humanity of Christ's standpoint looking at, because he is true humanity as well as true deity, how he has made it possible for us to have a relationship and to be reconciled to God, to God the Father. And we saw the parallel language, who is, who is, in him and by him, in him and by him. And then we saw through him to reconcile all things unto him.

Just as up in verse 16 we had all things created through him and unto him. Identical prepositional phrases. It's so easy to see in Greek.

Up here, Jesus is the creator. Down here, he is the reconciler. Up here, he is the origin of life.

Down here, he is the origin of new life. He is the firstborn of all creation up here. He is the firstborn from the dead down here.

But up here, all things were created in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. Well, looking at our parallels, what is all things in heaven and on earth going to mean down here? As far as being reconciled, same thing. There's nothing in the context to limit all things.

And if there was, believe me, I would be the first to jump on it, but there's not. This all things down here that are reconciled through him, unto him, is the same all things up here in verse 16. It's all things in heaven, all things on earth, all things visible, all things invisible, whether thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers.

It includes the angels. Now, in our standard doctrine of reconciliation, we talk about what God has done for us at salvation through Christ. You have redemption, reconciliation, propitiation.

One is toward man, one is toward God, one is toward sin, and so forth. This outline suggests to me that we need to flesh out. We don't necessarily need to revise what we understand about reconciliation, but we may need to flesh it out a little bit and realize that reconciliation is not just

for us.

We saw this in Romans chapter 8, in the early part of the chapter. Remember when Paul says the whole creation is groaning, waiting for the revelation of the sons of God? All creation is groaning, waiting on us. All creation.

All creation was cursed when we fell. All creation is going to be restored when we're restored. We're all tied together.

We're like Noah with the animals in the ark. Everybody with Noah is delivered. Well, everybody with the human race, as goes the race, so goes everybody that's tied to them.

So when we fall, creation falls. When Noah comes out of the ark, God says the animals are going to be afraid of you. The fear and dread of you is going to be on all creation because now you have the responsibility for individual judgment.

The fear and dread of God used to be upon them because it was God who judged. It was God who sent the worldwide flood. God's not going to do that anymore.

Now man is going to be the dispenser. So the fear and dread of man is on the animals. They have an instinctive fear that we're going to kill them.

That's why they run away. Well, as goes man, so goes creation. And in fact, as goes man, so goes the universe.

When we stop and think about the place that human history has in God's dealing with the angels, how is everything in heaven, the thrones and dominions and principalities and powers, how are they reconciled through Jesus Christ? Are they saved through Him? No. Reconciliation is not a synonym for salvation. It doesn't mean that because Christ died on the cross, angels are saved.

He says they are reconciled. He never says they're redeemed. He never says they're forgiven.

None of the other components. We tend to just squash everything in and say it's all salvation. And it's not.

Reconciliation. Can there be a question in your mind about the justice of a particular decision if you don't fully understand the basis on which that judgment was made? There have been movies made where you start out and you don't really know what's going on and some officer turns around and shoots one of his men with a pistol. Shoots him dead on the spot.

You say, whoa, that seems pretty harsh. Then they go and fill you in on how this situation came about. They flash back and fill you in on the details and then you see that this was necessary and justified and the right thing to do.

But at first you didn't see it. The angels obviously are initially at something of a loss to cope with

the permanent eternal destruction of one-third of their number in the lake of fire. They know that God is righteous.

They know that Satan and those who follow him have malfunctioned. But it is apparent from the witness of Scripture that God needed to explain himself to the angels. And that's why they watch us so closely.

Because God is demonstrating his righteousness and his justice as well as his compassion and his love, his long-suffering, his patience, his repeated offering of opportunities. He's showing the nature of free will and volition that people, given the opportunity, given however much revelation is necessary, will still know God and not glorify him as God, not be thankful, become empty in their imagination and darken their hearts, turn away to other things right in the face of God's grace and compassion. They just don't want it.

Well, sometimes it's a lot easier to see things clearly when you're looking at someone else than it is when you're looking at yourself. This is why theater and drama have been so popular from ancient times. Because you can go and see the actors on a stage portray a story and you can see the flaw in the hero.

You see the tragic flaw or the fatal flaw. You see where vice or pettiness or jealousy is the undoing of someone. Then you come back and it's easier to see it in yourself.

You say, oh, I may be like so-and-so in this play. We look around at other people and we see where we think that maybe they're doing better or doing worse in some particular area. Then we look at ourselves and we say, gosh, I wonder if I'm guilty.

I'm the pot calling the kettle black here. I'm throwing rocks at them and here I am and I'm no better. So we're a demonstration for the angels.

As God reconciles us to himself as our salvation and the recompense for both coming to God in faith or rejecting him is meted out by God, the rest of creation is reconciled. Now everyone understands. Every knee will bow.

Every tongue will confess. Everyone is going to see what God is up to. They may not like it.

They may not agree with it. They may not want it to happen. But it's clear.

God has spelled it out. Nobody's in doubt as to why he's doing what he's doing. And in that sense, everything is reconciled to him.

It doesn't mean that everybody has a wonderful relationship with him, but all things are reconciled. And in particular, the possibility of restoration to relationship with God is there. And I believe that there was some form of possibility of return to God after the angelic fall.

I have no idea what form it took. Don't ask me if there was another cross and another atonement and all that. I don't know.

But when you look at the pattern, God is consistent. And God always offers grace before judgment. Always.

There is not a place in the scripture where God did not offer grace before judgment. Even to the pagans, even to Nineveh, who is a race of idol-worshipping, fornicating unbelievers, God gave grace before judgment. So I cannot find a precedent to say that God did not give grace before judgment to the angels.

He did, because that's his nature. And his nature doesn't change. What form it took is not revealed, at least not to me.

And I refuse to speculate on it. But God is reconciling all things to himself. The potential is there.

The qualification is there. It remains to be seized and laid hold of by us. If you look at the conclusions that we can draw from this, first of all, and I've just made four here just by way of summary of this section, a son or a child is the material evidence and expression of intimate love between two persons, two parties.

That's what a child is, or should be. Obviously, you have your exceptions. But in the divine plan, the man leaves his father and mother.

Here's a little question for you to work on this week, just for your own edification. Why does Genesis say that for this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife? Why doesn't it say for this reason, a woman will leave her father and mother and cleave to the man, and they too shall be one flesh? Why is it that the man severs from the father and mother to cleave to the wife? Just ask you that, because I haven't figured out the answer. A son or a child is the material evidence and expression of intimate love between two persons.

So when you think of Jesus Christ, the Son, we should immediately make the leap to the love of God. That's why this whole section is introduced in verse 14. Jesus Christ is the Son of His love.

That's what that means. He's truly human. He's truly divine.

He is the union of God and man. Christ as deity is like His Father. He is the image of the invisible God.

He's the preeminent One. He's the creator and sustainer of all things. He is the reason for which everything exists.

And that's our part A of this two-part presentation that Paul has given us here. So Christ as deity is like His Father. He is the image of the invisible God, the preeminent creator and sustainer of all

things.

He is the reason for which everything exists. Christ as humanity, this is the third observation, Christ as humanity is like us, but like us glorified. He's not like us fallen.

He's not like us in our decrepitude and our infirmity. He is like us as we should be, glorified. He is the exemplar of resurrection life.

He's the firstborn from the dead. That's what we're going to be. We shall be like Him.

He's the example of resurrection life. He's the archetype of resurrection life. He's the archetype of indwelling deity.

He didn't operate in His earthly life here out of His own deity. He operated out of the indwelling presence of the Spirit. And that is our example.

That's our potential as well. And He is the example of unhindered fellowship with the Father. Resurrection life, indwelling deity, unhindered fellowship.

Those are the potentials that Jesus Christ embodies. Those things are potential for us. We're qualified for those things because of Him.

So finally, the fourth point here, He is the bridge from man to God. He is the mediator. We have some passages that talk about Christ as mediator, such as 1 Timothy 2, verses 2 through 6. 1 Timothy 2, 2 through 6. This is a fairly well-known and sometimes memorized passage.

Paul, in talking about prayer and exhorting supplications, prayers, and intercessions, and giving of thanks to be made for all men, for kings and for all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. The reason we pray for the government and the people in the government is so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. That pretty well rules out the picketing and the illegal activism that some of our brethren and babes in Christ are engaged in.

Paul says, we pray for the government so that we can lead a quiet and peaceable life with godliness and reverence. If you can make your opinions known in a godly and reverent fashion, quietly and peaceably, go to it. But don't throw bombs, don't yell and scream and make an embarrassment and a shame out of yourself and try to do so in the name of Christ.

It's not scriptural. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Christians today pretty much just desire all men to be saved.

We don't worry near as much about the second half there, to come to a knowledge of the truth. But Paul puts those on the same par. For there is one God and one mediator between God and

men, the man Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 2.5 There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. It is Jesus Christ in his humanity that is our mediator. The man Christ Jesus is our mediator, who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time.

And you see those concepts of knowledge of the truth and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross linked to mediatorship here just as we saw them in Colossians 1. Because that is the means by which he became those things. He's declared to be the Son of God through his resurrection, which is a result of his death. You can see the same thing, which is fascinating to see, in Hebrews 8. This is our second to the last passage tonight, but look at Hebrews 8.6 talking about Jesus Christ, comparing him to the Levitical priests who served under the law, and they made the tabernacle, the earthly pattern of heavenly things and so forth.

But now in Hebrews 8.6, he, Christ, has obtained a more excellent ministry inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, which is established on better promises. The covenant that Christ mediates did not exist in Old Testament times. Old Testament believers are not party to that covenant.

God will make that covenant with them when they're resurrected. He says, in that day I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Well, that day has not come, and God has not made that covenant yet with Israel, but he's made it with us.

We are the late comers, and yet we're sort of the younger son, and yet the last shall be first, the elder shall serve the younger, and we partake of this covenant first. We are united with Christ. He is our mediator through this covenant.

Turn over a page to chapter 9, verse 15 of Hebrews. For this reason, he is the mediator of the new covenant by means of death. Once again, the same thing we saw in Timothy and in our passage in Colossians.

This mediatorship comes at a price, a high price. By means of death, he is the mediator of the new covenant for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, so that, and here's the purpose, why all of this stuff we have on the board here? Why is Christ the head of the body, the church? Why has he, as divine creator and the one who holds everything together, become man and become the reconciler and become our mediator? What's the point? Why should we care? Well, it tells us right here, so that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. This passage and others like it are one of the reasons why if I had to speculate on the author of Hebrews, I think Paul wrote it.

I think the language is slightly different because he wrote it to his own people. But the ideas here are so similar to everything Paul says in Romans, everything he says in Colossians and Ephesians and in Timothy. These ideas in verse 15 are identical to what we see elsewhere in

Paul's writings.

He is the mediator of the new covenant by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions, so that those who are called, What's Romans 8.28? All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Are we the called? We're qualified as called, but are we reaching out and partaking of that calling? Then you are called indeed. Then you are the called who receive the inheritance.

Jesus Christ died and became our mediator, bridged the gap between man and God, and fully expressed God's love for a purpose, so that we could lay hold of the inheritance, so that we could be molded in the image of Christ, who Himself is the image of God, so that we could be united to God and share His essence, reflect His glory, reflect His character in our own lives. That's our goal. It doesn't really matter how much money is in the bank.

It doesn't really matter what person thinks what about us. What counts is laying hold of that eternal inheritance, the eternal opportunity that is before us. The little mundane details of this life pale into utter insignificance next to the opportunity to partake of the divine nature, to be a partaker of the divine inheritance that Jesus Christ died to give us.

We tend to think He died to rescue us from hell. That's filling in the negative side of the picture, and He did do that. But He has died to give us the positive side, to go up to the 100%, the fullness, that God has designed for us, the place that He has assigned the human race in His eternal purpose.

We're it. We're the first squad. We're not sitting on the bench.

We're out on the field here. God has called you and He's called me to fulfill this purpose. We tend to think, well, you know, there's Billy Graham and there's other people out there.

No, it's you and me. We are the ones that God has called to fulfill this purpose. Are you qualified? Yes, you are.

Are you able? Yes, you are. Are we empowered? Yes, we are. Why? We have been given all strength according to the divine standard, the standard of the divine power, His glorious power.

That's why the prayer preceded this. There's nothing impeding us. There's nothing stopping us from laying hold of this except our own obtuseness, our own lack of enthusiasm for the purpose.

If we catch hold of it and realize what it is and pursue it, it is the greatest thing in the universe to be in union with God, to actually reflect and share His characteristics, to have patience and peace, to have joy in the face of whatever these little mundane circumstances are that get thrown our way. But it's, as I've told you before, we have to want it. It has to matter to us.

And it has to matter more than the opinion of the person next door or the opinion of somebody at

work or the opinion of someone in our family. It has to matter more to us than some achievement in this life or some set of circumstances that we want to preserve or that we want to attain. It has to be the thing.

This is why John could rot in prison. This is why Paul could languish in chains. This is why Peter could sleep and snore chained to a Roman guard.

This is why men were sawed in two. This is why they were burned at the stake. This is why they were crucified upside down and they had joy, not slap-happy hilarity, but they had inner joy and inner peace and confidence because they understood this opportunity and they knew that they had a hold of it and they weren't going to let go.

Read Hebrews chapter 11. The life of faith is based on this picture right here on the board. It comes to us through Christ.

It's available to each one of us. It's our reason for being. It's the reason Jesus died for us.

It's a terrific opportunity and it's such a shame for us to be so easily deflected and distracted from it. That's what Paul is telling the Colossians. He says don't let anybody cheat you out of the opportunity that Christ died to give you.

We don't want that to happen to us today. There are lots of distractions. There are lots of false and twisted understandings of Christianity.

Jesus Christ and conforming to his image is the whole thing. It's a thing that is within our grasp through him if we just see it and lay hold. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the truth that you reveal to us so clearly in your word. We thank you for the ministry of God and the Holy Spirit who makes it understandable and real. We pray that these things will live in our souls, that your living word will cut to the quick and be a critic of our thoughts and intents.

We pray that we will be transformed and we'll live in a way that pleases you and glorifies our Savior Jesus Christ. We ask these things in his name. Amen.