

# UPLOOK

OCTOBER 2006

Assess the Need • Catch the Vision • Take the Challenge

THE IMAGE  
OF THE  
INVISIBLE GOD

Gary McBride

THE  
PREEMINENT  
ONE

Steve Beaton

MEET THE NEW  
GNOM TEAM

p. 16

## HIS PLACE





The One whose very name is “the First” will be seen to have the preeminence in all of the workings of God.

## His Place

Where do we find Christ?

**S**o that He Himself might come to have first place in everything” (Col. 1:18b).

Such is the Father’s plan concerning His Son. In a few rich verses in Colossians 1, God sums up His design in creation and redemption, and His plan is eminently simple. He has purposed that—when all is said and done, when all of the schemes of man have been laid to rest, when at last the curtain falls on this little drama we call “time”—the Lord Jesus will have the first place in everything. The One whose very name is “the First” will be seen to have the preeminence in all of the workings of God, of time, and of eternity. And this will be due to the other places He has occupied.

**His is the highest place.** “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place” (Isa. 57:15). “Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:20-22).

**He took the lowest place.** “But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Php. 2:7-8).

**He has the central place.** He was in the midst of the bush (Ex. 3:2-4), the cloud (Ex. 24:16), the fire (Deut. 5:22), the teachers (Lk. 2:46), the crowds (Lk. 4:30; 5:19; etc.), His disciples (Jn. 20:19, 26), the lampstands (Rev. 1:13), and the throne (Rev. 7:17). He instructed Israel to build a tabernacle that He might live in the center of His people (Ex. 25:8); He rules in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2); He hung on the middle cross (Jn. 19:18); He is central when His people meet today (Mt. 18:20); He will sing in the midst of His assembly (Heb. 2:12); and He is the center of Heaven (Rev. 5:6).

The first place, the highest place, the lowest place, the central place. Thinking of this ought to make us bow in worship, for who but the Lord Jesus could fill any of those places, much less all of them? But it ought to make us do something else as well: it should lead us to ask, “What place do we give Him?”

This is not merely a devotional issue; it is an intensely practical one. There are many good things that deserve a prominent place in our lives: family, the assembly, the work of the Lord. But above—infinity above—they all must be the Lord Jesus. Surely we assign Him a high place, but that isn’t sufficient. The real question is: when other things (even good things) in our lives come into conflict with Christ, where do we cast our lot? Do we spend more time with Christ than we do in recreation? When other responsibilities conflict with meetings, what wins our allegiance? Are we pouring the best of our time and energy and passion into pleasing Him or into improving our place in this world. Does Christ *practically* hold the highest place in our lives? Do our friends and neighbors see it? Do our children?

If the Father has given His Son the highest place, surely we ought to as well. One day we’ll wish we had.

A stylized signature in red ink.

# UPLOOK

OCTOBER 2006

Volume 73 • Number 7

Founded in 1927 as *Look on the Fields*, UPLOOK is published monthly except for occasional combined issues which count as two issues, by Uplook Ministries and Uplook Ministries (Canada). Street Address: 12064 Linden Drive, Marne, MI, 49435-9683 Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2041, Grand Rapids, MI, 49501-2041

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ISSN #1055-2642

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7 UPLOOK magazine is intended to encourage the people of  
9 God in fidelity to His Word, fervency in intercessory prayer,  
11 labors more abundant, and love to the Lord. Believing in the  
13 practical Headship of Christ and the local autonomy of each  
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23 which accrues, to God be the glory.

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you wish returned. Send news items to [frontlines@uplook.org](mailto:frontlines@uplook.org)

### Postal Information

US POSTMASTER: (USPS 620-640)

Send address changes to UPLOOK,

P. O. Box 2041, Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2041

Periodical postage paid at Grand Rapids, MI.

CANADIAN POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to UPLOOK,

P. O. Box 4089, St. Catharines, ON L2R 7S3

International Publication Mail Product

(Canadian Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 40020782

British POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to UPLOOK,

P. O. Box 1163, Bristol BS39 4YA

**Subscription Information:** The *Uplook* magazine mailing list is maintained on a subscription basis. There is no charge for a subscription, however you must renew your subscription annually in order to continue receiving the magazine. An initial subscription is for six issues. Thereafter any time you renew, your subscription will be extended a further ten issues. There are three ways to renew:

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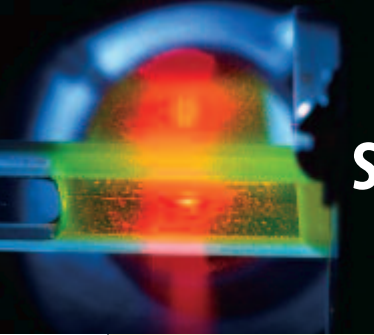
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## The Power of Prediction

What can you really trust in for the future?

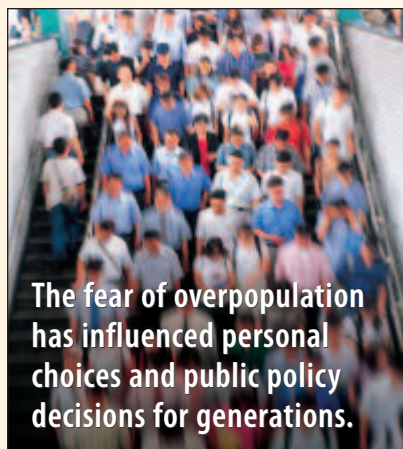
**P**redictions have power. They influence emotions, alter behavior, and even change social policies. During the 1960's, it was predicted that the earth would become overpopulated within a few generations. It seemed there would be no end to the periodic doubling of the human population and the negative environmental impact this would bring. Rachel Carson's 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, predicted a future springtime without the familiar songs of wild birds<sup>1</sup>. She based this prediction on the widespread use of the pesticide DDT to control mosquitoes in populated areas, and the discovery that DDT made songbird eggs so fragile that many were crushed in the nest. Carson predicted that if population growth and DDT use continued, then fewer birds would be born each spring—until one spring when there would be only silence. Her prediction ignited a new environmental movement in the United States that spearheaded a successful campaign to ban the use of DDT.

The fear of overpopulation has influenced personal choices and public policy decisions for generations. Part of the power of the “population explosion” prediction is due to the ability of the average person to understand its mathematical basis. If the time that was needed for a population to double is known, this can be used to project future growth. The numbers grow slowly at first but then suddenly rise explosively, or geometrically, and reach toward infinity. One 1970's-era astronomy textbook used this geometric progression to predict the earth's population would become infinite on Friday the 13th of November, 2026<sup>2</sup>. A day they called “doomsday.”

Doomsday predictions abound in the secular media today. The earth might be annihilated at any moment by a meteor impact. Human life may succumb to bird flu or some antibiotic-resistant plague. A giant volcanic erup-

tion could plunge the world into an ice age. Conversely, fossil fuel use might cause global warming, resulting in coastal flooding around the world.

So far, all these predictions have been wrong. Even the



**The fear of overpopulation has influenced personal choices and public policy decisions for generations.**

predictions of overpopulation may be wrong. Author Phillip Longman, in his recent book, *The Empty Cradle*, contends that birth rates in many cultures are well below replacement levels<sup>3</sup>. Longman suggests our current 6 billion-person population may never actually double but only increase to 9 billion by 2070 and then begin to decrease! This, he predicts, would cause social and economic problems for future generations. After all, nothing can replace the babies who were never born because they were aborted,

or because women entered the workforce and chose to have fewer children.

So are we headed for environmental ruin from overpopulation or economic collapse from under population? This exposes one problem with predictions: they can't be validated until after they come to pass. Christians are often scolded by the secular world for expecting the return of Jesus Christ at any moment based on biblical predictions (prophecies). But the lesson from secular history is that while man's predictions do have power, they can also be wrong. The lesson from biblical history is that only God's predictions can be relied on to surely come to pass.

—MICHAEL G. WINDHEUSER, PH.D.

1 R. Carson, *Silent Spring*. (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962).

2 G.O. Abell, *Exploration of the Universe*, (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).

3 P. Longman, *The Empty Cradle: How falling birthrates threaten world prosperity*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004).



## Latino Evangelistic Ministries

Reaching out to the Spanish speaking population of Southern California and beyond.

**L**atino Evangelistic Ministries was incorporated in 1992 to preach the gospel and teach the Bible among the Latino population of Southern California through radio and the distribution of gospel literature. The aim is to bring the gospel to the 7 million Latinos living in the greater Los Angeles area and to feed them the pure Word of God through sound Bible teaching over Radio KALI, a secular multicultural station. As well as Los Angeles, broadcasts are made each week in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, and Argentina. L.E.M. is involved in training Latinos for leadership roles, starting new Latino assemblies and supporting national missionaries in Colombia. The ministry also serves to direct designated gifts to workers commended from the assemblies to the ministry among the Spanish speakers of Los Angeles. As the Lord provides the means, L.E.M. helps assemblies or individuals in emergency situations and special projects.

Some facts about Latinos in Southern California: After Mexico City, Los Angeles has the largest concentration of Mexicans in the world. There are more Latinos in Los Angeles than some Central American countries.

**Contact:** L.E.M., P.O. Box 8305, Long Beach, CA 90808. USA

Phone: 562-429-4761 Email: [lem5@juno.com](mailto:lem5@juno.com) [www.latinoministries.org](http://www.latinoministries.org)

### CAMP IROQUOINA

#### *Retreat Schedule*

Oct 20-22 • Fall Teen Getaway  
Nov 10-12 • Father/Son Retreat  
Dec 14-17 • Staff Retreat  
Dec 30-Jan 1 • College/Career  
Jan 12-14 • Junior High #1  
Jan 26-28 • Junior High #2

### FLORIDA MISSIONARY CONFERENCE

A warm invitation is extended for all to attend the 39th Annual Missionary Conference at Park of the Palms in Keystone Heights, FL on Oct 20-21. There are separate meetings for the men and women. **Contact:** Helen Pinches 352-473-6393 email: [Mompinches@AOL.com](mailto:Mompinches@AOL.com)

### FAMILY CONFERENCE IN GEORGIA

The Fall Family Conference at Camp Hope, Dahlonga, GA will be held in the will of the Lord Nov 3-5. Thomas Wheeler (TX) will speak to the adults. Nate Thomas (SC) will speak to the

children. Conference begins Friday at 6:00 PM and ends Sunday with lunch. Cost: \$40/family; \$25/individual.

**Contact:** Steve Roys 770-536-4787 email: [camphopega@arilion.com](mailto:camphopega@arilion.com) [www.camphopega.org](http://www.camphopega.org)

### WESTERN NY MISSIONARY CONF.

Ken Hardisty and George Bristow Jr. are the invited speakers for an annual Missionary Conference which is scheduled for Nov 4 at the Blasdel Gospel Chapel in Blasdel, NY. The conference is one day only and begins at 9:30 AM and concludes around 2:30 PM. There is no cost and all are invited to attend. **Contact:** Timothy Reeb, email: [chargeybear@yahoo.com](mailto:chargeybear@yahoo.com)

### KANSAS FALL CONFERENCE

The Hutchinson Gospel Chapel Fall Conference will be held Nov 4-5 in Hutchinson, Kansas. The scheduled speaker is Dr. Jack Fish from Emmaus Bible College. **Contact:**

Andrew Hawkinson 620-664-6496 email: [ahawkinson@gmail.com](mailto:ahawkinson@gmail.com)

### LOUISIANA FALL CONFERENCE

Southside Bible Chapel is pleased to announce the Annual Fall Bible Conference Nov 11-12. The speaker expected is Dr. Robert Lindsted of Wichita, KS. **Contact:** William O. Walker, 103 Robert Drive, Lafayette, Louisiana 70506 Tel: 337-232-6577 email: [WOWalker@bellsouth.net](mailto:WOWalker@bellsouth.net)

### CREATION CONFERENCE

Living Waters Bible Camp, Westby, WI, is hosting a Creation Conference at the camp Nov 10-11 with Bodie Hodge from "Answers in Genesis." **Contact:** 608-634-4373

Registration information can be found at [www.lwbc.org](http://www.lwbc.org)

### FATHER & SON RETREAT

Fathers and sons...it's that time again! Attend the annual father/son retreat

## FRONT LINES *continued*

at Camp Iroquoia in the endless mountains of Pennsylvania Nov 10-12. The speakers are Don and Scott Dunkerton with Jay and Scott Allen bringing their musical talent.

**Contact:** Mark Thomas 570-967-0963

### FOCUS CONFERENCE

Northside Bible Chapel, 4510 E. 61st North, Wichita, KS will host the annual FOCUS Young Adult Conference Feb 16-18. The scheduled speaker is Joe Reese (ON). **Contact:**

Randy Horn 316-832-9756

Tom Goodson 316-744-3977

email: [thmsgdsn@yahoo.com](mailto:thmsgdsn@yahoo.com)

### OZARK FAMILY CAMP

Ozark Family Camp hosts three separate weeks of family camp each year from late July to mid August at Turkey Hill Ranch Bible Camp in Missouri. The camps are a great source of fellowship with other believers and spiritual encouragement. There is no set fee for the camp but rather it is provided on a donation basis. To be put on the mailing list to receive a brochure and registration form in the spring, contact Dan Moffitt at [danmoffitt@sbcglobal.net](mailto:danmoffitt@sbcglobal.net) or 918-744-6484.

### ONLINE HEALTHCARE SURVEY

Some brethren are interested in creating a healthcare program for commended workers and missionaries from U.S. assemblies. A website has been created with free tools to help workers and missionaries without insurance. These brethren earnestly request that all workers, missionaries and elders complete the survey on this website to ensure that the future program meets actual assembly needs.

Visit [www.assemblycare.org](http://www.assemblycare.org) or contact Jesse Gentile at 850-391-2411 for info.

### RAMSEUR, NC BIBLE STUDY

Ramseur and Randleman Gospel Chapels will host the "Back to the Book" study one Saturday each month until May, except Dec. Lord willing,

Randy Amos, Larry Price, Mike Attwood, Warren Henderson and Jim McKendrick are scheduled to speak. Also, three Ramseur/Randleman men

are continuing with a class. **Contact:**

Mike Moody 336-824-5525

Ramseur Gospel Chapel

PO Box 1259, Ramseur, NC 27316

email: [mcjmoody@yahoo.com](mailto:mcjmoody@yahoo.com)

### NEW ASSEMBLY IN CALGARY, AB

A group of believers seeking to gather unto the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone have formed a new assembly in Calgary, AB. The Good News Bible Chapel meets in the Scandinavian Centre located at 20th Ave & 7th St NW. Lord's Day meetings are: Breaking of Bread at 10:00 AM followed by Sunday School and Bible Reading at 11:15 AM. Midweek meeting is Monday at 7:00 PM Those of like faith in the Calgary area and those visiting Calgary are heartily welcomed.

**Contact:** Brent Rawlings

Good News Bible Chapel,

PO Box 64328, 5512-4 Street NW, Calgary AB T2K 6J1, Canada

403-619-2816 or email:

[goodnews@goodnewsbiblechapel.org](mailto:goodnews@goodnewsbiblechapel.org)

web: [www.goodnewsbiblechapel.org](http://www.goodnewsbiblechapel.org)

### OKLAHOMA FELLOWSHIP

Visitors traveling near Oklahoma City, OK are welcome to a small home fellowship at 701 NE 42nd Street in Northeast Oklahoma City.

### CORRECTION NOTICE

Last issue, in the article titled "Where To Now?" we announced some proposed dates for two gospel efforts with the Good News On the Move team. For your planning and prayers, the new dates planned for a gospel effort in the southern USA will be the first full week in March. The first full week in June is still slated for another gospel effort, this time in the New England area.

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Jason Kosanke 405-833-9325

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### COMMENDATION

Darrel and Barbara Valdois and their family have been in fellowship with the Gospel Chapel in Hutchinson, KS for many years. Darrel has faithfully served in the capacity of elder and has been active in the ministries of teaching the Word, visitation, and counseling. Their love for the Lord, involvement in the local church, and heart for others has been a wonderful example to us all. Recently the Lord has led Darrel and Barbara (their children are all adults now) to move from Hutchinson to Immanuel Mission in Arizona. They will serve the Lord there in teaching in the school and helping out in other ways as well.

### HOME CALL

Bill King, one of the elders from the Wilmington, NC assembly, went to be with the Lord on Wednesday, Sep 27, 2006. He often quoted this verse from Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." 



## The Image of the Invisible God

How can we know a God we can't see?

**God's preeminent revelation to man is in the person of His beloved Son.**

In human experience it is both joyful and humbling to see our personalities expressed in our children. They share our genes, character traits, and mannerisms. There are many of which it can be expressed "I know who your parents are" or "it's obvious who you belong to." As much as there is similarity, children are unique in that they share in the gene pool of two individuals. They may well be like their parents, but they are still uniquely their own selves in terms of character and personality. The word "image" or "likeness" may be used of them, but not in the way, or to the extent, that these words are applied to Christ in relation to His Father.

Of the Lord Jesus it could be said He is *"the image of the invisible God"* (Col. 1:15). He is *"the image of God"* (2 Cor. 4:4) and *"the express image of His person"* (Heb. 1:3). The word implies far more than likeness; "it implies there is a prototype and that the image is the revealed reality."<sup>1</sup> As "the image of God," Christ is the representation of God for man and the revelation of God to man. The Lord Jesus revealed invisibility and declared incommunicability. The English word "image" translates two different Greek words. In Colossians and 1 Corinthians, it supplies our word "icon" and in Hebrews it is "character." "Icon" means a pictorial representation while "character" is a graphic symbol. In both cases it is an image that conveys information.

### Representation

The Lord Jesus is the express image of the invisible God. Express in that He is in the very form of God, as indicated in Philippians 2:6. Vincent says "Here the essential being of God is conceived as setting its distinctive stamp on Christ, coming into definite and characteristic expression in His person, so that the Son bears the exact impress of

the divine nature and character."<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is true of the Lord Jesus, not only in time but also in eternity, that He is the image of the invisible God. Moule in quoting Ellicott says, "Christian antiquity has ever regarded the expression 'image of God' as denoting the eternal Son's perfect equality with the Father in respect of His substance, power, and eternity ... the Son is the Father's image in all things save only in being the Father."<sup>3</sup>

This perfect equality is seen in the earthly experience of the Lord Jesus. At His birth He was called Emmanuel, "God with us." John could say *"we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (Jn. 1:14). Jesus shared divine names such as God (*Elohim*), Lord (*Jehovah* and *Adonai*), Saviour, the mighty God, and the everlasting Father. He shares in divine activities such as creating, sustaining, giving life, raising the dead, forgiving sins, and judging mankind. He displays divine prerogatives again in forgiving sin and in revealing prophetic events. Certainly He displays divine compassion. His sympathy, expressions of concern, action, and words reveal the very heart of God. The Jews realized that He asserted equality with the Father. This equality is evidenced in His acceptance of Thomas' exclamation *"My Lord and my God"* (Jn. 19:28). Furthermore, Jesus could say to Phillip, *"he who has seen Me has seen the Father"* (Jn. 14:9). He claimed equal honor with the Father, accepted the worship of man, and will be worshipped by angels.

This equality is currently displayed in the present position and activity of the Lord Jesus. Both He and the Father are said to send the Spirit and to dispense gifts to the church. The Lord Jesus is addressed as God and Lord in Hebrews 1. And not only now, but even in eternity, the Father will reveal Himself in Christ.



## THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD *continued*

### Revelation

The parallel passage to Colossians 1:15 is John 1:1-3, 14-18. There the Lord Jesus is declared to be the eternally existent Word. Though not specifically mentioned in Colossians 1, the idea of Christ as the Word underlies the passage. According to Wuest, the Greek word *logos* implies a revelation that involved both reason and speech. “As His reason, it denoted His purpose or design; as His speech it implied His revelation.”<sup>4</sup>

A word is the visible and verbal expression of invisible thought. What a person is thinking, his or her ideas, opinions, and even personality can only be revealed through communication. God’s thoughts and will are revealed in both the written and the living Word. His preeminent revelation to man is in the person of His beloved Son.

As the Word, the Lord Jesus has revealed to man what was otherwise unknowable in reference to God. So much so that John, in his first epistle, could say they had seen the invisible, contemplated the inscrutable, and touched the intangible (1 Jn. 1:1-3). In his gospel, John writes of Christ: “*the only begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him*” (Jn. 1:18). “Declared” is the root for our word “exegesis” which means “to interpret.” The Lord Jesus brought to our understanding the eternal, invisible God.

This same thought is implicit in Hebrews 1:1-4. God’s message to man has been delivered at “various times and in different ways” through Old Testament history. That is, God spoke through the prophets by means of dreams, visions, proclamation, and acts of nature, to name some of the different ways. But God’s final and fullest revelation was through His Son. The Creator and Heir of all is the eternal Son. The word “Son” in verse 2 appears without a definite article. An article is supplied by the translator, as it would be awkward to render the phrase as “spoken to us by Son.” The intention of the writer is to present the Lord Jesus as not only the messenger, but as the message. Thus the Son, by virtue of His person, position, and purpose is the ultimate message of God to man.

The Lord Jesus is supremely qualified to be this

message as He is the “*express image of His person*” (Heb. 1:3). He is identical to the Father in substance and in nature. If man would know what God thinks and what God would say, they need only look at and listen to the Lord Jesus.

### Conclusions

The statement “image of God” is of importance doctrinally to the understanding and defense of the deity of the Lord Jesus. “*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*” (Col. 2:9) and “*He is the brightness of His glory*” (Heb. 1:3). Of no other but Christ could it be said that he is the express image of God.

Doctrine should lead to duty and belief affects behavior. In Colossians 1, Paul is declaring the truth of the deity of Christ. In chapters 3 and 4, he tells us that we should demonstrate the preeminence of the Lord Jesus in our lives. The world will see a representation of the person of God as His Son lives in us and through us. This is particularly true in our relationships with others. This truth is also central to the proclamation of the gospel. The world needs to see the “*light of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*” (2 Cor. 4:4). Christ, and Christ crucified, must remain our focus in the presentation of the gospel.

This wonderful truth should also cause us to worship as we think of Christ as God manifest. The glorious and gracious revelation of the very heart of God is seen in the person of His only begotten Son. Well might God’s people respond with the words of Jennings’ hymn:

“*Worthy of the sweetest praise,  
That my ransomed heart can raise,  
Is that Man in whom alone,  
God Himself is fully known*”



1 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, V, (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947-48), p.11.

2 Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, IV, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1946), p.385.

3 H.C.G. Moule, *Studies in Colossians and Philemon*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1977), p.77.

4 Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), p.182.



**If man would know what God thinks and what God would say, they need only look at and listen to the Lord Jesus.**



# Creator & Sustainer of All Things

Just say the Word

**The power of His Word should not come as any surprise, since, by that Word, He spoke the worlds into existence and continues to sustain them.**

**W**hen we think about how God created the world, we don't generally think of Him in His three persons. Genesis 1:1 says, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and earth,*" and we tend to assume it is talking about God the Father. Even the so-called Apostles' Creed starts off with this assumption: "I believe in God the Father, Maker of Heaven and Earth."

However, when we examine Scripture, we see that it was God the Son who created the heavens and earth. Colossians 1:14-15 is obviously talking about the Son of God when it says, "*In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.*" Then verse 16 continues by saying, "*For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth.*" And we see in

Hebrews 1:2 that the Father "*hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds.*" These verses clearly teach us that it was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created not only the earth, but the entire universe. Colossians also shows us the extent of what is under the Son's control, for verse 16 goes on to say, "*whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him.*"

So the Lord Jesus is clearly the Creator. But what we might find even more amazing is how Christ sustains everything: "*And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist* [or 'are held together']" (Col. 1:17). What must it take to keep the universe going? We can't think on this too long because it boggles the mind. Every planet moving in precise orbit; every atom held together and functioning according to its unique characteristics. "How does He do that?" one might ask. He just says the word.

## The Word in Creation

We know from Genesis that He spoke the world into existence: "*And God said, Let there be light: and there was light*" (Gen. 1:3). In Hebrews 1:3 we read that He holds everything together "*by the word of His power.*" All He has to do is speak the word and it is done. What marvelous power! Truly God is an awesome God.

Stop and contemplate that kind of power. Men think they have power, making things on this earth. They construct mighty buildings and command other men. But no mortal man can speak something into existence. The first law of thermodynamics states that "Matter cannot be created nor destroyed." Well, not by man. But God just says the word and it happens. "*By the*



## CREATOR & SUSTAINER OF ALL THINGS *continued*

*Word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth*" (Ps. 33:6). With this knowledge of God, it is easier to understand how the earth will "*melt away with a fervent heat*" (2 Pet. 3:10). Christ, who sustains all things, only has to say the word and the laws of physics, as we know them, will no longer apply.

What power is contained in Christ's Word! We see glimpses of it in His various miracles. He rarely performed the same miracle the same way twice. The Lord Jesus is much greater than that. He needed no formula for His miracles; He simply effected them in whatever way was best for the moment. But we do see a pattern in the raising up of the dead. At such times, the Lord simply called the person and commanded them to arise or come forth, and the person rose from the dead. We see this with Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and with Lazarus. It has been surmised that if Christ hadn't been specific in His call (e.g. "*Lazarus, come forth!*" John 11:43), every dead body within the sound of His voice would have arisen.

The reason Paul points out the fact that it is Christ who is responsible for the creation of the world and all that is in it, and that it is Christ who sustains and maintains the universe, was to combat error. Gnosticism had crept into the church at Colossae, denying the deity of Christ. This ugly heresy told people that they must attain a "higher knowledge" in order to reach God. The Gnostics claimed that Christ wasn't the Son of God, but had merely attained this "knowledge" of God.


Paul addresses these errors front and center. He goes out of his way to state that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. He goes on to reaffirm Christ's deity by saying, as we have here, that Christ is the creator and sustainer of all things.

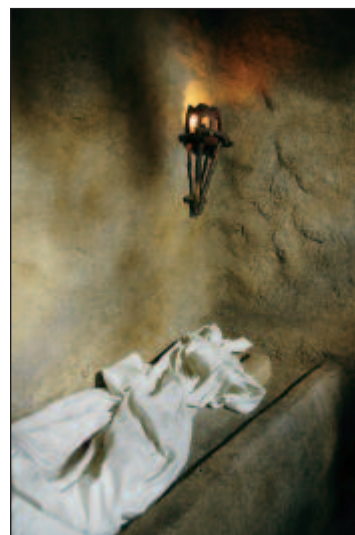
We see this same error cropping up again today in books and movies, and the recent discovery of a manuscript purported to be the "Epistle of Judas." Despite the lack of any historical veracity, these errors are receiving a lot of attention. But they are nothing more than the same myths and lies that Satan has been spreading for over two thousand years.

The world may argue against the truth. Unbelievers may try to re-write history or say that Jesus Christ was just a man. They cannot, however, argue against the might of His Word. They cannot escape its penetrating power. It cuts to the heart and into the conscience; it probes their thoughts and intentions (Heb. 4:12); it leaves them without excuse.

### **The Word in the New Creation**

The power of His Word should not come as any surprise, since, by that Word, He spoke the worlds into existence and continues to sustain them. But not even those mighty acts reveal the full extent of the influence of His Word. For He came to earth and spoke the words of eternal life. And of all Christ's wondrous words while here, perhaps the most notable words He uttered were when He cried, "*It is Finished!*" Such a profound declaration was that from the Son of God that the earth shook and dead men rose from their graves. With those words He gives to us a way to eternal life. And, just as with creation, His Word also sustains us. He rose from the grave and ascended to the Father's right hand where He "*ever liveth to make intercession*" for us (Heb. 7:25).

The same Word that gave life at creation, which raised people from the dead, is still bringing eternal life today. Christ is still, and will always be, on the throne at the Father's right hand. He is still maintaining the universe and is ready to show Himself strong to those who fear Him. All He has to do is say the word. So who other than His Son would God the Father send to secure our salvation? John wrote: "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God*" (Jn. 1:1). The One who brought human life into being is the One who also brings eternal life. 



**The same Word that gave life at creation, which raised people from the dead, is still bringing eternal life today.**

# The Head of the Body

The source of all that life needs

**The body and the head belong together... the head controls and brings life to every part of the body.**

**O**n his way to Damascus, Paul saw the glorified Lord Jesus and heard Him say, “*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*” (Acts 9:5). He might have wondered how that could be. He was pursuing Christians. How could he be persecuting this heavenly person? That was the first intimation to Paul that there was a risen Head of the church in heaven who is linked with His body on earth so much so that He hurts when they hurt. Subsequently, Paul developed this theme, and, five times in his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, he writes about the Lord Jesus as the Head of the body, the church (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). A body requires a head and the church finds its fullness in Him—we “*are complete in Him*” (Col. 2:10). A head requires a body and the church is “*the fullness of Him who fills all in all*” (Eph. 1:23)



## Life

I can live without my finger or my hand, even without a leg; but when the head is severed from the body there can be no life. The body and the head belong together and together they constitute a living organism. Paul refers to this in his letters using two phrases: “in Christ” (Col. 1:2; etc.) and “Christ in you” (Col. 1:27; etc.). As the arm and leg

and fingers and toes and all the various other parts are united in one body and connected to the head, so are we in Christ; and as the head controls and brings life to every part of the body, so is He in us.

Membership in the universal church is,

therefore, a matter of life. Someone believes in the Lord Jesus, receives new life, and is incorporated as a living member into His body. On the other hand, identification with a local church is a matter of profession and may not mean anything. It has been said that external membership is no proof of inward union. What really matters is not our baptism or our church connection but that we are trusting for salvation in the person and work of the Lord Jesus, and that we belong to Him and to the church which is His body.

## Authority

William MacDonald, in his *New Testament Commentary*, suggests that the head provides guidance, direction, and control. In a properly functioning body, the members of the body do what the head tells them. The Lord Jesus is the Head of the church, not the Queen in England as our Anglican friends might suggest, nor the pope in Rome as our Catholic friends would suggest, nor any other ecclesiastical figure. He alone has authority over the church.

That has implications for the local assembly. John saw seven golden lampstands representing seven churches. Each church is a single lampstand; each stands by itself on its own base; each consists of a group of people in a particular place at a particular time; each has its own leadership; and each is accountable to the Lord who walks among them. A local church is responsible to the Head in heaven, not to any man or group of men, and not to any other local church. We may not like some of the practices in a certain church, but we should be careful about how we treat and speak about others who do things somewhat differently than ourselves. They are not accountable to us, but to the Head of the church, as we are.



## THE HEAD OF THE BODY *continued*

### Unity

We sometimes hear mention of a new world order and the dream of the trans-nationalists that traditional barriers be broken down nationally, economically, and even religiously, and we become one family. The kind of oneness that the trans-nationalists dream about has already happened in God's new order. The Lord has taken some Jews and some Gentiles and brought them together in Christ, to make one new man *"where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised not uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave not free, but Christ is all and in all"* (Col. 3:11). Racial, religious, cultural, and social barriers have been broken down and we are *"all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:28). God does not see us riddled with division and friction and fragmented into numerous parts. Rather He sees us united to Christ in a unity which God has established.

Consequently, we are not commanded to create unity but to maintain it, *"with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph. 4:2f). As far as the company of believers at large is concerned, we are to recognize no narrower oneness than the body of Christ. A line in one of our hymns says, "We would remember we are one with every saint that loves Thy name." And within the local assembly, we are to do nothing that would mar the unity of that group but *"be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind"* (Php. 2:2).


### Growth

Paul writes about someone *"intruding into those things which he has not seen"* (Col. 2:18). Some texts omit the word "not," in which case we could translate it *"taking his stand on what he has seen"* (or claims to have seen). He uses a technical term for one who went through some sort of initiation experience as part of the mystery religions of the day. It's a dangerous position to take. It is subjective. Feelings are unreliable and experiences are passing. It contributes to pride which regards others who have not been initiated as less privileged and less spiritual. And it challenges the authority

and sufficiency of Scripture and the work of Christ. These people have let go of Christ. They are *"not holding fast to the Head"* (Col. 2:19). Their experience assumes an authority which is higher than Scripture and Christ. But real growth comes not from men but from God, not from mystical experiences but from contact with the living Christ as part of His body. He is *"the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God"* (Col. 2:19 cf. Eph. 4:15-16).

### Suffering

Paul writes, *"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in the flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church"* (Col. 1:24). He refers not to Christ's sufferings on account of sin, which cannot be added to, but to the afflictions which were His at the hands of men. He was despised and rejected; they hated Him without a cause; there was opposition, criticism, persecution, and misunderstanding. Now Paul was experiencing the same kind of thing. His afflictions were the afflictions of Christ in the sense that they were similar to those experienced by the Lord Jesus.

But his afflictions were the afflictions of Christ also in the sense that Christ continued to experience in the present what Paul was experiencing. They weren't simply Paul's afflictions, something Paul felt; they were also Christ's afflictions, something Christ felt. The Lord Jesus informed Paul of this on the road that day when He challenged him, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"* (Acts 9: 4,16). The apostle has suffered much and is now suffering in a Roman prison, but he wasn't the only one who had experienced this kind of treatment: Christ had. And the opposition he experienced wasn't directed only at him: it was directed at Christ. He wasn't the only one hurting: the Head of the church feels the pain when His body suffers. 



**Real growth comes not from men but from God. Not from mystical experiences but from contact with the living Christ as part of His body.**

## The Beginning

The source, the sustainer, the standard

What a wonderful thought! You cannot think beyond the One who ever was, who ever will be.

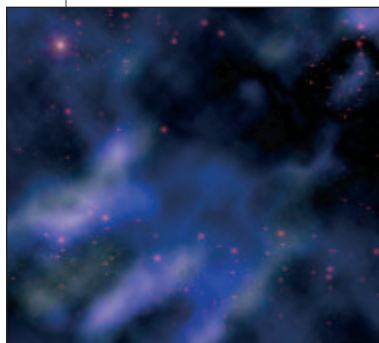
The theme of the central section of the opening chapter of Colossians is the supremacy of Christ. In verses 15-17, Paul emphasizes that the Lord Jesus is paramount in creation. He is the first-born over all creation. He called all created things into being. They exist for Him. He pre-exists the universe and holds it together. In verse 18, the apostle's thought moves on to new creation. This is shown by the three titles he uses for Christ: the head of the body, the beginning, and the first-born from the dead. These titles are closely connected. The head of the church is the source of its life. He is so as the first-born from the dead. The new creation broke into human history with the resurrection of Christ, accomplished by the omnipotence of God (Eph. 1:19f). It is manifest afresh in each individual conversion (2 Cor. 5:17). Indeed the whole sphere of Christianity can be described as new creation (Gal. 6:15). In that realm, as in the old creation, Christ is paramount. Paul draws the two realms together in verse 18 where he declares that it is God's purpose that in all things Christ might have the very highest place.

### Christ—The Source of Life

The Greek word *archē*, used in verse 18, is translated "beginning" in our English bibles. W.E. Vine defines its meaning as "the origin, the active cause."<sup>1</sup> Addressing the church in Laodicea (a neighboring city to Colossae) the Lord Jesus describes Himself as "*the beginning of the creation of God*" (Rev. 3:14). That title does not mean that He was the One whom God first created. This heresy was taught in the fourth century A.D. by Arius and it is still propagated

by Jehovah's Witnesses. This teaching is directly contradicted by many New Testament passages (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2,10). Rather, the Lord is affirming that He Himself is the fountain and source of all creation. As we have seen, the context here is the new order introduced by the resurrection. The title "the beginning" reveals that Christ originates the new creation, just as He did the old. The Risen One "is the source of spiritual life."<sup>2</sup> Paul's teaching here parallels Peter's declaration that the Lord Jesus is "*the author of life*" (Acts 3:15, ESV). Dick Lucas, a contemporary expositor, explains that Christ is "the One who gives the new life in the Spirit to all God's people."<sup>3</sup> All Christians share the risen life of the first-born from the dead. Once we were spiritually dead in our trespasses. Now Christ has made us alive together with Him. Our trespasses are all forgiven (Col. 2:13).

Every spiritual blessing we enjoy is in union with Christ (Eph. 1:3). All the grace which we have experienced flows from Him. Expounding the title, "the beginning," John Eadie, a 19th century commentator, emphasizes that Christ "has originated salvation and He gives it."<sup>4</sup> Without Him, there would be no salvation. Deliverance from sin was won by His death and resurrection alone. The risen Saviour is made to His people righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). The wonderful benefits included in the great omnibus word "salvation" all come to us through personal faith in Christ. It is the sinner who has faith in Jesus who is justified (Rom. 3:26; Php. 3:9). The high privileges of belonging to God's family come by faith in Christ (Jn. 1:12; Gal. 3:26). It is through Jesus Christ that God has abundantly poured out upon us the gift of His Holy Spirit (Titus 3:6). John especially emphasizes that eternal life is the personal and



## THE BEGINNING *continued*



God's purpose is that the coming universe of glory will be populated by millions of men and women who then will fully resemble Christ.


permanent possession of every believer in Christ (Jn. 3:16, 36). He who has the Son has life (1 Jn. 5:11f).

### Christ—The Sustainer of Life

Thus eternal life is bestowed by Christ—we receive this gift through faith in Him. But it is also true that our life is only sustained by communion with Him. We must continue as we have commenced. As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we are exhorted to walk in Him (Col. 2:6). One of the great themes of the Lord's sermon on the bread of life (Jn. 6:25-59) is that He Himself is the sustainer of spiritual life. In that message, the Lord Jesus unfolds the significance of the sign of the feeding of the five thousand which He had just performed. He is the living bread which came down from heaven (Jn. 6:51). Everyone who comes to Him in faith has eternal life (Jn. 6:47), and it is by communion with Him that spiritual life is strengthened. This is described metaphorically as eating His flesh and drinking His blood. He who does so, says Jesus, "*abides in Me and I in Him*" (Jn. 6:56). In the upper room discourse, the Lord stresses the same truth using a different word picture. He is the true vine, He declares, and His Own people are the branches (Jn. 15:5). Spiritual fruitfulness depends entirely on remaining in Christ. A branch only produces grapes by drawing on the vitality of the sap as it surges through the vine. So a Christian can only produce spiritual fruit by abiding in Christ. By remaining in Him we draw fresh supplies of His grace and power into our lives. Without Him, the Lord declares, we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). With Him, we can bear much fruit. No wonder then that Paul declares that Christ "*is our life*" (Col. 3:4). The Lord Jesus is the inexhaustible source of life eternal to all the members of His body. He is not only our Saviour and Lord. He Himself is our life—life in all its fullness. Grasping that truth will transform us.

### Christ—The Standard of Life

The great affirmation that Christ personally is the life of His people comes in a text which declares that when He appears, we shall appear with Him in glory. Christ in us is indeed the hope of glory (Col.

1:27). His present life within us guarantees our future conformity to Him in His glory. The word *arch*\_, according to J. H. Thayer, can also convey the idea of someone's being "the first person in a series, the leader."<sup>5</sup> In his commentary on Colossians, Peter O'Brien develops this aspect of the title "the beginning" by explaining that it means that the Lord Jesus is the "founder of a new humanity."<sup>6</sup> Already He indwells His people by His Spirit. Already He lives His life through them. They face the daily challenge to seek to be morally transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). God's purpose is that the coming universe of glory will be populated by millions of men and women who then will fully resemble Christ. That will be the consummation of the new creation. Every member of the new humanity will share the risen, glorified manhood of the Saviour. Each one of them will be totally conformed to His image, physically and morally (Php. 3:21). The first-born from the dead will then be the first-born among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). He will be utterly preeminent among the myriads sharing and reflecting His glory. The Lord Jesus rose so that others might rise through Him. He is "the first-fruits" of the coming resurrection and transformation (1 Cor. 15:20, 26). The new humanity is still also part of the old. They still bear the image of the man of dust. When Christ returns, we shall experience our true destiny. We shall bear the image of the Heavenly Man (1 Cor. 15:49). Then we shall see all the glory of the Lord Jesus, the beginning. 

1 W. E. Vine, 'The beginning' in *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

2 W. MacDonald, *Believers Bible Commentary*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), p.1994.

3 R. C. Lucas, *The Message of Colossians and Philemon*, (Leicester: I.V.P., 1980), p.52.

4 J. Eadie, *Commentary on Colossians*, (Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock, 1980 reprint), p.65.

5 J. H. Thayer, 'arche' in *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997).

6 P. T. O'Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary 44, Col., Phil.*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), p.50, 62.





## ELDER HELPS *To feed, to take heed, and to lead*

### Elders Have Their Limitations

*A good work an elder cannot do.*

**O**verseers often encounter situations where not only wisdom and tact are called for, but also some restraint. Christian women in desperate domestic situations (and unfortunately their number is increasing) need counsel. It would be unwise for a man to become too involved. Public ministry, as in a Family Bible Hour, may allow general principles to be covered, such as those given by Paul in Ephesians 5:22-24 or by Peter in 1 Peter 3:1-6, but these will not answer all the personal practical problems that arise when a woman attempts to implement what these Scriptures teach. If an elder's wife has inspired the confidence of any who need counsel in this way, she and her husband might together offer help. But still there are those details in which a woman needs the wise advice of a woman alone, and not every elder's wife will have the confidence, desire, ability, and emotional strength to cope with this need.

#### IS IT SCRIPTURAL?

Happy is the assembly which has in its fellowship any godly women who can answer the Holy Spirit's charge in Titus 2:1-4 to *"teach [the young women] to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at [or 'of the'] home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed."* This passage in no way contradicts what the author wrote under the same Spirit's direction in 1 Corinthians 14. In that passage, meetings of the church are in view. Also the word "teach" in the Titus text would be better translated "train." The etymology or original formation of a word used in Greek is not always the best way to discover or illustrate its

meaning, but W.E.Vine, in his Expository Dictionary, informs us that the word used for "train...to be sober" (*sophronizo*) is made up of two words that together might be literally translated "save the mind." Especially in a situation where a husband is overbearing or some form of abuse is involved, this kind of help is needed. Others may need instruction


in understanding what it means to be a home maker, etc.

#### A WORD OF CAUTION

Any Christian woman who is mature, godly, and has given a good example in her own home should be encouraged by the elders to help younger women who are struggling with domestic problems. We need to take the instructions to Titus seriously, and shepherds should not feel they are being sidestepped by a sister who fulfills this needed ministry. On her part she should, without

betraying the confidence of any she is trying to help, keep in close touch with the elders. Inter-dependence is desirable and any difference of counsel ought to be carefully avoided.

Like so much of the service rendered in a church, the above does not depend on official recognition or title, but results from a loving concern for others; not to be something to be undertaken out of a sense of duty but of love.

What then are we saying to our fellow elders? Simply, do not be threatened by any woman who, in a scriptural way, wants to give instruction to her peers in a gathering of ladies or on a one-to-one basis in a home, but encourage her by your prayers and advice. She is a blessed asset to your assembly. 



# May We Introduce...

Please pray for the Good News on the Move team for 2006-2007



## **James Bjorlie, Grand Rapids, Michigan**

James, age 22, is from Grand Rapids, MI and fellowships at Grace and Truth Christian Fellowship. Saved at the age of eight, James has been involved in Sunday School, rescue mission work, and other ministry in the assembly. He has taken a year out of his college studies because, he says, "I am seeking to be useful for God as a clean vessel 'fit for the Master's use.' I want to yield myself to His will. I pray that I will decrease that He may increase." He appreciates the prayers of the saints and is trusting that the other young men on the team will provoke him to love and good works.



## **Mike Donahue, Grand Rapids, Michigan**

Mike, age 21, was born again at the age of seven. Although not always walking with the Lord, God worked in his life in a big way during his first year in college, showing him that his inconsistent lifestyle was only bringing him misery. After being restored to fellowship at Northwest Gospel Hall, where he and his family attend, he felt God's call to go on GNOM 05-06. After a tremendous year of blessing, the Lord has seen fit to call him onto the team again, this time providing field leadership for the team. He asks us to please pray for continued direction in his future life and service.



## **Scott Duncan, Oxford, Pennsylvania**

Scott was raised in a home where parents and grandparents shared the gospel. He accepted the Lord as Savior at age eight. He writes: "I have had many godly influences in my life and have personally experienced the joy that only the Lord can provide through other believers who put their full trust in Him. I believe that 'God is not a subject to be learned but a Person to be known.' I desire to become more like the Lord each day and pray that He can use me to promote the gospel and encourage saints all over the country to live for the Lord!" He is in fellowship at Oxford Bible Chapel.



## **Nathan Griffiths, Eastbourne, England**

Nathan was raised in a Christian home and put his trust in Christ at the age of nine. He says: "Perhaps not fully appreciating what it meant to be a Christian, I drifted along for several years, going nowhere in my faith. It wasn't until two years ago that I saw just how fulfilling life as a Christian could be and began to get involved in working with my assembly (Marine Hall in Eastbourne) and studying my Bible. I'm looking forward to the opportunities that this year will present and hope to grow as a Christian and become more effective in my witness for Him."



## **Armand Nalchadjyan, Cranston, Rhode Island**

Now twenty years old, Armand was not brought up in a church-attending family. He writes: "I confessed to believe Jesus, but never knew who He was or what He had done for me. Over the past two years I have come to know Him personally through friends who brought me to a place where I could learn about Him. I was encouraged to apply for this program by two dear brothers in Christ. I jumped at the invitation because I had been praying for an opportunity to study the Word of God diligently and become a solid witness for Jesus Christ." He fellowships at Buttonwood Bible Chapel.

Pray that the team will *“come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ”* (Rom. 15:29).

At time of writing, the team has finished orientation, and is in Oxford, PA. Next, they plan to proceed to Hartville, OH and Danville, IL. Get the latest reports via email by subscribing at [www.uplook.org](http://www.uplook.org)



**Judah Sax, Sioux Falls, South Dakota**

Judah, in fellowship at Sioux Falls Christian Assembly, was raised in a Christian home, and came to accept Christ as Savior at age nine. He says: “Though I made the decision to follow Christ, it wasn’t until age 16 that I began to take my walk with the Lord seriously. But the Lord has continued to ‘perform’ that ‘good work’ which He began in me. I’m thankful for the opportunity to spend these months with a group of serious men spreading the gospel and sitting under the teaching of godly men. I pray that the Lord will teach me many things this year and further mold me into the image of His Son.”



**Samuel J. Philip, Dresher, Pennsylvania**

“As early as I can remember, every Sunday we went to church. I never understood why my parents were so insistent until 1989. During a VBS, the leader explained salvation and for the first time it made sense. I accepted Christ then and there. Years passed and I found myself living in Christianity. But at college during a Bible study I realized my spiritual drive was stuck in neutral. With prayer, new energy was breathed into my life. I asked God to give me the ‘eyes of eternity’ that Paul spoke about. Now, life is about living in Christ and eagerly awaiting His return.” Sam attends Philadelphia Gospel Hall.



**Nathanael “Bammer” Schonberg, Eudora, Kansas**

“Bammer” lives in the country just south of Eudora, KS and fellowships at Lawrence Bible Chapel. He knew the gospel as a child, but it was not until he was 15 that he came to completely rely on Christ to save him. He writes: “The last few summers I’ve been greatly blessed by the ministry at Box-T Bible and Saddle Camp in North Dakota where I first heard about the GNOM idea. I hope the Lord can use this group of washed, healed, and forgiven sinners to spread the wonderful word of reconciliation to this lost and hurting world. I look forward to seeing His hand moving the rest of the year.”



**Daniel Scott, Stanstead, Quebec**

Daniel grew up on a small farm in Quebec. At the age of six, he was saved at a Christian school through the witnessing of a classmate. He attends Assemblée Chretienne de Stanstead and has been in fellowship since he was baptized at the age of 12. He writes: “For the past few years I’ve been finishing school, working with my dad’s trucking company and looking for what the Lord had planned for me next. When I heard of GNOM, I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to learn more about the Lord, and tell others of the great salvation that I have found in Him.”



**Eric Smith, Altamont, New York**

Eric had the privilege of growing up with believing parents and an encouraging assembly in upstate New York, Bellevue Gospel Chapel in Schenectady. He accepted the Lord as Savior at a young age. Eric was on the GNOM journey last year and at that time asked the saints to pray “for more compassion for the lost, and courage and boldness in sharing the gospel.” We believe the Lord answered those prayers, and Eric has been asked to travel with the team (he is able to be with the young men at least until the end of 2006) to share some gospel methods and his passion for reaching the lost.





# NEW LIFE IN HIM *From seed planting to fruit growing*

## Spiritual Gifts

What are you doing with yours?

**T**he late Don Welborn defined a spiritual gift as: “A divine endowment and enabling of the sovereign Spirit of God in the life of the believer, given in grace for the express purpose of furthering the spiritual growth and development of other fellow saints to the glory of God.” Each line of this definition condenses biblical truth.

### A divine endowment and enabling

The apostles and prophets laid the spiritual foundation for the church (Eph. 2:4). This process included supernaturally declaring the Word of God and putting it on the pages of Scripture. Sign gifts appeared during this time, or “*at the first*,” to “*confirm*” the authenticity of the Word of God (Heb. 2:3f). The primary focus of sign gifts was to gain the attention and respect of unbelieving Jews (1 Cor. 14:22; 1:22). After the foundation was laid, the on-going building program for believers began and continues to this day. God equips His people with spiritual gifts such as service, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, showing mercy, faith, and helps (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-30). And although the apostles and prophets may have passed, God has bequeathed to the church at large gifted men such as “*evangelists, pastors [shepherds] and teachers for the edifying of the body of Christ*” (Eph. 4:11f).

### Of the sovereign Spirit of God

Spiritual gifts are sovereignly bestowed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11; Eph 2:21f). These spiritual gifts are suited to each possessor: “*every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that*” (1 Cor. 7:7). There should be no jealousy or envy in the body of Christ over the distribution of God’s gifts. They are specifically given for the profit of all (1 Cor. 12:7). Each gift plays a necessary function in the body. Just as the hidden organs of the physical body play the most vital roles, so do the less visible gifts in the spiritual realm (1 Cor. 12:22,24; Rom. 16:1-16). No believer is able to say, “There is nothing for me to do in service for the Lord.” Sadly, what this statement may really mean is this: “There’s nothing showy for me to do.” God is not impressed with outward-



ly spiritual showmanship regarding these gifts but rather with sincere service for Him (1 Cor. 14: 2-19; 12:31).

### In the life of a believer

Spiritual gifts should not be confused with natural talents such as athletic, musical, and artistic abilities. Most unbelievers possess natural talents. Spiritual gifts, however, are unique to believers, sometimes working in tandem with their natural talents for God’s glory. As graphically illustrated in Acts 10:44-45 and Ephesians 1:13-14, believers are spiritually empowered upon conversion. It is exciting to learn from God’s Word that every believer has a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 7:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). God supernaturally equips His people for “*the work of the ministry*” (Eph. 4:12).

### Furthering the spiritual growth of other fellow saints to the glory of God

A pipe wrench is a wonderful tool but may be rendered inoperable over time from lack of use and neglect. Similarly, spiritual gifts must be developed to be effective; they are of no value to anyone if they are not utilized. In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul exhorts Timothy to “*neglect not the gift that is in thee*.” Later Paul reminds Timothy to “*stir up the gift of God*” in him (2 Tim. 1:6).

As individual believers cultivate a humble, submissive servant’s heart, they will discern the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Moreover, it is the Spirit of God that points each believer to his or her own unique gift and role in the body of Christ (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18). Others will also discern a believer’s areas of giftedness as he or she labors for the Lord in various ministries. Paul observed Mark’s effectiveness and said, “*Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry*” (2 Tim. 4:11). May the saints of God be good stewards of the supernatural gifts He gives the believer for His glory!

—RANDY HORN

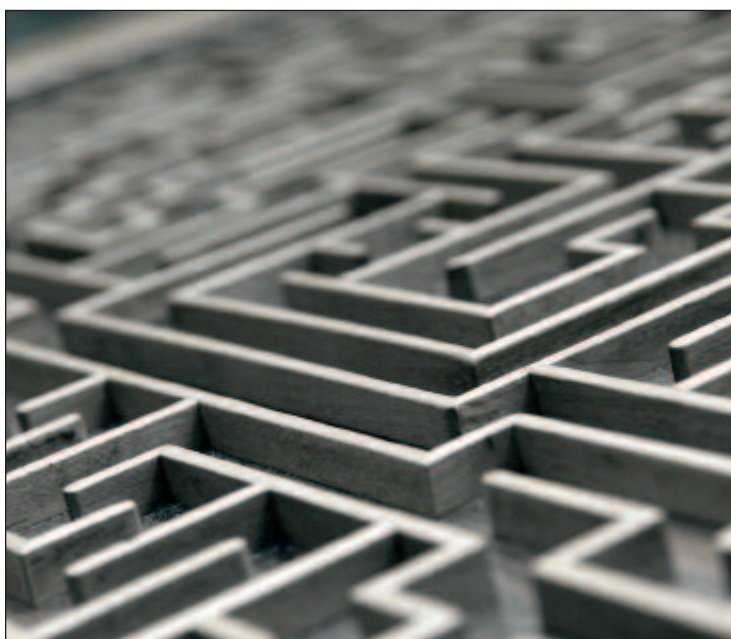
## The Preeminent One

We believe it. But do we defend it?

*"...that in all things He might have the preeminence"*  
Colossians 1:18

**R**eading through Colossians 1:15-20, we observe that the Lord Jesus is Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Head of the church, and the very Image of the Invisible God. If one holds to the truth of the Scriptures, Christ can only be perceived as the Preeminent One.

We must be careful not to interpret the words of verse 18 as a suggestion of what is possible but rather as a statement of what is fact. Christ is preeminent. He is of paramount rank, dignity, and importance. He alone is worthy of our praise, our worship, and our adoration. Only He is worthy and fully deserving to occupy the uppermost place in our hearts and in our gatherings. He alone is awesome! However, that being said, it remains that He is not always *recognized* as such. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul was addressing a problem that had arisen in that young assembly that is not altogether foreign to many of our gatherings today.



### The Challenge to Christ's Preeminence

Being on a major trade route, many people would come through Colossae and introduce strange ideas and philosophies from other cultures and peoples. Many of these ideas would find their way into the meetings and, before long, tolerance and even acceptance of these ideas and practices would begin to erode the centrality of Christ. The total sufficiency of Christ was challenged and the Lord Jesus was moved from the central place in their gatherings into the peripheries. Instead of being held as preeminent, the Lord was lowered to the same levels as the traditions, superstitions, and ideas that were allowed to permeate the church.

Is it possible that this same terrible thing could be happening in our assemblies today? Have we allowed worldly or religious philosophies and ideals to be introduced and given room in our gatherings that diminish or deny the truth of Christ's preeminence? Perhaps you've noticed some of the symptoms. As the centrality of Christ is subtly eroded we shouldn't be surprised to see a lack of solid spiritual growth among the brethren. We shouldn't wonder that souls are not being saved and being added to our numbers. And it only stands to reason that if Christ is not given the preeminence in our meetings, then our prayer and worship times will be dry and lackluster. Concerned about the symptoms, we then go looking for remedies to the spiritual dryness we find in ourselves.

But what help can there be if we go looking outside of Christ? We might try the programs or techniques of modern day philosophy or even religious thinking, but, alas, we will end up disappointed. How long will we plod along until we realize that spiritual awakening can only occur when we turn our eyes upon Jesus? Only when we

## THE PREEMINENT ONE *continued*

give the Lord Jesus His rightful place in our hearts and in our assemblies will we see the fruit we long for. Indeed, Jesus is the answer!

### The Defense of Christ's Preeminence

Upon the command of God, a group of men led by Joshua, son of Jozadak, and Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple of the Lord (Ezra 4). As they were building, they were approached by a group of Samaritans who were living in the land and who offered to help out with the project. In their own words, *"Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do"* (Ezra 4:2). We may say that was a very friendly and neighborly offer to make. But understand, these Samaritans were the products of the union between some of those Israelites left behind from the captivity and the colonists from other countries who had settled in the land. They were the product of God's people mixing with those who were not God's people, and they held no allegiance to the God of Israel. And so Zerubbabel and Joshua replied, *"Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel"* (Ezra 4:3).

There was discernment in this response and wisdom in the fact that Zerubbabel and Joshua knew that if the Samaritans were allowed to have a hand in building the temple, they would also claim the right to have a say in its use. The God of Israel was but one deity that the Samaritans worshipped, and it wouldn't be long before they would introduce their false deities and pagan practices into temple worship. It was as defenders and upholders of the uncompromised truth that Zerubbabel and Joshua took their stand, and it was against this sort of compromise that the apostle Paul was exhorting the believers of the church at Colossae to take a stand. Such a stand would demonstrate the preeminent place of Christ in their assembly.

But this wasn't the end of the matter for Zerubbabel, Joshua, and company. The Samaritans went on to spend much time and effort attempting to derail the work of the Israelites in their building of the temple, and the enemy of the church will do no less today. We can expect many and varied challenges against our stand for Christ in the local gathering.

One such challenge we face is the strong cry for toler-

ance in the church today. We are seeing unions form between Catholics and evangelicals; we see an acceptance, and even alliances, made between Christian groups and non-Christian cults. But no godly alliances can be made with those who do not honor the Lord or practice the teachings of the Scriptures. The measures necessary to avoid offending such partners would require us to compromise or abandon our commitment to the Lord and His Word. If Christ is to be preeminent, we cannot compromise our commitment to Him or His truth.

**We should pray that we would have submissive hearts to follow where [Christ] leads and to hold firmly to what He teaches.**

### The Practice of Preeminence

To practice the preeminence of Christ is to be diligently obedient to Him and to be defenders and contenders of the way, the truth, and the life. The enemy will continue to attempt to weaken our stand and to infiltrate our meetings with that which will deny the Lord His proper place. We must try the spirits to see if they be of God and measure all things against the Word of God.

The defense of the preeminence of Christ must begin with the individual believer, for the enemy will not only attack our assemblies on this point, but will also assail the heart of each believer. Our strength to resist and ability to discern comes from above. We are built up in our personal times with the Lord in prayer, and Bible study, and also in our obedient walk. We should pray that we would have submissive hearts to follow where He leads and to hold firmly to what He teaches.

The Lord Jesus is the preeminent One. Our place is to walk in, and defend, this truth, casting aside anything in our lives and in our assemblies that denies it. To the degree that He is exalted and His preeminence in all things is recognized, taught, and practiced, we will see His work being done in the church and spiritual fruit will result to the glory of God. 🔴



## Canada

Some helpful stats for believers working in the Canadian mission field

**T**he political stability, economic vigor and elevated standard of living enjoyed by most Canadians is the envy of many hopeful emigrants. Canada's cities now teem with millions from around the world. And these provide both a great challenge and a great potential for fulfilling the Lord's desire that the gospel should reach every nation.

Prayerfully consider the following snippets of information, remembering that Canada is made up not of statistics but of people—millions of lost, soul-hungry people.



### CANADA:

- the third highest suicide rate of any country
- declining religious observance among mainline “Christian” groups  
(Catholic, Orthodox, United, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran)
- rapid increase in observers of non-Christian religions  
(Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Confucian, Taoist, Shintoist)
- almost 15% of Canadians list themselves as having no religious affiliation but a much higher number (82%) were listed as “unchurched” in 1996
- in 1957, 53% of Canadians attended church regularly; in 1993, it was 23%
- the most needy people groups in Canada: French Canadians, Native Indians, residents of multi-family and high density housing, new immigrants
- the post-modern world view is becoming dominant among young Canadians



## NATIVE INDIANS

- 2400 reserves without gospel witness; few evangelicals, very few Christian leaders
- Overwhelming social problems  
Natives compose 50% of federal prisoners
- most Canadian suicides are native youth.
- “native spirituality” and syncretism dominant



## RECENT IMMIGRANTS

- Greater Toronto Area: 49% first generation, 69% second generation immigrant
- Vancouver: 63% do not speak English at home
- majority are Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, or Confucian; evangelicals largely ignorant of the views of these major world religions
- first generation more open to new ideas



## FRENCH CANADIANS

- largest unreached people group in NA (6,000,000)
- Less than 1% evangelical
- One evangelical church for every 17,000 persons (cf. English ratio of 1 per 3,400 persons)
- few participate in Catholic Church but are highly suspicious of non-Catholics “cults”



## MULTI-FAMILY, HIGH DENSITY HOUSING

- less likely to initiate attendance at church than residents of single family homes but often more likely to respond to invitations
- largely invisible to evangelicals; often untargeted
- highly mobile, regularly moving
- Quebec and Ontario have highest proportion



Images: Photos.com

# The Fullness of the Godhead

Refuting the Gnostic challenge

**For the Christian, Christ is the superior One ... and our place of security and completeness is in acknowledging Him and rejoicing in His supremacy.**

**T**he letter to the Colossians has a number of features relating to specific problems facing the believers there. For example, there are warnings against teachings which would encourage angel-worship and against being brought into bondage to man-made rules and procedures. On the positive side, there is the constant emphasis on the importance of our relationship with Christ: Christ in you the hope of glory; Christ Jesus the Lord; so walk in Him; buried with Him in baptism; raised with Him; (you) died with Christ; your life is hid with Christ in God; Christ is our life; Christ is all; ye serve the Lord Christ; and the mystery of Christ.

## The Gnostic Challenge

The background to this is a teaching which threatened the Colossian believers. This teaching was going to develop in the second century into a heresy which came to be known as “Gnosticism.” The word “Gnosticism” derives from the Greek word gnosis, meaning “knowledge.” These false teachers encouraged Christians to aspire to special knowledge, which, they alleged, would be attained through visions, higher states of consciousness, fastings, and communication with angels. They taught that all material things, including the human body, were evil. Since, according to them, the material universe was evil, it could not have been created by God, but must have been created by an angel at some remove from God. This led to a pre-occupation with angels, the threat posed by their power, and the need to placate them.

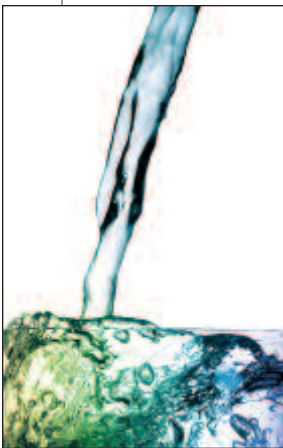
Against all this, Paul calls the believers to remember that their salvation, by the power of God, rests on Christ. The Christian’s security

depends on what Christ has done, therefore all believers are accepted on the same basis; there are no first-class and second-class Christians. The answer to the heresy lay in a well-founded faith in Christ, an understanding of His person, a confidence in His power, and a joy in His service. Hence the wonderful paean to the glory of Christ in chapter 1, verses 15-20.

Among the details in those six verses are passing references to angelic beings, mere servants under His divine sovereignty because they are His creatures. There is also in these verses an insistence that, in relation to the church, Christ is supreme, the One who purchased salvation by His own blood. His cross also has a cosmic significance, so that Christians need not fear cosmic powers (whether called angelic, demonic, or occult). We need not fear occult dominance if we hold simply to Christ as our Lord.

It is probable that, in verse 19 of chapter 1, the “fullness” referred to is to be connected with His victorious work in redemption, *“that in all things He might have the preeminence.”* The KJV of verse 19, *“For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell,”* surely gives the essential sense, though the manuscripts do not explicitly include “the Father”: the words are supplied to give what must be the correct meaning. We can never boast of our superiority, for all that we are before God is what the work of Christ has made us.

This heretical teaching would have had Christians believe that fullness of Christian experience depended on seeking a mystical, ecstatic experience. This, they said, would make one a “complete” Christian, with mystic knowledge. Paul says no; for the Christian, Christ is the superior One, superior to all others, and





## THE FULLNESS OF THE GODHEAD *continued*



our place of security and completeness is in acknowledging Him and rejoicing in His supremacy. It is a false ambition which causes us to seek to be super-Christians. God has made provision for us all to be complete in Christ as we bow before His supremacy and are happy to be joined with all His own, redeemed in glad union under Him.

### The Gnostic Challenge

But the second reference to His fullness adds another dimension. In chapter 2, verse 9 we read, *"For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."* We note that this is followed immediately by, *"And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power."* The heretics urged believers to seek fullness (or completeness) in following their heretical procedures and disciplines. Paul's answer is that *"ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord"* (v. 6). He exhorts the Colossians to walk in Him, to seek stability there, and to continue joyfully in Him.

Notice the word "dwelleth" in verse 9. This is a permanent fact about the essential nature of Christ. He lost nothing of His deity when He became true man. He had a body. His physical presence on earth was not a fantasy. He could touch and be touched, could be hungry, tired and sleepy, and could feel the slights to which He was subjected. But His eternal divine character remained unchanged, before incarnation, during the years of His earthly life, and now in His exalted place at God's right hand.

*"The fullness of the Godhead"* is an important expression. Christian progress depends, not on a monastic regime, but on our link with the exalted One who came down for our salvation and linked us to Himself. While upon earth He spoke with the full authority of His divine person, for example in forgiving sin. He was not simply godlike; He was God, in the full sense of the word. He was not a superman. As a man He lived in dependence on His Father. Yet He was truly God. He has not become more fully God since His res-

urrection, or since His ascension to where He was before, in heaven's highest place. He was fully God before He died, or rose, or ascended. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all alike God, and yet God is one.

But, for the heretics, the word which would cause real shock was the word "bodily"—the fullness of the Godhead bodily. They taught that our bodies, like all material things, are evil. The Bible does not teach this. We use our bodies in doing evil. That is because we ourselves are evil; it is not a question of our bodies being material and therefore evil. Christ lived in a body which was never used for evil purposes. We remember the messianic Psalm 40, as quoted in the New Testament: *"a body hast Thou prepared Me,"* then almost immediately, *"to do Thy will, O God"* (Heb. 10:5-7). He had a real body and lived a life of utter holiness. When His disciples saw Him, they saw His body, yet there was an important sense in which He could say, *"he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"* (Jn. 14:9). Having been born into a true human life upon earth, He was crucified, rose, and ascended bodily to heaven's throne. None of these changes altered the truth that *"in Him dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily."*

Our safety is in our link with Him: *"Ye are complete in Him."* The sense is that in Him we have been given fullness and now stand in that fullness. This is the birthright of every true believer; it is not the badge of a select few. Paul urged the Colossians to *"hold the Head"*; that is, to cling tenaciously to their place in Christ. He came to bring us to Himself; He paid redemption's price at the cross, confounding all His occult foes by His death. He cancelled the debt that stood against us, becoming accountable for it on His cross. When He appears He will appear as "our life." *"Every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure,"* said John (1 Jn. 3:3, RV). A hope set on Him purifies, even as He is pure. By contrast a bondage to ascetic severity is *"not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh"* (Col. 2:23). 🌱

## THE FIRSTBORN

Twice in Colossians 1:15-18, Christ is referred to as the firstborn. Often in the Bible this word has the sense of being first in rank or significance rather than first in time. We see this in picture and principle in Psalm 89:27.

Almost all of the occurrences of "firstborn" in the New Testament refer to the Lord Jesus.

Title	Reference	Event	Significance
the firstborn of all creation	Col. 1:15	creation	preeminent over and the source of creation
the firstborn of Mary	Lk. 2:7	His incarnation	truly man
the firstborn from the dead	Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5	His death and resurrection	preeminent in resurrection
the firstborn among many brethren	Rom. 8:29	the church age, culminating in the Rapture	preeminent over the church
the firstborn	Heb. 1:6	His Second Coming	truly God

## Preaching Through the Messianic Psalms

Portraits of Christ in the hymnbook of Israel

**M**ost biographies are written after the subject has died. Or, in the case of an autobiography, it is written towards the end of the person's life. However, the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus is such that His biography was written before He was born in Bethlehem of Judea. Of the countless references to Christ in the Old Testament, the Messianic Psalms, written 1,000 years prior to His birth, contain some of the clearest and most moving.

The Messianic Psalms are of particular interest regarding Christ's work on Calvary, detailed in Psalm 22 and Psalm 69. If the gospels furnish for us the facts of the crucifixion, these psalms allow us to enter in a small measure into the feelings of the crucified One!

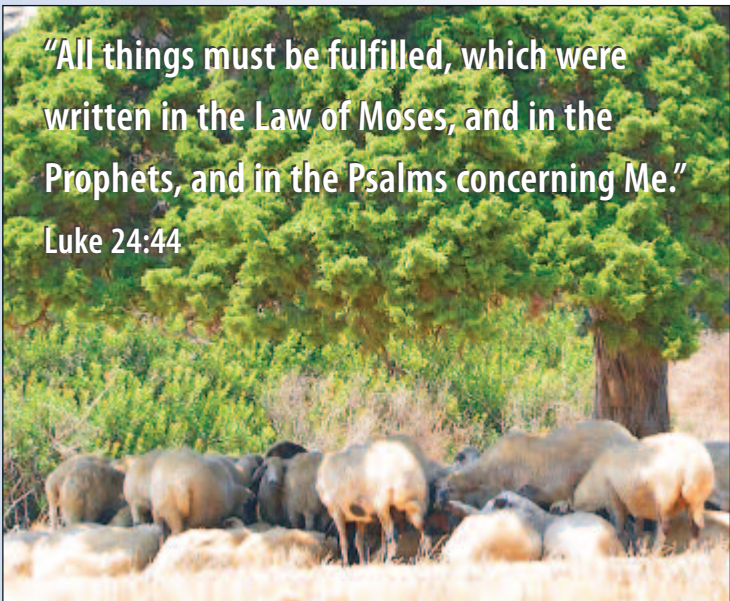
### How do we know they are Messianic?

It is important to present biblical proof that these psalms really do speak of Messiah, and that such an understanding is not merely the fruit of our fanciful imagination. In Luke 24:44, the Lord Jesus Himself, now risen from the dead, tells His disciples, *"All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me."* And then we read, *"Thus opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures."* It is quite clear then that a true interpretation of the Old Testament in general, and the Psalms in particular, is Christological.

The New Testament writers, no doubt giving us what the Lord delivered to them in that upper room and what He later revealed to Paul, quoted frequently from the Old Testament concerning Christ. To this end, the Psalms were quoted by them extensively, the Epistle to the Hebrews being an outstanding example of this practice.

### The value of such a series to the church

It is always valuable to get the saints "looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:1), and these psalms will certainly cause the believers to fall further in love with the One who is alto-



*"All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me."*

Luke 24:44

gether lovely. They will also prove helpful as a stimulus to worship as the saints gather to remember Him in the breaking of bread. When we begin to enter in to the feelings of the Saviour, the exorbitant cost of our salvation will fill our hearts with wonder and adoration. Finally, when the Scriptures are under such attack as they are today, a series such as this will help settle the heart of the child of God, filling him with awe at how beautifully the Old and New Testaments harmonize. Fulfilled prophecy is one of the strongest evidences we have of the truth of the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture. These psalms furnish amazing proof of both the inspiration of Scripture and the rightful Messiahship of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving details of his birth, life, character, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. How could men like David know these things? How could they describe details of execution by crucifixion, when the Romans would not invent it for several hundred years more? There is only one logical explanation: the inspiration of the Scriptures by the Spirit of God! Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

## MESSIANIC PSALMS *continued*



### Preaching suggestions

I have never seen it done, but have often thought it would be interesting to combine a series on the Levitical offerings with the Messianic Psalms, and especially those psalms which parallel the offerings (see chart below for details).

Alternatively, it would be a profitable series for an assembly to work through at the mid-week ministry meeting, taking a separate psalm each week.

Another fascinating study is the use of the Messianic Psalms in the preaching of the apostles as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, especially relating to the resurrection from the dead.

### Helpful commentaries on the Messianic Psalms

*The Messianic Psalms* by T. Ernest Wilson, published by Gospel Folio Press. This is a classic and a wonderful resource. It should be in every serious Bible student's library.


*Psalms* by W. Graham Scroggie, published by Fleming H. Revell. This is the result of tremendous research by this fine Scottish preacher, and well worth the investment.

*Practical Reflections on the Psalms* by John Nelson Darby, published by Morrish. Darby is not the easiest to read, but this volume contains some treasures and is well worth the work. Look on it as mining for gems.

*The Treasury of David* by C.H. Spurgeon, published by Hendrickson. Considered to be Spurgeon's finest work, it contains excerpts from other commentaries by Spurgeon's contemporaries, and those who had written on the Psalms prior to his day. The reader should be aware that he was not dispensational, although he was a historical pre-millennialist.

*Meditations in the Book of Psalms* by E. C. Olsen, published by Loizeaux Brothers. Nice overall treatment, although somewhat brief in places.

*Exploring the Psalms* by John Phillips, published by Loizeaux Brothers and Kregel. Exhaustive treatment with interesting alliterated outlines.

*What the Bible Teaches: Psalms* by Jim Flanigan, published by John Ritchie. Again another wonderful volume in this excellent series of commentaries. Highly recommended. Mr. Flanigan writes in a devotional style and is very much at home in the book of Psalms. 

Psalm	Subject Matter	Messianic Portion	New Testament Citations
2	Official Glory of the Eternal Son	Entire psalm	Acts 4:25-26; 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Rev. 2:26f; 13:5; 19:15
8	The Last Adam	vv. 2,4-6	Heb. 2:6-8; Mt. 21:16; 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22
16	The Resurrection	vv. 8-11	Acts 13:35; 2:25-28, 31
22	The Crucifixion	Entire psalm	Mt. 27:35-46; Mk. 15:24-39; Lk. 23:33-34; Jn. 19:23; Heb. 2:12-17
24	The King of Glory	Entire psalm	None
40	The Incarnation	vv. 6-10	Heb. 10:5-7
41	The Betrayal	v.9	Jn. 13:18; Mk. 14:18
45	The King - Bridegroom	Entire psalm	Heb. 1:8-9; Lk. 4:22; Eph. 5:27
68	The Ascension	v.18	Eph. 4:8-11
69	The Trespass Offering	vv.4,9,21-23,24-25,28	Jn. 15:25; 2:7; Rom. 15:3; Mt. 27:34,48; Mk. 15:36; Lk. 23:36; Jn. 19:28-29; Rom. 1:9-10; Rev. 16:1; Acts 1:20; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 20:12-15
72	The Millennial Reign	Entire psalm	None
89	The Davidic Covenant	Entire psalm	None
91	The Temptation	vv.11-13	Mt. 4:6; Lk. 4:10-11
102	The Unchangeable One	vv. 25-27	Heb. 1:10-12; 13:8
110	The Priest - King - Judge	vv.1,4	Mt. 22:44; Mk. 12:36; Lk. 20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; Heb. 1:3,13; 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:17-21; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2
118	The Headstone of the Corner	vv. 22-23, 25-26	Mt. 21:9,15, 42; Mk. 11:9; 12:10; Lk. 13:35; 19:38; 20:17; Jn. 12:13; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:4-7





## Is Christ All We Really Need?

Lessons on living from the fullness of Christ

Throughout our lifelong journey of faith, the Lord is fully equipped to help us achieve the spiritual maturity He desires for us.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then this exquisite portrait of Christ in Colossians 1 will keep us talking for eternity. But when we step back to view the whole chapter, we see that there is more to this section than simply showing us a glimpse of the Lord's multifaceted glory. There is a definite link between the perfection of Christ and His people, a lesson that the Colossians needed to clearly understand and appropriate. So must we.

### The Lesson

"Is Christ *all* we really need?" This was the central issue the Colossian believers were dealing with at the time Paul wrote this epistle. False teachers had attempted to "minimize the importance of the Lord Jesus, substituting philosophy, ceremony, angels, and religion instead of His person and work".<sup>1</sup> Heathen philosophers professed to have found the *pleroma*, an untranslatable word in English, but referring to a special knowledge that compensated for all human deficiency.<sup>2</sup> Paul picks up on that word and declares that the true *pleroma* is found in Christ alone—divine "fullness" and completeness, as we read in our version.

This is why Paul wrote to the Colossians, to communicate this fundamental message: yes, we are *deficient* in ourselves, but Christ is all-*sufficient*. What a needed message for today when the temptation is for believers to turn to men and programs to solve our problems rather than turning to Christ.

Before Paul addresses that issue, there are three other themes dealt with. As we look at the chapter, notice the parallels between the beginning and the end of the chapter. Seeing this structure will eventually help us to see the connection between this glorious Christ and His people.

### Faithfulness (vv. 1-8; v. 23)

Paul begins by commending these saints for their faithfulness. We have to remember that Paul had never even met these believers, or so it would seem from certain comments he makes: "*Since we have heard of your faith*" (v. 4); "*many...have not seen my face in the flesh*" (2:1). It was Epaphras, not Paul, who helped establish this assembly. Yet, look at what Paul knew about them through their testimony. Their outstanding features included their "faith" (v. 4), "hope" (v. 5), and genuine "love" (vv. 4, 8). They exemplified the marks of true Christianity (1 Cor. 13:13).

Down in verse 23, Paul draws out the theme of faithfulness again, but this time it's a charge to "continue in the faith." It is no surprise that a company of believers who had this kind of witness was subject to satanic attack. This opposition came in various forms such as enticing words, human philosophy, religious legalism, false worship, and the doctrines of men. As difficult as it may have seemed, the Colossians were to "continue," to maintain a steady position in the faith.

The challenge remains the same today. Just because an assembly may be noted for faithfulness in the past does not mean that it will always remain so (1 Cor. 10:12). In these days when the winds of false doctrine blow hard against the Lord's assemblies, we are to "*continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away.*"

### Filling (vv. 9-11; vv. 24-25)

After giving thanks for the Colossians' faithfulness, Paul prays for their filling, "*that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.*" This, Paul tells them, would empower them in their walk, their work, and their worship. Every true believer



desires this kind of filling and should pray for more of it every day.

But as Paul revisits this theme in verses 24 and 25, he describes another kind of filling, “*I Paul...rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church....*” He was willing to take his full share of suffering for Christ—while penning these words from prison, no less!

Here is the principle as Paul stated it to Timothy: “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim. 3:12). We may readily pray for the filling of His will, but are we prepared to be filled up with the scorn associated with following Him? That was the choice that the Colossian believers had to make. These two fillings invariably go hand-in-hand.

### Fellowship (vv. 12-14; vv. 26-27)

Another truth is stated here through a contrast: light and darkness. We know from experience that the two cannot coexist. “*What fellowship hath light with darkness?*” (2 Cor. 6:14). None! Before someone is converted, fellowship with God is impossible. A person remains under the power of darkness. But the Father, through the forgiveness of our sins, can take repentant sinners and make them “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” What a bright future we have. Heaven is waiting for us!

But there is another dimension to this new fellowship which Christians enjoy. Not only are we in Christ and His kingdom, but Christ is in us! “*To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (v. 27). The practical lesson is this: the blessings and privileges of heaven are not only for us to enjoy in the future—they are to be enjoyed now! Heaven will be wonderful because the Lord Jesus is there. But since Christ is dwelling in us now, we can have a taste of heaven on earth.

### Fullness (vv. 14-22; vv. 27b-29)

Given the paralleled thoughts so far, we return now to the Father’s portrait of His beloved Son and wonder what this passage has to do with the believer. Notice, first, what we learn about Christ.

The key word in this section is obvious: “Him”. But notice the prepositions that come just before. Christ is the designer of all things because “*IN Him were all things created*” (v.16).



Moreover, He is the creator as “*all things were created THROUGH Him*”. But He is also the sustainer, for “*BY Him all things consist*” (v. 17). Finally, we see Christ as the owner of all things since they were all created “*FOR Him*” (v. 16).

Such is His fullness! Paul summarizes this way: “*For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell*” (v.19) and “*For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*” (2:9).

Here, then, is the connection to the believer. After extolling the glorious person of Christ in all His glorious perfections, we read, “*that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*” (v. 28). Us? Perfect? This is exactly the point! It is true that we are perfect in Christ as to our position (v. 22), but Paul is speaking here of becoming full-grown, well-grounded Christians.

Throughout our lifelong journey of faith, the Lord is fully equipped to help us achieve the spiritual maturity He desires for us. Though this will only be fully realized in glory, the designer of all things has, in the meantime, carefully laid out all the plans for our trip. Nothing reaches us that He does not allow. And who could better know and meet all our needs than the very One who created us? Of course, the One who sustains all things has all of the resources required for our spiritual health and growth. And our protection and safe passage to heaven is guaranteed by the One who owns us and loves us.

The Lord longs for us to realize that He is all we need—and more! We are complete in His completeness (2:10). In light of this, may we determine to carry on in faithfulness to Him even in the tough times, to be filled with His will and His sufferings if need be, to enjoy intimate fellowship with Him, and to appreciate more the fullness we have in Christ. “*That, in all things, He might have the preeminence.*”

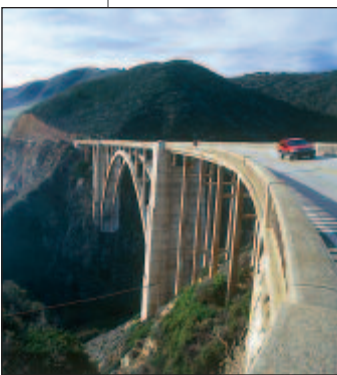
1 John Heading, *Directory of New Testament Churches*, (West Glamorgan, UK: Precious Seed Publications, 1992), p.35.

2 J. W. H. Nichols, *Brief Bible Studies*, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), p.2.

## Reconciliation

The perfect path to peace with God.

**There is nothing that might be added to the Lord's work of reconciliation—what Christ has done is full and complete and unblemished.**



**A**s Colossians 1 concludes its witness to the supremacy of Christ, we learn that it pleased the Father to reconcile all things through the finished work of the Son. That is to say that nothing of the fallen creation will be reconciled to the Father by any means other than the Son's death at Calvary. In these words we find a stirring reminder of Christ's own words in John 14:6 *"...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."*

Secondly, the general context of this passage tells us of the superiority and sufficiency of our Saviour. This verse is no exception to that lovely tone. The word that is used for "reconcile" here is a strong term signifying utter or total reconciliation. There is no additional requirement that is lacking, nothing that might be added by the most careful worker—what Christ has done is full and complete and unblemished. That no man comes to the Father with anything less than Christ is assuredly true; it is equally true that no man comes to the Father needing more than Christ and Christ alone.

### The Scope of Reconciliation

The words of Scripture itself prevent all but the most malignant sophists from limiting the span of God's reconciliation through Christ. *"All things"* is a broad enough term to be clear for most readers, but the text goes further still to prevent error and expands the thought by adding, *"whether things in earth or things in heaven."* This verse is speaking of something more than the reconciliation of a single blessed group of Christians. Christ's death is the avenue by which God has opened the possibility of return and restoration to all. Here, then, is the hope of every searching sinner; here, then, is the grand answer to the subjection of the creation detailed in Romans 8:20.

*And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. [Col. 1:20]*


There is an error in imagining that the reconciliation spoken of through Christ in Colossians 1:20 is the exclusive domain of the elect.

### The Nature of Reconciliation

But, equally, there is an error in imagining that the reconciliation of all things means that all men will—regardless of their rebellion and sin—be saved. God's provision of reconciliation must be received! 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 could hardly be clearer: *"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."*

God was (note the past tense) reconciling the world—reconciliation from God's perspective is complete and utter; it is a finished work.

But Paul adds that as Christ's ambassadors we implore men *"be ye reconciled to God"* (note the present tense). If God has dictated gracious terms of peace (and He has), it remains for those rebel sinners in opposition to accept them. A war does not, and cannot, end if one party is unwilling to lay down its arms. God's terms of our surrender are broadly inclusive: through Christ's death He has provided everything necessary to restore a right relationship with Him. But He will not impose a peace that is unwanted and unaccepted. C.S. Lewis has written about a hell filled with men who remain, in some awful sense, "successful rebels to the end."

Colossians 1:20 gives us an uplifting image of the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ as God the Father's means of reconciliation, while simultaneously giving us a view of the terrible depravity of men who would reject Him. 



# The Kind of People God Uses

Are we fit for the Master's use?

It is well to remember: God has a greater work to do in us than through us.

## A man with fear in his heart

*"Then the word of the Lord came unto me saying ... I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jer. 1:4-6).*

Jeremiah was a man who knew his limitations and his feebleness for such a task. He lived when Judah's last kings ruled, and he saw the end of the single kingdom era. His main ministry was to preach God's warning of judgment for the nation's sin and iniquity—the most difficult of tasks. He was probably shocked at the call of God in his life. Perhaps as the implications dawned on him, fear gripped his heart and he remonstrated about his inability to be God's messenger.

The Lord's response to him was simple and unambiguous: *"Be not afraid because of them, for I am with thee to deliver thee. ... Behold I have put My words in thy mouth" (Jer. 1:8f).* The truth of the matter is that they whom God calls, He equips. Proverbs 29:25 tells us that *"the fear of man bringeth a snare."* Who of us have not looked over our shoulder to hear what is being said about us! But if the Lord puts words on our mouths, we have no need to fear.

## A man with fountains in his eyes

*"Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the daughters of my people" (Jer. 9:1).*

This was a man who was not afraid to shed tears. He did not weep because of his own rejection by the people, but for their rejection of the Lord and their rebellion in not listening to the voice of God. Small wonder that he is called the "weeping prophet."

Weeping day and night reminds us of the apostle Paul in his last meeting with the elders from Ephesus: *"Remember that by the space of three years, I ceased not to admonish everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31).* His great concern was about the *"grievous wolves that would enter ... not sparing the flock."*

These are two hearts, in different circumstances and different eras, beating as one. Men whose hearts God had touched.

What a lesson for this generation as we approach the end of the age. Our world has never been more against God than it is now, and there is an urgent need for the church of God to weep over it.

## A man with fire in his bones

*"But His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jer. 20:9).*

Jeremiah is exhausted. He feels that the Lord has deceived him (v. 7). He has been thrown into prison because of his severe words to the nation. Yet, in the midst of his despondency, he says, *"but the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible One" (v. 11).*

The burning fire in his bones was due to the Word of God and the sheer frustration tearing at his heart. He was convinced that his persecutors would be *"made to stumble"* which would ease the pain of his burning breast. He had bared his soul to the Lord (v. 12) and ended up singing His praises (v. 13). This is a real word of encouragement to us to remember that however difficult our involvement in the work of the Lord becomes, the Lord will never leave or forsake us. He will accomplish His work.

Our hearts, our eyes, our bones. It is well to remember: God has a greater work to do in us than through us. 🔥





Few titles given by His enemies to the Lord Jesus were intended to contain so much gall and yet delivered so much sweetness as that of "Friend of Sinners."

To "receive" sinners as a judge or king might disdainfully do to hear small claims cases in their courts was one thing. But to "eat with them"? It was enough to add an extra curl to His critics' Pharisaic beards!

## Lonely People

Does anybody know someone who could be a friend to them?

Jesus embraced the name Friend of Sinners and reveled in it. Not only did He invite the lower caste—even the outcast—to come to Him for rest, He so convinced them that He was serious about having them as friends that the commoners flocked to Him. He touched their diseased bodies and healed them. He blessed their children when His disciples thought the little ones to be a nuisance, especially when discussing fine points of doctrine. He went into their rude houses, ate their simple fare, sat about their tables for long conversations, and seemed to have endless patience with their questions. He told them stories by the hour, and spoke of hope and forgiveness and peace. Many of them so learned to trust His steady love that they were willing to blurt out their secret longings or sob out their sins to Him. He never brushed them off, never turned one away.

The West has more stuff than they can cram into their lives. They have entertainment at their fingertips, sports leagues, country clubs, internet chat rooms, and associations of every kind. They have shopping malls and amusement parks. Yet for all that, so many are lonely still.

A recent *Associated Press* (AP) article was titled "Lonely Nation" (8/6/06): "In bleak nursing homes and vibrant college dorms, in crowded cities and spread-out suburbs, Americans confront an ailment with no single cause or cure. Some call it social isolation or disconnectedness. Often, it's just plain loneliness. An age-old ailment, to be sure, and yet...it is worsening. It seems ironic, even to those who are affected. The nation has never been more populous, soon to reach the 300 million mark. And it has never been more connected—by phone, e-mail, instant message, text message, and on and on. Yet so many are alone in the crowd."

One factor is that people are too busy for intimacy. Another is the changing complexion of the American household. "The trend toward isolation surfaced in the last U.S. census figures, which show that one-fourth of the nation's households—27.2 million of them—consisted of just one person, compared with 10 percent in 1950." The author also cites a study released in June by the *American Sociological Review*. They found that 25% of Americans said they had no close friends in whom they would confide on important matters; another "19 percent said they had only one confidant—often their spouse." What happens when that spouse dies?

The story is told of one Helen Granath, an 84-year-old San Francisco widow. She says, "It's a very lonely existence—most of the time the loneliness can be excruciating and painful. I have very few friends. They're either ill or they've passed away or moved somewhere else." She says her son "is very busy in the computer business. I don't see him very often." The author concludes: "Undoubtedly there are millions who could empathize ...."

And it's not just older people. "A lot of students go through periods of loneliness," the article quotes Zanny Altschuler, 20, of Menlo Park, CA. John Powell, an Illinois counselor, says students don't make "really satisfying connections." "All the students I work with," he says, "have incredibly many pseudo-intimate relationships online—but without the kind of risk and vulnerability that goes with sitting across a cafe booth from another person."

One would have to be in a very dark room to miss the import of this for the gospel. We must take time to make friends with the lonely. Then we can introduce them to that special Someone who said to those who trust Him: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do to me" (Heb. 13:5-6).

# THE GREAT PROVIDER

**"...who giveth us richly  
all things to enjoy"  
(1 Tim. 6:17)**

OUR LORD JESUS is ever giving and does not for a solitary instant withdraw His hand. As long as there is a vessel of grace not yet full to the brim, the oil shall not be stayed. He is a sun ever shining; He is manna always falling round the camp; He is a rock in the desert, ever sending

out streams of life from His smitten side; the rain of His mercy is always dropping; and the well-spring of His love is constantly overflowing.

As the King can never die, so His grace can never fail. Daily we pluck His fruit, and daily His branches bend down to our hand with a fresh store of provision. There are seven feast days in His weeks, and as many as are the days, so many are the banquets in His years.

Who has returned from His door unblessed? Who has ever risen from His table unsatisfied, or from His presence unfulfilled? His mercies are new every morning and fresh every evening. Who can recount the list of His bounties? Every grain of sand which drops from the glass of time is but the tardy follower of a myriad of mercies. The river of time bears from the mountains of eternity the golden sands of His favor. The countless stars are but as the standard-bearers of a more innumerable host of blessings.

How shall my soul extol Him who daily loads me with benefits, who crowns me with lovingkindness? O that my praise could be as ceaseless as His bounty! Miserable tongue, how can you be silent? "Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

—CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

