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Colossians Transcriptions
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The Image of the Invisible God

We're going to be in Colossians chapter one looking at a larger section this week, verses 15 -20 where Paul is exalting Christ in relation to all things.

***Col 1:15-20** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

There is a lot here, but I'd like to back up a little bit and say something very general. Much of this is Paul just declaring his view of Christ, who Christ is, and specifically who Christ is in relationship to visible and invisible things— that is, to the old creation and the new creation. Who is Christ in relation to the first collection of shadows and pictures and testimonies that came out from Him to point back to Him. And then who is Christ in the new creation that gives Him a corporate body, creation, vessel, bride that is joined to Him, of which He is the head, and by which He is glorified.

Let's start with "He is the image of the invisible God." What does that mean? At least as far as I've seen, I think you could say that **Christ is the seeing of God. Christ is the way that God communicates Himself to the human being.** And so there's no confusion, I'm not talking primarily about Christ the Nazarene, although in the incarnation He did become visible to natural eyes. Beyond that, and greater than that, Christ is the way God has truly communicated Himself to the human soul. That is true in a number of different ways.

Remember when Jesus said, “No one has ever seen God at any time”? There are many in the old covenant who said “You can’t see God and live,” and then they’d have an experience and say, “I just saw God and I’m alive!” That happened a number of times, and yet Jesus comes and says, “No one has ever seen God except the one who’s from God.” He also says, “No one has entered into heaven except the one who came down from heaven,” in John 3.

These words can mess with people’s theology and understanding of God and of heaven, because what we don’t understand is that God is not visible to natural man. God has to make Himself visible, reveal Himself, and therefore Christ is the revealing, the “visible-izing” (making visible) of God. God did that through Christ. It’s in that sense that Christ is called The Word.

What’s a human word except the way that something that is in me is somehow being presented to you? There’s no way that you can see what is in me or what I’m really thinking, feeling, being motivated by or moved by. So what do I do? I put something of myself into these things called “words” and I try to convey something real from inside of me, something that is true of my being, my emotions, my thoughts, and I put them into words, and then those words function as a container to bring me to your ears and to your heart so that you can know me.

Natural words do that very imperfectly, but Christ the Word is exactly that to God the Father. Christ the Word is the communication of God. God sums up in this one perfect expressive, revealed Word, everything He has to say and can say to humanity. He puts it all in this one “package” and He calls that package The Word of God.

In the same way our words come out from us and go to another hearer, and then, by hearing our word, something from within ourselves is presented to another. Well, that’s what Christ IS. God had something He wanted to show the world about truth, about righteousness, about love, and about everything that’s described by words in the bible... These are all aspects of God that He communicates to the human soul through speaking a Word.

People are still very confused about this. We think that reading words about the Word is spiritual knowledge, and it’s not. At the very best, the words in scripture (which I believe are all God’s words) present to you a different *kind* of word, a different nature of a word. This is the “word of life” or the “word of faith” or the “word of the kingdom that the Scriptures speak of. And this word needs to be received into the soul, and then seen by a new light.

James says, "Receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your soul." That's what Christ is. He is the perfect communication of the Father, the implanted Word. He's what God is trying to say to you.

What is God trying to say to you? He wants to tell you so much, everything... except for probably what you want Him to say to you! I doubt He is trying to say anything about your natural plans for your natural day.. That is the level that humans always want to relate to God... "What do you want me to do right now, God?" Or "How can I make you happy, God?" "What can I do to be important to you or to your church?" That's not really the way that God is trying to communicate to your soul. He's trying to fill you with all spiritual wisdom and understanding that you would increase in the knowledge of God and be filled with the knowledge of His will.

What are all these things? I mean, what is His will? What is spiritual wisdom and understanding? They are Christ. They're Christ known. This is what the author of Hebrews says in chapter one: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets, in many portions and in many ways, in these last days He has spoken to us in His Son."

What does that mean? It means that rather than tell you something *about* what is true in Christ, He puts you in Christ and then opens your eyes. Rather than describe the nature of righteousness to you in rules in a written law, He puts you inside of the Person who is the nature described by that law, and then says, "Let there be light." He puts that nature, that implanted word, that life, inside of you and then desires to speak to you in that Son. To communicate to you in Son, by showing you the reality of all that words could only ever point to.

Christ is everything God has ever wanted to say. God has described Christ and shown us Christ in two different ways: in the passing glory of the natural created shadows, and in the eternal, spiritual weight of glory that is Christ Himself in you. "Christ in you the hope of glory"...the expectation of glory.

Either way, whether you're looking at the Old Testament pictures, like the tabernacle or the sacrifices or the Ark, the Red Sea, the Tree of Life, the flood... or the new covenant fulfillment of all these things... all of these are Christ on display. They are the *imaging*, the illustrating, the putting forth, the communicating of Christ. God communicates to the human heart the one Word, the one thing that He is trying to say. God has never, ever wanted to say anything other than Christ. And I don't mean the word "Christ," I mean the person of Christ: the being, the

nature, the love, the light that IS Christ. He was never talking to Abraham, Moses, David, etc. about anything other than Christ...

You may say, "Wait, He was talking about a land with Abraham." What do you think that land is?? Or, "He was showing Abraham an inheritance." What do you think that inheritance was? Do you think God had something else in view that He wanted to show Abraham, something that was different than, or outside of, or apart from the Son that He's giving?

You say, "He was talking to Noah about how to get saved from a nasty flood." No, that's not true. He was talking to Noah about Christ. That's what the ark was. It was a place to go into death and to come out in a new creation. That's what the judgment of the flood was.

You say, "No God was talking to Adam about a tree." No, that tree was Christ! God has given image to, or expression to, that Son in two different ways. All things that God has made were either the passing glory of natural pictures and shadows, or the eternal glory of the very substance of Christ living in your soul.

God has been communicating Christ from the very beginning. You look at the law and someone says, "No, in the law God was talking about sacrifices." Again, what do you think those sacrifices are? Those are all pictures of Christ. What I'm trying to tell you is that God has never been talking to people about independent, personal, individual things. Someone says, "I wish God would speak to me like He spoke to Abraham. He talked to him about family planning. He told him, 'You're going to have a son,' and I want Him to talk to me about the children I should have." That's not why He spoke to Abraham! He wasn't speaking to Abraham about his personal family. He was speaking to him about Christ. Everything of God's dealing with Abraham was according to a view of Christ.

God never communicated with the fathers or the prophets about purely natural or individual things. Never! It was all Christ. It's true that He did communicate to them in words and symbols and pictures, and it did have to do with their natural lives, but ONLY in the ways that those things gave image to, gave expression to something of Christ. He wasn't just picking people to have a conversation with. He was revealing His Son in ways that are now recorded for us to see Him. We now go back to those pictures and we see the One that God's revealing. We see that He is now revealing in us the very substance of the things that He spoke to those men and women about.

You should not expect God to communicate to your heart anything other than the one Word that He has been saying from the beginning. Do you see what I'm saying? I used to cry out to God to hear His audible voice. I wanted to hear it. Why? I wanted my own doubts satisfied, and my questions answered, and my understanding either corrected or affirmed. I wanted Him to involve Himself in my natural life for my natural reasons. But all the while God had something that He wanted to say. There was something He wants me to hear – the living implanted Word. He wanted me to hear the same thing that He had on His mind when He said, "Let there be light!" Even back in the very beginning, God was communicating His Word.

He created a world and then brought into that Word the image of life and light and love and nature and righteousness and purpose, all of which can be summed up in one living Word. He doesn't want to talk about it anymore. In this new covenant, He doesn't want to talk about it or describe it with natural pictures and words. What God wants to do is put that Word inside of you and say, "Let there be light!" He wants to put you inside that word and say, "Open the eyes of your heart and look and see the things that I have described with so many words."

I'm talking about this because of this first little phrase: "He is the image of the invisible God." That means that God is making all things of Himself visible and knowable and experiential through and in His Son.

Christ is God. Christ is the eternal word. He is God the Son, and He shares the same life as the Father. But Christ is that Person of the Godhead, that life of God, that actually comes out from God and presents and offers God to the human soul. And in that sense you can say that Christ is the grace of God. He is the life. He's the stream that pours out from the Father to you. It's in Him we have redemption. We have salvation. We have sanctification. We have light and life... All those things you could say are in God the Father, too, but Christ is how those things come to you. Christ is how that which was in the Father in the beginning is now made real in your soul.

In the New Testament God never talks about "in the Father you have sanctification or redemption..." Obviously the Father is God too, but Christ IS that thing that comes out from God and communicates to the human soul, first in natural pictures, and secondly in spiritual substance. In the Old Covenant, it was in words and demonstrations and illustrations, ceremonies that repeatedly painted pictures and illustrated this communication of God in Christ. In the second, He communicated in the actual reality itself.

I think that's kind of what Paul is saying in this section of Colossians about the natural creation. Things in the earth came out from God through Christ. It says that Christ is the creator—the

world was framed by Him. Here it says, “Everything created in the heavens and the earth, visible and invisible...were created through Him, and for Him.”

It says that about the natural creation in also in John 1— “All things came into being through Him and apart from Him nothing came into being that is come into being.” Everything that came into being was the Word expressing the very person and nature of God to us. It was Christ Himself. It wasn’t just that He’s the agent of creation, or that He happens to be the member of the Trinity that waved the magic wand and made it happen. When it talks about Christ being the creator, Christ is putting God on display for the human soul.

It says something very similar to that in 1 John. “What was from the beginning, what we have heard and what we have seen with our eyes; What we’ve looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life, that life was made manifest and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father.”

I don’t primarily think this is referring to the incarnation, although they did touch and see the physical incarnation of Christ. But beyond that, everything that came out from that Word in the natural creation were things that could be seen, heard, touched, handled. And then he’s saying that life actually came out from the Father and made Himself known to you. We’ve actually seen the substance of what all these shadows were pointing to. It all comes out from Him, it all points back to Him, and that’s what the creation is. If you see the creation rightly, then it is a window. I’m not talking about Pantheism or worshiping trees. I’m talking about the creation of God drawing you to Him and pointing you to the thing that God is wanting to communicate to the human soul.

Christ puts God on display for the human soul. I think that’s what Paul is talking about here. That’s what the natural creation is, things on the earth, things in the heavens, things visible, things invisible....both aspects. The human soul was created to see and know and be conformed to the image of its Creator.

Let’s move onto this phrase “the firstborn over all creation.” “The firstborn” doesn’t mean what the Jehovah’s Witnesses and/or Mormons think. They say this title speaks of Jesus as the first thing God created. But that’s not what firstborn means in the bible. And certainly not here, where it says a couple of verses later that all things were created through Him and for Him.

When it talks about Christ being the firstborn, the firstborn is a word that has to do with “heir” or “ruler” or “pre-eminence.” In Psalm 89, speaking of David it says, “I have made him my

firstborn.” David was not the literally firstborn of Jesse. He was the eighth born. But he became a picture of Christ the firstborn, but firstborn as the heir, the one who ruled over and governed the land.

The firstborn is a title that communicates something. Reuben was the true firstborn of Jacob, and yet Reuben went to his father’s couch (meaning he had relations with his maid) and then the right of firstborn when to Joseph. Joseph was the eleventh born, but he became the firstborn.

It’s the same with Jacob and Esau. Jacob took the right of firstborn and he received the blessing and inheritance from the father and was given the right to rule over his brothers. That’s what it’s talking about here. Solomon is yet another picture of that.

It has nothing to do with being *part* of creation; it has to do with being the one to whom all creation is given as His own inheritance, and the one for which it exists. The firstborn is the one that the Father hands everything to and says, “It’s all yours. Everything I have is yours.” That’s why there are so many pictures of the firstborn receiving what the father has , all throughout the old testament.

Everything was created for Him, and for no other purpose. Everything God created (except for those things which disqualify themselves by maintaining themselves in a state that is separate from that life) everything was created to be handed to the Son, with the declaration that “This is yours to reign over and receive glory from. This is your own increase. This is given to you as your own glory.”

I wanted to mention this about the word firstborn because people do weird things with this word. It says a little later in Colossians, He’s the firstborn from among the dead, and there it’s dealing with Christ as the head of a *spiritual* creation, the firstborn in terms of this corporate body that comes out from death.

He’s not just the heir and ruler of all natural things in their created purpose and intent, He’s the heir and ruler and preeminent one in the spiritual new creation, too. The reason He is the firstborn of church is because Christ entered into the womb of death and became the last Adam. He became sin, became a curse for us. He went into the earth and then was the first one ever to come out of that condition. He opened up the womb. He opened up the tomb. The tomb is a picture of the womb. The world travailed. Literally, the earth shook in the story of the crucifixion of Christ. The whole world was in birth pangs, and all of a sudden, this One

who everyone thought couldn't come out from death...the One who'd entered into death, One who'd become a serpent on a staff; the One who'd become a curse, "cursed is everything that hangs on a tree," this One who'd become sin and drank the cup of God's wrath towards the adamic man— He came out! No one had ever left that condition before. No one had ever entered into heaven except Him who came from heaven— and all of a sudden the world travails and out from the womb of death, Zion is born in a day, a whole new nation.

Christ comes out alive as the head of another creation. He is the firstborn. The head comes out, but it's attached to a body. And the head and the body come out of the tomb, out of the womb, and right away, as a sign and testimony, many in Israel are made alive and come out of the tombs. Remember the story? It says in Jerusalem, believers who'd recently died came out of their tombs alive. I don't know what happened to them, but I'm sure they were a sign that a Head had come out attached to a body. They were a sign that the firstborn among many brethren, the firstborn from among the dead didn't come out alone. He opened the womb, but He had a body attached to Him, sharing His life.

In that sense, He's the "beginning" of a whole new creation. That's what it says in verse 18. He's the beginning of the new creation. He's the head of the body the church, and the beginning, and the firstborn from the dead. I see all of that as different language that describes the same reality. He is the beginning of a new creation, a new covenant. Christ makes all things new in Himself.

What are the "all things" that He makes new in the new creation in Christ Jesus? Well, there is a new relationship with God for those who are relating to the Father in the Son. There is a new creation. There is a new man. There is a new heavens and earth, a new day. All of this begins in the resurrection. The eternal Word and Son of God doesn't have His beginnings in the resurrection, but the new creation, the new covenant, the church – that all does. It has its beginning in the resurrection from among the dead.

That's why God can look down at this one new man, and as the psalmist says, declare, "Today I have begotten You." Theologians often question how God can say "Today I have begotten you" They say, how can God declare this if Christ has always been the eternal word of the Father; if Christ has always been there?

He's not talking about Christ Himself in the eternal counsel of the Godhead before the creation; He's talking about this new corporate life and being, the church. He's talking about the Son that came out in resurrection, the firstborn of many brethren that are joined to Him as their new

head in the day of the resurrection. Zion travails and a whole nation is born in a day. And God says, "Today I have begotten You!" Begotten what? Begotten one living corporate new creation! Christ is the head... He is always distinct as the source, as the life, as the head, and yet He is not separate from the body.

So, in a sense, Christ is a firstborn in a couple of different ways. He's the firstborn over the shadows and pictures of things that were created for His own glory and demonstration. And He's the firstborn over the new creation, which is the church.

When it talks about "for all things were created in Him," I don't really feel like I see this super clearly, but let me try to say a few things. There is a sense in which it can be said that all things are in Him, but that does not mean that all things are reconciled to Him. There is a sense in which you cannot go anywhere outside of God, or to flee from God's Spirit (as the psalmist says) "If I go up into the heavens, He is there. If I go down into the pit, He is there." There is nothing outside of Him, and yet there are things that are not joined to Him.

You could say that "In Him, all creation lives and moves and has its being," [Acts 17] but that doesn't necessarily mean all creation shares His substance and is joined to His life. It's kind of like if you can picture a child swallowing a toy matchbox car, and you could say that the car is "in him," yet that car isn't of the same substance as the child. It isn't one with him; it doesn't share his life.

So, Christ isn't far away in the heavens like Zeus, or other imaginations about God. Paul is telling them this in his speech in Acts 17... that God has created from one man every nation on earth and determined their times, boundaries and dwelling places, SO THAT "they would seek after Him and grope for Him and find Him, though He's not far from any of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being." That's the context of what Paul is saying... God is not far... If you start groping, you're going to find Him.

And yet..... the thing that I was trying to say about the little boy who swallowed the toy car is that in a sense, everything is in Christ, but not everything is reconciled to Him or relating to Him. If a little boy picked up a toy car and ate it, that car would be in him, but not really "of" him. It would be in him, but not reconciled to him. It would be in him as a foreign object that wouldn't join to him or form part of him, or receive his life, or give life back to him. Contrast that to eating a sandwich which then becomes joined to you. The sandwich is in you and becomes fuel, life, blood cells, etc....all of the things your body makes out of it.

I think that in a sense you have to say that nothing is apart from God, and yet NOT everything comes to receive His life. I don't know a great way to describe this. If somehow that car could receive that little boy's life, then it could actually be a living, joined part of his body. But until then it is in him, without being of him.

In a natural body you have natural, physical responses to get thing out of you when they don't belong. I mean, if you have a splinter, your body starts to swell and make pus, trying to push it out. If it's a toy car that you swallow you start to want to vomit it up, or maybe it comes out the other end. When you have a foreign object in you, your body says, "Get this thing out of me!" Why? Because it doesn't have life, it's not sharing your life.

I think that's what God offers us. If I had a little plastic army man in my stomach, I could say, "If he would just grope a little bit, I'm not far from him. I'm offering him life, if he would just look around and seek, he would find me."

That's why I love this verse in Acts 17:26, "And He made from one man every nation of man, to live on the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, THAT" – and I just want to circle and underline and highlight the word "that" because here's why He does it—" THAT they would seek Him, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being."

That's the sense in which I think Paul is saying that all things were created in Him. And yet not all things have been reconciled to Him, because it says later that it's through the blood of the cross that the Father reconciled things to Himself. It's the one who receives Him, who gropes for Him, the one who receives that cross as their own death, burial and resurrection who ends up finding the reconciliation to Him. And scripture says that what is not reconciled to Him is vomited out, or not united to that living body.