

Jesus, First Born among Many

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The subject of the sermon today is Jesus Christ. The title is Jesus, First Born among Many. Before I begin, I want to spend a couple of minutes on the subject of interpreting the Bible. This will follow up what Mr. Railston talked about last week in how to study the Bible. We're going to study the Bible and we're going to talk about Jesus, and we need to understand the importance of proper reading of the scripture and proper application. I brought with me volume 1 of The Expositor's Bible Commentary; there's a nice section in here on the subject of biblical interpretation that discusses personal, hermeneutical difficulties. Hermeneutics is the scholarly term for interpretation. We have personal difficulties that we deal with, and I'd like you to note what is said about it because each of us brings our own personal experience to the study of scripture.

The reading subject [that's you and me] brings something with him or her—our own background, education, presuppositions, culture, character, needs, desires.

We sit down with the scripture and we all have a little bit different background, we've all been through different experiences, our education and so on, so we bring those things with us when we sit down to read and try to comprehend what the scripture is telling us.

The text has an independent reality, it is not just clay to be molded. It is what it is, not what the reader or hearer makes of it. What our past background and experience has been will in large degree influence how we read and what we make of the scripture. Scripture is the text that communicates to the reader or hearer what is meant by the author. For example, to adapt a proverb there is many a slip between the lip and the ear partly through difficulties in the text, but not least through the predisposition of the hearer. Overcoming the problem of predisposition is a big part of the hermeneutical task, or the task of interpreting and understanding scripture.

So in the case of my own background—my presupposition, if you will—I was raised a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant. I grew up on a farm in central California. You could also describe us as conservative Republican. My father was a member of the National Rifleman's Association. These are the things that were a part of my upbringing. On the Protestant side of it, we were in a mainstream Protestant denomination, so as such, church revolved around Sunday. I was a child, I went to Sunday school and I don't know why we went on Sunday, I don't remember caring—that's just what we did. Why did we go to church on Sunday? Grandpa and Grandma did, Mom and Dad did, what else is there to know—that was my presupposition. There was the trinity, of course, and we had the Apostles Creed, and of course there was Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and Christmas and all of those things. We all had an immortal soul and it was the

purpose of the church to save that soul, because the soul gets lost in sin, and Jesus died to save us. So the saved died and went to heaven. Whatever we did there, that wasn't made clear particularly but it didn't matter. Of course the ones who weren't saved, you know what happened to them—they went to hell. They couldn't go up there in heaven with us good guys so obviously they went to hell. My aunt (my mother's sister) was from a more conservative denomination and they went to some length to describe what it was like to be in hell forever, whereas where we were we didn't pay too much attention; we just wanted to avoid being there. But those are some of the things that I bring or that I brought to the study of scripture.

Once upon a time, going back now to the summer of 1962—when I first encountered the World Tomorrow broadcast and I began to question my presuppositions—I was challenged to blow the dust off my Bible, take a closer look, and decide whether what I believed was actually the truth—perhaps the things that I believe weren't all in the scripture. So I had certain presuppositions that I brought with me and I needed to examine those things. Okay, I was willing to do that, so what happened? Well, of course there was the Plain Truth magazine and a Bible correspondence course, and various other booklets to educate us, the idea being that of course we were using the scripture as the primary authority. Of course that's important so I was of the opinion that I was now in touch with the one and only true church—that seemed obvious. There it was, the scripture was telling me things that I didn't know before, and was pointing out to me that there were things in my background that were incorrect and I needed to make some changes. That begins the long odyssey to where we are today.

As it turns out, not only are there personal predispositions and difficulties but there are also corporate ones. Let's consider that for a bit. The commentary, in talking about the history of interpretation, or hermeneutics, has this to say: It talks about primary authority and secondary authority. Now just think about that for a moment. Primary authority, of course, is what?—the scripture itself—that's the primary authority. Now there's this thing, secondary authority, that begins to creep in. Here's what they say:

Secondary authority, whether in the guise of creeds, oral tradition, the church fathers, councils, or teaching offices, came more and more to impose an obligatory sense on scripture to the detriment both of good hermeneutics and also of the Bible's own authority. A secondary authority begins to creep in.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I was going to learn over time that surely this couldn't be true of the church of God, I mean, this was the one true church, so we wouldn't allow secondary authority to creep in—it's always the scripture, right? It was always the scripture, we were always encouraged to read the scripture; we were referred to the Bereans who searched the scriptures daily to see if these things be so; study to show yourself approved, and those sorts of things. We would learn that we had our own presuppositions within the corporation, within the body that we called the church.

All kinds of things down through history have been discussed and argued over—dogmas, if you will. As the commentary points out,

Hermeneutically important here is not the dogma as such but the replacement of authoritative scripture by an authoritative interpretation.

How would that work? The Roman Catholics have their understanding, their authoritative interpretation, the Protestants have theirs, and the Protestants are all over the landscape. This is called secondary authority. Authoritative scripture was being replaced by authoritative interpretation. Notice, they go on to say:

That authoritative interpretation is backed by force, against which no further appeal could be made, even on exegetical grounds.

I'll give you some examples of that here in a bit. I went to Ambassador College and I was ordained an elder in Portland; I hadn't been baptized four years, and then three years later I was sent to pastor churches in Idaho. What was my job? I realize, looking back on it, it was my job to support the authoritative interpretation. I was there to represent the Worldwide Church of God, and, as to truth—a matter of quite some importance—new truth came from where? From the Apostle. God revealed new truth through His Apostle, period. So you can study all you want, you can search the scriptures daily, you can do the whole works, but don't you dare come up with something contrary to the authoritative interpretation. (Really? Certainly that can't be the case.) I didn't realize this until about four or five years ago, when it became obvious that the authoritative interpretation about, let's say, the subject being the record of God and Christ in scripture, was not accurate. The fact is, in certain areas it was flat out in error and it needed to be corrected. So what do we do about that? (Let me read on a little further, we'll get back to that point in a minute.) So, no appeal—if you come up with something that you think is appropriate, if it doesn't meet the authoritative interpretation, end of discussion—there will be no appeal, it's backed by force. Back in the Middle Ages they might put you on the rack and torture you until you confessed and then they'd burn you at the stake so they could free your soul to go some place and maybe not necessarily burn in hell forever. Backed by force today is a little different, isn't it? You can be threatened with all kinds of things, being put out of the church, being called various things, categorized in various ways, or, if you're on salary, your livelihood might be threatened. Backed by force against which no further appeal could be made even on exegetical grounds.

If the primary mischief lay in the sphere of authority, the effect on interpretation was hardly less detrimental. In an ever-expanding sphere, interpretation was brought under tight control.

Not just anybody can interpret the scripture—that comes with a special emphasis. You can read it and study it but you can't interpret it.

Wild views were checked [and of course that's a good thing—we don't need lots of wild views all over the landscape], but so too was ongoing study along sober and constructive lines.

You do some ongoing study along sober and constructive lines, and if it didn't match the authoritative interpretation, you're in trouble. So the task of the interpreter changed—now who is the interpreter today? Who interprets scripture in the modern world? What do we do? In the church of God, as we've experienced it, there's usually a flagship publication of some sort, a monthly magazine or something of that sort; it might be a correspondence course. There are people writing scripts for radio and television broadcasts, there are weekly updates and the like. This is the official line. These are the interpreters.

So the task of the interpreter changed; instead of trying to get at the true sense, he now had to substantiate the imposed interpretation, had to demonstrate that the official interpretation was indeed right—correct. Or indeed to provide the texts that might seem to support what was agreed upon in advance to be the authentic, dogmatic meaning. That's the place of the interpreter? I woke up here recently (within the last four or five years) to the realization that my role as an elder in the church of God had been to defend the authoritative interpretation. I was sent out there to teach as I had been taught. We must all speak the same thing. Yes, search the scripture if you want, but don't you dare come up with something contrary to the official authoritative interpretation. Now, at the time, I assumed and felt very certain that it was based on scripture—the authoritative interpretation was actually based on scripture. But there were things that began to come to the fore as, I'll call them, corporate predispositions.

The church of God was predisposed to explain things in a particular way. For example, there was the business of God and who He is and what He is. We have monotheism on the one hand and yet there is a clear indication that there is a plurality involved. God said, let Us make man like Us, make man after Our image. It's monotheism, right?—but there's clearly a plurality here. What's the official interpretation? As I recall what it amounted to was, Elohim (that's the word that was used—that's a "uniplural" word—like one church but many members), one family, many members, so there's one God but it's a God family, so there are many members in the God family. Okay, that seemed to sound alright—I actually defended that but that's not the record of scripture.

God is not a family, God has a family, and we'll get into that part in a bit and show where Jesus Christ has started that process and where He fits into it, and where we fit into it. Then of course, you get into the business of, again, the monotheism thing—the record of God and Christ in scripture and how does it work? The official interpretation today seems to be that there is one God but two divine Beings. Really? The ministry is expected to support that notion with scriptures. If you believe scripture, John 1:1 is very clear: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God. Now the Greek actually says the Word was with the God; we've been through that many times. And then, what?—And the Word was God. In my recollection, one and one, down through history, has always been two. The official interpretation is that there is one God and two divine Beings—how is that different than one God and three divine Beings? What do you say? We'll touch on this a little bit more from the point of view of the scripture as we go along.

It's my experience that this business of personal predisposition is not something you overcome one time. It's something you deal with over the course of history. We change as we grow and mature, so we have to continually examine ourselves. Last week, the scripture Hebrews 4:12 was covered; in studying the scripture and how this Word of God is capable of cutting right down to the marrow of the bone, getting to the heart of the matter—our true intentions—it's not something that we can just dispose of, face once, and then just set aside. Likewise you would think that with corporate predispositions, we think we'd overcome that sort of thing, but no—we are forever having to be alert to that sort of thing.

So, again, the subject is Jesus, firstborn among many; let's go to Luke 1 and we'll illustrate some of these points as we go along. We're interested in the scriptural record—the primary authority. So we have to be cautious about the fact that indeed, predispositions do begin to develop and mature, and we find ourselves supporting a particular idea because it's the official record, not because it's supported in scripture.

Luke 1:26 *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth ... (NKJV)*

Now the sixth month, this is a reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth, who will be the mother of John the Baptist. So here comes Gabriel, the same Gabriel who appeared to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist,

27) *... to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.*

28) *And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"*

29) *But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. (NKJV)*

Indeed, think about it, if the angel Gabriel appears to you and says you have found favor with God, rejoice—that's good news.

30) *Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. (NKJV)*

This is God the Father. Notice verse 31.

31) *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. (NKJV)*

This isn't particularly surprising—she is betrothed to Joseph, there will be an official ceremony and they will then live as husband and wife, and usually what happens is children will be born; that would be expected. Gabriel was just pointing out, your firstborn is going to be a son and you're going to name Him Jesus. Alright, the Word

now has a name—Jesus is His name. The Word is in the process of becoming flesh and will dwell among us. His name will be called Jesus. Now notice verse 32.

32) *He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest;* (NKJV)

Son of the Highest—who are we talking about?

32 continued) *... and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.* (NKJV)

The Lord God is the Highest. Jesus, who will be born of Mary, is the Son of the Highest. What does “highest” mean? If the city has a tall tree contest and we decide where the highest tree in the city is, the highest tree is the highest. This is the highest authority in all the universe—the Lord God, and He will have a Son. Now notice, this Son, Jesus,

33) *... will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”* (NKJV)

This is prophetic—that’s still ahead. The house of Jacob is still scattered all over the landscape but God will one day bring it back and Jesus will reign from the throne of His father David.

34) *Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”*
35) *And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest [here we are, the power of the Highest, once again] will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called [notice] the Son of God.* (NKJV)

Jesus Christ, firstborn among many; we’ll see that more specifically in a bit.

36) *Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.* (NKJV)

I suppose Gabriel shared this with her, in case there was any doubt—your relative, who is beyond child-bearing age, is indeed pregnant, has conceived and will bear a child, and so you can expect that it will be the same for you.

37) *For with God nothing will be impossible.”*
38) [Notice Mary’s attitude, this has got to be our attitude as well] *Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.* (NKJV)

There was a time, as has been pointed out by John and others, the Word became flesh and dwelled among us, and here is how it happened. Here is the initial process by which the Word became the Son of God. So technically speaking, the Word is the Word. Now, when Jesus is born, He is the Son of God—yes—but He’s also the Son of

Man, that's the term He used for Himself repeatedly: I am the Son of Man. Later we're going to see how He became the born again Son of God.

So here we are, we are introduced to the family of God for sure, because Jesus is going to be born and called the Son of God. That's His position, that's who He is—His name is Jesus, He is the Son of the Highest, so there is a Highest. This notion gets in the way of the trinity. If you're predisposed to the trinity then you can't have a Highest because the trinity says there is one God in three persons and all three are equal, so one cannot be higher than the other, otherwise that just shows the trinity to be a concoction of men rather than a record in scripture.

So you can't have one that is called the Highest so how do they deal with that?—well, they do. Maybe we can touch on that before we're finished here as well. Okay, let's go now to Ephesians 1. This is enlightening and here we'll illustrate the importance of having more than one translation of the Bible. Having a couple of translations around is important—you can compare the two. For me personally, I preach and usually study with the New King James as the default translation. It's a word-by-word, word-for-word translation. It's referred to as a literal translation—a literal equivalence it's called. Word for word; they do their best, the translators did their best to translate the Greek into English word by word where it was possible. In some cases it just isn't possible. Now I have the New Living Translation here and this is a paraphrase, or in official terms, a dynamic equivalence. They're not so concerned about being entirely accurate about word for word but here's the thought—it's thought for thought.

The scripture says, here's the thought, let's put it into English in a way that is comfortable to our English hearing and speaking, because, let's face it, Paul is a bit laborious in his writings, at least in the King James version. For example, in Ephesians 1, which we're going to go into shortly, there are twenty-three verses there. In the New King James and the King James version, there are six English sentences—six—in twenty-three verses, and you wonder why it's kind of difficult for people to comprehend what the King James is doing, even after you try to tidy it up a bit and call it new—New King James—it's still a little bit laborious. Whereas in the New Living Translation, twenty-three verses—twenty-six sentences. So the modern translations are good about cleaning up the pronouns and the commas and the phraseology so it's more attuned to our ears. Let's go to Ephesians now and continue the story here. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. So right away we have Jesus Christ, whom you're going to see is involved in the whole process—that's the record of scripture. There are apostles involved and Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ but it's all by the will of God. Continuing in verse 1.

Ephesians 1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: (NKJV)*

Here again we have God, the will of God, the work of Jesus Christ, Paul a servant of His; the result is we have individuals, in this case in Ephesus, who are faithful in Christ

—they’ve responded to the call. We’re going to see there was a time when it was predestined that people would be called and this is the result.

2) *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
(NKJV)

Okay, not only is Jesus the Son of God, but Paul refers to God as our Father; “our” meaning the saints at Ephesus, those who were part of the church. So the family is indeed expanding. Jesus at this point is the only one who has been glorified, born again from the dead; the mortal has put on immortality and the corruption of the flesh has put on incorruption and that will be our end result as well. Here we see God as our Father, so the family is expanding here. Notice verse 3.

3) *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ ...* (NKJV)

We have a perfect illustration here of denominational or doctrinal bias and this is what it looks like. I’m going to read the first part of Ephesians 1:3 in the New King James and we’re going to compare it to the first part of Ephesians 1:3 in the New Living translation. Notice, I’ll read slowly again, just the first part—the New King James.

Ephesians 1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ...*
(NKJV)

Ephesians 1:3 *All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ...* (NLT)

Do you see the difference? The New Living Translation acknowledges that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but conveniently omits that He is also the God of Jesus Christ. Notice the New King James again: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. If you’re a trinitarian you can understand why they might conveniently leave that part out, because, again, it discredits the doctrine of the trinity which requires three in one, all equal. If one of the trinity—Jesus—has God as His God, that’s no longer equal, is it? That’s the record of scripture. Who’s right? Last week, Mr. Railston referred to the use of the Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, and that’s where you go to see the actual Greek laid out, and you make the comparison, and lo and behold, the New King James is correct. The New Living Translation has conveniently left out the fact that God is not only the Father of Jesus Christ, He is also the God of Jesus Christ—can’t have a trinity! What’s the difference between one God in three divine beings or one God in two divine beings—you just left out the Holy Spirit. Quite frankly, this has turned out to be the official interpretation of God. But what is the record in scripture? We can go on—there are other places we could show more of the same but we’ll save those for another time.

Continuing then. Here we have *blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Verse 4.

4) *just as He chose us in Him [that is in Christ] ...* (NKJV)

You're going to see this term come up regularly in the third and fourth verses: *in Christ*. Here it's *in Him*; in certain places it might say, *in Jesus Christ*, or, *in Christ Jesus*; in verse 6, it's *in the Beloved*. You're going to see Jesus involved in this whole process. Paul is going to point out to us, at least in part (maybe it's not the full explanation), but he's going to illustrate for us just what *in Him* means.

4 continued) ... *as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, (NKJV)*

So this process began before the foundation of the world, and of course we're familiar with Revelation 13:8, that the Lamb of God, who would be Jesus, was slain from the foundation of the world. There were things going on way back in the beginning. Paul is writing to the Ephesians, they are in a congregation together, they are called out, so this process began which leads to a congregation way back before the foundation of the world.

5) *having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,*
6) *to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. (NKJV)*

Finally, end of sentence. I'll read it next in the New Living Translation, just so we get a feel for how the translators smooth things out a little bit. Starting in verse 4.

4) *Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes.*
5) *God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do and it gave Him great pleasure. (NLT)*

Paul brings up the subject of adoption now and he uses that term to get across a particular point, but as we're going to see that's not the full, entire story, this business of adoption. Obviously the family is being expanded and he describes the Ephesian congregation as having been adopted. We're brought from one family into another. We leave our human association and become directly and intimately associated with God, having predestined us to adoption, as it says in verse 5. William Barclay wrote a commentary called The Daily Study Bible Series, and in the book of Romans, where it discusses the business of adoption, he has good background material on what it meant to be adopted under first century Roman law, so that's what we're talking about. There were several things that he pointed to. First, you forfeited all rights to your former family. This is in line with putting God first. Love less by comparison your mother, father, all these things—put that behind you. God must be first above everything. But having done that, you've also gained legitimate rights in the new family. In a regular human adoption, the adoptee has the same rights as the biological child—with a new father. Of course in Roman law it was patriarchy in spades, so you have a new father and are now

a co-heir with the other children to the family estate. You share in the inheritance with the other children even though you're not a biological child. You enter into a new life; the old debts, the old life, are all put out, and you have a new name—everything is new. Finally, you are absolutely the son of this new father—a joint heir. This is the point that Paul is getting across. When you become a part of the work of God—and it goes back to the foundation of the world—it was predestined that there would be individuals adopted, the term used here:

- 5) *having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will [God's will],*
- 6) *to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. (NKJV)*

He, God, made us accepted in the Beloved, Jesus. It was predestined that this would happen. Here we are then; who then are we joint heirs with? Who are the other children in the family, that we will share the inheritance with? There's only one and that's Jesus. Now think what it is you're going to share. Jesus Himself is going to share His inheritance. All things were made (we're going to see when we get to the book of Colossians) through Jesus for Him. He's going to share the whole business with the children of God, with the enlarged family of God. Let's go on a little further, verse 7.

- 7) *In Him [here we go, we're back to the phrase, in Him, in Christ, in Jesus, in the Beloved—now notice] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*
- 8) *which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence ... (NKJV)*

You see, we are in Christ Jesus. There is no way we can get through this process apart from the part that Jesus played. He was the redemption. In Him we have redemption through His blood. You have to come through that course; there's no other way through, no other way to access the plan of God and its ultimate course without understanding the redemption that comes through the blood of Jesus Christ. Verse 7 again.

- 7) *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*
- 8) *which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,*
- 9) *having made known to us the mystery of His will [here we're talking about the will of God again], according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,*
- 10) *that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ ... (NKJV)*

He—God—might gather together in one, all things in Christ.

- 10 continued) *... both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.*

11) *In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will ...* (NKJV)

It's all according to God's will, Jesus Christ working out the will of God in the process of calling us and making us a part of the family of God.

12) *that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.* (NKJV)

Here we have it: God predestined these things long ago, and of course God does things in His time because we can try to hurry things if we wish, but there's not much sense in that—God is going to work it out according to His process. What is the record of scripture? That is what we're concerned about. Verse 13 now.

13) *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,*
14) *who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.* (NKJV)

So the day is coming. A person is drawn to understand. How did I know I was predisposed to believe certain things that weren't really scriptural? How did I come to understand that? God has to begin to intervene and open our mind so we can comprehend it, otherwise you're just stuck in the mud believing whatever it was you were taught—there's little choice. So God opens our minds and begins to teach us and work with us so we can begin to see it. We have a guarantee; the Holy Spirit is granted, the power of God will overshadow you, Mary was told by the angel. We receive this very power of God and it seals us, it sets us on the way. We are begotten now, we are in the process now of being born into the very family of God—we'll see more about that in a bit. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.

When will the full redemption take place? At the resurrection, we're going to put off the old man for sure—we're going to put off mortality and embrace immortality and that's still ahead. We are a part of this process; God has called us to be a part of that and share in the very work that Jesus Christ has done. It's interesting, when you talk about the business of being called; you heard the word of truth and it rang true. Why did it ring true all of a sudden? Why were you suddenly receptive to the word of truth? God begins to work with us, open our minds, predispose us now to something different than what we've been raised with. The gospel of your salvation in whom also you believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (verse 13).

The question is asked every now and again about this whole process of the record of God and Christ in scripture and it's been presented to me and others (you've heard it probably)—what difference does it make? Think back to the time you were being called and coming to repentance and you were counseling for baptism. Did you ask the

question, what difference does it make? You may have, but then what would have been the response? The minister would say, I'll tell you what difference it makes, and we'll sit down and recognize that it does make a difference, how we are to orient ourselves, one way or another. In my experience with counseling people for baptism (there were dozens and scores back in the day and they were all excited), it was a good principle that we never visited anybody who didn't ask us to come and visit, and that was always nice because you were received and didn't have to worry about being stoned or shot. People wanted to know, they were hungry—tell me the truth; they're coming to understand, they have been predisposed to things that weren't true—explain it to me. I don't recall anybody who was serious about baptism and conversion and setting their life in order and following God who asked, what difference does it make? If it doesn't make any difference you can just remain a Methodist—if it doesn't make any difference. Which is the great commandment in the law anyway? Does that matter? What's the record of scripture?

Let's go to Romans, chapter 1 first, just briefly, the first four verses. When I read this, I thought, wow, this is great, this is one of those moments of sudden insight, from way back in the day.

Romans 1:1 *Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God
2) which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,
3) concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh ... (NKJV)*

Alright, a rehearsal of what we saw in Luke, chapter 1.

4) and declared [now notice] to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. (NKJV)

This is when He once again received the glory that He'd had with God before He came to earth as the Lamb of God; He became the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. That's the pattern that we're all going to follow. We're going to be resurrected in the Last Day when the trumpet sounds, the dead in Christ will rise first and somebody will be alive at the time, and they will be changed, and this is it. I suspect the bulk will be resurrected from the dead. And that's the same pattern—this is how Jesus became the Son of God in the same fashion that we will.

Now let's go to chapter 8 because this is informative and it helps follow up on what we've been saying so far.

Romans 8:12 *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.
13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die; (NKJV)*

We're going to die anyway, brethren. What He's talking about is not just the human body, what he's talking about is an orientation—a fleshly orientation. Whatever the flesh desires, whatever the basic current culture is, it pursues that—chases it to the end of the earth. We have to change that orientation.

13 continued) ... *but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* (NKJV)

This isn't talking about just breathing a little longer, this is talking about living in the true sense—eternal life. Notice verse 14.

14) *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons [children] of God.* (NKJV)

That's the whole point of this life, isn't it? What does your action, what does your life, your example, say about how you are led? Are you led by the Spirit of God or are you led by the spirit of the world, just pursuing whatever satisfies or titillates the flesh? Verse 15.

15) *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."* (NKJV)

Abba is "Father" in the Aramaic, so we're looking to God as our Father. That's the whole point; we're going to be a part of the family of God. We're going to share in the inheritance with Jesus Christ. Verse 16.

16) *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God ...* (NKJV)

This is the step beyond simple adoption. You can be adopted and might have the same rights as the biological children but you still are not a biological child. Our relationship to God goes beyond mere adoption, it goes to where you're being conceived as a child of God—we're going to be born into the family of God.

16) *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God ...* (NKJV)

This is the part that the Holy Spirit plays; starts us on the process to being born into the very family of God.

17) *and if children, then heirs ...* (NKJV)

Heirs? What are you going to inherit? Heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ. In the adoption process, if you were the adoptee, you were a joint heir with the other children in the family; joint heirs. Now here, the inheritance goes way beyond anything we have in this life. We are now heirs of God; what is God offering?

17 continued) —*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him ... (NKJV)*

Oh, we have to put that in there. If indeed we suffer with Him. The question comes up from time to time, is it necessary to suffer? Is that a requirement of salvation? If you listen to the announcements, the updates from week to week, maybe it's not required of salvation but it seems to accompany this business of salvation in general. If indeed we suffer with Him—so are we fair-weather Christians?—I'll go along with this as long as I don't have to give up anything; I'll go along with this process as long as I don't have to suffer. I think most of us have learned to do the best we can in spite of the suffering. Verse 17 again.

17) *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God [not of some human being] and joint heirs with Christ ... (NKJV)*

How much greater and magnificent is that compared to what we might have on this earth? We don't want to pass up our opportunity for this kind of inheritance just so we can enjoy something or other in this physical life.

17 continued) ... *if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (NKJV)*

We're going to be glorified together; together with whom? Together with Jesus Christ. He's the one who set the example and leads the way.

18) *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (NKJV)*

Paul had plenty of occasions to suffer. The fact is when Ananias was sent to Paul when he was fasting and was blind and couldn't see for three days, the message that was delivered to him was that he would go to kings and to Israel and to the Gentiles and be shown what things he would suffer—for My name's sake. Sometimes we are called upon to suffer for Christ's name's sake; it does happen.

18) *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (NKJV)*

When you're suffering, brethren, and it seems like it's kind of overwhelming, take the time and the effort, if you can, to meditate on what's ahead, on what God has prepared for us, and it will help you deal with the difficulties of this life when they arrive.

19) *For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (NKJV)*

Won't that be something!

20) *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;*

21) *because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (NKJV)*

It's hard for us to comprehend what that means. All I know is I am a human being, and I know that the outward man is perishing. We read these weekly updates about people who are suffering and they have difficulties, and for those of you who are struggling with that sort of thing, I think I can sympathize with you because it seems like I usually describe my life as, the first sixty-eight years were pretty good; pretty good run for sixty-eight years. Frankly brethren, the last seven years, I've been recovering from something for seven consecutive years; one thing after another, after another. First it's prostate cancer, then it's spinal stenosis requiring surgery, then it's one hip, then it's the other hip, then it's a bad knee that crippled me so bad I couldn't walk well enough or far enough to call it exercise, and now what?—now there's the coronary issue. Dear God, can we have a little plateau here? ((laughs)) What do you say? For those of you who are suffering, I feel your pain. I think I can say that and sympathize with you. What is Paul saying to us? Paul—you read of his sufferings, he enumerates them in part in the book of Corinthians—all the things he suffered for God. Yet, he had enough sense to sit down and meditate on what God had promised him and what's certain to come. It's wonderful—one of these days we'll put all this stuff behind us and we will indeed embrace the full inheritance that comes from God. Verse 27.

27) *Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (NKJV)*

It's always the will of God. So, what's in your mind? Is God searching you? To what are we dedicated? Do we have a clear vision of what God wants us to do? Are we dedicating the strength and energy we have to pursuing that? Verse 28.

28) *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

29) *For whom He foreknew [there was a time, He determined, that there was going to be a work, there was going to be a family], He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son ... (NKJV)*

We saw how the Son first was born into the flesh, how He became the firstborn Son of God via the resurrection.

29) [Again, here it is, stated specifically] *that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (NKJV)*

We have the opportunity to be one of those many brethren and to share in the very same inheritance, the same reward as Jesus Christ.

30) *Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified;* (NKJV)

This is being in Christ, we come under the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

30 continued) *... and whom He justified, these He also glorified.* (NKJV)

I have to say, I look in the mirror and I don't see anything glorified yet, so that's coming—hang on. I'm determined I'm going to hang on to the end because I want to see how this turns out. It's going to be amazing.

Finally, let's go to Colossians 1 and we'll wrap it up. What's the whole point here? There is a record in scripture, brethren, and we must be careful to be true to that record and not impose upon the record of scripture, our own notions, our own predispositions, whether they be personal or whether they be corporate. We've got to allow the scripture to speak to us and be willing to do whatever is required to follow through on its requirements. Now in Colossians—we'll begin in chapter 1 and verse 9—and here again some of these principles that we've been touching on are sort of summarized. Paul goes over these things again and again depending on who he is writing to.

Colossians 1:9 *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;* (NKJV)

Again, it's God's will forever being reemphasized. Notice verse 10.

10) *... that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work [now notice] and increasing in the knowledge of God;* (NKJV)

Is that important? By Jesus' own testimony, eternal life depends on knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. So Paul is emphasizing the point to the Colossians.

11) *strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;* (NKJV)

Here's where the joy comes in. It isn't because somehow we don't have any pain or suffering, it's because in spite of the pain and suffering we may experience, we have come to understand the wonderful promises and the inheritances ahead for us, and we can rejoice in that.

12) *giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.* (NKJV)

We must come into the light. The inheritance of the saints—Jesus Christ set the pace.

13) *He has delivered us [God has] from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,*

14) *in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*
(NKJV)

We don't like to acknowledge it but the human heart is indeed deceitful and desperately wicked and that's the default position of the human heart until it is influenced by the Spirit of God, and it seems like the dark side can always rise up if we aren't careful. Verse 15. This is Jesus Christ:

15) *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.* (NKJV)

Firstborn implies there will be many sons, many children brought to this inheritance.

16) *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.* (NKJV)

The whole business was created for the firstborn Son of God who will indeed share it with the children who will be born into the family as well. Verse 17.

17) *And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*

18) *And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.* (NKJV)

Yes indeed. There's a great plan and purpose being worked out and we are called to be a part of it. Brethren, it's important, history tells us that the devil will make all manner of effort at sidetracking us, at getting us pointing to things other than the scriptural record. We have to be on our toes, as it were, on guard regularly, continually seeking the truth of God. That is a mighty powerful revelation, that one day we're going to share in the same inheritance that Jesus Christ has. He freely offers it to us. It's worth the struggle brethren, it's worth the effort so that we can look forward with joy to the fact that one day, we'll put off this flesh and we will indeed receive the promise that was made way back in the very beginning. So let's continue the effort and let's not grow weary in well doing; continue to seek the revelation of God as we pursue the course God has set before us.