

Our Affinity to Christ

What It Means to Be a Firstfruit

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Given 19-May-02; Tape #559A

Many of us seem to have a natural affinity for certain activities. For my own experience, as a young boy I just loved to read. I don't know what it was about reading and books. I just loved to do it. By the time I was about eleven years old, I don't know what possessed her but my sister, Virginia, gave me three of James Michener's books for a Feast present; and I was reading them (at age eleven)—you know those thousand page tomes by James Michener. I read Hawaii, and Centennial, and The Drifters (I think it was) in about a year's time; but I just love to read. About that same time I read the complete Sherlock Holmes and several other books that were probably above my level to understand. I'd probably learn a lot more if I actually went back and read them now; but I just love to read.

But at about age twelve, I discovered writing; and that was far better than reading. Anybody can do reading, but not everybody can do writing; and, for me, it was like a duck to water. I just went in and swam, paddled around, and it was great. The "water" was wonderful! So I just loved doing it. I loved editing it. And I've just kept on doing it. It just seems like the natural thing for me to do. So I have an affinity for writing and for editing that goes beyond mere hobby—or even mere occupation. I do it whenever I'm not getting paid! I just love to do it. For me it is the thing to do.

Now, other people are born with other objects in their hands. I guess it just all depends upon how they are wired, or what things they are exposed to when they are young. Tiger Woods was born with a driver in his hands, or a putter. It almost seems like he is genetically endowed with a golf gene. He can't seem to miss, and people are in awe when he does miss. *"How can this happen? This guy is so good, and he missed that easy putt."*

My son, John, has a pretty good affinity for gymnastics. We found that out by letting him try out gymnastics one summer, and he's quite good at it. He's been asked to join the team. The only problem is that all the meets are on the Sabbath. So, maybe the realization of that affinity that he has for gymnastics won't necessarily get to be fulfilled fully.

Of course, every one of us has certain affinities to something. I just know about these particular ones because John's my son, I like golf, and I am who I am! But if we enjoy doing them, and they seem to come easily to us, and we want to do them more and more and get better and better—that means we have an affinity for that sort of thing.

The word *affinity* itself is somewhat interesting in its development. This is another thing that I like to do: Because I like writing, I like words. I like understanding where words came from. I like to look at their roots. I like to see the way that they have been transmitted down through history, and changed, and become different. Well, affinity is one of those words where its root only marginally means what we use the word as today. Affinity's root means *to border on*, like your land "borders on" my land.

What it came to mean was *related by marriage*. If a man had (let's say) daughters, and he had a lot of land, and his daughters married—he would give [part of] that land to his daughter, and that family would be related to the main family by marriage; and their land would border on the original land. Thus, it came to mean "related by marriage." There was this *family relationship*. So, I have an affinity then to Mike Ford, and Ronny Graham, and Bill Onisick because we are related by marriage. They married my sisters, and so I have a certain affinity towards them because of our kinship through marriage.

Now, the second meaning of affinity is *sympathy marked by common interest*. Thus, you have a kind of kinship; and you can see how that came out of this original meaning (i.e., "related by marriage"). But this one has to do—not with literal kinship—with *a feeling of kinship*. It doesn't have to be actual "blood" or "relation by marriage," but actually just a feeling of kinship with another person because of enjoying similar things, or having similar skills, or having a common cause of some sort.

From western and movie history, we have Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. They had an affinity for each other in robbing banks, and stagecoaches, and trains! They loved doing it, and they loved doing it together! And they died, running from the law, together! They had an affinity for one another.

Soldiers in the trenches had an affinity for their trench-mates—where they go through a certain offensive, or a siege, or whatever; and years and years later, they still feel this same *closeness* to these men—even though they have had years of experience beyond that. These guys got together fifty years after the Normandy Invasion, and it was just like yesterday for them. They wept, and laughed, and did all those things that buddies in the Army (even after fifty years) would do.

The common definition (as I used it in my introduction) is *an attraction based on shared interests*. That's very similar to the second definition, but it is a little bit less intent. It's not necessarily "a kinship" but just "an attraction." And it doesn't even necessarily have to be for another person. It can be for a thing—like me with writing, or what have you.

Likeness is its chief synonym. We like something. We like to do something. Other people also like to do [the same] something; and so we have *a likeness* to this other person who likes to do what we do, or who has the same cause as we do. So, we have a certain affinity for people because we *share interests*. For example, stamp collectors get together. They have an affinity for one another and they forge philatelist societies. They get together and they talk about stamps and collecting stamps. So they have an affinity towards one another. They are attracted to one another because they are all similarly attracted to stamps.

So, we bond together because we like each other in some significant way. As Christians, though, our natural affinities for these things (like writing, and jumping rope, or whatever it happens to be, golf, tennis, racing) have to take a back seat to our chief affinity, which is to our Savior and Elder Brother—Jesus Christ. That is the affinity that we have to be developing—growing in. And that's the one that takes top priority in our lives. And Pentecost is a very good time to recall just how *close*, how much *like Him*, we are and we should become.

So that's what I'm going to be speaking about today—OUR AFFINITY TO CHRIST. Let's begin in Genesis 1:26-27. We know these scriptures well.

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Notice that three times within those two verses it says that we are made in His image, and it also adds that we are in His likeness as well. Remember that's one of the synonyms—a chief synonym—of *affinity*. So the first biblical mention of man in the entire Bible talks about this *affinity that we have to God!* We are *like* Him. We are like Him in image, and we are like Him in likeness. God created man (1) like Him and (2) to be like Him. So He's not just finished with our physical bodies, the way they are. But there is also a potential there—to be like God.

So we are in both His image AND His likeness. Many commentators believe that "image" and "likeness" are parallel to one another. That is, that they are complimentary. They basically mean the same thing. But really they are *supplementary*. That means that they add definition to each other—not just restate each other.

Generally, likeness conveys the idea of form and shape. Mankind looks like the God kind. I want to say that these are not exact definitions, but it's just a general impression from the wording—that we are like God in our physical form and in other ways. But image tends to imply spiritual qualities. Or, maybe we should make it "non-physical" qualities—such as mind, personality, and (probably most important) character. Though we are born in the *likeness* of God, we must be called and grow into His *image*.

Now, we do have some bits of His image if we just relegate it to "non-physical" qualities. We do have a mind that is fashioned like God—to understand, to plan, to think, even to form language and to use symbols, to write, and to convey ideas, and to take a plan and create from it. But there is much more that could be added to that mind of *aspirational nature*, which we have put under the broad category of character and becoming like God is in the way that He lives His life.

We know that this is the case from the New Testament. Let's go back to I Corinthians 15, where we'll see Paul using an example from the Garden of Eden—from Adam—to make a point about this similarity, this affinity, between God and man. He has just been talking about when we die. It is like being sown as a seed. And then, when we are raised up, we no longer have the natural body; but we have a spiritual body. Then, he quotes from Genesis 2:7, about Adam become a living soul. And then he says, "the last Adam (which is Jesus Christ) became a life-giving spirit."

I Corinthians 15:46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

We start with the physical body, and we are allowed to grow in that—in our bodies, and our

minds, and our way of life. And then after that—after we die, after that body wears out—then it rests in the grave; and when we are raised, we are raised a spiritual person, in a spiritual body.

I Corinthians 15:47-49 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

This implies a process of change. It implies a process of growth and improvement. We begin as human beings—physical and subject to death. And it is during this time when we do our greatest amount of growth and overcoming. Once that process is over and we die, we are then raised to bear the image of Jesus Christ. So this is the same sort of thing as in Genesis 1:26, about the ideas of likeness and image. It didn't just end there with the creation of Adam and the genetic process of putting us in the image and likeness of God; but it goes further than that. It goes beyond the grave—until the time that we are resurrected and given eternal life in a spiritual body. We could say then that our becoming in the image of Jesus Christ has been completed.

Let's go now to Romans 8:29-30. This is after the well-known scripture about "all things work together for good." This is what Paul goes on to.

Romans 8:29-30 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

I want you to look specifically at the part in verse 29 that says that we are to be conformed to the image of His Son—which tells me that in our physical bodies we are NOT necessarily conformed to the image of Christ. We are, let's say, in shape and form like Him; but there is something that needs to change, something that needs to be conformed. And these people, whom God has called, have a goal—a destiny—to do this. To conform to the image of Jesus Christ and, beyond that, to be glorified just as Christ has been glorified.

So there's a correspondence—an affinity—between those who are *called and chosen* and *the Son*. Not only do we become His younger brothers and sisters (because we are these "many brethren" that are talked about), but we must look like Him. We must act like Him. We must think like Him, and speak like Him. Everything that we do must look as if He did it. That is how we will be in His image.

And in other places that we could go to, it says that we are commanded, actually, to imitate Him. It is by this imitating Him that we begin to grow in His image. There's no other way to do it. It won't just be put on us all at once by fiat—as Mr. Armstrong used to say. He used to say that God cannot create perfect righteous character by fiat. It takes our cooperation, and God's

guidance and His power and His Spirit in us, to produce His image in us. So, it takes a lifetime normally. And that whole lifetime is dedicated *to growing in the image of the Son*, so that our affinity to Jesus Christ becomes closer, and closer, and closer, and closer as we grow.

In Colossians 1:15 and Colossians 1:18, it mentions that Jesus Christ is *the firstborn*. So this is something that is on Paul's mind as he's writing this. In verse 15, it says "He is the image of the invisible God." That's interesting. It's like a step down. There's God the Father, and Jesus Christ is the image of God the Father; and then we are to become the image of Christ. There's a very direct route right from us, to Christ, to God the Father. But it says:

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Colossians 1:18 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.

So, here in the space of about four verses, Paul mentions twice that Christ is *the firstborn*, which begs the question, "*Are there others?*" And the answer is definitely, "Yes." He couldn't be, necessarily, the firstborn without others coming behind; and that is US. We are the others that come behind—the other brothers and sisters.

Colossians 3:1-11 If then you were raised with Christ [This is speaking of baptism.], seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Paul lays it out here very clearly. We might say this is a synopsis of a Christian life in broad terms. Our minds are to be focused—from our baptism on—on godly things. We are then to seek those godly things to add to our own character. That's what the first two verses here are talking about. We have to be focused—concentrating on "those things which are above." Things of this earth only have transitory meaning to us anymore. But the eternal things are there with God, and they are godly things. They are the *spiritual things* that we can take

through the grave. And those are the things that we have to have our minds firmly fixed on, as our goal.

Then it says in verse 3 (which is a fairly difficult scripture to translate) "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." The hard word there is *hidden*. What does it mean that our lives are hidden with Christ in God? A lot of commentators believe that this word, hidden, implies security. And it does. That's fine. That's a good way of looking at it, but it's not the whole way of looking at it.

It can even mean secrecy, like something you've hidden in a drawer so that no one will find it. Some people have said that what this means then is that our inner life is hidden from almost anybody in the world. Our growth in character is not seen. And I guess that's a possibility, but I don't think that's what Paul meant.

The real meaning of the Greek word here is covered, as with a blanket; and I think that's the best way of looking at it. Another definition that some have thought it meant is "locked away," and they use this definition to support their eternal security doctrine (which says that, if you've been baptized, your eternal life is locked away with Christ; and it can't be taken away). But that's not what it means. The word is actually *covered*—not actually locked, just covered.

What it suggests, then, is enveloped. That is, totally enwrapped within. And you can see this later on, that this is what it actually means. It means, "contained within." If we add these in there: Your life is contained within Christ. Your life is wrapped up in Christ. Doesn't that make more sense? That's what Paul just finished saying. "*Focus on the things that are with God, in heaven.*" And who is with God in heaven? Jesus Christ, our Savior and High Priest and our Mediator. He's the one that we have to be totally focused on. So we can say that we are *totally wrapped up* in Christ, which is kind of the Greek way that Paul was trying to explain to us here.

And Christ is in God. So we have this tiered system again, that I talked about just a minute ago. We are wrapped up in Christ, and Christ is wrapped up in God. So there is that direct link between us and God the Father again, through Christ. That's our life, which he gets to in the very next sentence.

Verse 4 tells us what verse 3 means. We are "hidden with Christ in God" in verse 3; and [then verse 4] "when Christ who is our life appears." That's basically what he just said in verse 3. Our life is wrapped up in Christ, and Christ is our life. That's how close the affinity is! As a matter of fact, I didn't put this in my notes, but it is an obvious thing to think about—that Christ says that, if we accept Him, then He will come and live *in us*; and God the Father will be *in us*. That's how "wrapped up" in God we have to be—or that we are!

Our lives are totally in Him; and that's what he finally gets to, in verse 11—that *Christ is all in all*. He's EVERYTHING to us. We don't necessarily need anything else. [Some say,] "*All you need is love.*" But, really, all you need is Christ—for all the eternal things that have been promised to us. Paul is saying here, then, "*You guys in Colossae need to get away from this stupid philosophy you've been listening to.*"

Remember that he said, "*Taste not, touch not, handle not*"—that sort of thing. They were getting wrapped up in ideas that were 180 degrees from what Christ had brought. And he

said, "Look, if you want to do what's right, if you want to get your life straightened out, then be totally wrapped up in Christ. Put your mind on things that Christ revealed. Put your mind on things that will have eternal consequence. Put your mind on things that will get you to the Kingdom of God. That will help you to overcome. That will make you like the new man, which is Jesus Christ."

And that's what he gets to. He said, "Part of this process then is putting to death—murdering, killing—the things in your life that are holding you back from being like Christ." And he mentions several of these things. At least four of the commandments are mentioned there. And he goes through and makes a list of these things that we should be *putting off*, that we should be getting rid of.

Then, in verse 10, Paul says to "*put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge.*" What he was telling the Colossians here is that their knowledge was no good. They had to be renewed in knowledge—in the knowledge of Christ, and in the knowledge of things that He had brought that would bring them into the image of the One who created them.

And then from verse 12 to the end of the book, he basically gives them positive instructions of things they need to put on. It talks about putting on holiness, tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, etc., etc., etc. So he gives us first what we need to *put out* (as in the Days of Unleavened Bread type of "putting out") and what we need to *put in* to live lives of holiness—so that we look like Jesus Christ.

Verses 12 through 17 are the character traits that Christ showed in His life. It even says in verse 13, "As Christ forgave you, so you also must do." That shows the correlation between Christ and us. If Christ did it, you do it! That's the formula for being like Him. If Christ did it, you did it.

I don't want to get too far away from the Day of Pentecost. So let's please go back to Leviticus 23. We'll just pick up a couple verses here about the Wavesheaf Offering and a couple on the Day of Pentecost.

Leviticus 23:9-11 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.'"

These are the commands having to do with the Wavesheaf Offering, obviously. This was what begins the count to Pentecost. This is the first day of the count. Now, if we would care to do this... I won't do this today, but it is very easy to go back and look at the events of Jesus' death, and resurrection, and His ascension to heaven and see that what happened in the Wavesheaf Offering is what He fulfilled in basically His resurrection and His ascension.

The way it works out is that the priest, who must wave the sheaf, *cut* the sheaf at basically the same time that Jesus rose from the dead. That is, right at the end of the Sabbath day—as it is

beginning to go into the first day of the week. That's when Jesus rose from the dead. Then they keep that sheaf overnight, and it is waved before God at about nine o'clock in the morning. At least, sometime fairly early or mid-morning—in that area; and that is about the same time that Jesus ascended to heaven.

Remember that Mary Magdalene came up to Him; and He said, "*Don't touch Me. I haven't been accepted by the Father yet.*" So, she had to wait to give Him a hug basically until He had done that and been accepted by the Father. That is *the fulfillment of the Wavesheaf Offering*. Now, let's go to the Feast of Pentecost.

Leviticus 23:15-17 "You shall count to yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. [And that comes out to today.] Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwellings [habitations] two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the first fruits to the LORD."

Now, this is an unusual offering—baked loaves made with leaven, and two of them. Why not just one? There was only one Wavesheaf. Why make two loaves and wave them before God? Well, it is all part of the symbolism of what these two loaves represent. When anything has *leaven* in it, there is the symbolism of *sin*. So what it is showing here in the type of this offering, then, is that it represents something that has sin in it—or, it had sin in it.

What we have figured out, then, is that these wave loaves symbolize the church—and probably split up into an Old Testament church and a New Testament church. I don't know what other kind of "pair of churches" there could be. There was a "congregation in the wilderness"—the congregation of Israel. Some of those people were actually called and qualified (let's say) for the Kingdom. You have to count people like some of the judges, most or all of the prophets, some of the kings, certainly Moses and Aaron, and the patriarchs. They would have to come under that first dispensation, or that particular dispensation before the giving of the Holy Spirit in 31 A.D. or before Christ came.

So, one of them [the two wave loaves] symbolized God's work, let's say, under the old covenant; and the other one would symbolize the fruit of God's work under the new covenant. I don't know exactly how that goes, but that's what it seems to be. There's a definite demarcation between the two time periods, and that's how we've taught it for many years. So these are humans, who had sin and still have sin; but they have, as I used the term before, qualified to be part of *God's first fruits*.

Those [two] loaves could NOT in any way represent Jesus Christ, or Him fulfilling anything. He had already fulfilled the Wavesheaf Offering. He was already *the first fruit*. But there are other first fruits that came at a later harvest, and these are people who had sins and were redeemed from sin, let's say. Jesus Christ was in no way *redeemed from sin* of His own. He had the sins of the world put upon Him, but they were certainly NOT His sins.

I Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

That is, the Wavesheaf Offering. He was *the first fruit of all first fruits*.

I Corinthians 15:21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

Because He *fulfilled perfectly* the Wavesheaf Offering—by dying, by being resurrected, and by ascending to heaven—that opened up the way for others to go through the same process. That is, to die, to be resurrected, and to be *accepted before God* as His sons and daughters.

I Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

So there you have it. The "first Adam" showed us the way to death by sin. The "second Adam" showed us the way to eternal life through the resurrection of the dead.

I Corinthians 15:23 But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

At this point, Paul only takes it so far—at the first resurrection; and there's a reason for it. He's speaking to people who could qualify for that first resurrection—who could be there, who could attain to it! First there was *the first of the first fruits*—Jesus Christ, with the Wavesheaf Offering. And then there are *other first fruits* that come at the harvest, which we memorialize each year in the Day of Pentecost.

Let's go to James 1, and I want you to see here that those who could be in the first resurrection are given this same title.

James 1:17-18 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.

So not only do we get to participate in the same sort of thing that Jesus Christ Himself went through and thus opened for us to do; but, if we do this, we also end up getting one of His titles—*first fruits*! That shows you a further proof of the affinity we are to have with this One, Jesus Christ. Not only are we going to be God's sons and daughters; we are also going to be given the title *first fruits*, just like Jesus Christ has.

As we'll see, we go through the same process that Jesus Christ went through to get that title, to have that honor. And, as you know, what He went through was no picnic. But before we go

through that, let's just jump to Revelation 14 and see some more of this affinity with Jesus Christ. This is talking about the 144,000.

Revelation 14:1 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him [Notice that. With Him, next to Him, around Him...] one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.

This is interesting too. They are *closely aligned* not only with Jesus Christ but the very Father's name is written on their foreheads. That's how close they are to Him as well. Not just the Son, but also the Father.

Revelation 14:2-3 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, like the voice of loud thunder. [I want to comment on THE TWO WITNESSES sermon, but I'll just go on.] And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and [Listen to this.] no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

That means that they are given special privileges—special honors—that no one else is given. And it's interesting that they are called the ones who were "redeemed from the earth." Eventually, everyone is going to be "redeemed from the earth." But this seems to imply that they were redeemed from the earth without God—meaning *the world without God*. They were redeemed in the same circumstance in which Christ overcame and grew. That is, having to face all of the perils, all of the evils, that Christ had to face. So they are worthy of these honors.

I want to go back to the word earth here. In Revelation, the "earth" normally symbolizes *the world apart from God*. When things spring "*out of the earth*," they tend to symbolize either satanic things or human things. I believe the three frogs come "out of the earth" at one point. That sort of thing. But if something comes "*out of heaven*," then they represent godly things, or something sent from God. That's why I meant that this being redeemed "from the earth" implies that they were redeemed from a world still held captive (as Mr. Armstrong put it).

Revelation 14:4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.

That should remind you of Jesus Christ Himself. Not only was He physically a virgin, but He was spiritually a virgin. And these ones have this affinity to Him, this likeness. They will be just like Him in this respect.

Revelation 14:4 These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

Now, this is an honor! The 144,000 are His court—His entourage. They are the ones that get to be right up where everything that's important for all eternity will happen.

Revelation 14:4 They were redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

There you go. They are given, once again, this title of *first fruits*—just like Jesus Christ.

Revelation 14:5 And in their mouth was found no deceit [guile], for they are without fault before the throne of God.

So it's *an amazing reward* for those who are among these 144,000. They are so close to Christ in every way that they get to spend the rest of eternity with Him. They are like "glued together." Do you want to know why? Because they are one Body! They have spent their entire Christian lifetime fulfilling a place in the Body of which He is the Head. So they are already used to going wherever He goes, because that's just the way it is.

That's what they were called to be—a cell in the Body of Jesus Christ. And so *that relationship* will not end just because Christ comes down and begins to rule on the earth (or, whatever He happens to be doing for the rest of all eternity). They will always be His Body. So they, naturally, go wherever He goes. The Head leads and the Body follows.

Let's go to Romans 8 now. This is just added proof of this. Paul is saying this in a slightly different way.

Romans 8:12-13 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body [It sounds very much like Colossians 3.], you will live.

And he means [live] eternally. He doesn't mean that you'll never die in this physical body. What he means is that you won't face the second death. You'll live and have eternal life.

Romans 8:14-15 For as many as are lead by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption [or, sonship] by which we cry out, "Abba, Father."

We have that special place—special honor and privilege—to be able to call God our Father; and therefore we can call Jesus Christ our Elder Brother because we are all motivated by that same Spirit. We all have the same mind.

Romans 8:16 The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are

children of God.

It's a very definite positive statement. The Spirit bears witness—it affirms, it testifies. That means it shows and manifests itself by the way we act, by the way we speak, by the way we think, by the way we interact with one another—that we are God's children.

Romans 8:17 And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Keep that in the back of your mind. We are going to be getting to that ("if indeed we suffer with Him"). That's a very important part of this process. It's a very important part of being a part of the first fruits group. You can't be part of that first fruits group unless you fulfill what's there at the end of verse 17.

Let's go to Galatians 3. Paul has just been telling the Galatians here that IF they are Christ's THEN they are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. [Galatians 3: 29]

Galatians 4:3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

Remember what I said about being redeemed from the earth. As children—meaning as newly converted members of Christ's Body—we were still somewhat in bondage to the elements of the world. We still hadn't shaken off their yoke altogether.

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Paul had been particularly talking about the children of Israel before Christ had come; but it applies the other way as well, in a more personal way. Typically, before our conversion—but also as we grow—we shake off the elements of the world and become more and more *a son of God* by the Spirit of the Father in us.

I Peter 1:3-9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept [guarded, kept secure] by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last

time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love [meaning, you have that attraction for, you have an affinity for]. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

What a wonderful inheritance we have set up in heaven for us—reserved there for us—if we just follow through. God has given us (Peter says) so many things to make sure that this happens. We even can come to the point where we express great joy at trials—because we know that beyond the trial (at the very end) is not only salvation but great reward because we are the sons of God.

Let's go to Revelation 2 and 3 and look at some of these *rewards*. We are going to hop, skip, and jump through the seven churches and just look at their rewards, because they are many things that Jesus Christ Himself received or was given the power to give. It's also interesting, if you go through the greetings in each one of these letters, you'll find Jesus Christ talking about certain attributes of His that seem to apply to each one of these church eras.

Revelation 2:7 "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

It's speaking of eternal life and all of the added things that eternal life gives.

Revelation 2:11 "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

I've always thought this was kind of an interesting one to put at the end of the Smyrna era since they were so faithful. All it says is that they'll be given eternal life. But if we understand what is going on here, each one of these doesn't apply just to that particular era. All of these will be given to those of every era [who overcome].

Revelation 3:17 "To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

It sounds very similar to the song that no one else can sing, no one else knows.

Revelation 2:26-27 "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations [This is definitely something that Jesus Christ has, that we will also be able to

also wield.]—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels—as I also have received from My Father."

There it's as plain as day. *"You're going to have a very similar reward as what I received from My Father."*

Revelation 2:28 "...and I will give him the morning star."

I'm not exactly sure what that means, but that's one of His titles.

Revelation 3:5 "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

Jesus Christ will be there to vouch for us.

Revelation 3:12 "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. [That sounds very similar to following the Lamb, Jesus Christ, wherever He goes.] I will write on him the name of My God [That also sounds like Revelation 14:1.] and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."

So isn't that interesting? Not only do we get all these rewards (the same as Jesus Christ received), but we are going to be called the same thing He is. We don't have just His titles. We'll have His name!

Revelation 3:21 "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

We will rule the universe with Jesus Christ—if we are the first fruits!

Now, notice what He says here (twice in verse 21). He says, *"To him who overcomes..."* And then He says, *"As I also overcame."* And this is where the sermon is heading now. To get the reward—to be part of this—we must *overcome* like He overcame. We have to go along the same steps that He took. You can't have the reward without the experience to deserve that reward.

Let's go to Hebrews 2. In verse 8, Paul had just said that all things will be put in subjection under our feet, but these things haven't quite happened yet. Right now (verse 9) "we see Jesus." He is the hope that we have for this all coming to pass.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels [What does that say? What did He become? A man—lower than the angels.], for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Verse 9 is a synopsis of what Paul goes on to say here.

Hebrews 2:10-11 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain [author] of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one.

Isn't that interesting? Didn't I say we are all His Body? Well, we are all of one kind. There is only one way.

Hebrews 2:11 For which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

If we'd come in thorough the back door, He'd be ashamed to call us His brethren. But since we are all going the one way and doing it the only way that this sort of thing can be produced, then He's very proud to consider us equals—brothers.

Hebrews 2:12-13 Saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly [congregation] I will sing praise to You." And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."

"Look at us—buddies! Here I am with all the rest that You've given me."

Hebrews 2:14-18 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

So God thought it was appropriate—He decided that it was proper—to train a perfect High Priest by making Him experience life as both God and man. He had experienced life as God for untold

eternity. He knew what it was like to be God, to have all the power of the universe at His disposal. But did He really know what it was like to be a creature—a person who had all of these physical attributes, physical failings, and physical limitations? Sure, He could as God kick Satan back to the stone age. But could He stand up to Him as a flesh-and-blood human being?

God would never be tempted by sex. But what if He was a physical man, with the hormones raging? Could He withstand someone like Mary Magdalene (or any other woman, for that matter)? As God, He didn't have to worry about gorging Himself with food. But could He resist food as a man? If someone made Him angry, as God He had the right to take life. But as a man, could He control Himself and wait in faith for God to take care of the problem? He had to learn all these things. He had to learn that the temptations of humanity were different from the other side. He had to learn how hard it is, by being a man.

I am sure that God, in His wisdom, had a pretty good idea; but to make things right—to make things fair—He had to experience these things personally. Then no one could ever come to Him and say, *"Oh, it was a cake walk for Him. He had it easy."* We won't ever be able to say of our Redeemer that He just waltzed through life. We can see in the Bible that He didn't! We can see the temptations. We can see Him getting angry and not sinning. We can see Him feasting and not sinning. We can see Him doing all these things that a normal man would do and not sin.

So, we have a perfect Redeemer. He is now at the right hand of God in heaven. And when we have a problem, we have an Advocate there to mediate between us and God and say, *"Father, I went through something like this while I was there; and I understand just how hard it is to be a man. I know how hard it is, when something like that confronts one, to just ignore it. Let's try it this way."*

Several places in the Bible, it says that He is our Advocate before the Father. He's like our lawyer, up there at God's right hand, saying, *"Well, this is the other side. This is the human side of things."* And by God's grace, He's there to do that for us and to give us help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

And aren't you thankful that He is there, because we are treading the path that He trod 2,000 years ago. We must! We aren't going to have that reward unless we walk the same path. So we can say here that—because He went through all these things, He became the perfect High Priest and was glorified to His present position. Conversely then (let's just turn that around), we can say that we suffer, overcome, and strive *just as He did*. And because of doing that, the firstfruits have this affinity to Christ because their paths have been the same; and they will therefore get the same reward.

Now, the degree of the reward won't be as high. He'll always have more than we do. But we will have this similarity of reward. The difference, basically, is just in the degree; and it's the same in the sufferings. His sufferings were worse than ours will ever be. But we will go through similar things, so that we can have a similar reward.

As we begin to wind down here, we're going to go through an example from Peter and then one from Paul and then another one from Paul where he uses the example of others in the Old Testament. But they are all the same. They all say the same thing.

I Peter 2:20-21 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. [The next verse is the one I really want to get to.] For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

This basically says, "*You were called to suffer like Christ suffered, and therefore to overcome the suffering as Christ overcame.*" That's what this Christian life is all about. We are so different from the world that its logical end is suffering, persecution, problems, and trials. It's just a natural outgrowth of having this whole different way of life from the way the rest of the world lives it. So we must—like Jesus Christ did—react to these problems and take it patiently (as He did).

I Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.

That's what I just got through saying. What's so odd about trials? They are going to happen.

I Peter 4:13-16 But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this manner.

Why? Because this is just in preparation for your glorification and your reward. We should be *happy* that God has given us the opportunity to share in Christ's suffering and therefore reap the same reward. Hard to do, but it is the ideal.

Now back to Philippians 3. You'll recognize this set of scriptures. This is Paul speaking to the Philippians about all that he had as a physical human being—to give him all kinds of advantages—and he says they weren't worth anything compared to what Christ meant to him.

Philippians 3:8-11 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness,

which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

He was *happy* to get rid of all the advantages he had, just so that he could know Christ, know what Christ taught, experience the life of Christ in himself and die (so he could be resurrected in this wonderful resurrection). He was willing to put it all out there—rejoicing, like Peter said—so that he could attain to this resurrection because the reward was just so fascinating! So wonderful!

Let's go to Hebrews 11, and we'll see that this is not a New Testament idea. Paul had just finished talking about all the *heroes of faith*. And he doesn't want to take it any further, because he'd run out of space.

Hebrews 11:32-35 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to fight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, [Why?] that they might obtain a better resurrection.

Our heroes of faith went through all of these terrible things. I think of poor Isaiah being sawn in two, which is mentioned later (in verse 37). Why did he go through that? Why didn't he give in? Because he was looking forward—he was seeing what it meant to stand firm in His beliefs, to be faithful to God. And the reward that he would get would not be just eternal life, but a resurrection with the rest of the saints of just stupendous gain.

They weren't selfish in doing it. This was a freely given thing—by God the Father. But they knew, if they failed in standing up for the godly way of life, that these rewards were going to pass by them. They might, indeed, get eternal life. It says that in I Corinthians 3—that some people may be saved but they won't have anything to show for it. All their works will be burned, because they built with wood, hay, and stubble instead of the more precious things (gold and silver).

But they knew that they would much prefer to be in the first resurrection and have this wonderful reward, and to be forever with their Savior. Maybe, of all the things that we are promised as our reward, that is the most important. Paul mentions, in another place, that when we are finally changed at Christ's return then we will be forever with the Lord. And that was what he was looking forward to. That was the reward that really mattered.

This Day of Pentecost is very important—to make us think every year about our position as first

fruits of God. What does it mean to be a first fruit? It's not a small matter to God, because He has put so much effort into making us turn out just like His original product—Jesus Christ. He wants a whole batch of first fruits that look so much like Jesus Christ that they are one Body. And He will always be able to count on them to be perfect—as His eldest Son, Jesus Christ.

So it is during this time of the year, we should be asking ourselves, "*Are we really qualified as a first fruit?*" Or maybe an easier question to ask is "*How much like Christ am I?*"

I John 2:28-3:2 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. Behold what manner of love the Father had bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.