

In the introduction of the letter to the Colossians, we saw the importance of the fruit of love in a church. It will be a focus for this church for the coming year. Many of you are already doing a wonderful job of expressing it by caring for one another. Most of us need to increasingly die to our selfish use of time and let Jesus serve others through us. (Galatians 6:10) We need to dwell in His presence through His word so that the love of Jesus overflows from our lives into the lives of one another.

We also saw this wonderful prayer that we will be praying for our families and for one another throughout the year. We're praying to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, and to be strengthened with the power of His glory to be patiently victorious in circumstances and relationships. **Victory is God being glorified!** And through it all we pray to be joyful and grateful. We are joyful and grateful because we've been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. We share in the inheritance of the saints.

What a fantastic introduction and prayer! But now Paul continues the opening of the letter with a crescendo! He is going to clearly tell us of the glory of Jesus. Before Jesus was crucified, Jesus asked the Father to glorify Him with the glory He had with the Father before the world existed. (John 17:5) John had a clear understanding that Jesus had ever been with God (John 1:1) and was one with God. (John 10:30) The more you examine the language and the Gospels' inferences to Old Testament passages, the more you come to the conclusion that the Trinity concept is the only answer to the mystery. There are three, but they are one. (for a more complete analysis of the concept, see the upcoming book YHWH – Yeshua)

Let's begin Paul's description from verse 15. ¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God,...* Paul is echoing the very words of Jesus in John 14:9, *"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."* We need some background to understand how radical a declaration this was for the Apostle Paul. He had helped to stone Stephen for just saying Jesus had authority over the Temple and the Law (in other words for saying Jesus is the long awaited Messiah who would deliver from the hedge of the Law). (Acts 22:20; Genesis 38:29) Now, Paul is declaring for himself that Jesus is not only Messiah, but the very image of God Almighty!

How is it possible that Paul came to such a radical shift in his beliefs? He was educated under the leading rabbi of the day. (Acts 22:3) He was considered to be one of the up and coming young scholars. We know from the three reports of his conversion that it was on the road to Damascus that he was confronted by a vision of Jesus, blinded for a time, and commissioned to be an Apostle. (Acts 22:10) But I suspect there was

Commented [Paul1]: Galatians 6:10 (ESV)
¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Commented [Paul2]: John 17:5 (ESV)
⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Commented [Paul3]: John 1:1 (ESV)
¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Commented [Paul4]: John 10:30 (ESV)
³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Commented [Paul5]: Acts 22:20 (ESV)
²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him."

Commented [Paul6]: Genesis 38:29 (ESV)
²⁹ But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore his name was called Perez. (Included because of Rabbinical comments that Messiah would be of the line of Perez and break us out of the hedge of the law.)

Commented [Paul7]: Acts 22:3 (ESV)
³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

Commented [Paul8]: Acts 22:10 (ESV)
¹⁰ And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said to me, "Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do."

something that led up to that fateful day. Long after his conversion, he wrote a letter to a church warning them not to believe any vision of an angel of light that preached anything other than what they had been taught. (Galatians 1:8) Why would he write that if his conversion was based on a vision of Jesus?

Let me speculate for just a moment based on what we know of Paul. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures better than most of today's Bible professors. He probably had much of the Old Testament committed to memory. As he persecuted the church, he would hear the stories of the one they worshiped, Jesus. He heard Stephen remind him that the tabernacle was only shadow and not the substance, and that the prophets predicted the coming of the Righteous One. (Acts 7:49, 52) The Righteous One of the Old Testament is God (Proverbs 21:12; Isaiah 24:16). Isaiah called God the Righteous One, but he also called the Suffering Servant the Righteous One (Isaiah 53:11). There were probably a dozen other passages that stirred in Paul's spirit as doubts about the path he was on troubled his mind. The shining face of the martyrs just reinforced those doubts. When Jesus appeared to Paul and Paul responded, "Who are you Lord?" (Acts 22:8), I think he knew full well who Jesus was. Paul's own standard was that the Word held more importance than any vision. (1Corinthians 4:6)

Then, over the following years in Arabia and Damascus, he must have studied all the passages that had been nagging him to see how they had come to pass in Jesus. (Galatians 1:17-18) Time after time, the Word declared something unique to YHWH that was seen in the life of Jesus.

Let me give you just a couple of examples. Joel 2:32 declared that those who call on the name of YHWH are saved, but Paul saw the followers of Jesus declare that those who call on the name of Jesus were transformed. (Acts 9:14, 21) He knew it was YHWH that sanctifies His people (Exodus 31:13) and yet he could see lives were sanctified by Jesus (Acts 26:18). He knew it was YHWH that walks on the waves of the sea (Job 9:8) but he heard from the disciples that Jesus walked on the waves of Galilee (Matthew 14:25). Over and over again the Scriptures spoke of things that were true of YHWH alone and yet he saw that Jesus had done those very things. There was only one conclusion. Jesus is the image of the invisible God!

The Greek word that Paul used for image (*eikon*) meant a representation of something, like a picture, so in that loose sense you could say Paul only meant Jesus represented God. However, he clarifies that he means more than that in the following verses. If an image was exact enough, it could mean the manifestation of the thing, which is the way Paul is using it here.

Commented [Paul9]: Galatians 1:8 (ESV)
⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

Commented [Paul10]: Acts 7:49 (ESV)
⁴⁹ "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?"

Commented [Paul11]: Acts 7:52 (ESV)
⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,

Commented [Paul12]: Proverbs 21:12 (ESV)
¹² The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked; he throws the wicked down to ruin.

Commented [Paul13]: Isaiah 24:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One. But I say, "I waste away, I waste away. Woe is me! For the traitors have betrayed, with betrayal the traitors have betrayed."

Commented [Paul14]: Isaiah 53:11 (ESV)
¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Commented [Paul15]: Acts 22:8 (ESV)
⁸ And I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting."

Commented [Paul16]: 1 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV)
⁶ I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

Commented [Paul17]: Galatians 1:17-18 (ESV)
¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.
¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

Commented [Paul18]: Joel 2:32 (ESV)
³² And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Commented [Paul19]: Acts 9:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."

Commented [Paul20]: Acts 9:21 (ESV)
²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"

Commented [Paul21]: Exodus 31:13 (ESV)
¹³ "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you ... [1]

Commented [Paul22]: Acts 26:18 (ESV) ... [2]

Commented [Paul23]: Job 9:8 (ESV)
⁸ who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea; ... [3]

Commented [Paul24]: Matthew 14:25 (ESV)
²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ... [4]

Old Testament literature declares Wisdom as being eternally with God. (Proverbs 2:6) The inter-testamental book of Wisdom (7:26) declares wisdom as the image of God. Philo called the Word, *logos*, the image of God. So Paul's use of the word was something both Jews and Greeks could acknowledge as eternally present with God and yet one with God.

Commented [Paul25]: Proverbs 2:6 (ESV)

⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

The average Jewish reader may not have thought that deeply, but they would certainly have thought back to Genesis chapter one, where man was made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27) Paul seems to be saying that Adam was meant to be like Jesus. He failed to achieve the destiny God intended for him because of sin, and so God had to become man to show us what Adam was meant to be. The righteous life of Jesus was what God intended for mankind. **Jesus is not only the perfect image of God, but the image of what God intended for man.** Even more, He is the image of what God will yet achieve in those who call on Him as Lord. (1John 3:2) When we see Him we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. The image distorted by sin will be restored.

Commented [Paul26]: Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Commented [Paul27]: 1 John 3:2 (ESV)

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Even for the Greeks that had no Bible knowledge, the word *eikon* had a rich meaning. When a contract was drawn up, there was a description of the two parties involved so there would be no mistake. Distinguishing characteristics of each person were mentioned. In that sense of the word *eikon*, Jesus has the distinguishing characteristics of God. What makes God unique is seen in Jesus. Paul goes on to say in verse 19 that all the fullness of God is seen in Jesus. It's not just the main characteristics, it's everything about Jesus. If you want to understand God, to visualize God, look at Jesus. In answer to the Gnostic suggestions that Jesus was simply a man with higher wisdom than other men, Paul was declaring Jesus to be wisdom Himself, the very image of God.

Commented [Paul28]: Colossians 1:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

Understanding this truth means that we must interpret the manifestations of God in the Old Testament as pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus. He is the person of the Trinity that appears to man. The Father and the Spirit are unseen. (For more on this see *Jesus Concealed in the Old Testament*) Interpreting the Old Testament in this manner means that Jesus is just continuing the work He always had, revealing the Father in a way that man can relate. From walking with man in the Garden (Genesis 3:8), to warning of the judgment on Sodom (Genesis 18:1), to wrestling with Jacob (Genesis 32:24), to giving plans for battle to Joshua (Joshua 5:13), the One that appeared was the *eikon* of the invisible God. The entire book is about Jesus!

Commented [Paul29]: Genesis 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Commented [Paul30]: Genesis 18:1 (ESV)

¹ And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.

Commented [Paul31]: Genesis 18:1 (ESV)

¹ And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.

Commented [Paul32]: Joshua 5:13 (ESV)

¹³ When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"

Next, Paul pointed to Jesus' relationship to creation. He is *the firstborn of all creation*. That does not mean that He was the first thing created as the Jehovah's Witness believe. The context shows that interpretation to be incorrect. Firstborn is a position or rank of importance within a family. The firstborn was the main heir. It was used as a

title of honor. God called the nation of Israel His firstborn son. (Exodus 4:22) That does not mean Israel was the first people of God chronologically but positionally.

Commented [Paul33]: Exodus 4:22 (ESV)

²² Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son.'

Jews used it as a Messianic title, pointing to Psalm 89:27, ²⁷ *And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.* This has nothing to do with time, but rather of importance. Paul is saying that in all of creation Jesus holds the highest position. In fact, Paul may have had that verse in mind when he wrote this. It may have been one of those verses Paul wrestled with while in Arabia. In the previous verse of that Psalm it predicted the Messiah would cry out to God, *"You are my Father."* "Father" was one of Jesus' most common expressions when praying to God, a term that was highly uncommon in that day.

Paul goes on to say that not only is Jesus the very image of God, the Supreme Being over creation, but He is in fact the Creator of all things. ¹⁶ *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.* The false teachers presented a hierarchy of intermediary angels between man and God, beings which must be appeased by our actions before we could reach God. Those false teachers would put Jesus in amongst these as another intermediary. Paul bypasses all that and declares that Jesus is the Creator of all of things visible and invisible. (1Corinthians 8:6) If there are angel hierarchies He is not among them, He is over them as Creator. They were created to serve Him!

Commented [Paul34]: 1 Corinthians 8:6 (ESV)

⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

He created everything out of nothing. God spoke and it was. Jesus is that Word, one with God. Think of it. We are still discovering new life forms at the bottom of the ocean floor that are unlike anything we have seen, forms that do not require oxygen but thrive on other chemicals. We are still cataloging the creatures of the sea. 800,000 insect species have been identified and new ones are still being discovered. There is the fascinating microbiological world and the grand cosmos with black holes and supernovas of which we know so little. He made it all.

Think of how He designed a blueprint, DNA, which He could reorder so as to come up with the amazing variety we see in the earth. But He made more. He made an unseen world of angelic beings as well. We know almost nothing of that!

I understand the verse to say that Jesus planned every authority and every ruler that would exist in every realm. He planned it all and is carrying it out in spite of the will of man. He is the final authority for all things were created through Him and for Him. (Revelation 4:11)

Commented [Paul35]: Revelation 4:11 (ESV)

¹¹ "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Instead of beginning the letter to the Colossians by demeaning the false teachers, Paul began by declaring Jesus, Jesus in His glory, Jesus in His rightful title. He was following the very command of Jesus, *"If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me."* (John 12:32) Of course Jesus was speaking of the cross, but the same effect happens when we just tell people of how wonderful is the Lord we serve. When people get a glimpse of the real Jesus, nothing else comes close.

I'm so glad He is the image of God. That tells me God is most patient and understanding, for Jesus was. It tells me that God hates the abuse of power and the corruption of power for personal gain, for Jesus did. It tells me God does not esteem people because of their position in life or their wealth, for Jesus did not. It tells me God loves us more than we can imagine, for Jesus, the image of God, went to the cross for you and me.

And He is firstborn, King of kings and Lord of lords. Satan doesn't stand a chance. His days are numbered, and so are the days of all those who refuse to bow to the loving goodness of God. Nothing can stand against Jesus for all things were created for Him. All rebellion will one day cease. This is the glorious Jesus we need to share with others.

¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is preeminent. If for a moment Jesus ceased to be, all things would cease to be. Everything is held together by Him, electrons in their orbits and planets, moons and galaxies in theirs. Incomprehensible, but He does it all! Jesus! What a name!

Let me close with a parallel passage, probably by a different author, but one that said the very same things we just read in these short three verses. Hebrews 1:1-3 (NIV) *¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

This is Jesus! He is our glorious Savior. He is the radiance of God's glory. He's the exact representation of His being. He holds all things together by His powerful word. I hope you've asked Him to be your Savior, God, and King, because there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

Questions

- 1 Have you been praying the prayer?
- 2 Did Jesus ever say what Paul claimed in verse 15?

Commented [Paul36]: John 12:32 (ESV)

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Commented [Paul37]: Acts 4:12 (ESV)

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

- 3 Why is this a radical thing for Paul to say?
- 4 How would Paul come to such a conclusion? Give example passages.
- 5 What did *eikon* mean to the Greek?
- 6 How was it used on documents?
- 7 What would it say to the Jews?
- 8 What are the implications to the Old Testament?
- 9 What does "firstborn" mean? Psalm 89:27
- 10 Why do things exist?
- 11 What do we know of God when we look at Jesus?
- 12 Compare the passage with Hebrews 1:1-3

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Exodus 31:13 (ESV)

¹³ “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.’

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Acts 26:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

Page 2: [3] Commented [Paul23] Paul 1/16/2011 8:05:00 PM

Job 9:8 (ESV)

⁸ who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea;

Page 2: [4] Commented [Paul24] Paul 1/16/2011 8:05:00 PM

Matthew 14:25 (ESV)

²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.