



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Colossians 1:15-20

John Bunyan Conference, Lecture XVI

TRANSCRIPT

[Introduction of Dr. Johnson] I'm somewhat at a loss. I'm not sure how to introduce a patriarch. [Laughter] I have enjoyed all of the appreciative comments about Dr. Johnson and his ministry this week. I was talking to someone last evening and I said, "If when I am eight-five years old I can preach half that well and if I'm half that good of guy, I'll get proud about it and ruin it." [Laughter] But it is great to have a role model like that and especially for a conference patriarch. So, patriarch, would you come please. Preach for us again. [Laughter]

[Johnson Lecture] It's been a pleasure to be here. And my manager and I [Laughter], translated, Martha and I, have both been real happy to be here. We enjoy the country. It's nice to come to Pennsylvania. And so, we have had a good time. We appreciate very much the attention and the times of fellowship that we've had with many of you in the days that we've been here. And in the days in which lying shortly ahead, which I won't be able to do any preaching at all, if possible, we'd like to come to this conference and enjoy that.

I'd like for you to turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1, verse 15 through verse 20. And I want to read it and then give you some of my thoughts on the text which

could be called “Christ Preeminent,” or it could be called “Christ the Lord in Creation and Redemption” because it’s one of the greatest of the apostle’s sections. No man could ever do it justice. And in one sense that’s good because when you finish and you’ve failed to do it justice you can say, “Well no one could do justice to that great passage.” So, verse 15 of Colossians chapter 1, the apostle writes after his prayer. He says,

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation; 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: And he is before all things, and in him all things consist. 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. For it pleased the Father that in him all the fulness should dwell; And by him to reconcile all things to himself, by him whether things on earth or things on heaven, having made peace through the blood of his cross.”

Let’s bow for just a moment again.

[Prayer] We thank Thee Lord for this magnificent paragraph by the great apostle concerning the great savior, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Enable us each to understand and enable us also to respond in a way that will honor the name of our great triune God in our daily lives. We ask Thy blessing upon the remainder of our conference as well. We give Thee thanks for the blessings of life through Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of our sins, for a savior who constantly walks and lives with us and who is gradually bringing us into the marvelous experience of the presence of the triune God, the apostles, the whole church of Jesus Christ and the great company of the redeemed down through the centuries since Adam and Eve walked in the Garden of Eden. We ask Thy blessing upon us now. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] This is, as we all will know probably in this room, one of the apostle's greatest messages concerning our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Setting it in some kind of context we might think of the evening on the Sea of Galilee when a weary Jesus Christ said to his men, “Let's cross over to the other side.” But as they were making their way across the sea, there arose a lashing storm churning the sea into wet fury and as a result, of course, the experience described in Mark chapter 4 took place.

The line of Colossians 1:15 in which the apostle writes, “He is the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,” introduces the section in Colossians that we have read that is called by biblical scholars “The Great Christology.” It's the apostle's answer to the Colossian heresy of Gnostic Judaism, the source of a great deal of learned investigation that, of course, still continues because in biblical history and in biblical studies these things do not ever seem to come to a final conclusion.

Paul's defense here is a defense of our Lord Jesus Christ and especially of what we might call his lordship, the lordship of Jesus Christ. And it's clear from what Paul says here that when we talk about the lordship of Jesus Christ we are talking about his lordship over the universe by virtue of who he is and over the church by virtue of what he has done. Later he will say that Christ is all and in all and that would comprehend all of that.

But let's take a look at it very simply in verse 15 he begins by saying that “Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Someone has called this the hymn of the Beloved Son. And whether we could call it a hymn or not scholars can do that and perhaps there's some justification for it. It's certainly a great passage and it certainly seems to have a special kind of sense which marks this out from the other things that the apostle writes. But at any rate, it's about the Beloved Son. It's about our Lord Jesus Christ. And he begins by comments concerning the essential basis of his lordship. He says, “He is the image of the invisible God.” He is the unique, the

perfect likeness and manifestation of God. In other words, he's the great and final theophany. If we want an appearance of God and an appearance that will enable us to understand the God that we believe exists and has existed from eternity, Jesus Christ is the perfect likeness and manifestation of that God. He is God's great and final theophany. “He's the image of the invisible God.”

You'll remember in John chapter 14, verses 9 and 10 the Apostle John says some things in a different context, which essentially make the same message. Philip asked the Lord one day, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” And Jesus answered him and said, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? he who has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, Show us the Father?” He is the great final theophany.

Other passages in the New Testament say essentially the same thing, not quite so clearly as perhaps that one. But in Luke chapter 8, verse 38 and verse 39 we have something similar in connection with the maniac of Gadara. In verse 38 Luke says in Luke chapter 8, “Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged him that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away. Return to your own home, and tell what great things God has done for you.”

Now, this man was no theologian. But notice what is stated concerning it. “He went his way, and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.” There's no contradiction. The things that God had done for him are the things that Jesus has done for him. If we had nothing but this, we would know that there is a claim being made in Scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. He is God, the Son.

Now, he also says, the apostle, after saying “The image of the invisible God, he's the firstborn over the whole creation.” Firstborn's not an easy term. A lot of discussion has raised around it. But I'm just going to bypass that because it wouldn't be really fruitful for us to go through all of the difficulties with reference to the term and not come to a certain solution. I always feel that that's not really the happiest thing to do with a

crowd of people when you don't have the opportunity to discuss all the facts about it. But, at any rate, “He is the firstborn over all creation.” And whatever that term means, it includes this and pretty general agreement on the point, that he is prior to and supreme over creation.

If you want to look further, look at Psalm 89 and verse 27. The fathers spoke of him as *prototokos*, which means first created. So, the essential truth of it is that he is the Lord, the context, the saving experience that others have in his presence confirm the fact that he is the firstborn over all creation.

Athanasius has some things to say about that. I'm not sure I can turn to them as quickly as perhaps I ought to. But here are some of the things that have been said. Yes, here it is. He says against the Arrian appeal in Proverbs 8:22, Athanasius drew attention to the meaning of the title firstborn in the light of Colossians 1:16 and added, “But if all the creatures were created in him, he is other than the creatures. And he is not a creature, but he is the creator of the creatures.” The fathers had a happy way of wrestling with these questions and after a lengthy period of discussion and debate come up with some words that have resounded down through the centuries. I imagine if Athanasius had been told, “Why, your words will be repeated by professors of New Testament theology and so forth, down through the centuries,” he would have been surprised. And nevertheless, that is what has happened. He is the Lord and the economic basis of it is set forth there.

The proof of his lordship is found in two great works. In verse 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.” So, he is the creator of all things. He is the architect of the universe. He is the builder of the universe constrained before the indescribable majesty of the eternal Christ we are justified in saying, “How great Thou art. Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee: How great Thou art, how great Thou art.”

“Firstborn over all creation. Creator of all things visible and invisible, whether thrones, dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things have been created through him, and for him.” And not only that, but we read, “He is before all things, and all things consist in him.” That word consist is a word that really means something like hold together. So, he is the principal of – what shall I say – he is the principal of – not sustenance – I’ll just say he’s the sustainer of the universe as well. The principle of cohesion is found in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He’s the creator. He’s the sustainer. All things hold together in him. Continuing sovereignty over all cosmic powers by this preexistent sustainer of the universe. “Before Abraham came to be, I am.” What a statement that is. So, all things hold together. I like that expression, “All things hold together in him. All things consist in him.” Sunesteken is the Greek word.

We have an expression that we use constantly. We talk about dolls that are broken and they become unglued. Furniture becomes unglued and wife calls for husband to repair the damage. We even say, “He became unglued,” or more commonly, “She became unglued.” [Laughter] I thought that would wake up a few of you. [Laughter] But we use it with reference to people. “They became unglued.” Furniture becomes unglued. People become unglued. Well, all things hold together in him. There is no need to push the panic button. He’s the one in whom divine breath flows.

The amazing wonder of the incarnation that holy Scripture sets forth is startling. “All things hold together in him.” The God of Genesis 1 is the babe of Matthew 1. Isn't that astonishing? “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?” That person is the same one of whom the apostle said, “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” The one of whom we read, “But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king” is the same one pictured in Scripture in the words, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. And Jesus wept.” “After

that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.” This is the Lord who is the true King, the living God and an everlasting King. “And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.” This is the same person of whom we read, “But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith there came out blood and water.” He who warned the ancient Israel, “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb” says at length to his own son, “Behold my hands and feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see.” What a magnificent thing it is to think about the way in which Scripture speaks about the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now in verse 16 and verse 17 we have two great works that are explicitly written by the apostle in proof of just who he is. Verse 16, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth.” And then he adds at the end of the verse, “All things were created through him, and for him.” So all things – to put it very literally – all things were created in him. That is, he is really the divisor of the creation. All things have been created in him. But at the same time what was in him ultimately was manifested and the apostle says, “All things were created through him.” In him and through him. He is the architect of the universe. He doesn't wait for the father to build the universe and then he begins his work. He's the architect. And he also is the builder. He is the one in whom all things were created. He is the one through whom all things were created. And it's all put in one little statement by the apostle. “For by him all things were created.” And then at the conclusion of the verse, “All things were created through him, and for him.” So, creator of the universe. Sustainer of the universe. The amazing wonder of the creation and then this one incarnate.

In verse 18 we read, “And he.” Incidentally, that is set in a slightly emphatic way so that we're justified in saying if we wish, “And he, and no other is the head of the body,

the church.” “He and no other.” So, from cosmological to soteriological perspective, the apostle turns, “He is the head of the body.”

Incidentally, in the New Testament – I’m leaving town soon, so I just want to remind you that here it says, “He is the head of the body.” And the Bible also says that the husband is the head of the wife. Same term. That’s startling, isn’t it? I have to think about that. Martha has already thought a lot about it. But I have to think about it. [Laughter] She doesn’t object, at least around the head. [Laughter] He is the head of the body and the husband is the head of the wife. That has a great deal to say ultimately with the debates that have been going on over the sexes and the relationships one with another. So, here we read that. In verse 18. “He is the head of the body, the church.” The apostle moving now from the cosmological to the soteriological. The head is inseparable from the church, but not yet the church himself. The head is not in Rome. The head is in heaven. We need no Giovanni Battista Montini or Karol Wojtyla to be up to date. We don’t worship Peter’s bones in Rome. No need to do that. Our savior has been resurrected and is in heaven. “He is the head of the body, the church.” I would say that that is an expression of the lordship of Jesus Christ very simply. And then to go on to justify it a bit, the apostle says, “He’s the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” This is the reason he’s sovereign. He’s the first to break the hold of death. And therefore he is in all things the preeminent one. The reason that he’s sovereign is because also of what he has accomplished.

Now, in verse 18 he says at the end of the verse, “That in all things he may have the preeminence,” and literally the text says that in all things he may become preeminent. In other words, he starts out with all of these other things, but the goal is for them all to express the idea of the complete preeminence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



In Matthew chapter 17 we have a very important passage. I'm sure that you remember it has to do with our Lord in one of his most significant appearances, the transfiguration. Matthew writes in Matthew 17, verse 1,

“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them, and suddenly a voice out of the cloud saying, ‘This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased; hear Him!’”

I cannot help but think that Peter is purposely interrupted. It's as if the Lord was saying to him, “That's enough Peter. Shut up. [Laughter] You are in the presence of the head.” So, while he was still speaking. I don't know what Peter intends. Maybe he had three points he wanted to give. [Laughter] But, at any rate, he didn't get a chance to give his points. “While he was still speaking, the bright cloud overshadowed them and the voice came out, ‘This is My Beloved Son, hear Him!’ Pay attention to him.”

So, the head of the church. “Hear Him.” So, Peter, you be muzzled. The father is jealous of the glory of the son looked at from a human standpoint. I don't have any statement that says the father is jealous of the glory of the son, but that certainly might be an explanation of this, that Peter is interrupted and the voice from heaven announces in a new way the glory of the son.

I think of those expressions in the Old Testament. There is an interesting incident in the life of Joshua in Joshua chapter 5, verse 13 through verse 15. And I'd like to read

the verses for you, which illustrates also something of the same point. In verse 10 of Joshua 5 we read,

“Now the children of Israel camped at Gilgal and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at the twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land, and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year. And it came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man stood opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went up to him and said to him, ‘Are you for us or for our adversaries?’ And he said, ‘No.’”

Have you thought about that? “Are you for us or are you for our enemies here?” “No.” [Laughter] Well, we would say, “What’d he mean by that? No.” “Which one are you not for?” “No.” [Laughter] Well, “I’m no-ing everything you’ve said. I’m not for you. I’m not for your adversaries. I’m something different.” So, he said, “No. As commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” So, “Are you for us or our adversaries?” “No.” “I’m taking over Joshua.” “Joshua recognized what had happened, falls upon his face, worships him and says, ‘What does my lord to say to his servant?’ Then the commander of the Lord’s army (Isn’t that interesting? Are you for us or for our adversaries? And now, he’s called the commander of the Lord’s army) said to Joshua, ‘Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.’ And Joshua did so.” No let down there. Joshua did so. This is the Lord of the new creation, the head of the church. What we learn, of course, is that preparation, ordination are not the source of the fruitful ministry for the Lord. Subordination is necessary. And Joshua kneels before our Lord in subordination.

Now, back to Colossians in verse 19 and verse 20 the apostle writes, “For it pleased the Father that in him all the fulness should dwell.” “He is the head of the body, the church: he is the beginning, he’s the firstborn from the dead; in order that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father.” It is the delight of the Father in heaven to grant the Son the fulness, all the fulness, that is his in the presence of his earthly ministry.

Two problems make verse 19 a bit uncertain. “For it pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell.” The subject. The NASB has it, “It was the Father's good pleasure.” The NIV has “God was pleased.” There’s a little bit of a question about what is all the fulness. And I can only with other interpreters suggest the interpretations offered the one that I especially feel is a little bit better than the others. What is the meaning of all the fulness? Well, I think in the light of chapter 2 and verse 9 that all the fulness is the official fulness of the Son of God. That is, that all saving power and grace rest in him. That he is the covenantal head of the people of God. All fulness dwells in him. This is the ground of his primacy in redemption. That in him all fulness of saving power in grace resides in him. In verse 19 he says, “If it pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell.” And it’s specifically in him. That is, in his person. There’re no hierarchy of mediators between God and men.

The heretics have often sought to set up a series of mediators. But there is no series of mediators. By resurrection there’s only one saving mediator. And that mediator is our Lord Jesus Christ. “It pleased the Father that in him all the fulness should dwell.” And all of the fulness incomprehends also what is stated in verse 20 where his work is referred to. “And by him to reconcile all things to himself; by him, whether things on earth, or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of his cross.”

The universe disturbed since the fall is now returned to its divinely created and divinely determined order in our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, to put it simply, the universe is now under a one man – in fact, we could say, one God-man headship.

Everything under him through the cross. The peace that he has accomplished includes that.

So, you couldn't, it seems to me, set forth the preeminence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in redemption in any clearer way than the apostle has done here.

“It pleased the Father that in him all the fulness should dwell; And by him to reconcile all things to himself; by him (Not by him and the church, not by him and by churchly authorities having control and supervision over the blessings that he provides). But by him to reconcile all things to himself; whether things in heaven, things on earth, he has made peace through the blood of his cross.”

The universe today exists under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ. And men, you who preach the gospel, there is no way whatsoever for you ever to indicate or suggest that that is not true. Everything rests under the sovereign Lord of the universe who came into our midst, accomplished a mediatorial work, has ascended to the right hand of the father by the power of the triune God and father especially and sits there as the sovereign over the universe.

We pass through the age of Clinton. [Laughter] Isn't that great? [Laughter] George Bush is George Bush. But we dwell and live under Jesus Christ. [Amen from audience]. He is the head of this universe. And we could never serve our country better than to serve it under our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If all questions were related to him, what a great country this would be.

Well, he is sovereign, sovereign in his person. There are no other mediators. One saving mediator. But also in his work. In verse 20, “By him to reconcile all things to himself; whether things on earth, or things in heaven, he's made peace through the blood of his cross.” The universe has been disturbed since the time of the fall. But when our Lord came and accomplished his work, ideally the universe was returned to its divinely

created and determined order. The universe is under its head and we shall ultimately see the marvelous results of the head of the universe and his work which will be accomplished finally from heaven itself. So, what a glorious future the universe has.

Well, the apostle then in this text unites with Peter and others affirming that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. I cannot help but think of those words “Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all.”

There is another question. It’s an urgent question and it’s this. Will the new creation respond to its head as the old to its creator? Mark chapter 4 and verse 41 Mark writes, “And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, who can this be, even wind and sea obey him?” Preeminent and all things.

But now – just a few moments let me ask you a personal question, particularly you preachers. Can we really say he is preeminent in me? He is preeminent in all things. Is he preeminent in me? Put it another way. Is he preeminent in my ministry? In the ministry of the word of God is the preeminent thing. The ministry as set forth in the Scriptures, the word of God. Is that the preeminent thing? Or is it my church? Is it my board of elders? Well, you’re Baptists, so you don’t have elders or board of elders. You’re an elder. Okay. What about your deacons? No one can control deacons. [Laughter] Well, yes there is one who can. Those who are deacons, are you also controlled by the one who is the controller of deacons, elders, men and women, the sovereign Lord of this universe. Is he sovereign in me, as well as in all things?

There was a great French preacher by the name of Theodore Monod. And there’s an old story about him which is told and you may have heard it because it’s been told over and over again. But Mr. Monod was in a meeting and he mentioned this particular story as one that had happened in his experience. He said, “A man was passing out of the hall and he saw someone in front of him drop a piece of paper and he picked it up and discovered that it was a five pound note. He hesitated the moment on how he should deal with it and then says to himself, ‘I’ll give the man who dropped it a pound

and I'll keep four for myself.' But then his conscious began to disturb him a bit. And he resumed his thought and he said, 'I'll give him four and I'll only keep one pound.' And conscious objected again and insisted on more than this and at last with a sigh the finder says, 'Then I'll do a great grand thing. I'll consecrate the whole five pounds to the man who lost it.'" But anyone who heard his thoughts, of course, would say, "It wasn't a very grand thing after all. It was a mere matter of common honesty. He lost the five pound note. You found it. Give him the five pound note." "In truth, personal consecration," Mr. Monod said, "extended or was reduced to the same element." It's just a matter of basic honesty.

If we belong to him, doesn't he have all of us? Isn't that common honesty? We found ourselves to be the ransom, purchased possession of the triune God in heaven. We belong to them? The father as the motivator and instigator of the work of the Son our Lord Jesus Christ and the spirit as the third of the Trinity who has by a mighty power invested in him brought us to the knowledge of the one who gave himself for me in my sin. Do I not owe him total obedience and submission and surrender to what he says to us in the word of God? I do. Of course I do. So, we get down on our knees by the side of our beds and we ask the Lord God to produce another miracle, to bring us into submission to his will. This great one of whom the apostle has written here.

The Heidelberg catechism is not my catechism, but it's a good catechism. Question fifty-nine says, "But what doth it help thee now that thou believest all this?" "What doth it help thee now that thou believest all this?" And so, I'm going to turn it to a question asked of you and also of me. What does it help now that thou (and I) believest this? Well, we're faced again, are we not, with the fundamental question of our life as servants of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, ministers if it were or whatever task we are called to, to give him the control that is his by right and which he desires and enjoy the wonderful grace of God that is the life that is in our Lord Jesus Christ. May God enable us by his grace to respond properly to him.

“Who is (as Paul says) the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, the creator and sustainer of the universe. The one who was before and is before all things in whom all things hold together the head of the body the church: the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, the preeminent one.”

May the Lord enable us to respond properly. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the words that the apostle has spoken because they present to us so plainly to each of us, to me, to these who are here in this meeting, the real issue of our lives, whether young or old, our relationship to Jesus Christ. Is it submission or is there struggle? Enable us, Lord, to truly submit and to truly experience as fully as we possibly can the glorious ministry of our great head in our lives. We pray for each one to that end. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Introducer of Dr. Johnson] I certainly can say it again God's word has been preached. God has been honored. And if we ever get to the point where we aren't moved, hearing Christ exalted like that. God help us. We have a few minutes for discussion if you have questions related to this passage, related to this subject, and Brother Barker, we're going to hold it to the subject. If you have any questions, please come to the microphone and Dr. Johnson will take the questions. Yes. Dr. Johnson, you ought to come back up. You need help up? [Laughter]

[Johnson] You speak about my age in introducing me and then you ask me to come back and forth [indistinct]. [Laughter]

[Question from the audience] I just wonder what needs reconciling in heaven.

What needs reconciling in heaven?

[Johnson] What is reconciling – what?

[Question from the same audience member] What is being reconciled in heaven in the 20th verse? “All things reconciled on earth or in heaven.”

[Johnson] How’d you think of a question like that? [Laughter] You ask a question like that and then you flee. [Laughter] Which verse was it specifically?

[Comment from the same audience member] Verse 20.

[Johnson] Is it possible to say I don’t know? [Laughter]

[Comment from an audience member] That’s a legitimate answer.

[Johnson] Well, I say it. [Laughter] No, I would have to take a little look at it and I honestly on the spur of the moment I don’t know specifically something that might include that or the sense in which it is used because he says, “And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”

Now, there were things in heaven that were to be reconciled. And that, of course, was – we say at least in a broad sense perhaps – of the evil angels and the warfare that has been going on in the heavenly places. And so, in that sense there may be a reference to that. But to go back to my first answer, I don’t know. That would be my suggestion that it might have some relationship to the warfare that originally began between the Lord and the evil angels and that it may have something to do with that.



[Question from the audience] Could this be a statement of the like we find often in the Scriptures of the restoration of the entire created order as a result of the work of Christ?

[Johnson] Well, yes, of course. That’s ultimately involved in this passage. So, that’s possible.

[Comment from an audience member] So what else? We need your questions.

[Johnson] That does not bode well for the answers to the remaining questions, does it? [Laughter] Anyone else?

[Comment from an audience member] Yes, we have one coming. Somebody had a question.

[Comment from an audience member] I’d like to say praise the Lord for honest men, trustworthy. [Laughter]

[Johnson] What did he say?

[Response from audience member] Thanking you for your honesty. [Laughter]

[Johnson] Well, I can at least say if no other question is asked that when I finished my message there was only one question. [Laughter] Usually, when I listened to people I have more than one question after they – so okay. Anything else? Yeah, there’s one fellow that – we perked him up.

[Question from the audience] How does headship preeminence relate to kingship and thus if it does relate to – and I’m presuming it does, you can correct me if I’m going too far – if it does relate to kingship, is it an active kingship or is it a passive kingship because there’s a big debate about that, of what role is Christ taking today.

[Johnson] Well, I can only, again, give you some ideas that float around in my head. I would say that there is a sense in which the kingship is active if you are talking about the problems of forces that are still in opposition to one another in heaven. There are still evil angels. There is still Satan. There’re ways by which there – the warfare is still going on, to put it that way. So, obviously that’s something that may involve a whole lot more than I’m acquainted with. But anything else specifically?

[Comment from the same audience member] Certainly, the dispensational discussion relates to that question. Thinking of one writer who dies trying to argue that though Jesus may be king today, he’s king in a passive sense because he’s sitting at the right hand of the Father and the sitting idea as a passive idea, not an active idea.

[Johnson] Well, that’s over my head. [Laughter]

[Question from the audience] I have one for Dr. Hagen. Get you off the hook for a minute. He is the greatest. Can you come up here? Yeah, please. Listening to him this morning you get the impression déjà vu, you know. We’ve been down here, heard all of this, done all of this, and the same old garbage back in the 2nd century is the same old garbage in the 20th century. And the question I have for him was is Gnosticism as he was talking about it really being expressed today all over in full blown preterism? And that’s for Dr. Hagen. He’s going to answer. You can answer it too if you want to.

[Johnson] No, I won't. [Laughter]

[Response from audience member] Fred asked me right after my session and my initial response was no. I don't think there's a link. But as I was thinking about it, I think there is a link of full blown preterism. If it denies the resurrection of the body – I'm not sure it does. I'm not as familiar with full blown preterism as I probably should be. That it's very similar to Gnosticism because Gnosticism does deny the resurrection of the body. And so there would be some elements of eschatology in full blown preterism that would be very similar to Gnostic eschatology. Basically put, Gnostic eschatology is completely realized. Every thing has been accomplished. It's all done. There is nothing down the road as it were; it is all being completely and fully realized. In the tension in the New Testament between the now and the not yet, Gnostic eschatology it is all completely now. There is no not yet to await something down the road. If I understand preterism, broadly speaking, it has a similar perspective. Every thing has been accomplished. There is nothing to come. And in that sense, it would be similar to Gnostic eschatology. Is there an organic link? I would say probably not. But it is certainly similar in intent.

[Johnson] If every thing has already been accomplished and all done, then we are left with a rather dismal view of the future. Aren't we? [Laughter]

[Question from an audience member] A simple question. Just in my New King James -

[Johnson] You're rejected if it's only a simple question. [Laughter] Part of this is to humiliate the speaker you know? [Laughter]

[Comment and question from the same audience member] We would never think that. In Matthew 17 where you had us reading. In the New King James it reads after “Peter beholds, Moses and Elijah appearing to them talking with Jesus,” it says in the New King James then Peter answered and the word answered in this translation, of course, it’s not the same in all translations why the word answer why would a translator choose a word like answered in verse 4 of – Matthew 17, verse 4. “Then Peter answered.” Is he replying because of what he’s saying? What’s really going on here?

[Johnson] Matthew 17?

[Comment from the same audience member] 17, verse 4. The New King James reads, “Then Peter answered.”

[Johnson] That’s exactly what the Greek text says.

[Comment from the same audience member] Huh. [Laughter]

[Johnson] It’s an aorist passive participle about the *krino*. So, that’s it. And Peter having answered said – or in answering said since we have an aorist that follows. So that would be the force of it.

[Comment from the same audience member] But he’s replying to every thing [indistinct].

[Johnson] He was probably trying to make it suitable for English hearers [Laughter] and not – you know, sometimes if you translate the Greek text it’s very awkward in English translated literally. And so, it’s legitimate for a translator to smooth

out some of the distinctions between the Greek language and English, providing it's still true to the sense and that may be something that was in the translator's mind. But [Greek indistinct] is the participle for [Greek indistinct] that means to answer. So, having answered he said, or answering he said.

[Response from the same audience member] Thank you.

[Question from the audience] You eluded to the word in this passage kephale the head and then made some comments in regard to how that works out in human sexuality between men and women. That, of course, is a great battleground today that each of the key words are being redefined. How in a pastoral setting do you take a word like that with the, you know, century long understanding of what it meant. There've been essentially no question as to what it meant and now in the last twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years there's been all kinds of work to reverse that to take away the sense of any kind of leadership and authority and so forth. How do – in a pastoral context where not every one has the interpretation, the resources to look at what's been said and they hear on the radio somebody who is a scholar that's done this and that and kephale really doesn't mean headship, it really means indeed something else. How do you approach that?

[Johnson] Well, I just translate it by what it means, head. [Laughter] And if individuals object to it, I want to see the proof. And usually there are some ways in which people can come up with opposing viewpoints that are worthy of consideration. But in the final analysis it comes down to just exactly what does the text that we have mean. And kephale does mean head. And it's the same term that is used in connection with the husband and the wife. So, I – it is not my responsibility, I do not believe, from an exogetical and hermeneutical standpoint to explain his view. His responsibility is to try to handle the text. If the text says he is the head of the body, then it's his

responsibility. Show me that head doesn't mean head as it normally does. Sometimes you can do things like that. There are, of course, in language all kinds of ways by which situations arise in which you might actually be able to give a better explanation of what appears to be the plain truth. But I would think that in this particular case it's very simple. Christ is the head of the church; the husband is the head of the wife.

Now, that's – you would want to modify that to this extent and say the church relationship of husband and wife is not the same thing as the divine headship within the divine family, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That's not the same relationship. He's the head of the church. He the second person of the Trinity is the head of the church. That's a church relationship. This is a personal relationship. The husband is the head of the wife. But there would have to be some reasons why in the one case one should understand head in some different way. And it's simplest, it seems to me.

[Question from the same audience member] In the word head, does that always contain the idea of authority and submission? Because that's the point of issue that [indistinct] use. It doesn't necessarily mean [indistinct].

[Johnson] Now, you know as well as I know that that is not always true. In English, for example, head. What about a river? A river is often said to have its head in a place, its beginning.

Now, there are other meanings of the term head. But in connection with Scripture it seems to be rather close if the father and the son and the spirit and the church are involved and Christ is said to be the head of the body. And in the same language and literature among the same people, one of those apostles says that Christ is the head of the wife, the normal interpretation, I think, surely the one preferred by exegesis if they weren't bothered with all of these social questions which rise up from time to time, he would say that the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church.

And it has to do with authority. And that's why the wife is said in other places to be submissive. That's very bad for today because of the social situation in which we are living. Praise the Lord for wives who read the Bible. Amen. Thank you Martha.

[Question from the audience] One more question. Here in the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians it's talking about Christ being preeminent and everything and we're in this resurrection chapter here where Paul writes,

“But then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule, authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He (I suppose that means the Father) is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.”

Do you think that God in all in all is the Trinity or do you think that's speaking of the Father there?

[Johnson] No. I think it's the very fact that the term God is used rather than the Father would seem to indicate that what we have is the Trinity in perfect relationship with one another as.

[Comment from the same audience member] Then in other words, the Trinity will be together. It won't be no one big and one little. Is that right?

[Johnson] Certainly. At least it would seem so to me.

[Comment from the same audience member] That is a very – you know I went to the library there at the seminary in Jackson and I tried to get something on that and they all avoid it, so I just wondered maybe you could help me.

[Johnson] Well, is something the matter with the library there? [Laughter]  
Although, that’s a good seminary and they have a good library. Next time go to the librarian and present your theological problems. See if he can help you out in Jackson.

[Comment from the same audience member] I figured that’s what it means. But that is a tricky word there.

[Johnson] Yeah.

[Question from the audience] My question is a simple one. With regard to his Christ kingship and whether right now if he’s active or not, I can’t conceive of him not never being not active. I always conceive of Christ as being active and involved in our lives today as he was always. But isn't when a king takes his throne, which was what was referred to, isn't he then doing his job as a king? I mean, doesn't he do it on the throne? So, that’s my question there.

[Johnson] Well, now wait. What is the question though?

[Response from the same audience member] Is he doing his job as king right now on the throne?



[Johnson] Well, we look out over this audience and there're probably some differing theological positions. And so, with love and devotion towards all of those who may have a different idea. I think that he does not assume his kingship in the sense of kingship over the created world until he becomes king in the sense in which Scripture speaks of him as the King to come. He is the King, but he will exercise his kingdom in the future.

Now, I happen to be a premillennialist. I still am a premillennialist. And so, I do believe in a kingdom upon the earth to come. And so, when I speak of him as king in the sense of entering into the full range of his authority, I would include the earthly aspect of it, which has not yet come to pass, but I believe will. If it doesn't, then I will just say I was wrong. [Laughter] But I'm not going to say it to my friends until then. [Laughter] One more? Oh, okay. Yes, David?

[Question from the audience] You may wish to address this to Brother Hagen, but it relates to *prototokos*, the word that's used for firstborn, found twice there in Colossians 1. You mentioned the word *protoktisteos*, the word that was used by Arrians to say that Christ was actually first created as opposed to *prototokos*, which is the word for firstborn. When Paul asserts that our Lord is the firstborn of every creature, it seems the orthodox response to the Arrian claim that Christ was first created was to make this totally in the way of preeminence, but as it were to separate Christ from the creation. What I'm wondering is incarnationally, can we say that because our Lord has in fact become part of his creation, though the eternal creator the firstborn of all creation can be applied to him and his humanity here and that we have not just an autological reference to Christ, but also a soteriological view that's coming into play. Not just Christ and his essential being as the one who has preeminence from all eternity, but in his mediatorial work and the success of it, is he therefore the firstborn of the creation in which he became a part by his incarnation?

[Johnson] Well, I think the term *prototokos* is a term that does have the concept of sovereignty. And so, in that sense I would think of it. I would think of it in that sense.