

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians
(5) The Preeminence of Jesus Christ in All Creation (part 2) (Col. 1:15-23)

Last Lord's Day we arrived to Colossians 1:15 through 20, which is the setting forth of the glory of Jesus Christ in what must have been an early Christian hymn. The apostle Paul was addressing the church at Colossae that had been assaulted by false teaching. The apostle determined he could best confront and correct the errant teaching that was plaguing this church by setting forth the person and work of the Lord Jesus. This is what we have beginning with verse 15 and continuing through verse 20. Let us read these verses again.

¹⁵He (Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

These verses convey two major themes. We see the *pre-eminence of Jesus Christ in creation* in verses 15-17. In verses 18-20 we read of the *pre-eminence of Jesus Christ in redemption* (vs. 18-20). Jesus Christ is set forth in these verses as the source and meaning for all that is and occurs in creation and in history.

Here, however, Christ is presented as the agent of God in the whole range of His gracious purpose towards men, from the primeval work of creation through the redemption accomplished at history's mid-point on to the new creation in which God's purpose will be consummated.¹

This passage is one of the clearest and fullest expressions of the person, Jesus Christ. There are nine specific traits of our Lord set forth by the apostle. Let us take each of these phrases and clauses and consider their meaning and implication.

I. The pre-eminence of Jesus Christ in creation (vs. 15-17).

1. Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (v. 15a).

a. Let us first consider Paul's description of the "invisible God." "He (Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God..."

God cannot be seen with the physical eye. God is invisible.

God is described specifically elsewhere in the Scriptures as invisible. **1 Timothy 1:17** reads, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, *invisible*, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." Paul repeated this attribute of God in different words in **1 Timothy 6:13-16**.

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), p. 193.

¹³“I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, ¹⁵which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, *whom no man has seen or can see*, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”

We read, “No man has seen or can see God.” When we speak of God as invisible, we are describing the spiritual nature of God. God is Spirit. He is invisible to us. We cannot see God with our physical eyes. But we can see Him with the eyes of faith. Hebrews 11:27 describes the faith of Moses in this way: “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured *as seeing Him who is invisible*.” Although Moses was born and raised in pagan Egypt, he had come to God, Who was invisible to him. But Moses believed in his God to such an extent, that he was willing to forfeit every privilege and position open to him in Egypt. He was willing to suffer the wrath of pharaoh for doing so, for his spiritual sight of the invisible God, which was his faith, governed his thinking and his desires.

We read in the Scriptures that Moses saw a manifestation of the presence of God in a bush that burned but that was not consumed. But the reference to Moses “seeing Him who is invisible” describes Moses’ faith long before that occasion on the holy mountain, when he was in Egypt. .

Now what was it that Moses saw of God while in Egypt? Moses observed several of the attributes of God that had convinced him that he was seeing God. For although God is invisible in His essence, some of God’s attributes may be *clearly* seen with the eye of faith. And so, although God is invisible not able to be seen by man, some of God’s attributes, that is, what He is like and what He does, can be clearly seen. We read in **Romans 1:20-21**,

“For since the creation of the world *His invisible attributes are clearly seen*, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Here we read a paradox. God’s “invisible attributes” are, nevertheless, “clearly seen.” Moses must have observed the creation about him, perhaps hearing of the true God taught and spoken about by God’s people, and he was then enabled to *see God* through faith.

Now again, when we speak of the invisible God, we are describing God in His essential nature as being Spirit. We are not merely God possesses a spiritual nature, for we, too, have a spiritual nature; rather, we are saying that *God’s very nature is exclusively spiritual*. God has no physical form, a body as we have. Because He does not have a body, He does not have passions that control him as we have. He has no limitations of time or space as we have. Let us consider this more carefully.

Because God is spirit, He is not bound to time or space. The attributes of God that speak to this are God’s *immensity* and *eternity*. *Immensity* speaks of God as spirit not being limited to any given location. He is omnipresent. The psalmist declared this truth regarding the nature of God:

Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, *You are there*;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, *You are there*. (Psa. 139:7f)

When we speak of the *eternity* of God, we are speaking of His infinity of time. The psalmist also wrote of this attribute of God:

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. (Psa. 90:2)

But there are other attributes of God that can only be true of a spirit being, not of one in a corporeal body. We speak of God being wholly and completely ***independent*** as well as being ***immutable***. All persons with bodies are susceptible to influence from without and are by their very nature changeable--all physical things change. But God does not change and is fully independent of all of His creatures. This can only be true of One who is essentially spiritual. God declared to His people:

“For I am the LORD, I do not change;
Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” (Mal. 3:6)

And no one can force God to change, for He is wholly independent of His creatures:

³⁴For who has known the mind of the LORD?
Or who has become His counselor?”
³⁵Or who has first given to Him
And it shall be repaid to him?” (Rom. 11:34f)

These are rhetorical questions which demand the answer, “no one.” No one has ever made any change in God, for God is immutable, as only a spirit can be.

God’s absolute ***perfection*** warrants God being a non-corporeal, spirit. That which is physical is finite, knows limitation, and is changeable. God is perfect. He can only be so because He is essentially Spirit.

Now in order to show that this understanding of God to be a Spirit suggests and shapes our understanding of God’s attributes, we might consider another assessment of this teaching of Reformed theology, that is, of the Scriptures. **Joel Beeke** and **Mark Jones** put together a wonderful collection of teachings of the Puritans and entitled the book, ***A Puritan Theology; Doctrine for Life***. They included a chapter on **Stephen Charnock** (1628–1680), who wrote the classic work, ***Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God***, which is still available in print. Here is Beeke and Jones’ assessment of Charnock’s view of God as Spirit, which is under the heading, “What is God?”

The being of God is necessarily bound up with the concepts of essence and existence. The former comes under consideration in Charnock’s exposition of John 4:24, “God is a Spirit.” “He hath nothing corporeal, no mixture of matter, not a visible substance, a bodily form.” Charnock notes that John 4:24 is the only place in the whole Bible where God is explicitly described as a Spirit, at least in these very words (*totidem works*). If God exists, He must necessarily be immaterial or incorporeal, since material by nature is imperfect. Here Charnock, in a similar vein to many Reformed orthodox theologians, argues by way of negation. Charnock affirms that God can be described in two ways: by affirmation (e.g., God is good) and by negation (e.g., God has no body). “The first ascribes to him whatsoever is excellent; the other separates from him whatsoever is imperfect.” In Charnock’s view, the way of negation is the best way to understand God; indeed, it is the way we commonly understand God. To describe God, the word “mutable” becomes “immutable”; that is, God does not change.

By affirming that God is a spirit, one is at the same time affirming what He is not (i.e., He has no body). As opposed to a material existence, God’s being is noncomposite. Moreover, because God is a spirit, Charnock is able to show how this necessarily speaks to His other attributes. For example, holding to the Reformed maxim *finitum non copax infiniti* (the finite cannot contain the infinite), Charnock explains that if God were not a spirit, He could not be infinite; or, positively, because He is

a spirit, He is also an independent being who is illimitable and immutable, and His immutability depends on His simplicity. The point that Charnoch makes in this section of his exposition is that there must be consistence between God's essence and His attributes; otherwise, He cannot be God. By beginning with God's spirituality, Charnoch is in line with the Westminster Confession of Faith, which makes spirituality the first of the attributes of God: "There is but one living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body" (2:1). For these reasons, Charnoch's defence of God as Spirit is a fitting starting point for his discussion of the attributes of God, the major part of His discourse.²

And yet, even though we know that God is spirit, we read of descriptions of Him throughout the Bible in which He is represented in a bodily form or in a manner that would suggest that He was something other than pure spirit. We should understand these descriptions to be God condescending to humans in a manner that they can relate to Him. Here is a list of references that describe God in terms that would seem not consistent with God as spirit:

Those which speak of Him as having *location*: Gen. 4:16; Exo. 19:17-21; 20:21; 33:14, 15.
As having motion: Gen. 17:22; 18:33; Exo. 19:20; Num. 12:5; 23:4; Deut. 33:2; Judg. 5:4; 1 Sam. 4:7; Psa. 47:5; 68:7, 8; Ezek. 11:23; Micah 1:3; Hab. 3:3; Zech. 2:13.
As using vehicles: 2 Sam. 22:11; Psa. 18:10; 104:3; Hab. 3:8, 15; Zech. 9:14.
He is said to dwell on the earth: Exo. 25:8; 29:43, 44; 1 Kings 6:13; 8:12, 13; 2 Chron. 6:1, 2; Psa. 132:14; Micah 1:2, 3; Hab. 2:20.
He dwells with man: Exo. 29:45; Lev. 26:11, 12; 2 Chron. 6:18; Zech. 2:10; Rev. 21:3.
He dwells in men: 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19.
He has face: Gen. 32:30; Exo. 33:11, 20; Deut. 5:4; 34:10; Rev. 20:11; *eyes*: 2 Chron. 16:9; Prov. 22:12; *nostrils*: 2 Sam. 22:9, 16; Psa. 18:15; *mouth*: Numb. 12:8; Psa. 18:8; *lips and tongue*: Isa. 30:27; *breath*: Isa. 30:28; *shoulders*: Deut. 33:12; *hand and arms*: Exo. 33:22, 23; Psa. 21:8; 74:11; 89:13; 118:16; Isa. 52:10; Hab. 3:4; *fingers*: Psa. 8:3; *back*: Exo. 33:23; *feet*: Psa. 18:9; *voice*: Exo. 19:19; 20:22; Lev. 1:1; Numb. 7:89; 12:4; 22:9; Deut. 4:12, 36; 1 Kings 19:12, 13; Psa. 29:3-9; 68:33; Jer. 25:30,31; Ezek. 43:6.
His voice is spoken of as dreaded: Exo. 20:19; Deut. 4:33; 5:24-26; Joel 2:11; 3:16; Amos 1:2; Heb. 12:19, 26.
He is said to exercise laughter: Psa. 2:4.
He appears to men: Gen. 35:9; 48:3; Exo. 3:2-6; 19:9; 1 Kings 9:2; Job 42:5, 6; Amos 9:1.
His appearance is described: Exo. 24:10; Deut. 31:15; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 8:2, 2, 4; 43:2; Dan. 7:8, 10; Rev. 4:5.
He is in human form: Gen. 18:1; Ezek. 1:26, 27; Rev. 4:2, 3.³

All of these depictions of God are characteristic of Him being in one location or another, communicating through the senses of a physical body. These are *anthropomorphisms*, which is how God condescends to relate and communicate with finite, physical beings. They do not describe God as He is in essence, but as He is to us, God revealing Himself to us in manner that we may relate to Him.

Here is one who described our limited ability as human beings and therefore God's need to condescend to us to reveal Himself:

Our gift of language belongs to the realm of the physical. Our words and expressions are derived from terrestrial objects. It is therefore a wondrous reality as well as a manifestation of divine goodness that man, in using sounds which are expressive of that which is tangible, is able to give an explanation about divine and spiritual matters by means of the vehicle of language. Our mind, being

² Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology; Doctrine for Life* (Reformation heritage Books, 2012), pp. 60f.

³ James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1887), pp. 63f.

finite and having limited capacity, must function in the realm of concepts and ideas before comprehension can occur. It is the goodness of God that He adjusts Himself to our limited ability to comprehend. Since a harmonious concept of God--which would include all that could be said and thought about Him--is beyond our comprehension, it pleases God by means of various concepts and ideas to make Himself known to man.⁴

And so, in order for God to reveal Himself to His people so that they may know in a measure what He is like and in order for Him to have a relationship with them, God condescended to reveal Himself through analogies which we could understand and relate.

But that changed with the incarnation of the Son of God. We read again in Colossians 1:15, "***He (Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God...***" Here is not God set forth by way of analogy, but rather God is set forth in visible, physical reality.

2. Let us consider Paul's description of Jesus Christ, "the image" of the invisible God.

Although God is invisible, there is One in His image Who has revealed God to us. Jesus Christ is the image of the Living God. Philip had foolishly asked of Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us" (John 14:8). "Jesus said to him, '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'? (John 14:9). Here Christ is said to be the visible representation and manifestation of the invisible God. Make a study of Jesus Christ, and you will become acquainted with who God is and what He is like. But in addition, to know Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible God, is the means by which we may experience the purpose for which God made us--to be image bearers of our God who made us.

Here we read that Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God." But is it not true that all human beings were created the image of God?⁵ In the first chapter of the Bible we read of God's deliberation and purpose for mankind:

²⁶Then 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." ²⁷So God created man ***in His own image***; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Gen. 1:26f)

And although it is certainly true that Jesus Christ is the image of God that all other human beings never were or could be, nevertheless, there is an association between Paul's statement of who Jesus Christ is as the image of God and what the Bible sets forth the purpose for which God made you and me as the image of God.

1) What does man as the image of God mean?

First, recognize that man as the image of God distinguishes man from all other creatures and exalts mankind above all other creatures. Man is distinct. He is not an animal (although he may behave no better than one). He is a wholly different creature from the animals, and should be regarded as such. Man has a dignity and worth that far surpasses any other animal in creation. God created mankind to serve Him in this lofty role as bearers of His image. We are to glorify Him in and through all of life.

⁴ Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 1 (Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), p. 89.

⁵ "No reader conversant with the Old Testament scriptures, on reading these words of Paul, could fail to be reminded of the statement in Genesis 1:26f., that man was created by God 'in His own image'" (Bruce, *Colossians*, p. 193).

God created us all, each of us, male and female, in His image. As God's image, we are to reflect the glory of Him in whose image we were made. As a **mirror** reflects the image of the one standing before it, we should reflect Him before whom we are always standing. This means that we are to live in a manner so that when people watch us they may understand better the God whom we represent and display before them.

Another illustration of man as the image of God is that of a **coin**. The Lord Jesus Himself is described in language depicting the stamp of a coin's image. As a Roman coin bore Caesar's image that was stamped upon its face, so Christ bore the image of God. **Hebrews 1:3**, "*He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature.*" To see Christ was to see God displayed. We, too, are made the image of God. And although through the fall of Adam that image was marred terribly, in Christ that image is being restored. When people see us, they should see Christ in us.

Our lives should make known the glory of God. Now, of course we are finite, and our God is infinite. But in our own small way we should reflect the glory that is God's. The finite *wisdom* that we have should be an indication to others of the nature of God's infinite wisdom. The *justice* we manifest should reflect in a measure the nature of God's justice. The *love* that we show to one another, although certainly flawed, nevertheless should reflect the infinite love that He has for His people. When we as Christians do good toward others, may they see that we so live because we are fashioned after the image of God and as a result they glorify our Father which is in heaven. This is what the Lord Jesus taught His disciples, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your **good works**, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16).

Second, man as the image of God suggests certain *characteristics*.

(1) Man is a living soul, or spirit. This is seen in that he is a *personal being*. He has a *self-consciousness* with respect to himself. He is able to contemplate and act upon his reflection of who he is and what he wills to do. He is able to acquire knowledge and to reason based on acquired knowledge. Animals do not have self-consciousness. They are unable to think upon their past, wonder and meditate on their identity and capabilities, or plan and improve their condition in life. Animals operate on the principle of instinct, not from a principle of self-awareness. Man was created with the ability to reason, to contemplate, to create and develop things within his environment.

(2) Man is a *moral being*. He has a *conscience* that governs his thoughts and actions. Animals do not have conscience. Your dog does not feel guilty because he remembers having chewed your best boots when he was a puppy. Conscience is an aspect of the image of God stamped in human nature.

(3) Man has the ability to *communicate* and to develop and maintain a *relationship with others and with God*. Animals do not have relationships based on communication of values and ideas. Animals do not commune with or pray to God. They are incapable of entering into contractual arrangements of privileges and responsibilities. This is a part of the divine image that is man.

(4) The *human body* is an aspect of the image of God. Through this body we are able to relate to and manage the world in which we were given rule.

(5) God has given to man the capacity for *eternal life*. God created him alone, of all the creatures of the earth (excluding angels), to live forever. "*Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?*" (Ecc. 3:21).

(6) Man is capable and qualified to *rule over creation* on behalf of His Creator. He is able to receive instruction, consciously understand, devise plans, execute his plans and solve problems along the way. God is able to prescribe man a task, and man is able to plan and organize, and utilize and fabricate what is necessary to accomplish his tasks.

This last-stated purpose for man to rule the world on God's behalf is an astounding thought. Consider this: *God created us with the capacity and purpose to rule over the entire world*. This should amaze us and lead us to praise our God for having created us with such a noble and high purpose.

We read of this the same truth and what should be our response to this truth in **Hebrews 2:6ff**:

For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. ⁶But one testified in a certain place, saying:

“What is man that You are mindful of him,
Or the son of man that You take care of him?
⁷You have made him a little lower than the angels;
You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And set him over the works of Your hands.
⁸You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”

For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. (Heb. 2:5-9)

The writer to the Hebrew Christians quoted Psalm 8:4-6. When the psalmist considered the lofty end to which God had designed mankind, he was overwhelmed at God’s goodness that He would ennoble and exalt man within all of creation.

But what became of man as the image of God after his fall into sin? We also have recorded for us in Hebrews 2 a record of man’s fall into sin, marring him terribly with respect to his being the image of God. After having exclaimed the glory in which God created man to rule over creation (vs. 5-8), we read in **Hebrews 2:8b**, “*But now we do not yet see all things put under him.*” This is an expression in the form of an understatement; it is *designed to emphasize the utter failure of man to rise to his noble calling*. When sin entered the world, man fell from his lofty estate. The image of God became terribly marred, though it was not extinguished. Even fallen man in his sin is the image of God, but it is in some ways a shadow of its original form. As one put it:

We retain the image structurally, in the sense that remain human beings, but not functionally, for we are now slaves of sin, unable to use our powers to mirror God’s holiness.

Mankind through Adam’s sin fell from his righteous state. He failed to live so as to fulfil God’s purposes for him. Having been made in the image of God with great privileges and opportunities, he chose rather to live for himself, and thus forfeited his life. Rather than having dominion over the creation, the creation asserted its dominion over him. Rather than rising to manage the world on God’s behalf, man could no longer even manage his own soul. Mankind ever since Adam’s fall has been enslaved to the creation that objects to his presence and resists his efforts to manage it. He forfeited his life through his resistance and rebellion toward God who made him. He loved his life supremely, more than God who gave him life. The result was his forfeiture of life, coming under the terrible, miserable, eternal wrath of God (cf. John 12:25). All mankind is now “naturally under the guilt and power of sin, the reign of death, and the inescapable wrath of God” (cf. Rom. 1:18, 19; 3:9, 19; 5:17, 21). In short, fallen man came under the realm of “the dominion of darkness” in which satan rules over his people (cf. Col. 1:13).

But God sent His Son to fulfil His original purpose for mankind, and to restore fully the image of God in believers. After the writer to the Hebrews declared his disappointing acknowledgement of the failure of man to live to the end to which God had created him, he then pointed to the work of Jesus Christ to recover His people from their fallen state and exalt them to their destiny as glorified children of God. Beginning in **Hebrews 8b** we read,

But now we do not yet see all things put under him. ⁹But we see Jesus, who was made a little 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. ¹⁰For 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 of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, (Heb. 2:8b-11)

It is through Jesus Christ, “image of the invisible God” that God reconciles us unto Himself, and fulfils in us through Him God’s original design for us to become all that He designed and purposed us to become. Through Jesus Christ, God restores us as His image bearers, so that we are able to glorify Him fully through us.

2) What occurs to man as the image of God through redemption in Jesus Christ

When sinners come to faith in Christ, God begins the restoration of His image in that person’s life. Regeneration, or becoming born again, begins the process of restoring God’s moral image in our lives. This restoration and fulfilment of God’s image in us occurs as we become more like Jesus Christ, God’s Son, the true and full image of God. He is God himself who assumed a human nature, becoming one of us. Now certainly, we will not reflect God perfectly in thought and action until we are fully sanctified and glorified. Only when we are glorified, standing before God on the day of the resurrection that we manifest the fullness of God’s design for us. We will then be like Christ fully, manifesting in our glorified humanity the life that was illustrated and demonstrated through the life of the incarnate Son of God (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29, 46).

But even now in this life this process is taking place in the lives of Christians. God had purposed in eternity that believers in Jesus Christ would become conformed to His image. He is fulfilling that purpose in the life of believers. **Romans 8** declares this:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed *to the image of His Son*, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rom. 8:28-30)

We see in **verse 29** that **God’s love for His people is from eternity--“He foreknew” them before creation.** Furthermore, we see that the ones He foreknew, “He also *predestined* to be *conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” What does this mean, to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ? It means we become like Him in at least *four ways*.

(1) God has predestined that we will be like our Lord in His relationship to the Father--He has predestined that His chosen people would be His *adopted children*.

(2) God has predestined that we will be like our Lord in His character. Because of the love that God has for His people He has predestined that they would become *holy*, like His Son.

God *treats* us *as if* we were righteous, when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as our righteousness; this is what the Bible calls our **justification**. And then, through the gift and the power of the Holy Spirit He begins *to make* us righteous; this is our **sanctification**. Salvation involves God not only treating us as if we were righteous (our justification); salvation involves God making us righteous (our sanctification). God has predestined that this will be so.

(3) God has predestined that we will be like our Lord in His suffering. As Jesus Christ bore a cross, so He would have us bear a cross after Him. Our Lord Jesus said, “If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). This is the calling of all true disciples of Jesus Christ, that is, all true believers. What this means is that God has appointed His people to suffer as His Son suffered. To be conformed to the image of His Son in a fallen world is to suffer as did His Son in this fallen world.

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. (John 15:18ff)

(4) God has predestined that we will be like our Lord in His *resurrection glory*.

Suffering is a prelude to glory. One leads to and results in the other. Let us look again to Romans 8. The context speaks of suffering and its relationship to our future glorification. Romans 8:18,

For I reckon that the *sufferings* of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the *glory* which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the children of God.

Suffering assures us that we are the children of God. We have the promise of 2 Tim. 2:12 (and elsewhere), "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." As we have born his image in this life, we may be assured we will bear His image in eternity."

God is forming the fullness of His image in us as we conform to the Lord Jesus, in whose image we are being fashioned. This is a foundation and principle for how we are to live and how we are to treat others. We will close with Paul's words on these matters from **Colossians 3:8ff**:

But now you must also 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.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

The apostle in declaring of Jesus Christ that "He is the image of the invisible God", he was not only declaring that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, when You see Jesus Christ, you see the invisible God, but Paul is also declaring that in Jesus Christ God will restore fallen men and women and restore them to the dignity and nobility for which He created them, to rule over His creation as His image bearers.

Jesus Christ is all and in all. He is the sum of all perfection. He is the center of all meaning and value in God's creation. In Him you are complete, if you are a believer in Him. Do not allow anyone or anything to obscure your beatific vision of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20f)