

Our Affinity To Christ

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You know many of us seem to have a certain natural affinity for certain things. I can give myself as an example. As a young boy, I loved to read. I started when I was very young and it was *The Ugly Duckling*, a little gray book that my mom taught me how to read from. And that was it. From then on I loved to read whatever I could get my hands on. By the time I was about 11, I was reading Michener, you know the big thick Michener books. When I was 12, I discovered writing and I thought, hey, if Michener can write these great big books, why can't I? And that was very egotistical of me.

But, it was really, as the saying goes, "a duck to water." I just took to it. It was something that was part of me that was coming out because I just have an affinity to it. And then I figured out that not only did I love writing, I loved editing, and I am going back and looking over my writing and seeing what can be improved, what could sound better, what would make a better sentence structure or how would this flow a little better. So I have an affinity for reading, writing, and editing that goes beyond a mere hobby or occupation or whatever. It is what I do. It is really a big part of who I am.

Other people are obviously born with other objects than a pen in their hands. Think about Tiger Woods. He seems to have been born with a golf club in his hands. He has this ability, almost like he has a golf gene. He can just do it so well. He did not get the driving [vehicles] gene though.

But there are people like that that just seemed to be naturally endowed with the ability to do certain things and they just come easily to such a person. It does not matter what the thing is that they do. It just seems like they were born to do it. I know my kids have their own affinities. I will not go through them all. It is not necessary to brag on them, although I am happy to do so if you want to come up later. But they seem to have certain things that they do

that they do very well, and they seem to have the mental capacity and just the inner urge to do those things and they do them well because they have worked on them over a long period of time.

All of us have that. I may be picking at myself or my kids or Tiger Woods or whoever, but we all have that sort of affinity for *something*. Maybe we have not discovered it yet. Maybe doing something in the next a few days or weeks you will find, hey, I really like this, and you find you can do it well without even a whole lot of practice and then with a little bit of practice you can do it really well, whatever it happens to be. I am not necessarily talking sports or whatever. Maybe it is crocheting, maybe you were born to crochet. Who knows? But there are things that we seem to be able to do well because we have just this affinity for them.

Now you notice the word I have been using a whole lot is "affinity." I probably used it ten or twelve times already. The word itself has an interesting history of development. Its root means "bordering upon" or "bordering on" and came to mean "related by marriage" because normally people who lived next to each other often had a family relationship with one another because dad would get a square mile and he divided it into this parcel for this kid and this parcel for that kid. Then pretty soon they all have distinct land ownings and then these people married and whatnot. And if you had an affinity for that particular person, it was because you were related to them. That is how it was originally meant to be understood.

You could think of it in this way. I have an affinity for Ronny Graham or Martin Collins or Bill Onisick because they are related, not by blood, but they are related by marriage. And so we have a certain commonality between us. We have things in common and they have to do with in terms of their being related by marriage.

Its second meaning or the next meaning in its development was "sympathy marked by common interests." Or even it still retained the old meaning of kinship. In this case it is not a literal kinship though that is being mentioned, but a *feeling of kinship* because of going through common things, common events, common activities, either because you enjoyed doing those certain things, either together or separately so you could talk about them. Let us say you did woodwork and this other guy also does woodwork and you come

together and you do not normally do would woodwork together but you do talk about it a lot together. And so you feel this kinship, this common sympathy with the other person because you have something that you both do and you both enjoy.

It is not just a kinship because of doing similar things, but kinship because of a common cause. So two people may not know each other except that they go to the soup kitchen and they have a relationship with one another because they both enjoy helping, let us say, the homeless or what have you in their charity work. It could be something else too like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. They had an affinity for one another for robbing banks and robbing stagecoaches and things. They felt like brothers, even though they were not related, they felt like brothers in outlawry. And so they had affinity for one another.

This is also seen in such things as soldiers when they are in a battle, they are in the same pit, and bombs are going off all around them and they survive the battle, they are lifelong brothers in arms. The same thing can happen on a ball team. Take a team through an arduous season and win the championship and you are known forever because of the team. You have done something together. You have accomplished something memorable, and forever you have an affinity one for another. And even in those cases, people on the outside realize that these people will forever be etched in sports history as together. A relationship there, a bond has been formed.

I am getting to a third development of the word affinity here. The common definition as I have used it is an attraction based on shared interests. This is not necessarily the way I used it in the opening where I said that I have an interest or affinity for certain things to do. But this is having to do with the relationship of people who do something similar or have shared interests. And the word likeness is its chief synonym. We have an affinity for certain people because we share interests, we share ideas, we share goals, and we share causes. We bond together in a close relationship because we are like each other, at least in that one way and probably many other ways too. But we are like each other in a significant way, something that means something to us.

As Christians, our natural affinities have to take a back seat to our chief affinity, not just as brethren but as brothers of Jesus Christ, brothers of our Savior and our Elder Brother. Now it is good every once in a while, I believe, just to recall how close, how like Him we are, or if we are not we should have an affinity to Christ much stronger than we have an affinity to any other person, activity, place, or thing.

Let us start in Genesis 1. It is always a good place to start. We will find that here in the Bible's first chapter we are already getting commands or indications, which may be a better word, that this affinity is real. And it started way back then and for each one of us it starts at our birth because we are like Adam.

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

So the first mention of mankind, humanity, comments on this very issue of *likeness*. That we are like God even in a physical way. Our form is like Him. We already share something in common which is our form, our shape, and we could go on from there to think about our minds. He constructed our minds in many ways to be like His and then that moves out into areas like personality and character. All of these things are reflections of God. They are showing us that we have a likeness to Him that is in a lot of ways greater than we ever thought. So he tells us here that God created man like Him and to be like Him and it uses two different words: that we are in His *image* and that we are in His *likeness*.

Now, a lot of people believe, and I agree with them to a certain extent, that image and likeness are parallel terms. Many commentators just say they are just synonymous, that they mean basically the same thing. But I believe that they are somewhat supplementary, that is, they build on one another, they add a little bit of information than they could if they were just alone. That is what Hebrew parallelism does. They do not just repeat themselves like they

are a broken record. They usually add another clause, another phrase, another word, whatever it is, that heightens the meaning or expands the meaning so that if you did not get it the first time you are going to get it the second time, because the meaning shifts just so slightly that you say, "Ah yes, now I get it." I think this is what happens when He says after Our image and after Our likeness.

Maybe I should back up just a second here. Generally "likeness" conveys the idea of form and shape. That is essentially the way it comes out when you look at the words. That mankind *looks* like God. God is the model for man. He looked in the mirror and said, "Hey, I'm going to make somebody, a physical being that looks like this"—same shape, anthropomorphic as we call it. He has got a trunk with two arms and two legs and a head and he will ambulate on his feet, which is attached to the end of those legs and on from there. So we look like Him and we could say with the Bible's authority that He looks like us.

Turn it around. Modern scholars say, No, He does not have (what they call anthropomorphisms in the Scriptures), an arm, an almighty right arm, He does not have hands, He does not have a head. He is God. He is kind of everywhere and a blob. I mean, that is what it comes down to. That is how they think. That it is just humans applying anthropomorphic phrases to describe God.

But if you take the Bible more literally, He is talking about His head, His mouth, His arms, His feet, His ears, His hands—all those things all the time. So it must mean something. They must be true. Why would God talk about those things that may not be true? He does not say things that are not true. So we have to think that men and God look very similar as to form and shape.

Image, however, over the years has come to imply more spiritual qualities. Physical qualities seem to have been under the idea of likeness, but the spiritual qualities tend to be those under the word "image." There are things like mind and personality and character and function and those type of attributes that are like God's. So we have all these abilities to function in various ways that are not necessarily physical. Like, we can understand language. There is a physical element to that, but most of that is done in our heads, in our brains. Those sorts of things, having understanding, even being

able to have a bit of a spirit of ourselves that we can project. When you come into a room, people project a spirit. You know that when a charismatic person comes into a room, everybody turns toward him, everybody seems to be attracted. You have a person who comes into the same room but has a bad attitude or is angry, that changes the mood of the whole room, or it could. That is the sort of things that we are talking about here in terms of image—that we can be like God both on a physical and on a more mental or even spiritual plane. That those affinities to Him are real.

We know from the New Testament that we are in the image of God. The New Testament writers do not necessarily mean that we look like Him. It means we have the same character as Him. That is our goal, to be in the image of Jesus Christ. We are not going to all look like Christ, there is not going to be 144,000 beings that look like Him physically. We are all just going to think, act, speak, and do all those other things like Him but we will be ourselves. So image in the New Testament mostly refers to those spiritual qualities, those non-physical attributes that we have that are like His and that we can grow in. I mean, how many times does it say that we have been called to grow in His image? That is our goal.

Let us go to the New Testament in I Corinthians 15 and see the next step in the evolution of my thought here on this subject. Of course, this is the resurrection chapter and Paul talks about various other things leading up to his final conclusion here about being raised with Christ when He returns. But this is what he gets to just before that. He says,

I Corinthians 15:46-49 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

So here Paul takes us in back to Adam and he reminds us that mankind was first made physical, and yes, we were made physical but we are also in the image and likeness of God. So we are physical. That is how we start—natural, fleshly. Yet we are still in the likeness of God, clay models as it

were. We all resemble Adam in this way. But then, in the resurrection from the dead (what he is getting to here in I Corinthians 15), we will bear the image of Christ in a heavenly or spiritual body. What he is getting at without actually saying the word is that what we are involved in is a process of change—a change from physical to spiritual. It is a process of growth. It is a process of improvement. As Dr. Maas said today in a sermon, it is a process of sanctification. It is where we become holy as He is holy.

He puts this in a little bit different way in Romans 8.

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

Paul now is giving us a few more additional pieces in this idea of this process of change. God has chosen, he said, some people, very few people we know, to conform to the image of His Son. All these billions of people out there on Planet Earth and He has chosen just a few. And he says, "I have called you and your job is now to conform to My Son's image." It is to change. It is to be not so much like yourself as you are now and to be more like Him, as He is. That is your job. He says here it is their destiny. He has predestined these people to do that. They are chosen to be glorified just as Christ is.

It goes all the way. If He has chosen you for the justification, He has chosen you for the sanctification, He has chosen you for the glorification. He is not going to stop you along that way unless you stop yourself by refusing to conform to the image of His Son. But once He calls you, He puts you into the process and He gives you all that He can to make that change.

Now, once you have been called to this process, there is an automatic affinity to Christ. It has to happen. If you are going to conform to the image of His Son, then you have to be like Him. I mean, that is just it. You have to have a relationship in order for that to happen.

So there is an immediate affinity between these called of God (and now chosen ones) and the Son. It is our job. Not only do we become His younger brothers and sisters, but eventually we will have so many of His attributes that people will, in a sense, not be able to tell us apart. And especially of course in the time of glorification. We will resemble Him. Does not John say that we will look like Him? We will see Him as He is, right? That does not mean that we are going to look *exactly* like Him, but we will have similar features and he is talking about *glorious* features. Read there in Revelation 1 about the glorified Christ. That is *your* description in the age to come. You will look like Him in that way.

But we will certainly *act* like Him, we will think like Him, we will speak like Him, and all this will happen in its fullness in the resurrection. We will be so much like Him that people could not fail to say, they are brethren. They are the same. Just like the Father and the Son are the same. I do not mean exactly the same. They have distinct personalities, but there will be such a likeness between the Son and His glorified brothers and sisters that there will be no doubt who they belong to. We could even go so far as to go to I Corinthians 11:1. I will just tell you that we are commanded there to imitate Him. So once we get started, that is our job—to be like Him, to imitate Him, to have this relationship with Him so that we can be like Him in as many ways as possible before the end of our lives and then to be like Him *truly* in the time of glorification.

Let us go to Colossians the 3rd chapter. We are starting to narrow in here on how much like Him we need to be. Let us read the first four verses. Here we start where Paul started earlier in Romans.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ [we are talking about baptism, just after your calling], seek those things which are above [Why? Because that is the image we are supposed to grow into. Right?], where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. [That is how we keep ourselves in the right place mentally so that we can do this job that we have been given to do. Now he gives a reason. Why?] For you died [that old self died in the waters of baptism], and your life [now] is hidden with Christ in God. When

Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

This is very similar to what we saw there in I Corinthians 15 and also in Romans 8:29-30. But Paul lays it out here very clearly for us so that we cannot avoid getting the understanding here. He says our minds are supposed to be focused on godly things and we are to seek them to add them to our own characters, and the only place that we can have the right vision, the only place that we can see what we are to conform to, is in heaven. That is the goal, that is the model. And so our job as called sons and daughters of God is to always be looking at the goal and trying to conform to it, using the term from Romans 8—conforming to the image of His Son. That is where our minds are supposed to be, that is our mindset.

Then he says in verse 3 something that is not easy to translate or to explain because it lends itself to a variety of meanings. But you will see there, "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." It is that word hidden that kind of throws a little bit of a wrench into the works, because this word in Greek can imply various, different things. It can imply security, it can imply secrecy. It can even imply being locked away or imprisoned, or it can imply being covered.

I like the last one the best—covered. Put that in: "For you died, and your life is covered with Christ in God." Maybe covered is not quite the right word. Maybe we should use terms that mean similar things like enveloped, contained within, enwrapped. Let us put those in. Verse 3: "For you died, and your life is enveloped with Christ in God," or your life is contained within Christ in God. Or, it is enwrapped with Christ in God. Does that not make a whole lot more sense? It does to me.

But he says once that once you are baptized, raised up out of the water, given the Holy Spirit, and you start your life of conversion, your whole life is to be wrapped up with Christ in God. It is almost like Christ is a big blanket and we come out of the waters of baptism and He wraps that blanket around us and He says, "From now on we are inseparable, we have the same goals, we have the same work ahead of us." So what Paul means in here is that once we are raised from the waters of baptism, our lives are intimately entwined with Christ. Inseparable.

That is kind of what my dad has been getting at over the past couple of years when he keeps going back to John 15:5 where it says, "Without Me [Christ] you [we] can do nothing." Because Christ is so enwrapped with us in our lives, He takes a good share of everything we do. He is involved in it, if we let Him. But he is talking ideally here. This is how it *should* be, that Christ is involved in everything and we let Him be involved in anything and everything in our lives. That we welcome Him in the same way as this being enwrapped in the blanket idea, that we hug Him back and say, "I want to be with You and live my life with You so that we can achieve this goal."

Now verse 4 hits it very squarely. It says, "When Christ who is your life. . ." This even goes beyond the enwrapped idea. It is not just that He is wrapping us up. He *is* our life. "When He who is our life appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory." That is the way it is done. He is going to walk with us step-by-step through all this process of sanctification until we both come to the same goal and we are alike. We are just like Him because He has taken us through all these experiences. He has given us all the help that He can and we have submitted to it and learned from it, grown from it, and God glorifies us for it. Because we have gone along the path, the same path that He took.

This concept of Jesus Christ being our life appears in Deuteronomy 30. Let us just look at that. He tells us here in verse 19 that we have to choose life, right?

Deuteronomy 30:20 That you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him [Aha! Wonder if Paul was thinking of this verse when he wrote Colossians 3:1-4?], for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

The same ideas from the Old Testament brought out in different ways in the New.

So when He appears, we will have His life, in full, in glory. Until that time we are to be putting off these sins and attitudes that cause death, and putting

on the new man, as he goes on to talk about there in Colossians 3. And the new man, no surprise, is the image of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ. He is the New Man, not the old man. He is the new Adam, not the old Adam. He is the one we are to be conformed to and we have to always have the attitude that He is *everything* to us. No one comes close! If you want to look at the new man qualities that Paul mentions there, they start in verse 12.

I have mentioned to several people that this was once a Pentecost sermon that I have changed a little bit to be a Bible study, but I want us to think about the symbolism of the wavesheaf and the Pentecost offering because they help to show us our affinity to Christ as firstfruits. Think of it that way.

Let us remember how it works here. The wavesheaf offering is given on a Sunday, the day after the Sabbath which is during the Days of Unleavened Bread. And there is a particular offering that is given there. The offering is a sheaf of barley that has been cut. The barley is cut at the end of the Sabbath day before, during the Days of Unleavened Bread. It is held overnight and then the priests do their ritual thing in the morning at about nine a.m. The sheaf of barley is raised to God as an acceptable offering. And we understand that Jesus Christ Himself fulfilled this when He rose from the dead. He was cut off, as it were. That is, He was actually resurrected from the dead at the end of the Sabbath just about the same time that the wavesheaf offering was being cut from the ground, cut from the earth. Then He was held overnight, just like the offering was, and it was not until early the next morning, He told Mary Magdalene, "I haven't gone to the Father yet, so do not hug Me so hard." Then He rose and was accepted before God probably about the same time that the barley was being raised at the Temple.

The Bible makes it clear, when you look back at Leviticus 23, that this sheaf of barley was called the first of the firstfruits, or it was the firstfruits of the grain. It is very clear that this was the beginning of the harvest when you look at the symbolism. The Israelites would not reap the harvest of their barley until this particular offering was made in the Temple or at the Tabernacle. So this started the barley harvest and of course there was fifty days and we come to Pentecost. Pentecost has its own offering. So seven weeks later, the yield of all the harvest of the barley has been reaped, and Pentecost then marks the end of that whole harvest.

Now, this bigger festival typifies a much larger harvest because now everything has been reaped. But we find out that the offerings that are given there also represent the firstfruits of God. But they are different. The wavesheaf offering was a sheaf of barley grain, whereas the wave loaves, that is what they are called, that are given on Pentecost are actually ground flour that have been made into a loaf of bread. These loaves were made from very fine barley, well-sifted, ground very hard. Then the oil is put in and such and are also filled with leaven. Leaven is put into this offering. And then it is baked.

This is hugely symbolic. These are symbolic of *people* who are being harvested as part of the firstfruits. These loaves, these people, this congregation, however you want to put it, have been put through the wringer. They have been full of sin. They have sinned throughout this process but they have been ground—first they had to be beaten from the stocks, and then they had to have the chaff taken out and then they were ground. And then had these things added to it—all the sins and such. And then they were baked, fire being trials and that sort of thing. So we come out on the other end with two loaves of barley and these are also lifted before God and He accepts them.

So we see in this two firstfruits: one is the First of the firstfruits. He is the perfect one, the one that was cut from the earth, and He was made to go through these things we know from His life, and He was raised from the dead and accepted before God. These other ones, also called firstfruits, have to go through a very similar process but they are obviously human in that sense. They obviously are sinful and they have been forgiven of their sins and all of the processes that they have gone through have allowed them to be like the original wavesheaf offering, although there are slight differences—because they are not the Son of God. They are, as you might say in the New Testament, adopted sons of God. That is my summary actually of all that.

Let us go to I Corinthians 15, back to the resurrection chapter. We see Paul affirming all that summary explanation that I just gave.

I Corinthians 15:20-23 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since

by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.
For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.
But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those
who are Christ's at His coming.

Here Paul specifically calls Jesus Christ the firstfruits of the dead. By doing so, He has opened the way for others to be resurrected. The next group that we see here in his explanation that comes in the order of the resurrections, are those who are resurrected at His return. And if we would go on, we would find in verse 24 that he does not mention anybody else. He is talking specifically about those who are the chosen in this age.

Let us just move on a little further and go to James 1.

James 1:17-18 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. [That shows you where we get our power and all the good gifts and everything to do what we need to do.] Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

We know that Jesus Christ is *the* firstfruits. We in the church have called Him the First of the firstfruits to differentiate, but He is the actual firstfruits. But James here says that God has included us in that as a *kind* of the firstfruits. Remember kind after kind? A bear does not produce pigs or spiders or birds. Bear produces bears. Humans produce humans. The Son of God produces sons of God. We are a *kind* of Him. We have to go through the process just a little bit differently because we do not have divinity within us from the very beginning.

We have to go through a different thing. We have to be *called* out of the world. We have to be *given* a divine mind, or the ability to understand the divine mind and produce the divine mind in ourselves through His Holy Spirit. We have to go through all these various things—all these various trials and tests and whatnot—so that we can learn the way of God. So we have all these gifts from God, as James here tells us in verse 17, and an added feature of the eternal life that He has promised to us through His Son is that He has called us now.

Have you ever thought about that? Because we are kind of firstfruits. Everybody else after that point of His return are not going to be firstfruits because of the way we have to be produced in this world, with the temptations of Satan the Devil and this evil world and our own flesh. Having to overcome and grow in a very similar way to the way He did, which we will get to in a minute. So not only does He call us and give us eternal life, but there is an added portion, if you will, that He has done it *now*. That we have to go through all of these things now, before the Millennium, before the White Throne judgment, at a time very much like what He Himself went through back in the 30s AD.

Let us just take this another step further. Let us go to Revelation 14 where it talks about these particular people, the kind of firstfruits.

Revelation 14:1-5 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. And they sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. [They are a special group.] These are the ones who are not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

So here we are seeing that the affinity of these people, these firstfruits for Christ, carries on into the Millennium and the White Throne judgment and on into eternity. They are the true firstfruits of God who followed the path of the true, true firstfruit of God, Jesus Christ. They stand with Him on Mount Zion and they are identified with the Father's name in their foreheads like firstborns. And most of this affinity, as we saw, was in verse 4. They follow Him wherever He goes because they are just like Him. They are firstfruits like Him. Let us keep adding on to this. We will go back to Romans 8.

Romans 8:12-17 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself [or itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we also may be glorified together.

Do you see how it is *we*. We are with Him, we are together in this whole process.

Galatians 4:3-7 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. [This is what we came out of.] But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

You are seeing that we are being identified with Christ in every manner down through actually inheriting all that He inherits. Because we have responded to God's calling, repented, and obeyed Him, shown the growth, God has given us His Spirit making us His children, and thus we are heirs—heirs with Him in everything. And this means that the firstfruits—those in the first resurrection—receive rewards of the same measure as Christ. Because we are all firstborns together. We get what He gets. And He gets the double portion of the firstborn.

You see what an honor it has been from God to have called you now. This offer is not open forever! Only up to the return of Christ. Let us look at I Peter 1. This is all throughout the New Testament.

I Peter 1:3-9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you [It is there, it has got your name on it. All you got have do is get there in terms of becoming like Christ.], who are kept [meaning secured or guarded] by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

This is all yours for your faith and loyalty and endurance and growth in your calling. And of course, the biggest thing of all, your relationship with Jesus Christ. We have got to be hip-to-hip with Him in everything. You have got to be, as I said earlier, intimately entwined with Him in everything. We could go through Revelation 2 and 3, the messages to the seven churches, and see what the overcomers receive. But they are all things that Christ receives too. They are part of His inheritance. You know, the things like the white robes and white stones and being pillars in the Temple of God and all those sort of things. Those are rewards that we share with Him because we are all firstfruits—sons and daughters of God.

How about Hebrews 2 now? We will notice how the author here puts us together with Him, intimately.

Hebrews 2:9-10 But we see Jesus [We are always to be looking at Him, right?], who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned [now] with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in

bringing many sons to glory [we are being put into this equation here quite often], to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

He is saying here that Christ went through all of this to give us salvation and what did He do? What was all of this that He put himself through? It was suffering. He came to this earth and lived as a man and fought all the temptations of His body and this world and Satan the Devil, for all that time, never giving up once! And because He did not give up once, He suffered. He was persecuted, He was reviled, He was beaten, and He died. He did all of this for us because He wants brothers and sisters.

Notice how he goes on here. Notice this connection—the affinity.

Hebrews 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one [They are united. The idea here is basically they are one entity, one thing.], for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

He is the God of the universe and we are worms and scum. But He has decided in His holiness that we are His brothers and He is going to bring us to His level!

Hebrews 2:12-18 Saying, "I will declare your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you." And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me." Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same [affinity like this, right?], that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. [He would do anything to get rid of the big bad guy. And He did. He helped us in that way.], and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren [He had to share all these things], that He might be a merciful and

faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

So, kind of to summarize here. God decided that it was appropriate to train the perfect High Priest by making Him experience life as we live it, as both God and man. And as a man, Jesus had to suffer, overcome, and strive for perfection, just as we do. Conversely, we can say that we suffer, overcome, and strive, just as He did.

Do you see the parallels? The firstfruits have such an affinity or a likeness to Christ because their paths have been the same—on purpose. The difference though is the degree of difficulty. Even though we think our temptations are so hard to overcome, they are nothing compared to what He went through. And of course He is going to be the king of Kings and Lord of lords. We get a station below that. Kings and priests for all eternity who follow Him around forever. And I think that is pretty good. But we get slotted in *just under Him* in the governance of the entire universe.

Let us go to Luke 14. This is why he says this, what we just read about there in Hebrews.

Luke 14:25-27 Great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

Now we know why. Hebrews 2 explained it to us. You have got to go through the same thing He did. That is what He did. He loved less, as it were, everybody else and even His own life, in order to accomplish His task because He loves us and who of course bore His cross all the way to death.

So He requires the same thing of us. We do not have the same physical circumstances as He did. But He requires the same loyalty, the same endurance, the same stick-to-itiveness and that sort of thing that He had in order to accomplish His goal. And that is how we learn those things and grow in them, by seeing Him model those things and we imitate them.

Mark 10:35-38 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And they said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. [Knowing what we know, we can understand why He said this now.] Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

He is saying you guys are awfully naive. You do not understand yet what it will take to sit on My right hand and on My left. Do you notice He did not say no? Because those two will sit beside Him on His throne, but they could not do it at that time. They could not just get a free pass to the place on His right and the place on His left because that had to be done over a whole process of sanctification until they became like Him, having to do the same type of things He did in order to get to His place. And of course they said "we can!" I mean, bold naivete.

Mark 10:39-40 So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized. But to sit on My right hand and on My left is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."

He said, "If you want this position you have to give your all and be like Me."

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

So, been having trouble lately? This is why you were *called* to that trouble. Maybe not to that specific trouble, but you have been called to things like that and it is part of God's training mechanism for you to become like Christ.

I Peter 4:12-16 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part, He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this manner.

You know why? Because it is a sign that God's working with you and you are on your way to firstfruihood and all those rewards and glories that God has promised. So take heart when you suffer, when you are persecuted. That is what Paul did. He kind of gloried in all his sufferings because he knew that God was putting him through the paces for eternal life. It affirms to us that we will receive the same salvation and reward that Christ receives.

I John 4:17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

Just as Jesus Christ went through life having to suffer the slings and arrows of all the things that were laid down to test Him and try Him and He suffered by them, the same sorts of things will happen to us because in this world we are just like Him. Like He was in the world of His day.

Back to Philippians. We are nearing the end. I just want you to get the full thrust of this and how much like Christ you are going through the same rigorous training that He went through.

Philippians 3:8-11 [Here is Paul's way of expressing it. He says] Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is

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

He said, nothing else matters. I must know Christ so that I can know the power of His resurrection. So I go through all these things and I am happy to do it because I know what it is producing—the very image of Jesus Christ in him. He did *desire* the rewards. It is not wrong to desire the rewards that God has promised us, all the honor and the glory and the closeness to Christ throughout all eternity that it will bring, if we live good and righteous lives before God. And just remember this: The greater our affinity to Christ now, the greater our reward.

Notice Hebrews 11 because we are not alone in all of this. There have been others—that great cloud of witnesses that Paul talks about in Hebrews 12. But just notice this, what these people were willing to go through to have an affinity with Christ and be in the first resurrection.

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

That was one of their great motivations, that they wanted to be in the *first* resurrection. Not any other resurrection. They wanted to have the rewards and the glory and the closeness to Christ that will be the reward of the firstfruits. So it was not just Peter and Paul, but all who saw this by faith.

Remember earlier in chapter 11 it says Abraham looked for a city with foundations. From Abraham on, and we could probably go back to Abel if we wanted to, they all looked for something more permanent—for the Kingdom of God, whether they knew it under that designation or not. There was something that they knew that God had promised them that was bigger and greater than this life. And they yearned for it and they worked for it.

These men and women in the Old Testament, they had mostly personal relationships with Christ, in a kind of a different way than we have. Many of them walked with Him because they *saw* Him. He revealed Himself to them in more outward ways than He does for us. We know of him through the Bible and through His personal revelation through the Spirit and His personal walk with us. But they had a slightly different approach because they heard His voice. They saw Him.

I do not know if it was a good thing or if it was a bad thing, but they had that more, I do not want to use the word tangible, but He had revealed Himself to them personally. So they knew that there was something greater and they worked for that and they did not give in, they were strong people. They did not give in to their suffering because of this idea that there was a better resurrection, there was something more and greater out there. They *wanted* to be firstfruits, they wanted to be like Christ and so do we.

Now God has us observe Pentecost to make us think every year about our position as a firstfruit of God. He makes us go through those paces every year because it is no small matter to Him. He wants the best crop possible and He is going to put every plant, as it were, through the same paces. I know I am mixing my metaphors, sorry, but He will put every plant through the same paces He put Christ through so that it produces the exact same product. He does not change the way He works with people in such a way that it will produce something different. It is the same process. He wants every piece of fruit, as it were, to have the same characteristics of His first and best Product.

So we should ask ourselves: how much like Christ am I? How much further do I have to go?

I John 2:28-3:3 And now, little children, abide in Him [That is, continue in Him. If we use Paul's words, continue to be enwrapped in Him.], that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. [There is that affinity again.] Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.