***Jesus as Firstborn, Creator, and Sustainer
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Romans 8:28-30. The Destiny of Good. This is segment number 10.

In that grand and famous Romans 8:28, we have found that God is dealing with the human race according to His own purpose, which means, a pre-determined plan. God's purpose of saving some of mankind is executed by Him alone apart from human help, thus God's saving work is perfect. So, once the sinner has been regenerated under this system, he cannot be lost again, because it's God who's doing it, therefore it's good. It's perfect. It cannot be reversed. You cannot undo what God alone has done. Now, if you've had a part in it, then you can undo it. But that's why God has made this purpose that He has to do it all alone. Whatever sin may enter the life of a person who is already in the family of God, he can be absolute certain of receiving from God the good of ultimate salvation. Whatever sin may enter, the good of ultimate salvation is going to be there.

Paul explains why a Christian is secure in his salvation by outlining in Romans 8:29-30 a chain of five divine actions that ties the believer to eternal life. Five tremendous links which God alone forges and which He then puts together which ties man on earth to God in heaven. And it is the chain which cannot be broken. The links of this chain are foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. This divine chain is absolutely unbreakable because it is all God's doing.

In the Greek language, these five links are presented in the aorist tense. The aorist tense in the Greek language is the tense that represents a point action in time, or we would describe it as something that happens once and for all. It is very important, therefore, for you to realize that only once and for all does God foreknow you - that is, pick you for salvation. It is absolutely important that only once and for all does God predestinate you to be transformed into the image of His Son. It is only once for all that He calls you. Only once for all that He justifies you. And the last link, glorification - it only happens once. And they're all done by God. None of these links has anything to do with you as a human being.

So, it's a tremendous two verses in the Word of God, and Paul ultimately is trying to explain to us why your destiny for heaven is an absolute certainty. So, when the doctor comes to you and says, "I'm sorry, I have to tell you that you have something very serious; you will not survive more than three months, if that, of life," you don't have to come apart. You don't have to go panicking because now suddenly facing God becomes a reality. You recognize that you are now ready for the stage of moving into His presence because you know Romans 8:29-30, which is the basis of your dying grace. And you know that the chain which God has forged from heaven to you is a chain that neither you nor anyone else can break. As a matter of fact, because of God's consistency and immutability, even He could not break it.

Dealing now in this passage with subjects of such majesty, it takes our breath away. And I must tell you, you will not fully understand them. So, don't play the arrogant role and say, "But I always thought." When you tell me that you always thought something or "But I think this," then you are talking as a philosopher. And you want to be a philosopher? That's fine. But understand that the philosophers can't go any further than the best of human reason. Ok? You want to be a philosopher and what you think and your philosophy is and what your conclusions are and what your assumptions are, great. Be a philosopher. But if you want to be on track with the mind of God, you have to go to the scriptures. That's all that counts. And when the Bible tells us something, we accept it. No, you will not all understand it. Don't play philosopher. Play student of the Word of God, and believe the Word of God.

And that's what we have here in Romans 8. We have the Word of God. The question is: what does the Word of God teach about the links of this chain? We may not understand. We may, as a matter of fact, decide we don't want to believe some of these links exist to salvation. But that isn't going to affect your salvation. You'll go, in spite of your ignorance, to heaven if you have trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior. You are still attached to that chain even if you do not believe in one of these links. The fulfillment of God's purpose toward believers will indeed demonstrate the fact that He is a wise God. Who indeed could have taken such vile, filthy sinners as ourselves and make us qualified to be eternally in the presence of a perfect God? And more than that, to make us as perfect as Jesus Christ.

Who could have come up with a plan such as that? Mankind is constantly trying that. The religions of the world. The cults . . . are coming up with such a system. But God has come up with the only system that works.

And so, Ephesians 3:10 says, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places [angelic beings] might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." God is showing how wise a person He is to all the angels of heaven by the fact that He can take you and me into His heaven. God has created a plan which is going to fulfill His purpose, His purpose of transforming us into the image of His Son. God has purpose to bring a certain number of Gentiles into His family. And when that is completed, then the rapture is going to take place.

Romans 11:25, therefore says, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come." Until every last one of you Gentiles that He has selected for eternal life is going to come in. That's His purpose, and He's going to carry it through. It would be executed.

When that is finished, blindness is going to be lifted from Israel, the Bible tell us, and then the whole Jewish race will look and say, "My God! Jesus Christ: He was the Savior! He was the Messiah! We were wrong! Our forefathers were wrong! They murdered the very Son of David, the King of Israel!" And then, the Bible tells us, the nation will be born in a day, and they will see what . . . they have not been able to see.

**Steps Leading to Glorification**

So, God's ultimate purpose is to make all Christians into the image of His Son spiritually and in resurrected body physically. There are several steps that lead to this goal. These steps, of course, include forgiveness of sins and the imputation of absolute righteousness to us.

Paul's first link in this goal to God's purpose is foreknowledge: the special selection of the sinner for salvation into a close, family relationship with God. Foreknowledge means more than the fact that God knew something ahead of time. Foreknowledge means that God knew something ahead of time because He decided that something was going to happen ahead of time. That is the biblical meaning of the word "foreknowledge."

The second link in the chain was predestination. Pre-ordained, to be conformed, we are told, to be in the image of Jesus Christ. The image of Jesus Christ means that we are going to be an exact duplicate of Him into the same form. This particular Greek word means "exact image," not just similar. It is going to be an exact reproduction, like when you see somebody's face on a coin, it looks exactly like that that person. That is an exact reproduction. The Christian in heaven is going to have the very character of Jesus Christ. He's going to have the very glorified and resurrected body of Jesus Christ. He, of course, will not be deity as Jesus is, but he will be everything else that the Son of God is.

So, in Romans 8:29, we continue with the second part of the verse that says having been being predestinated, be conformed to this image of His Son. For what reason? "That." The word "that" is the Greek preposition "eis." This preposition here indicates God's purpose. Why did God predestinate us to be transformed into the very image of Jesus Christ spiritually in our character and physically in our resurrected body? "That He might be," and the word "might be" is our familiar Greek verb to be, "eimi," the verb for "status quo." This is in the present tense, indicating that this is God's constant purpose for us. It is active voice: it means that this is what God is doing, but it's in the infinitive mood, which tells us again that this is purpose. This is what God intends to do. I stress "purpose" because you and I propose to do a lot of things, and we never get around to doing them. You have several things already that you intended to do this week that you didn't do. But when God purposes to do something, it will be done. It will be executed. We translate this, "that He might be."

**Jesus as the Firstborn Among Many Brethren**

We are changed into the perfect image of Jesus Christ that Jesus Christ, in turn, might be the firstborn among many brethren. The word "firstborn" is the Greek word "prototokos." This word "protokos" basically means first in sequence to be born into a family. For example, we have it used in that specific way in terms of family order of birth in Luke 2:7 relative to the Lord Jesus. In Luke 2:7, we're told, "And she [Mary] brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." And so on. Jesus Christ was the firstborn Son of Mary. That is, He was the first in the order of her children.

Now, later on, the Bible indicates to us that after Jesus was born to Mary in a virgin status, she then entered the regular, marital relationships with her husband, and she bore several other children to Joseph, both sons and daughters. Mark 6:3 teaches us that where the people in Nazareth are trying to figure out this boy Jesus now who has grown to young manhood and has grown to a place of teaching authority. They have known Him all His life. He was the boy that has been working as a carpenter with His father, and they want to know, "Who is this man standing up here and making claims to being the Messiah of Israel, the One that we've been looking for over all these centuries?"

So, Mark 6:3 says, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother [here's His half-brothers] James, and Joseph, and Judas, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him." They said, "We know this boy! We know His brothers. We know His sisters. We know His family. They live down the street here in Nazareth. Who does He think He is?" And they were offended over His Messianic claims.

So, the Bible is very clear that after Jesus, who was the firstborn, there were other children who were born in the family, and they followed in sequence. But there was only one firstborn. John 7:5, we may add to this, "For neither did his brethren believe in him," referring to the half-brothers of Jesus who until the resurrection scoffed at their older brother, the firstborn of the family. And they held Him in contempt for His claims. But, after the resurrection, they too believed in Him as their Messiah.

So, this word "protokos" used, first of all, that sequence of birth in the family. In the Old Testament era, this was a very special group of human beings because God laid personal claim upon every firstborn male in the human race and every firstborn male in the animal realm. In Exodus 13:1-2, we have this pointed out to us, "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 'Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.'" Exodus 13:12 says, "That thou shalt set apart unto the Lord all that openeth the womb, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the Lord's."

So, under the Old Testament system, when a son was born in the family, the first son, he was firstborn, he belonged to God. The animals that were firstborn, they belonged to God. Now, the basis for this claim was that God had saved all the firstborn sons in Israel when He swept through the land of Egypt and He killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians. He saved all the firstborn of the children of Israel and therefore, He claimed them as His own.

Exodus 13:14-15 explains this, "And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that thou shalt say unto him, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the womb, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem.'"

So that, the order that Moses was given was that when an animal, the firstborn of an animal, is to be taken and sacrificed to God (that is of the clean animals, the animals that were fit for sacrifice). The firstborn were sacrificed to God. Since God, of course, is against human sacrifice, He would not sacrifice the firstborn males that were born in the family, but they belong to God until the family redeemed the child back to themselves. And there was a method by which they did that. You may add Numbers 3:13 to that principle of God's claim upon the firstborn. So, the clean firstborn male animals were sacrificed to God. They did this when the animal was eight days old.

Again, in Exodus 13, Exodus 13:12-13 point this out, "That thou shalt set apart unto the Lord all that openeth the womb, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the Lord's. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem."

In the case of the donkey, firstborn donkey was an unclean animal. Therefore, you did not sacrifice a donkey, but it had to be recognized as belonging to God. Everything firstborn belongs to God. Therefore, it was required that they break the neck of the donkey and kill him. Or, they sacrifice the lamb and redeem the donkey.

In Exodus 22:29-30, "Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy presses: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto Me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with its dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it Me." On the eight day, the clean animals, then, were sacrificed to God.

Numbers 18:17 adds to that point, "But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat [that is, the firstborn], thou shalt not redeem; they are holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the Lord."

Now, in the case of human beings, since God does not permit human sacrifice, the firstborn males were to be redeemed with a price, and that price was five shekels. In Numbers 18:15-16, we have that told us. "Everything that openeth the womb in all flesh, which they bring unto the Lord, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem. And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine valuation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs."

God had a standard of weights and measurements, so a shekel was an exact amount of precious metal. And He said that, "For a male child, when he is one month old, you'll pay five shekels, and then I give him back to your family. Up 'til that time, he belongs to Me."

The tribe of Levi as a whole was designated for God's service in place of the redeemed firstborn of the other tribes. This is indicated in Numbers 3:12, "And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the womb among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine."

And we can add to that Numbers 8:15-18, "'And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an offering. For they are wholly given unto Me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto Me. For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself. And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel."

So, the Levites as a whole, the tribe as a whole, was viewed by God as replacing all the firstborn of the other tribes which He permitted the individual families to redeem. So, you see, to be the firstborn had a very significant relationship to God. You were God's very own because you were the firstborn male in a certain family line.

Now, the word is also used in a figurative sense in terms of rank and authority. And that's the one that comes to bear more precisely here in our passage in Romans. This was applied figuratively, for example, to the whole nation of Israel. Exodus 4:22, we read, "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, 'Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn.'" So that, in this way, God was telling Pharaoh a firstborn belongs to Almighty God in a very special way. And I view the nation of Israel as my firstborn. Therefore, Pharaoh, you better back off. You are trying to claim as belonging to you what in a special way can only belong to me. The whole nation was born as God's firstborn.

And so, the Lord Jesus Christ, we are told, is the firstborn of God the Father in the sense of this preeminent position of authority and rank. Jesus has this preeminent position in the human race. Hebrews 1:6 points this out to us. Hebrews 1:6, "And again, when He bringeth in the First Begotten into the world, He saith, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him.'" Referring to Jesus Christ, the firstborn of God, all the angels are to worship Him. The Lord Jesus, then, is the Father's Firstborn then in the sense of His having a position of priority and of authority over all the rest of mankind.

This is pointed out in a reference in Psalm 89:27. In referring to Jesus Christ, God says, "Also I will make Him [referring to Christ] my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." Jesus Christ, firstborn in terms of declaring His preeminence priority among all members of the human race. Jesus is the firstborn of all creation. So, He holds this place of preeminence in the universe, though He is so rejected by mankind. His preeminence in terms of creation is pointed out to us in Colossians 1:15, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

Now, at this point, the J.W.s (the Jehovah Witnesses) really go bananas. They take this verse, Colossians 1:15, and say, "You see? We've been telling you: Jesus Christ is not God. He is not preexistent deity. He is simply the first that God the Father created." He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. And the line of argument of many cults is Jesus Christ is simply human being, and they base it on this passage. But we must note that Jesus Christ Himself was in existence before anything at all had ever been created.

**Jesus as Creator and Sustainer**

Verse 17 of Colossians 1 tells us that, "And He [Jesus] is before all things [preexistent to all things], and by Him all things consist." So that, the Bible makes it very clear that before God the Father took one step, one action in creation, and He did this through the agency of the Son, Jesus Christ was already in existence. Jesus Christ was the one who created everything. He could not have created Himself. He could not have been a product of divine creation since He is the divine Creator.

Now, notice verse 16, Colossians 1, "For by Him were all things created [Jesus Christ was the Father's agent of creation], that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers [that is, spirit beings]: all things were created by Him, and for Him." Consequently, here again, He not only was preexistent before creation, He Himself was the one who did the creating. He did not create Himself. Further, the end of verse 17 says that, "by Him, all things consist," which tell us that because He is the Creator, He is the One and the only One who has the ability to hold the molecular structure of the material of the universe together.

This is why everything doesn't fly apart, is because the Creator, Jesus Christ, holds it together. He is what the scientists of the earlier days used to refer to. They didn't want to say, "Jesus Christ holds it together." They couldn't explain why molecular structures have an affinity to one another, why they don't fly apart on their own, why they're attracted, they're held together. So, they used to call it the Colossian force. And they referred to what is unknown to them and is still unknown to them, and they simply refer to it as the Colossian force. And what they meant was Colossians 1:17, Jesus Christ, the God who made it, holding it all together. They were a lot smarter as scientists many respects in days past.

Now, of course, this does imply then that Jesus Christ as true deity stands in the relationship of priority and sovereignty over all creation. And in that respect, the Father calls Him His firstborn. He as true deity stands in that position over all of humanity because He is not only deity but He is the godman. Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Yes, He is true deity. He is man. He is not a created being. He is absolute true God.

Titus 2:13 says, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Now, you really have to be pretty dumb to say that the Bible does not teach that Jesus Christ was God. You really have to be a poor reader or something. The Bible is very explicit. And the grammatical structures of the Word of God are very explicit that they are attaching deity to Jesus Christ. Well, if He is God, then obviously, He is not firstborn in terms of being the first of some created order of beings.

In Colossians 1:18, we are furthermore told that Jesus Christ has a certain priority as firstborn in terms of resurrection. Colossians 1:18, "And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence."

Was there ever anybody who was ever resurrected from the dead before Jesus Christ? Yes. Several people. But what happened to them? They died again. They were all resurrected back with mortal bodies, bodies subject to death. The first in line was Jesus Christ to be resurrected with the body that could never die again. Therefore, you see, He is referred to as the firstborn in terms of the resurrection. And again, the word is fittingly applied to Him, because it means to have a position of priority among all the rest of us who are now going to have bodies that will be immortal in time.

Revelation 1:5 refers to this same thing when it says, "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead [the firstborn from the dead], and the Prince of the kings of the earth," and so on. It is a position of preeminence in terms of resurrection. He is the first one to be raised, never to die again.

**The Christian's Place in the Royal Family of God**

And so, 1 Corinthians 15:20 refers to Him as the firstfruits of the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:20, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." That's what the Easter season is all about. He is the firstfruits. He is the number one of those who are going to be resurrected. We Christians, because we are related to Jesus Christ as the firstborn one, are therefore, by position, also firstborn.

Hebrews 12:23 says, "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect." We are in Christ. We once were in Adam, that terrible place of condemnation. Now we are in Christ. Because He is the firstborn, we share that position of prominence, preeminence, priority, exaltation with Him. We too, in that sense, are firstborn. And I want you to notice that your position as one of the firstborn of the church, one of the firstborn of the body of Christ, we are told, is on legal record: "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are written in heaven." Hebrews 12:23.

Your names are recorded as part of the firstborn of the heavenly Father in heaven. Your names are recorded, in other words, not only from the Book of Life. You can be erased from the Book of Life. That's just the list of people who've been born in the human race. But you have been recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life, those who belong specifically to Christ.

So, as joint heirs with Jesus Christ, we share His position of firstborn privilege. We share with Jesus Christ the privilege of firstborn honor in the human race as members of God's royal family. That's why we call you the "royal family of God." That's why we say you are the aristocrats of all the saints that have ever lived in all the ages. Because you are the firstborn. You are in the position of special priority because of your relationship to Jesus Christ. We share a special position.

The Lord Jesus possesses the family prerogative then of the firstborn. He exercises authority over the royal family of God which is the church. And we have thereby declared one of the positions that is specifically true of the person who is the firstborn. If He is firstborn, He is going to carry authority over the family. And we are told that He indeed is the Lord of the church. Matthew 28:28 tell us that all authority is given to Him.

You can compare that with Genesis 25:31-34, which gives you an Old Testament example of someone who is head of the family. Furthermore, Jesus Christ as the firstborn is our High Priest. Hebrews 4:14 tell us that He acts as our High Priest. And you can compare that to Job 1:5 where Job is acting as priest for the family because he was the firstborn and in charge of the family, and so he was running that for them. And furthermore, the Lord Jesus Christ receives the double portion of the Father's inheritance. He is not only Lord of the church, but He is also King of the Jews. Ephesians 1:22 and John 19:19 and compare that with Deuteronomy 1:17. So that, He has received, as God's firstborn Son, double-portion of the inheritance. He has inherited the church body; He has inherited Israel.

So, Romans 8:29 is making for us a very wonderful statement concerning ourselves when he tell us that Jesus Christ was to be the firstborn of God in a special position of preeminence and authority being firstborn. He had a special relationship. He was particularly possessed by God. He had certain rights and privilege. Firstborn in His spiritual character, firstborn in terms of resurrection. And furthermore, it is important that we observe that the point of His being in this preeminent position was the perfection. You know, the most perfect human being that the world has ever seen, He is that AMONG, we are told, which is the Greek preposition "en," which means "in the midst of many." The Greek word for "many" is "polus" which means, "a great multitude of brethren." And that's the word "adelphos." "Adelphos" is the normal Greek word of what you call somebody who's born in your family who's your brother. Jesus Christ, to be exalted in the midst of glorified, perfected human beings. A place of preeminence.

Now, you can understand that if you have something which is the marvelous gem (say, the beauty of the diamond), it is one thing to look at that and to say, "That is an attractive stone." It is a perfect stone. It may be absolutely flawless, but if you surround that stone with other stones that are perfect - near perfect, but not like that one - then you see how this one is brilliantly going to stand out against all that surrounds it, see. The setting is going to set off the beauty of the real quality. And that's the point of saying that Jesus Christ is the firstborn, the preeminent, perfect man in the midst of the group of human beings, you and me, that have been transformed into His image but none of us quite as beautiful and as perfect as He is. So that, when we surround Him, He will stand out with great brilliance. The priority of Jesus Christ in the midst of saved humanity. The Lord Jesus views all of us, furthermore, as His brothers. So that, the Bible stresses that we have a strong family relationship.

It is one thing to take a handsome person here and say, "I've got this handsome person here, and I want to put him here," but you surround him with a bunch of uglies here, terrible looking people who aren't members of his family. Sure, he's going to look good, as long as you surround him with uglies. But you know, there's some families that just produce good-looking people. They just can't have any uglies no matter how they try. Now, supposing you surround him with members of his family, all of whom are rather handsome people, now he stands out a very supreme, superior way because you can see how close these people come to him but not quite. They're not as beautiful as he is.

And that's what He has done with us. He has transformed us as family members, not aliens. Not somebody who doesn't have the same kind of nose or ears you have, but somebody that looks just like you. Members of the brethren. Brothers in the same family. That's what he is comparing us to.

We have this in Hebrews 2:11-12, "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren." He that sanctified: Jesus Christ. We who are sanctified. We're all of one Father. So, He's not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. The word "brethren" is male and female. "Saying, 'I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee.'"

It's in the midst of that kind of a setting. Before salvation, we Christians in God's sight were all in Adam. It's a place of condemnation, a place of eternal death. We were brothers in a fallen race doomed to an eternity in hell. Not much of a family to be in. After salvation, we believers in God's sight are now in Christ. We're in a place of justification and a place of eternal life. Jesus Christ as the last Adam is the firstborn of a new species of mankind, a new race of humanity which is to be transformed into the perfect image of Jesus Christ as His brothers in the same family destined to eternity in heaven. That's what we Christians now are. We Christian brothers will have all the spiritual and physical blemishes removed. We will form a magnificent, perfected humanity. We will be the really beautiful people.

Have you heard that term? Some ugly movie star snorting dope and sucking on the cigarettes and all the other things that give you the authority sign of the world and who show how flexible you are by a multiple series of marriages and whatnot in life - all that the entertainment world stands for. And if you don't know what the entertainment world is like, then you're out of touch with reality. It's a cesspool. All of that, these people are referred to as the beautiful people. And you really have to feel sorry for them.

No, I'll tell you who the beautiful people: this bunch sitting right here. Ephesians 5:25 says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it [you people who are part of the church]; That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word [clean you up with the Word of God from the point of salvation to taking you through the full counsel of God into spiritual maturity and into maximum divine, good production]." Verse 27, "That he might present it [the church, you people] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Absolutely perfect.

When was the last time that you looked in the mirror and discovered that you had a wrinkle? I found one this morning. [Laughter.] First one. There it is. Terrible. Everything is beginning to break down. Now, the Bible says, "I'm going to surround my Son with peoples who have His family characteristics and appearances so that they all start even. They're going to be perfect just like He is in His spiritual character and in His resurrection body. But there will be something about Jesus Christ, the gem of all humanity, that's going to shine and stand out above all the rest. He will be in the midst of all this perfected humanity, and He will be the really beautiful person of the universe.

You know, even Satan, when he was God's archangel, and he was known as Lucifer, the son of the morning, the Bible tell us that he stood in great contrast to the rest of the angels because the guy was just so handsome. And he was just so smart. He had the greatest wisdom of all of them, and he was one good-looking dude. So that, Satan, had he been the only angel, would have been an impressive figure. But not nearly as impressive as he was surrounded by all those other angels God had created who themselves were perfect beings and then the real superiority of Satan shown very clearly.

It was that very problem that caused him to resort to the crime of trying to take God's place. Because, if Satan looked upon the rest of the angelic realm, and he looked upon himself, it was evident to him that he was far more beautiful to look upon, and he was far wiser than any of them. He was in a position of priority and preeminence to be a leader that they could not be. And that caused him to decide to think more highly of himself than he ought to. But it was this very quality.

If you have a superior skill, supposing you're a good pianist, how good a pianist you are will not be seen until someone else sits down next to you who is a good pianist but who does not have the refinement of your skill. That's when it comes through what you can do. You may be a good craftsman with your hands. You can build things. Other people can build pretty good things. How much more of a quality craftsman you are will only be seen when what you've produced is matched up against someone who is a good craftsman too. Then, you really shine out. You see, you have to have the setting. Every jeweler knows that you have to take a gem and you have to put it in the proper setting.

So, the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be glorified as the supreme gem of humanity surrounded by the brothers who he has perfected. And he will stand out in that beauty that indeed, when you look upon Him, you will say, "Yes, He is a Lord." No, He is more than that. He is Lord of Lords, because He's surrounded by all the rest of us lords. But He is Lord of Lords. When you look upon Him, you'll say, "Yes, here's a mass of kings. All of us, we're kings. We're part of the royal family. But right there in the middle. See that man? He's the King of Kings. He stands out. And all the rest of us enhance His beauty."

So, it's going to take some doing, I think, for God indeed to fulfill His purpose of transforming us into the image of Christ so that we are such perfection that we are even in the running. He can't do a half-way job. He can't just make you part-way look good. He has to really do a superior job. It'll take God Himself to do a superior job so that you are even in the running to be reasonable to be compared with Jesus Christ. He's going to give you such a superior quality. He's going to make you so handsome, so beautiful, that you will indeed be a fitting setting for the Son of God. However down you may get this week, just remember that: you're headed for the very best.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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