

Focus on the Kingdom

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The Five Points of Calvinism

by William M. Wachtel

A recent book by George L. Bryson is entitled *The Five Points of Calvinism*. It contains a brief but helpful study of John Calvin's views on how people are saved — his theology of salvation, or soteriology. John Calvin is regarded in church history as one of the fathers of the Protestant Reformation, and his theology has had a profound influence on religious thinkers and churchgoers ever since his time. Today there are many who are proud to call themselves "Calvinists," although some of Calvin's views have been called into question by some within the Calvinist tradition itself.

The heart of his soteriology has been summarized in five points: 1) total depravity, 2) unconditional election, 3) limited atonement, 4) irresistible grace, and 5) perseverance of the saints. A word that borrows the first letter of each of these points has been used to create an easy way to remember them: TULIP.

In Calvinist thinking, "total depravity" means that humans are, because of our sinful nature, unable to believe in Christ or accept the gospel. Our inability is such that God must regenerate us first, before we can believe. This places regeneration as the *cause* of belief. The Scriptures, on the contrary, make regeneration the *result* of belief. "As many as received him [Christ], to these he gave power to become the sons of God, namely to those who believe in his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12, 13).

"Unconditional election" means that God chose, from all eternity, those who were to be saved. His choice was made arbitrarily, that is, without basis in any foreseen response on the part of his elect. He chose those who would be saved, and all others not chosen would be lost. There was no "condition" of salvation on the part of human beings. It was strictly a matter of God's own sovereign decision. Scripture, however, makes election *dependent on a person's decision to believe the gospel*, to put his faith in Christ as Savior and bearer of the Gospel of the Kingdom. "He who believes [the Gospel] and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). "By grace you

are saved, through faith" (Eph. 2:8). "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21). The Golden Text of the Bible, John 3:16, is the inspired answer to this false teaching of Calvinism.

"Limited atonement" means that Christ died only for the elect, and for none besides. This doctrine, in Calvin's logic, follows from the preceding premise that God's election is unconditional. But if this premise is false — as we have shown that it is — then his conclusion is not valid. Scripture, in fact, declares that Christ died for all men, not just for the elect. "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also *for the sins of the whole world*" (1 John 2:2). If this text alone does not disprove Calvin's third point, it is hard to imagine what it would take to do so!

"Irresistible grace" means that God will cause His elect to believe and be saved. They have really no choice in the matter. God's grace is not extended to those who are not elect, those who are not among the ones chosen from all eternity. But Scripture says that God's grace *can be resisted* and despised by those who have experienced it, according to Hebrews 10:29. It is, therefore, not irresistible!

"Perseverance of the saints" means that those who have been elected to be saved will remain faithful to God until the end. If a professing Christian does fall away and give up his faith, Calvinists say this proves that he never was saved in the first place, never was truly among the elect. The constant New Testament admonitions to persevere seem rather pointless if the elect cannot help but persevere! (Those who say that a Christian who falls away was really not saved in the first place are like people watching children coming down a waterslide. When some of the children fall off the slide, the audience proclaims that the children really were not on the slide at all!)

A dark blot is cast upon God's character by Calvin's theory of salvation. Calvinism believes in a hell of eternal conscious torments, a hell which God

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has created to receive the lost (who were predestined to go there). In this view, those not elected to salvation will be consigned to this tormenting hell forever and ever, without any hope or possibility of repentance or change on their part. In effect, God is made to appear as a cosmic sadist and monster planning the horrors and agonies of hell for all those He does not choose to elect to salvation, those He does not cause to accept His salvation. This, in fact, makes God responsible for their presence in hell for all eternity! Such a doctrine has led many to the opposite error of believing that hell is a place of correction and conversion, and those who go to hell will ultimately turn to God and be saved. This doctrine is called Universalism, because it teaches that all human beings will ultimately be saved and be received into God's presence.

The truth of Scripture is that the real "hell," properly called the Second Death or Gehenna, is neither a place of torment nor a place of correction. It brings about total destruction without hope of resurrection. The lost will meet their end, and become ashes under the feet of the righteous (Mal. 4:1-3). They will be "as though they had not been" (Obad. 16). The celebrated Greek scholar Richard Francis Weymouth, translator of the New Testament, once declared his amazement at the fact that the strongest words in the Greek language that mean total destruction and are used in the New Testament to describe the end of the wicked, are misinterpreted by many to teach instead their *continuation alive* in conscious torment or else their continuation alive for the purpose of correction. Neither of these two ideas can find any support in those words themselves nor in the context in which they are found in Scripture!

These facts in regard to the rather obvious mistakes of a leading Protestant Reformer should drive us back to the Bible in search of Truth which saves (II Thess. 2:10-13). It seems clear that the vast majority of those who attend churches have never conducted a personal investigation of the Bible to verify, or expose as false, what they have heard from the pulpit. No task could claim a greater urgency than this. Our destiny depends on our intelligent reception or rejection of the Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus preached it (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12; Mark 4:11, 12; Acts 8:12). ✧

The Promise to Abraham

A flood of brilliant light will be shed on the New Testament when we stop uprooting it from its Hebrew environment in the Old Testament. The promise to Abraham was that he would be the progenitor of the Messiah and that he (and the Messiah) would take control of the land and possess it forever: "The whole land of Canaan where you are now an alien, I will give to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8).

For every pious Israelite the horizon was bright with this grand covenant promise. So it was that Isaac's parting words contain the ultimate blessing for his son, Jacob: "May God give you and your descendants *the blessing given to Abraham* so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham" (Gen. 28:4).

Two thousand years later, when the New Testament was written, Abraham had not personally come into possession of the promised land (literally, "the land of the promise [made to Abraham]"). Stephen, shortly before he was martyred, explained that "God gave Abraham no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land" (Acts 7:5).

The writer to the Hebrews knew well that Abraham had been "called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance" (Heb. 11:8), residing in the promised land only as an alien. What Abraham looked forward to was permanent possession of "the land of the promise." The land in question was of course located on our planet and it was this land which "he would later receive as his inheritance" (Heb. 11:8). It is a "heavenly" land since it is divinely ordained by the God of Heaven and will be blessed with the presence of the Messiah himself as God's supreme agent. But the inheritance guaranteed on oath to Abraham is definitely to be *on earth*. Had he not been invited to look to the north, south, east and west (Gen. 13:14)? God's covenant assured him that "I will give *all the land* you see to you and your offspring forever" (Gen. 13:15). Abraham was not asked to look upwards to the sky to understand his future inheritance.

God's formal arrangement to give the land to Abraham is celebrated as the bedrock foundation of the divine plan for mankind. In times of distress the faithful comfort themselves with the assurance that: "God remembers His covenant forever, the word He

commanded for a thousand generations, the covenant He made with Abraham, the oath He swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: To you I will *give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit*" (Ps. 105:8-11).

At the birth of Jesus, Mary sings of the magnificent blessing of God who has "remembered to be merciful to Abraham and to his descendants forever, even as He said to our fathers" (Luke 1:54, 55). Zechariah takes up the song of praise to God who has "shown mercy to our fathers and remembered His holy covenant, the oath He swore to our father Abraham" (Luke 1:72, 73). The promise was for worldwide dominion — a Messianic empire — through Jesus Christ, a theme beloved by the Apostles when they eagerly inquired of Jesus, after a six-week intensive training in the "affairs of the Kingdom" (Acts 1:3), "Lord, has the time now come for you to restore the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). This episode, which caused such joy to Luke, has embarrassed commentators whose interests are far removed from those of Messiah's chosen disciples. It is time for Bible readers to renounce a mistaken tradition which criticizes the Apostles for their "political" question about the Kingdom. Jesus did not rebuke them for any misunderstanding. The question about the Kingdom and the restoration of worldwide government under the Messiah remains *the* crucial Christian question. The fulfillment of Jesus' and the Apostles' greatest desire awaits the return of Jesus to rule and reign with his saints in the coming Kingdom.

The promise to Abraham that he would be "heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13) awaits fulfillment at the return of Christ. Meanwhile God has graciously allowed the Gentiles who believe the Gospel about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12), and who undergo baptism, to become fellow-heirs with Abraham and Christ. "If you are Christians," says Paul triumphantly, "you are Abraham's descendants and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). And what is the promise?

The promise guarantees that the "blessing given to Abraham" will come upon the Gentiles in Christ (Gal. 3:14). We have already seen what that blessing was in Genesis 28:4: to gain permanent possession of *the land* in which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were aliens.

Through the death of Messiah we are redeemed by his covenant blood. Our sins are forgiven. Forgiveness is contingent also upon our intelligent reception of the Gospel about the Kingdom (Mark 4:11, 12; cp. Luke 8:12). Through faith in God's covenant with Abraham

and David and the Messiah, ratified and guaranteed by the death of Christ, we must now strive to gain possession of the promise made to Abraham. Our hope is to rule the world with Christ when he intervenes to assume his Messianic role as the first and only successful world ruler. Until that time we must "live lives worthy of God who is calling [us] into His Kingdom and glory" (I Thess. 2:12).

"When the world is reborn," Jesus promises, "when the Son of Man comes to sit on his throne of glory, you too will sit on twelve thrones to administer the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). "If we suffer with him we shall rule as kings with him," Jesus says through Paul to his church (II Tim. 2:12). The Apostle repeats the message to the Corinthians: "Don't you know that the Saints are going to manage the world? And if the world is to come under your jurisdiction..." (I Cor. 6:2, Moffat). Jesus reaffirms the Christian goal: "To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations; he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery, just as I have received authority from my Father" (Rev. 2:26, 27). Then Jesus adds: "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:29). The Messiah will deal violently with the world at his return. Such vengeance is not characteristic of him, but it will be a necessary expression of the wrath of God. The Lord Jesus "will be revealed from heaven...in flames of fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God or obey the Gospel" (II Thess. 1:7, 8). At present Christians are commanded to take vengeance on no one, following the example of Jesus when he lived in Israel.

Heaven at Death?

Despite these dramatic statements about the destiny of believers, the traditional dogma of a vague "heaven when you die" clings in the minds of many to a few, select verses. Did not Jesus promise "treasure in heaven" (Matt. 6:20) and a "reward [which is] great in heaven"? (Matt. 5:12). Is not our hope "stored up in heaven"? (Col. 1:5). Yet Jesus encourages the meek with the prospect of inheriting the earth (Matt. 5:5). How is the apparent contradiction to be resolved?

The clue is given us by Peter. He speaks of an imperishable inheritance "*kept in heaven* for you...ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:4, 5). All the good things of the future, say the Rabbis and the New Testament, are laid up for us with God. This does not however mean that we go to heaven to acquire them any more than one who retires goes to

live in the bank where his hard-earned savings have been invested. When Jesus returns he will grant entrance into the Kingdom of God on earth and possession of the world to all the faithful. That reward is at present reserved as treasure with God in heaven and will be brought to the earth with Christ at his Second Coming. Thus the Psalmist sings: “[God has] installed [His] King on Zion [His] holy hill. [God] said to me [the Messiah], ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter’” (Ps. 2:6-9).

Popular ideas about the Christian destiny are in collision with the Bible. Scripturally speaking, Christians do not go to heaven. Heaven is where their inheritance is now deposited. Jesus comes back to us to bestow “the reward of the inheritance” (Col. 3:24) which is possession of the earth renewed and purified under the direction of Messianic government. “Heaven must retain the Messiah,” says Peter, “until the time comes for the Restoration of all things about which the prophets spoke from long ago” (Acts 3:21). It hardly needs to be said that no prophet envisioned future bliss in a place other than a regenerated earth, blessed by the presence and the just rule of Messiah and his assistants:

“The government will be upon [the Messiah’s] shoulders...Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his Kingdom establishing it and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isa. 9:6, 7). “See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice” (Isa. 32:1). “In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it — one from the house of David — one who in his administration seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness” (Isa. 16:5). “Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the Saints, the people of the Most High” (Dan. 7:27). “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time, I will make a righteous Branch [the Messiah] sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right *in the land*. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. At that time they will call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the Lord. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah will join the

house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance” (Jer. 33:14-16, 3:17, 18).

In the light of these thrilling promises of peace and international justice on earth, Christians should raise a protest against the “heaven” presented by leading evangelists. For Billy Graham heaven is a place far removed from this planet, in which, however, conditions will be like the most beautiful things we know on earth. Our function in heaven, according to this popular teaching, will be “to prepare heavenly dishes,” “play with children, “tend gardens” or “polish rainbows.”¹ But why doesn’t he take his information from the Bible? This “evangelical” heaven is a far cry from the restored earth foreseen by the prophets and anticipated by Jesus. Jesus never spoke about rewards to be enjoyed in a heaven removed from the earth — much less about disembodied souls. He promised that “in the New World, when the Son of Man sits on his throne of glory, you too will sit on thrones to govern the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). He graciously extended this administrative function to all the faithful (Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:1-6). The disciples of Jesus must be busy preparing for this divine honor.

It was Plato who promoted so successfully the idea of the soul as a conscious entity escaping the body at death for a trip to heaven. But philosophy is the great enemy of Christian teaching (Col. 2:8). Just as the Israelites of old were unable to resist the lure of pagan religion, so the Church after the death of the Apostles fell into the clutches of Greek philosophy from which it desperately needs to be rescued. A step in the right direction will be taken when a moratorium is called on all preaching about “going to heaven,” “departing souls” and “going to be with Jesus” prior to his return.

The shift from Hebrew to Hellenistic ways of thinking spelled disaster for the Apostolic faith. A progressive paganization ate away at the fabric of Truth. There was a time when Christian spokesmen sounded the alarm at the influx of pagan philosophy masquerading as Christian doctrine. So Justin Martyr in 150 A.D. warned: “If you meet some who say that their souls go to heaven when they die, do not believe that they are Christians.”²

Today original heresy has become entrenched orthodoxy. The truth of the Bible sounds alarmingly

¹ “What Heaven is Really Like,” *Hope for the Troubled Heart*, Word Pub. Co., 1991.

² *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80.

alien to Hellenized believers who read the Scriptures with one foot in the biblical text and the other planted in the world of their cherished Church-Platonism. The return to the Bible (i.e., the study of the Bible to “examine all things carefully,” rather than a superficial and occasional glance at a few verses) will be under way when the words of noted scholars are taken to heart, not as dry academic observations, but as prophetic calls for a radical return to the Christian documents: “The difference is obvious between the mental patterns of the New Testament and most of our accustomed Christian thinking...The explanation of this contrast lies in the fact that historic Christian thought...has been Greek rather than Hebrew. Claiming to be founded on the Scripture, it has, as a matter of fact, completely surrendered many scriptural frameworks of thinking and has accepted the Greek counterparts instead.”³ “The hope of the early church centered on the resurrection of the Last Day...This understanding of the resurrection implicitly understands death as also affecting the whole man...Thus the original Biblical concepts *have been replaced by ideas from gnostic hellenistic dualism*...The difference between this and the hope of the New Testament is very great.”⁴ Church members, however, often seem blissfully unaware of any such problem.

Conclusion

The words of Jesus promising the meek that they will “inherit the earth” provide a salutary reminder of how far we have removed our hearts from him. We may share Jesus’ Messianic outlook by understanding that the rule of Messiah and all his Saints has not yet begun. David is dead (Acts 2:29, 34), as are all the Saints. They are not in heaven. They await resurrection into the Life of the Coming Age (mistranslated as “eternal life” in our versions) as promised in Luke 14:14, 20:35; I Cor. 15:23; Dan. 12:2. This future age will be the manifested worldwide reign of Jesus and the faithful on the earth renewed and purified. May that biblical “heaven” on earth be proclaimed everywhere as the heart of the New Covenant (Luke 22:28-30⁵), the essence of the Gospel,

³ H.E. Fosdick, *A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, Harper Bros., 1938, p. 93.

⁴ Dr. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Fortress Press, 1966, pp. 143, 414.

⁵ Note the word “covenant” and the fact that God here is said to have made *a covenant with Jesus* to give him the Kingdom of God. Thus the Jesuanic covenant fulfills the

and the goal of God’s oath-bound promise to Abraham in Christ.

Appendix: What the Experts Say Some Remarkably Challenging Statements About Death in View of What Is Commonly Taught

The celebrated *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*: “No biblical text authorizes the statement that the soul is separated from the body at the moment of death” (Vol. 1, p. 803).

Isn’t the separation of the soul from the body at death taught by nearly every church and expressly in funeral sermons?

Well-known British theologian and Bible scholar J.A.T. Robinson says: “It is an almost universally cherished belief that the immortality of the soul is a tenet of the Christian faith, despite the fact that it rests on assumptions which are fundamentally at variance with the Biblical doctrine of man” (*In the End God*, Collins, Fontana Books, p. 91).

“Heaven, in fact, is nowhere used in the Bible as the destination of the dying” (*Ibid.*, pp. 104, 5).

But isn’t “heaven” the term used by millions of churchgoers as the place they hope to go to at death?

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Eerdmans, Vol. II, p. 812): “We are influenced always more or less by the Greek Platonic idea that the soul is immortal. Such an idea is *utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness and is nowhere found in the Old Testament*. The whole man dies, when in death the spirit goes out of the man. Not only his body but also his soul returns to a state of death [this is true of the faithful dead as well as the wicked — they all fall asleep in death]. Therefore the Old Testament can speak of the death of one’s soul. Death is a place of darkness, cut off from the land of the living...Death is also a place where God is no longer praised or thanked (Ps. 6:5; 115:17). Death is where the dead are unconscious, do no more work, take no account of anything, possess no knowledge or wisdom...The dead are asleep (Job 26:5; Prov. 2:18; 9:18; 21:6; Ps. 88:11; Isa. 14:9).”

John Goldingay, *Word Biblical Commentary on Daniel*, Word Books, 1987, p. 307: “The Old Testament’s standard way of envisaging dying and coming back to life is by speaking of lying down and sleeping, then of waking and getting up. The former [dying] is an extreme form of the latter [lying down to

promises and covenants made with Abraham, Israel and David.

sleep] which thus provides the metaphor for it (II Kings 4:31; 13:21; Isa. 26:19; Jer 51:39, 57; Job 14:12). Further, dying means lying down with one's ancestors in the family tomb, with its non-material equivalent Sheol; so coming back to life would mean leaving such a 'land of earth' (cp. Ps. 49; 73). The image presupposes a restoring to life of the whole person with its spiritual and material aspects."

This way of understanding death is also a prophecy (Dan. 12:2) of what happens when we die in the New Testament period and onwards until today. There has been no change in the meaning of death. In Jesus only is there a promise of a future resurrection from the state of death. This will happen when he comes back to establish the Kingdom of God on earth (I Cor. 15:23 — "those who are Christians will be resurrected at his coming").

A contemporary writer helps us to understand that man in the Bible does not have a never-dying soul, when he speaks of "our unfortunate preoccupation with the notion of the immortality of the soul. That doctrine is a piece of non-Hebraic philosophical baggage with which we have been stuck, ever since the church got out into the wide world of Greek thought" (Robert Capon, *Parables of Judgment*, p. 71).

The same author goes on to say that the idea that we live again immediately after we die "has given us almost nothing but trouble" (*Ibid.*, p. 7).

This author is right. There is no imperishable part of you that will go on living automatically after you die. Jesus will not reattach immortal souls to new bodies at the resurrection. The Biblical scheme is that when we die, the whole man dies, and then in the resurrection the whole man will live again. The writer just quoted goes on to say: "Those so-called unbelievers who horrify Christians by saying that when you're dead, you are dead, are actually closer to faith in the Gospel than they know."

Popular ideas promoted in church have disregarded this biblical understanding of death and resurrection. "What would Jesus say?" should be our motto. At present many of the Messiah's would-be followers sound very much unlike him when discussing the great issues of Christian destiny. ✧

Colossians 1:16 — A Misleading Text in Standard Versions

Colossians 1:16 in the King James (Authorized) version of the Bible is likely to be misleading. It reads: "**By him [Jesus] were all things created that are on the earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created by him and for him.**" Although the creation in question is that of the hierarchy of the universe, the average reader is likely to receive the impression that Jesus was the creator in Genesis 1:1. "All things were made by him."

Such a view contradicts a mass of biblical texts and threatens the unique position of God, the Father of Jesus.

To say that Paul thinks of Jesus as the creator active in Genesis 1:1 contradicts a number of other biblical passages. Firstly, in Hebrews 4:4, where God and Jesus are quite distinct personalities, the writer says that "God [not Jesus] rested on the seventh day from all His works." This text makes the Father the active agent in creation. The same book says in its opening verses that God spoke by a Son only in "the end of these [earlier, OT] days." God did not speak or act through a Son until the ministry of Jesus in Israel.

The Son is associated *not* with Old Testament times but with the historical ministry of Jesus. Jesus himself referred to someone other than himself "who made them male and female." He stated in Mark 10:6 that "from the beginning of the creation *God* made them male and female." He positively did not say, "I made them..." This view is exactly in line with the Old Testament assertion that the One God of Israel, Yahweh, the Father, created everything and was *alone* in the act of creation of Genesis 1:1: "Yahweh who makes all things, who stretches forth the heavens all alone, who spreads forth the earth by Myself. Who was with Me?" (Isa. 44:24, RSV). The implied answer is that no one assisted the Father at the creation of the universe. In Isaiah the promised Messiah is a personality distinct from the God who claims to have been unaided and unaccompanied at creation. The Messiah is the Son who is to be born to Israel (Isa. 9:6). In Malachi 2:10 the one God of the Hebrew Bible is defined as the Father and it was He who created all things alone. Paul knew these texts and would not have contradicted them by asserting that the Son had actually created the universe. Paul was a staunch believer in Israel's creed: "There is no God but One...There is One God, the Father" (1 Cor.

8:4, 6). Jesus is the human Lord Messiah (Ps. 110:1, *adoni*, not *adonai*) according to Peter in Acts 2:34-36 and the angel in Luke 2:11.

Accurately translated, Colossians 1:16 does not say that all things were created by Jesus. *The Expositors' Greek New Testament Commentary* on Colossians says directly of Colossians 1:16: "This does not mean 'by him.'" The margins of many Bibles will show that the text actually reads: "In [en] him all things were created... All things have been created **through** [*dia* + gen.] him and **with a view to** [*eis*] him." Paul's chief purpose in this passage is to speak of Christ's work in redemption and his supreme position in the hierarchy of authority, i.e. the Kingdom in which Christians have been promised a share and which they await as an inheritance (Col. 1:13; 3:24). Jesus has a supreme position over all created beings and rival powers. Paul describes the position of Jesus as "firstborn" (*prototokos*) and founder or chief (*arche*) of the new creation. Jesus is to head up the Kingdom, the "Kingdom of God's dear Son" (v. 13). The issue here is authority and rule. "Firstborn" is a Messianic title drawn from Psalm 89, in which the Father speaks of the coming Messiah: "He will cry to me, 'Thou art my Father, my God and the rock of my salvation.' I will make him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. I will establish his seed for ever and his throne as the days of heaven" (Ps. 89:26, 27, 29).

Because Jesus is God's eldest Son, he is the reason for the creation. All things were created "in" him. The exact force of these prepositions is difficult to specify, but one distinguished authority suggests that it should be taken here in a causal sense: "For *because of him* the universe was created" (Moulton, Milligan, *Grammar of the New Testament*, Vol. III, p. 253).

The creation was designed and brought into existence with Jesus in mind. As firstborn he inherits it as a gift from the Father. But Jesus would have been the first to renounce the idea that he had made the universe for himself!✧

Comments from Africa

"I am a listener to your programme on Radio Africa 2 and I have been blessed by your messages. May you keep on doing the wonderful work of God."

"It is high time now for me to express my innermost interest in listening to your radio program. Indeed these programs are rich in spirit. They draw me into the atmosphere of contemplating, meditating and reflecting on God's love and mercy."

Atlanta Bible College's Tenth Annual Theological Conference — February 16th-18th, 2001

We invite all of our readers to visit us for a unique experience. Beginning on the afternoon of Friday, Feb. 16th and ending at lunchtime on Sunday, Feb. 18th we will convene a gathering of like-minded Bible students and inquirers (all are welcome). We have invited as guest speaker, Professor Clayton Sullivan of the University of Southern Mississippi, author of a remarkable book, *Rethinking Realized Eschatology* (Mercer University Press, 1988). None should be daunted by the technical language — the issues are well known to students of the Bible. The professor's objective in writing was to examine Jesus' central and favorite topic: the Kingdom of God. Professor Sullivan exposes and unravels the immensely popular notion (promoted by well-known scholar C.H. Dodd) that the Kingdom of God in the gospels was actualized and exclusively present in the ministry of Jesus. Dodd had left no room for the understanding of the Kingdom as the future, decisive event by which God will establish through the Messiah peace on earth, when Jesus returns. Sullivan writes provocatively: "Throughout most of this two millennia span, the Church has paid scant attention to Jesus the Jew... Instead primary attention was given to doctrines and dogmas about Jesus."

Professor Sullivan's expert knowledge of this most crucial of Christian issues will sharpen your understanding of what has been going on by way of an eclipse of Jesus' own Gospel. You will be empowered by this information to speak with greater confidence about the Kingdom of God, Jesus' "magnificent obsession." Professor Sullivan will present two lectures (with opportunity for questions following).

The remainder of our weekend will consist of presentations (with time for audience participation) by various speakers on central Christian topics. There will be space also for short "journey of faith" presentations by our visitors. We look forward to becoming acquainted with those whom we have met only through radio contact. We expect visitors from abroad. The meetings and socializing provide a rare opportunity to meet other "truth-seekers."

We will be advertising block rates at a local hotel, and transportation will be provided free from Hartsfield International Airport as well as from the hotel, to Atlanta Bible College. If you have questions about the conference, please email us at anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com or phone us at 1-800-347-4261. A registration form is provided here.

Cost	Regular Rate	Full-time Student
Early Bird (by Jan 20 th)	\$29	\$19
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2001 Theological Conference

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