

“Christ - the Firstborn Head of the Universe”

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When discussing the Christology of Paul it is important to remember that “for Paul, theology and religion are inseparable”.(Ladd p. 415) I believe that to appreciate the meaning of the writings of the greatest theologian of the Greek Scriptures it is imperative to understand them from the author’s perspective as well as how he intends it to be conveyed to his audience at the beginning of the first century. “Paul was a theological thinker whose theological “concepts” were facts about God, humankind, and the world that described the world’s estrangement from God and God’s deed in Christ to bring the world back to himself.”(Ibid.) Paul wrote extensively about the Age to come when the reality of what God has done in Christ would become evident to everyone. An examination of Paul’s writings would cause one to conclude that the kingdom of God is both present and future. It is present, as the resurrection of the Messiah is a present reality to the believer in this age. But the resurrection and the reign of believers with the Messiah is an expectation that will be realized fully when the Messiah comes.

for Paul the *eschatological resurrection has already begun*. Followers of the Messiah now enjoy the blessings of the Age to come through the gift of the spirit in the present age which acts as a deposit or partial payment of the guaranteed eschatological inheritance that will be fully realized when the resurrection occurs. A theological term to denote this idea of already, not yet is realized eschatology. Eschatology, the study of end things, has as its root the Greek word Eschatos, which means last, utmost. Eschatos is used in 1 Peter 1:20 as an adjective that signifies the end of times or time of last things. In George Elden Ladd’s profound work “**A Theology of the New Testament**” speaking of Paul’s eschatology, Ladd says,

“...the eschatological gift is divided into two portions, the first of which has become present experience, but the fullness of which remains an object of future eschatological realization. The resurrection is both history and eschatology; the life of the Spirit is both experience and hope; The Kingdom of God is both present and future; the blessings of the Age to Come remain in their fullness objects of hope and expectation; yet these very blessings have in part reached back into the present evil age because of the modification of the antithetical structure and have become in Christ the subjects of present Christian experience.” p. 409

God has pierced the veil which hid the end of the present age of history and makes manifest the age to come through the human agent Jesus, the Messiah, his chosen spokesmen. This plan is what existed from the beginning in God’s mind, and it concerns both his relationship with man and man’s destiny to rule his creation. Some passages in the Bible which I think offer great insight into God’s plan will be looked at in light of the reality of the in breaking of the eschatos into human history. This realized eschatology is, I believe, a correct perspective which can alleviate confusion in certain passages of Paul when they are looked at from the perspective of the eternal nature of God’s plan and realized eschatology verses the assumption of the deity and pre-existence of the Messiah. I can’t get into the depth of some of the ideas I’m presenting of course because of time. My goal in analyzing these passages is to convey in a broad overview God’s purpose and ultimate goal for history. That the Father be worshipped by man, through a re-establishment of the image of God, which though Adam the first man was created in, through the fall was distorted and so had to be re-formed through the man, Messiah, Jesus. This image of God is also to be borne by all of those who are now being conformed to the image that God envisioned for humanity. A new image that mankind will be created in, because it has been re-created through a man, Jesus.

“Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2)

The great hope of the believer is to be able to perfectly reflect the image of God as resurrected new creations in the Messiah, who himself is a resurrected human. As a son of Adam he is the prototype of a humanity that will be able to perfectly bear the image of God. He is the first born from the resurrection who being born from the dead is the New Man that brings back the perfect image of God, to the community who in the age to come will be “like him” when he is seen “as he is.”

The plan of God for the salvation of man was in the Father’s mind from all eternity past. The election of man for salvation came about by the good pleasure of his will. The method employed by God to achieve his purpose is to call those who have faith in him to follow his son and become conformed to his image. The Bible summarizes the purpose of God succinctly in Romans 8:28-30. Reading these verses and arriving at their meaning can be a little difficult because of words like foreknew and predestined that can appear very complex and difficult to define.

To start with, I want to look at the general idea of foreknowledge. Very simply stated, to foreknow something, is to know it in advance of it occurring. If I foreknow what I want to get my wife for our anniversary, it means I’ve already made up my mind about what I’m going to get. It is a decision that originated with me thinking that something should be done, and then deciding what I’m going to do in advance of actually doing it. It sounds simple, and really it is not that complicated, but it is a vital piece in understanding Paul’s theology of realized eschatology.

To predestine something is to take or to see to it that necessary steps are taken to implement that decision. Implicit in the idea of predestining is planning out a strategy and then implementing or having implemented the details which bring about a realization of the decision. The decision God made before he created Adam, or his purpose in the creation of human-kind, was his purpose from all eternity. This purpose is to be worshipped forever by a man created in his own image, and the descendants or the offspring of that man, human-kind.

What is meant by God’s image here is not his essential, eternal attributes that are expressive of his deity. What this paper refers to as the “image of God” are his moral attributes and character. We don’t have time to review the passages of scripture which deal with God’s image, or his attributes and moral character in the Bible. It would take pages and pages because there are literally thousands of verses that deal with God’s character and attributes. But a few examples of these attributes which are in him and are able to be realized in the new humanity in their fullness are pure, righteous, just, merciful, kind, holy and so on.

The Image of God and Oneness

God’s purpose was that the creature that he created in his own image, mankind, would reflect and manifest all his attributes and characteristics and through love and thankfulness give him adoration and honor. But the image of God, and therefore the ability to render to God the pure worship which he intended to receive from his creation, has become horribly corrupted by the

disobedience of the first man and the subsequent fall of all mankind. God's image in man has become the merest shadow of what was intended, and it would have never been able to be recovered at all except through the man who does perfectly qualify as the image of God, Jesus, the Messiah.

This one man, the Messiah has said "whoever sees me sees him who sent me." (John 12:45) And "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) He goes on to say in verse 10 of the same chapter,

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves."

The question is did Jesus see himself as God or as a human, moral agent who was so similar in character to his Father, God, that he expressed God's will perfectly and thus reflected his character and moral attributes. Was Jesus trying to convey that he felt that he and the Father share one to one equivalence involving absolute deity? God's works were able to be done through Jesus in the way that God wanted because of the relationship he had with God. He described the works he did as being God's works. Should this automatically lead us to infer he was ascribing to himself deity?

Jesus explicitly said that God was doing the works through him because he was in him. What was the meaning of God being in him? Could it not have been that what God was desiring to be done, that perfect, holy will which is a result of God's perfect and righteous character, is exactly what Jesus did because he manifests the true character of God. Would we not then be able to say that the image of God, his character and moral attributes are perfectly reflected in Jesus and so they are one?

Jesus said, by believing the works that they saw Jesus do, they were believing that he was in the Father and the Father in him. He then says later in verse 12 that they (his disciples) will be able to do God's works because God will be in them through the Spirit in the same way he was in Jesus.

"On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

The way they will know that God and Jesus are in them and they are doing their works is the disciples will love Jesus and He and the Father will reveal themselves to them. This love will be manifested by the disciples keeping Jesus' word. The idea here is they will have God and Jesus manifest themselves and they will be one with them if they obey the words of Jesus. Are the words of Jesus not the expression of his will? This obedience to Jesus' will relative to their oneness with him in the same way illustrates the oneness that the disciples will have with the Father and Jesus.

The description of the oneness Jesus has with the Father, it seems should be understood the same way. Namely his obedience to God shows that he was perfectly aligned with God's will. This is

a oneness in their relationship or the unity of their will, not a oneness in essence. He said,

“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.” (John 8:28-30)

Jesus so perfectly obeys the Father, that the Father’s image is perfectly recognized in the form of his son. To the extent that when the disciples were looking at the son the Father’s image is reflected by the son.

Did Jesus “come” from heaven?

The premise of this study is that it was God’s plan to effect the restoration of his image in mankind and to fulfill the eternal plan of man ruling his creation forever in concert with his righteous will. The centrality of Jesus’ role is of utmost importance. Did Jesus exist prior to being born? Or, was it that the works and office that Jesus would fulfill on history’s stage existed in God’s plan before he did. Was he then, in the fullness of God’s time, given existence by an unmediated creative act of God in the womb of Mary and through his birth come to fulfill that which God predestined and described in the pages of scripture? Is this how we are to approach such passages in scripture such as: “Before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58) “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?”(John 6:62)? Or do these, and other passages suggest as many hold that Jesus had a pre-existence in heaven before his birth as a baby, and he came down literally to assume human form or impersonal human nature; that he always existed as God the Son, and was God of very God?

Jesus, the man, was predestined in God’s plan to restore the image of God in man and he perfectly succeeded in this mission because he reflected everything that was able to be known about God’s moral attributes. The biblical texts we will look at describe how Jesus fulfilled God’s purpose. It would have to be admitted that the idea of a man literally coming from heaven from a previous existence and form would have been a foreign concept to a Palestinian Jew living in the 1st century. If this was the case, would this key concept not have been emphasized in their scriptures. Certainly, in their minds, a description of the moving one form of life from a previous existence in heaven into another form in an earthly realm would be abhorrent. This idea wasn’t foreign, however, to the Greek pagan mystery cults which declared the need for a proto-gnostic redeemer to come from heaven to impart to man knowledge of how to re-enter the spirit world of ideas which was corrupted by the material world.

The terminology employed in the time of Jesus to describe something being manifested in God’s plan which has existed with him in the indeterminate past and which is being manifested has been forced to agree with today’s orthodox meaning of pre-existence. The idiomatic expression that Hebrew thought patterns used to describe something as coming from God is that it came from heaven. An example is found in Luke 20:4, when Jesus says:

“I will also ask you a question, and you tell me: Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?”

The context is an argument that arose over the origin of Jesus' authority to teach. The religious leader who opposed his teaching refused to believe that he was sent by God even though there were miracles and wonders everywhere he taught. So he used the baptism of John, something they were all familiar with, as an object lesson to point out their bias against him. Jesus spoke about the baptism of John using the phrase to "come from heaven" to describe the origins of the authority of John's baptism. In this episode Jesus speaks of something that derives its authority from God or has its origin in his plan as coming from heaven. This is an idiom that was frequently employed and universally understood by Palestinian Jewry in this manner. The term "coming down from heaven", when employed here and elsewhere should be understood as a description of something which is predestined by God and originates as a part of his overall purpose. Some of the other "coming down from heaven" verses such as John 6:33 and 6:38 among others, don't need to have read into a literal reading of pre-existence into them. This was something that was forced on these passages later to support the claim of pre-existence when this distortion about the son of God became orthodox. We should do well to consider that in the Hebrew mind something that "comes from God" or "comes from heaven" is something that originates in the mind or plan of God.

God's Will - to be All in All

No-one before Jesus or since has had a fuller understanding of the specifics of God's plan. And even his understanding was not fully complete when he was on the earth. He didn't know the day or the hour of his return. Throughout the ages, however, God has revealed facets of his plan through his spirit to those who sought him with all their heart, and aspects of it were "spiritually" discerned by his prophets and those who studied and searched the scriptures to grasp the meaning of God's revelation. Prophets were men that God used to foretell and forth tell, to predict what God was going to do and recount and interpret what he had done. The prophets spoke by the Spirit to teach about the gifts that God has bestowed on men. (I Corinthians 2:12). But these gifts did not originate by the will or creativity of any man. The ideas that comprise God's plan have to be revealed and transmitted to chosen vessels. This passage in I Corinthians goes on to teach that we who have the spirit of God are able to know the mind of God in the areas that he has given us revelation because we have the mind of Christ. What was revealed to Christ was taken and taught and expounded by him so that we are able to have as much of an understanding of things pertaining to God's purpose and plan as Christ had when he walked the earth. Possibly even more because additional elucidation was given through the canon of the Greek scriptures which were not available as of yet in the time of Jesus.

This was God's wisdom which is hidden and secret but which the Bible says God decreed before the ages for our glory. What was this wisdom that God decreed or predestined. it was his plan for the ages which had its origin and inception with God before the ages began. The word here for ages is the Greek word *aion*. This word means a period of indeterminate duration, or time viewed in relation to what takes place in the period. Also, the idea is that there are indeterminate periods of time that God fore-knew that are characterized by certain spiritual or moral characteristics. The following is an overview of the ages which have been revealed are to follow Christ's death:

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all

die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says all things are put in subjection it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all." (I Corinthians 15:20-28)

Notice that the final state is for the Father to be all in all after all things are subjected to Christ who himself is to be subjected to the Father. This is the ultimate age, the age of ages which takes place after the Millennial rule of Christ when he has "destroyed every ruler and every authority and every power". Christ's throne is exalted above all of the rulers and authorities and powers, and they all are put under his feet. Who is the "he that puts the enemies of God and Christ under Christ's feet? Verse 27 says that God, speaking of the Father has put all things in subjection under Christ's feet.

Exchanged Dominion for Death

In the coming age the earth is to be under subjection not only to Christ but the dominion of the earth is to be restored to mankind. This dominion is still future and is to be realized at the Messiah's second coming. God made Adam to have dominion over the earth as Genesis 1:26-27 says:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

God's commission to Adam was to have dominion. He re-asserts this in verse 28 to "them" indicating that the man and the woman were to share this dominion. God gave the first man authority to be his representative and vice-regent on the planet earth. This was all contingent on Adam's obedience. He would have continued to rule over the creation so long as he continued to obey God's will; be one with him in purpose and will. This first man that was made came from the dust. God imparted to him the gift of life and quickened him making him a sentient creature who was able to be aware of and partake in a relationship with his creator. The living being he created and breathed the spirit or breath of God into was in the image of God. He was also given authority by God to act as God, as his viceroy, to have delegated authority over all that God created. Adam, By virtue of his unmediated creation by God from the dust, was given the name and status - son of God. He was the first-born of God's creation, the original created order that existed before the fall.

Adam was to exercise his power under the subjection of God. God alone holds the ultimate authority by virtue of his being the Creator. When Adam held the title of son of God he was able to exercise the power and authority of God himself. He was sovereign Lord of creation and the only greater power was God's. Adam knew that God's leadership was to be supreme, but he was given a free will, along with which came the possibility that he could yield to the temptation to disobey God's command. He did disobey God and consequently relinquished his sovereignty and that of his descendants to Satan and the spirit beings that had rebelled with him. He was separated from his creator, losing the oneness and the perfect unity he once enjoyed by virtue of his relationship with his Father. Adam listened to the spiritual wickedness and powers of darkness who sought to undermine the power and authority of God. He gave into their temptation as he listened to the ultimate lie; that he would be as God, knowing good and evil. Adam's attempt at grasping all knowledge was equal to an attempt at usurping God's own prerogative to have absolute obedience given him. Adam, the first man's attempt at grasping equality with God brought the ultimate punishment - death.

By declaring his independence from God, Adam would no longer have access to the life of God, which would have been unending. For his sin, Adam, the first man, who came out of the earth, would have return to the earth and experience cessation of his existence, death. Through Adam, as humankind's representative and progenitor, death passed to all mankind. It was through Adam, the head of the human race, the fountain from which the springs of reproduction were to flow, that death and corruption were passed to all of humanity and because of Adam's disobedience the creation experienced corruption as well.

Humankind could no longer enjoy the fellowship with God their Creator because the image of God has been so marred. Mankind, as a result of Adam's disobedience were enslaved to the god of this age, the devil, and enslaved to sin, which is disobedience to God.

Resurrection Correction

I Corinthians 15:45-50, relates the plan of God to restore the dominion of man through a man:

“Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

The fall of Adam did not ever alter the plan of God. In fact God knew all along that he would fall, and he foreknew that his second son - the last Adam - would be raised up as the new representative of a new created order including a new humanity who would be conformed to the last Adam. Through the last Adam, who is the “life giving spirit” mankind would be recreated in the image of God through the resurrection. “Paul contrasts death, which entered into the world through a man, with the resurrection of the dead, which has entered into the world through a man.”(Ladd p. 408) There are two stages in the resurrection for those who will take part in the

age to come. Christ is the first fruits, the first to be resurrected. After Christ's coming then those who belong to him will be resurrected in the second stage. Ladd further stresses the importance of the resurrection to bring the purposes of God to fulfillment:

“The resurrection of Christ is the beginning of *the* resurrection as such, and not an isolated event. Jesus' resurrection is in fact the beginning of the eschatological hope. The resurrection of the dead is no longer a single event taking place at one time at the end of the age.....It is because *the* resurrection has already begun that the individual in Christ knows that there is resurrection in the future for him or her. The first act of the drama of eschatological resurrection has been separated from the rest of the play and has been moved back into the midst of the present evil age.” Ibid. p. 408

After the second stage of the resurrection a renewed humanity will have the ability to manifest God's will perfectly because of the restoration of God's image. Mankind will also no longer be accomplices of the spiritual forces that are contrary to God's rule and dominion of the earth can also be restored to him. This dominion is to last forever, since a resurrected being can never die. I Corinthians 15:49 states that those who at their resurrection “bear the image of the man of heaven” will constitute a new creation. It also says that as is the man of heaven is so will they be. It is absurd to maintain that “those who are of heaven” will be somehow like someone who existed eternally as God and came down from heaven. The image of the man of heaven that is to be borne by the new humanity is the perfect embodiment of the image of God which he bears. This doesn't mean that those who bear the image of Christ will be the same as the omnipotent, omnipresent, eternal God.

What is Man?

God has crowned a member of the human race with glory and honor and has subjected all things under his feet. Hebrews 2:5-9 says:

“now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But some one has testified somewhere, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet.” now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside of their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

In a quotation of Psalms 8:4-6 found in Hebrews 2:6-8, David, in a prophetic utterance, contemplates the entire universe and echoes the confidence that he has that God will restore to man the dominion he had lost. The writer of Hebrews confesses that the autonomous existence that humanity is now experiencing is indeed still devoid of the blessing of God. The restoration of the natural and moral order that was anticipated by the prophet David in this Psalm is still yet to occur. But David prophetically sees that a savior will come. He has the

utmost confidence that God would restore the dominion of man because God had made a covenant to David that he would raise up a ruler for Israel from one of his descendants and that of his rule and dominion there would be no end. The fulfillment of the plan of the ages assuredly found in the fulfillment of that prophetic promise made to David about his seed in the sentence, “but we do see Jesus”. This phrase trumpets the jubilation that the rightful ruler of the universe has assumed his place. This is whose image we are to be a partaker of. To take him out of the family of David and say that he pre-existed is to empty this promised restoration of mankind’s dominion of its impact. It is through Jesus, because he is human and bears the image of God, that humanity can be restored to a right relationship with God. It is human beings bearing the image of God who will rule with the Messiah over the new creation. It’s difficult to relate to being conformed to the image of a pre-existent being that was artificially attached to the line of David from outside of humanity. It doesn’t seem like he could legitimately represent humanity at all, which indeed goes against God’s revealed purposes.

This passage states that God, the Father, has subjected all things to human beings. This implies the whole of the creation and the entire universe as well. Psalms 8, which this quotes, talks about the heavens that God created, in which all the “works of your hands” are to be made subject to man. Jesus was able to taste death for everyone, and as the representative of mankind, all things have been subjected to him. Through the Messiah his fellow heirs, those who follow him in the resurrection, will have all things made subject to them as well. This passage states that for a time Jesus has been made lower than the angels. It is obvious that human beings who, before their resurrection are subject to death, are inferior to the angelic hosts who are not. That the Messiah, who before his resurrection was made lower than the angels, can taste death for the sinful humanity in Adam, shows he is truly a human being, a descendant of Adam. He also stands as the representative of the New Humanity which is to be created in him. As the New Man, the Last Adam, he able to restore the image of God to the human race because he is also the only one who as man bore the image of God perfectly in every way. Jesus is now the man who has been “crowned with glory and honor”.

Had he not died and risen again, then fulfillment of the plan of God could not be realized by any of the sons of Adam. As a resurrected man, the last Man is now far above the angelic realm, the entire universe having been subjected to his authority. Jesus has tasted death for the old humanity as well being raised to be the head of the new order as the representative of the New Humanity. In the Messiah, God’s plan for humanity to bear his image has been fulfilled by the representative of the New Humanity who re-creates God’s image in his brethren by resurrection. Through the resurrection the New Humanity now has been given dominion over all the works of God’s hands, the New Creation, in the Age to Come. The dominion by the New Humanity over the entire created order is still a future event. God, in the resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah has reached through into this age to bring the realities of the age to come into sharper focus. Through the Messiah he has given Christians the assurance that everything will be made subject to them. As with the resurrection, this dominion of the New Creation has, in The Messiah’s resurrection, been separated from the age to come and moved back into the present evil age.

The Hebrews 2 passage emphasizes the fact that Jesus entered into this exalted status because he tasted death for everyone. It is because of the fact that he was the last Adam, the new representative of humanity that he could through his resurrection accomplish the redemption and restoration of man, and bring many brethren, also referred to as children back to God. The

passage emphasizes the glory and dominion that Jesus has will be shared by children. It says God will give him these children, as brothers and sisters.(Hebrews 2:13) The pioneer of their salvation, who tasted death for all, will share his glory with these children that have been given to him by God. Hebrews 5:8 underscores the fact that he became the source of salvation of the world to come because he learned obedience through his suffering. His life manifested a humility which belied the exaltation for which he was destined. He lived in complete submission to the Father, unlike the first Adam, who sinned and brought corruption and death. He was raised into immortality and crowned with the rightful sovereignty that God promised he would give to a descendant of David in the covenant made He made with him in II Samuel 7:14. Currently he awaits at God's right hand until he returns to bestow the fulfillment of the revealed purposes of God.(see Daniel 7:14) Throughout the Greek Testament this is described as a completed fact that God has now wrought in history through the exaltation of the Man Messiah. Paul described these future glories as having already happened. This serves to underscore that in the Messiah the final completion of his purposes has been realized. (Romans 8:30)

The issue of Messiah

God, the scripture says, is the Father of Jesus and the children whom have been given to Jesus by him. (Hebrews 2:11,13) These children are his offspring, his brothers and sisters. Did God, as claimed by some accomplish the birthing of these children by sending the pre-incarnate son down from heaven to become a man, a little lower than the angels? Hebrews 2:11 says, "For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all have one Father". If Jesus was pre-existent and had to be made into a human being in the incarnation, then it seems to be a contradiction to say he was the same as his brethren in every way except without sin. It goes on to say that the reason Jesus is not ashamed to call those he has sanctified brothers and sisters is because they all have one Father.(Hebrews 2:11) This relationship is described as a spiritual relationship by some who assert that Jesus who pre-existed as God was some how inserted into the lineage of David as a way of "expressing the solidarity established in the incarnation between the Savior and those he came to save."(Zuck p. 381) But how can this shared solidarity between a pre-existent, eternal being who was always God, and humankind be the same as that which a human being shares with his brethren. Maybe you can say he infiltrated humanity, but it would be a reach to say that Jesus was human if he pre-existed. But the scripture says,

"Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is , the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonements for the sins of the people."(Hebrews 2:14-17)

The trinity camp claims that the breathtaking truth of Christianity "shines forth again: the eternal Son did not serve from afar but came to be one of us and to walk the costly path of obedience which leads us to glory!"(Zuck p. 381) To claim he pre-existed and yet became one of us seems irreconcilable to the definition of human being. What kind of identification could a pre-existent being have with humanity? They describe his identification with humanity in terms of it being a

necessity to accomplish his mission. But it seems that often overlooked is the fact that he could not die for humanity as its representative unless he were a man descended from the seed of the woman, as well as from the line of Adam, Abraham and David. What kind of descendant of man is it whose origins are without the lineage of man. By definition a being who existed from all eternity can not be human. Pre-existing in another time would take him squarely out of the family of man and no amount of explaining can bring him back into it. Additionally in order for there to be any relevance to the many scriptures which emphasize the origin of the Messiah from within the human race, pre-existence could not be an option.

To say that he came down and became a man just to taste death seems to minimize the importance of the rest of the passage. Verses 16-17 alludes to the fact that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham. His adequacy in his representation of humanity is in him being in every respect like his brothers and sisters, though without sin. He is able to effect their redemption through experiencing death for them. Death which would have had a finality for them, without his resurrection. It says in I Corinthians 15, he was the first fruits to enter the door through which his children would one day follow. The door, which has become the focal point of history and the entrance into the age to come - the resurrection from the dead. It is clear that this passage is not concerned primarily with a pre-existent figure who lowers himself to *become* a man; they focus rather on a human being who is raised to an exalted status.”(Hurst quoted by Zuck p. 380) Most of the expositors who relegate his being made lower than the angels to the incarnation strike at the core of what the author of the previous quote has realized. The awesome reality that humanity could be restored by the exaltation of the promised descendant of Abraham who shared fully in the flesh and blood of his brethren. In Hebrews 2:10 says that, God for whom and through whom all things exist, is the one who subjected all things to Christ. It is God who crowned him with glory and honor, and who has given him children to enjoy dominion with throughout eternity on a new restored earth they are to rule.

For the Last Adam’s resurrection to be efficacious to humanity there was a need for him to be able to atone for the sin which had passed to it from the first Adam. Because God’s penalty for sin, death, passed to the entire race, only a true human representative could bear the sin of humanity. As Romans 5:15-19 shows, Jesus as the representative of the New Humanity takes care of the sin problem which was inherited from the first Adam.

“For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”

This passage builds upon the necessity that the representative of the New Humanity must be a descendant of Adam. The judgment that came through Adam brought condemnation and death to the “many” which were his descendants. the Last Adam brought a right relationship with God, was obedient, and bore the image of God as the first Adam should have. By virtue of Jesus being of the line of Adam he was able to identify with sinful humanity as its representative. By his gift

of righteousness he was able to take away the condemnation to which humanity was consigned. Graciously, the New Man offers this to the sons of Adam as a free gift. Vital to the impartation to humanity of the gift of righteousness through the new representative, The Last Adam, is the understanding that all humankind were under the same condemnation and penalty of death which fell upon the first Adam. As a human, Jesus could be the Last Adam. As a pre-existent being that was made man, he couldn't truly share the exact characteristics of Adam because he wouldn't have been a son of man, the title that he applied to himself more than any other in the gospels. He couldn't legitimately have been called the Last Adam, or be able to be the representative of humanity. It was as the representative of the New Humanity as the New Man that he can impart the gift of righteousness to the issue of the first Adam. The passage reiterates that the recipients of the gift of righteousness are to "exercise dominion in life" through the one man, Jesus, the Messiah. The life is through the man, Jesus, first fruits of the resurrection.

The idea that he is the first among others is explained using the terminology of the first fruits. Ladd explains the analogy of the resurrection of the Messiah as being the first fruits as follows:

“The firstfruits constitute the beginning of the harvest itself. While they are not synonymous with the harvest in its totality, the firstfruits are more than blossoms and leaves and green fruit; they are the fruit come to full growth, ready for harvest; and because they are the *first* fruits, they are also the promise and the assurance that the full harvest will shortly take place. The resurrection of believers is related to the resurrection of Jesus as the full harvest is related to the firstfruits of that harvest. They are identical in kind; the only difference is quantitative and temporal. (Ladd p.408)

Conquest of Heaven's rebels

Jesus has been exalted by God to his right hand and has received the authority to rule over all the works of God's hands. The Messiah's rule is not manifested completely yet. The new humanity, whose destiny it is to be conformed to his image and to rule at his side, are not yet ruling either. The evil rulers of the present age which the Bible describes as thrones, dominions, rulers and powers in Colossians 1:15, were utterly defeated at the Messiah's resurrection and exaltation. These evil principalities and thrones, which are at work in this "present evil age" are actively working to subvert God's rule. The thrones, dominions, rulers and powers constitute an evil insurgency in the heavenly realm that is not manifest to the senses of man. Hence they are described in Colossians 15:1 as "things in heaven and on earth...things visible and invisible." Their interference in God's plan is manifested currently in human government and society which are also contrary to God's rule. God's purpose from the beginning was that all temporal and spiritual authority was to be an extension of God's own righteous rule, through his chosen representative, man. The Devil and his angels are to be finally cast out down from their insurgency in the heavens as described in the following passage:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God....Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with

great wrath because he knows that his time is short!" (Revelation 12:10,12)

These invisible rulers and the visible evidence of their devastation on the earth and the heavens were subjected to the Messiah when he was resurrected and exalted by God. This was the moment, from the perspective of God, when the war in heaven was won. The redeemer of man according to Genesis 3:15 is the offspring of Adam and Eve. This promised seed of the woman was destined before his birth to defeat Satan and all of his forces as shown by the following:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

Even though the final battle is still being fought, the Messiah has won and victory for the woman's seed has been guaranteed.

These thrones and dominions have been made subject to the sons of Adam in the current age through the man, Messiah Jesus, the last Adam. They have been defeated and made subject to him and to the New Humanity who have been given the authority to reign the New Creation in the age to come. This cosmic victory is the background of Colossians 1:15-18, which reads:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers - all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Through the resurrected Messiah, the firstborn of the New Creation, the dominion of the entire created order, which had been lost by virtue of Adam's rebellion, has been restored. Those rulers, principalities, thrones and dominions which were opposed to God, in the Messiah have now been made subject to his sovereignty. This also was part of the plan of God from the beginning. The absolute fulfillment, when the powers of evil that are arrayed against God receive their final judgment, will occur at the return of the Messiah. The passage in Colossians goes on to demonstrate that the Messiah is the firstborn, the first to be resurrected to the New Creation, ensuring the final defeat of the rulers of the present evil age who were opposed to God. Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting show that the focus of Colossians 1:18 is on "the new creation initiated by the resurrection of Jesus, who is the first-born from the dead." This theme of a new creation is expounded further in the authoritative work The Doctrine of the Trinity. Analyzing Colossians 1:15-20 in this context they go on further to say,

"Paul's concentration in this passage is on "inheritance," "kingdom," and "authorities" (Col. 1:12,13,16). This strongly suggest that he has in mind the Messiah's headship over the entire creation as the new order which God had in mind from the beginning, and of which Jesus as first-born is appointed head" p.107

Those of the human race who will follow him in being born into the new creation will see those forces which led it into rebellion and depravity made subject to them. This is especially important in that it was through a human being, Adam, that the authority of man in the old order

was lost. God's vindication of his son through the resurrection shows the powers, rulers, thrones and dominions that God has restored man to the destiny for which he was initially created. A major concern of Paul in the passage is also the "reconciliation of all things" which is accomplished as God had decreed in the eternal past. Quoting Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting again:

"Paul believed that God planned that the Messiah should have preeminence over all that has been created, visible or invisible, in heaven or on earth, either thrones, dominions, rulers or authorities. Jesus was the starting point of all God's creative activity - the key to God's entire purpose as well as the embodiment of God's wisdom. The Messiah, however, was not an eternal being but a human person to be revealed at his appointed time, now qualified, as first-born from the dead, to "head up" the new order (Eph. 1:10)."

Again the context of this passage which has been used to tout the deity of Christ is of utmost importance. Namely its focus is the defeat of the powers of the old order which opposed God and led to Man's degradation and death contrasted with the victory of God's rule through his chosen Man. This judgment though unseen in the context of the current age, has occurred in the Messiah's assuming his throne and power and the subjecting of the principalities and powers under his feet. From this perspective we see that in the eternal purpose of God, the promised powers of the age to come have, in the Messiah's resurrection, reached back into the present age. This is the culmination of God's plan for the ages. We now know fulfillment of what God decreed in ages past has been guaranteed. The imagery of the resurrected Messiah ruling in the age to come brings this reality home to us so that we indeed can understand the eminence of the exaltation of the Man Messiah Jesus through whom all things in the age to come have been created and appreciate his superior position in that new order. Take this into consideration as we read the rest of this passage:

"He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together...He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have the first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."(Colossians 1:17-20)

As mentioned above in the Genesis creation man was to have dominion over the earth. The pronouncement that we are told in the Book of Genesis 1:27 is that God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them." The old order which Adam was to be head over had failed to fulfill his purpose. The old order is to be replaced by the "coming world" (Hebrews 2:5). Consequently the image of God is once again attainable through Jesus, the Messiah, who is now placed by God over the whole creation. There is a new order, a new day which is dawning, that has not yet been fully realized. But in him the old order has passed and in the new order that is yet to come the Last Adam, the "firstborn raised from the dead" is going to rule as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation"(Colossians 1:15). It is appropriate to say that in that new creation of which he is the firstborn, which he has the pre-eminence and the exalted status over all thrones and dominions and ruler and power, "all things have been created through him and for him."(Colossians 1:16) He is the focal point of the creation of God, the reason for everything which has been made. He was "descended from David according to the flesh and was

declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus the Messiah our lord. (Romans 1:4) And the passage goes on to say that those who are called by him to the obedience of faith are “called to belong to Jesus Christ”.(Romans 1:5,6)

The Messiah’s new creations

For Paul, the knowledge of this power which was manifested by God in the resurrection of his son is able to bring the power of God into his own life. This is as a result of his relationship with the resurrected Messiah who was given power from his Father. Joseph Fitzmyer describes the dynamic, transforming principle that is resultant from the resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah as,

“a power to create new life in those men who would believe in him. At the resurrection he became the “last Adam,” the first parent of the *eschaton* (I Cor. 15:45, “The first man Adam became a ‘living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit). As the “first-born from among the dead (Col 1:18) he was, like Adam at the first creation, a principle of life for his offspring. Jesus is an instrument of a “new creation”(2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) because he became at the resurrection a *pneuma zoopoion*, a “life-giving spirit”(I Cor. 15:45). In virtue of such a dynamic principle Paul realizes that it is not he who lives any more but that it is the Risen Christ who lives in him (Gal. 2:20), transforming even his physical life (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:5-6). As a “life-giving spirit,” Jesus brings about the justification of believers and saves them from the wrath on the Day of the Lord (I Thes 1:10; Rom 4:25). Paul prays “to know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Phil 3:10), realizing that the *Kyrios* is possessed of a power capable of bringing about the resurrection of Christians (cf. 1 Thes 4:14)

It is no wonder that the scripture says that if anyone belongs to the Messiah “there is a new creation: everything old has passed away;”(II Corinthians 5:17) The context of this quote is to be found in the preceding chapter and the rest of Chapter 5 which talks about how the knowledge of the resurrection that God has planned is leading us to a walk that reflects his glory now because of the radical re-creation which is promised to those who are of faith.(II Corinthians 4:14,18; 5:1-6) These verses are filled with the expectation that those who are living in faith have for the day “when what is mortal may be swallowed up by life”(II Corinthians 5:4) In light of this the believer is to “regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.” Because we know that he is resurrected and exalted and we see “the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror”. While we strive for the exaltation at our resurrection, we “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another;”(II Corinthians 3:18). Yet we are reminded that it “was the god of this world” who has veiled the men’s eyes in this age from understanding that it was God (The Father) “who said” (in the beginning at the first creation) “let the light shine out of darkness” and has now “...shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah” and we can see the glory of he “who is the image of God.”(II Corinthians 4:6,4).

The coming age is described in terms of this new creation. The world that was in the mind of

God as his eternal purpose. It was hidden and so the Bible teaches in Colossians 1:26, that it has now been revealed in this age as an accomplished fact, though only those of faith can appreciate this reality until its final unveiling.

“the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.”

The new order would not be fully attainable had the originators of the rebellion of Adam, the Devil and his minions not first have been defeated. This is pictured by Paul in terms of the Messiah’s victory over the spiritual powers that are working in the world.

“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.”

These rulers who have been triumphed over by the Messiah are what have been responsible for the things that held the race of Adam captive, “the philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe”, and which still rule over those who have not “come to fullness in him (The Messiah) who is the head of every ruler and authority.(Colossians 2:10). The false religious traditions of the world originated with these evil powers of this age to corrupt the truth and keep men in blindness. Even those which were originally useful to teach about the Messiah, were corrupted and misused by men. Paul warns that a follower of the Messiah must not be misled through “a human way of thinking”(Colossians 2:18) insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions...” and thereby be disqualified. Those who “have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself, have all the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge”(Colossians 2:2,3).

Understanding of God’s plan for the ages in setting his son over the rulers and principalities that obstructed and tried to disqualify man from achieving the rightful place of authority for which he was destined is vital. To have a proper appreciation of this leads to understanding that the powers of the age to come have not only been revealed in the Messiah, but that now through our identification with him, we are partakers of the divine image once again. As was previously noted, God’s plan that he foreknew was not frustrated.

“When the right time arrived, the divine image was displayed on earth in the new Man, into whose image those who are united with him in faith are progressively changed - from one degree of glory to another - until the day when, to quote another author of the Greek scriptures, they will be perfectly conformed to his likeness, because they will see him ‘as he is’(I John 3:2) F.F. Bruce p.163.

When the Messiah was exalted he destroyed the rulers and principalities and restored the image of God to man. This reality will be experienced fully at the second coming, and yet Paul also stresses the importance of this reality presently for the sons and daughters of God, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27)

The coming world is a future experience. It is impressed upon the Colossians by Paul that those who God foreknew that he would call and justify he as already glorified (Romans 8:29). The

revelation of the glory to come has been realized by Christ as the firstborn of all creation. This will be the inheritance of his brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:8-12). Though not realized yet in the children, Jesus is able to bring children, who will be raised to immortal life in the age to come, to God.

As with other passages of Paul that foreshadow this cosmic victory Paul testifies in the epistle to the Colossians that they are to consider this accomplished. He says:

“...you were buried with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead....God made you alive together with him...”(Colossians 2:12b, 13a)

“So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:1-3)

It is clear that the things that are above which are the object to be sought is referring to the future world to come of all things being made subject to the human race. This is through the human representative that has gone before and has made the way possible through his resurrection. Paul’s exhortation to the Colossians to set their mind on things that are above is speaking to their inheritance in the age which is to come. The inheritance that already belongs to the Messiah, as was predestined by the Father. For when the Father raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand above all rulers and authorities it was in a sense the re-establishment of man’s dominion over the old world by virtue of there now being a Man who has received all authority and power over everything in the world to come. He has already received it, but it is only evident by faith. He is going to give this inheritance to his children, the children who are born to him when he returns and raises them from the dead. As he is the firstborn of the new creation, when he comes again he will make manifest man’s dominion and the re-established image of God in man. Part of his mission is to bring many brethren to God in world to come. This is the world that God foreknew would be re-created through the Messiah, the Last Adam. This was the purpose which was in heaven and existed with God even before the first Adam and the first creation was created. The coming world, which has been subjected to Christ, the firstborn who returns man to his rightful place, is juxtaposed with the old creation under Adam. This plan for a new creation in Christ, is a creation in which “all things have been created through him and for him.” and in which “He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together”(Colossians 1:16,17). This plan for a new creation in which “he might come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18) is what is pre-existent, having its origin with the Father in eternity past. To take these descriptions and divorce them from the context of this coming world causes Colossians and other passages related to the future glory to have forced upon them the idea of the literal pre-existence of a God-man. This of course leaves the door open, when reading such passages as Colossians 1:15-19, to mean that the Messiah is the creator of the heavens and the earth. But that is not what it says. It talks about God’s image being restored and the whole creation being restored through the firstborn Man, the Last Adam. He has been given authority over all that is to come,

“For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers - all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”(Colossians 1:16,17)

We find this description fits very well in what God had pre-destined for man to have. Remember, dominion over the entire universe was the plan that God had for Adam. In this sense Messiah Jesus was before all these things, in terms of the role God had destined him to have as ruler over all God’s creation. Truly the Messiah’s primacy in God’s plan to have all things hold together in him as the Last Adam makes perfect sense. As the firstborn of the dead, he is the beginning of the new creation, all the things in the world to come have been created for him and through him and he is their focal point. All the authority in the world to come has been given to him as the Man, the human representative, who will rule the universe for God. He is the beginning of this new creation, and it is in this sense that God through him reconciled the universe by bringing it back to his original intention for his creation. The reconciliation is also to bring to an end the bondage that the entire universe was subjected to through Adam’s sin and rebellion. God was pleased to dwell in Christ in all his fullness. Christ bears the image of God and his brethren are to have that image restored to them fully when they are resurrected. In light of this they are to have

“clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.” (Colossians 3:10)

The Messiah is the firstborn of the new creation, who bore the image of God and will bear it for all eternity. The Messiah as first fruits is the first-born of the coming world through the resurrection. He is also the first born from the dead. But according to God’s plan there are many more to come. This is going to happen when he returns and raises the children God has given him, in a sense, when he creates the new community which will glorify God forever. These children of the Messiah will once again bear the image of God, because they will be created by the Man, the Last Adam, the head of the new creation.

The object of God’s original design - that he will be worshipped by mankind who bears the image of God, is also included the command to the head of the old creation, Adam. God told him to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with offspring. These offspring were to rule over God’s creation as his representatives who bear his image. So also the Last Adam, as first born of those who are to be a part of God’s family, is given the power to multiply his own offspring. This isn’t through human conception and the course of natural birth, but through the new birth which comes by the spirit of God at the re-creation of the human race at the resurrection. This is going to be a resurrection into a new order, the Kingdom of God. There is a new community of sons and daughters of God, who are brethren of Jesus. They will have been conformed to the Messiah’s image. Just as he bears the image of God, they also will bear the image of God,

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”
(Colossians 1:15)

The image of Christ is what God predestined that his brothers and sisters, the children of Christ, would be conformed to:

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, on order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.” (Romans 8:29)

In summary, the conforming of children to the image of the Messiah, the last Adam, a human being, is what God foreknew, or knew in advance. He called Jesus of Nazareth, the son of David, to be the representative and head over a new community. The foreknowledge of God also included the provision of resurrection. For there would have been no other way for the Messiah to be the firstborn of many brethren. All of the members of the family of God that he predestined would be raised up, were in a sense raised with Christ, and as the New Man he is representative of the new humanity. As new life had been conferred on the Messiah, it was also predestined in God's plan that his brethren would also be raised from the dead. God, in his gracious foreknowledge knew that he would send his son, who through giving his own life, would have the power to give life to all flesh. God granted the son the power to raise the dead (John 5:21). To be conformed to the image God's son and be given life by him in the world to come is the goal every believer is to strive for. We all can appreciate being part of a family. Parents want to have children because they want to see their image in their offspring. They want to mold them and shape them in their own image. No parent wants their child to be evil, and when children fall short of the destiny that their parents have envisioned, they will always love the child, but there has got to be a sense of having their original purpose unfulfilled. In our condition of hopelessness God did come down. Not literally as a second part of the God-head but in the sense that he visited the creation in the Messiah, Jesus, whom he sent to bring God's image which was in Christ back into his children and to be the ruler of a new creation in which God will be all in all.

“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more **for the first things have passed away. And the one who was seated on the throne said, “see, I am making all things new.”**”(Revelation 21:3-5)

“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nation will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.”
(Revelation 21:23,24)