

**Outline of
the Messages for the Full-time Training
in the Spring Term of 2023**

**GENERAL SUBJECT:
THE CRUCIAL POINTS OF THE TRUTH IN PAUL'S EPISTLES**

Message Ten

Conformed to the Image of the Firstborn Son

Scripture Reading: Rom. 1:3-4; 8:2, 14, 19, 26-29; Heb. 2:10, 12b

I. Christ's resurrection was His birth as God's firstborn Son—Rom. 1:3-4; 8:29:

- A. Christ was begotten by God in His resurrection to be the firstborn Son of God among many brothers—v. 29:
 - 1. Christ was the only begotten Son of God from eternity—John 1:18; 3:16.
 - 2. Through incarnation God's only begotten Son put on humanity and became the God-man.
 - 3. After incarnation and through resurrection He was begotten by God in His humanity to be God's firstborn Son—Heb. 1:6; Rom. 8:29; cf. Psa. 2:7; Acts 13:33.
- B. The word *firstborn* indicates that in addition to the firstborn Son of God there will be other sons:
 - 1. Through His resurrection Christ was born to be the firstborn Son, and at the same time all His believers were born to be the brothers of Christ and the many sons of God—John 20:17; 1 Pet. 1:3.
 - 2. Hebrews 2:10 speaks of many sons, and Romans 8:29, of many brothers.
 - 3. As believers in Christ, we all are sons of God and brothers of the firstborn Son.
 - 4. The Firstborn has both divinity and humanity, and we, His believers, also possess both the human nature and the divine nature—2 Pet. 1:4.

II. In eternity past we were predestinated by God to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers—Rom. 8:29:

- A. Before the foundation of the world, God predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son; this means that conformation is our destiny—v. 29; Eph. 1:5.
- B. Transformation involves a change in form, whereas conformation involves the shaping of this form into a certain image—the image of Christ as the firstborn Son—2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29.
- C. To be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son is to be saved in Christ's life from self-likeness, that is, from the expression, the appearance, of the self—5:10b; Matt. 16:23-24.
- D. When we have been saved from our self-likeness and have been fully conformed to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son, we will be sons of God in reality, and in every aspect we will bear the appearance of God's sons—Heb. 2:10.
- E. The function of the law of the Spirit of life is to shape us, to conform us, into the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God—Rom. 8:2, 29:
 - 1. The shaping by the law of the Spirit of life is the meaning of *conformed* in Romans 8:29.
 - 2. The law of the Spirit of life regulates the shape of life; this shaping function of the law of the Spirit of life requires growth in life, for the law of the Spirit of life functions only as life grows—1 Cor. 3:6-7; Eph. 4:15; Col. 2:19.
 - 3. As the divine life grows within us and transforms us, the law of the Spirit of life functions spontaneously to conform us to the image of Christ, the firstborn Son of God—Rom. 8:2, 29:
 - a. The law of the Spirit of life makes us the reproduction of the firstborn Son of God.

- b. The firstborn Son is the prototype for the mass reproduction of the many sons of God, who are His many brothers—vv. 14, 19, 29.
- c. The firstborn Son of God, as the indwelling prototype, automatically works within us as the law of the Spirit of life to conform us to His image—vv. 2, 29.
- d. Eventually, through the shaping function of the law of the Spirit of life, we all will become mature sons of God, and God will have His eternal corporate expression—Rev. 21:7, 10-11.

III. The Spirit intercedes for us, and all things are working together for us so that we may be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son—Rom. 8:26-29:

- A. The Spirit's intercession is not mainly according to the will of God but according to God Himself—vv. 26-27:
 - 1. The Spirit intercedes for us that we may be fully conformed to the image of Christ—vv. 27, 29.
 - 2. Christ is the pattern, and the Spirit prays that everything that happens to us will mold us into this pattern, the image of God's firstborn Son—v. 29.
- B. As a result of the Spirit's intercession, "all things" work together for good, that is, for the fulfillment of God's purpose—vv. 26, 28:
 - 1. The working together of all things outside of us always follows the groaning of the Spirit within us—vv. 27-28.
 - 2. God the Father is sovereign, arranges everything, and knows what is best for us; He answers the Spirit's intercession by causing all things to work together for good—that we would be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God for the corporate expression of the Triune God—vv. 28-29.
 - 3. We need to realize that the reason we pass through sufferings is that God has a purpose and that our sufferings are the "all things" working together for the accomplishment of this purpose—v. 18.
 - 4. According to the context, the good mentioned in verse 28 refers to our being conformed to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God in verse 29.
 - 5. We are not in our own hands but in the Lord's hands, and He has placed us in the process by which His purpose of conformation is being fulfilled; those who realize that they are in the process of God's purpose will have genuine peace—John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:28-29; 15:33; 16:20.
- C. God has called us with the purpose of conforming us to the image of His Son, and the way to cooperate with God in His purpose is to love Him—8:28-29:
 - 1. To love God is to cooperate with Him, and to cooperate with Him is to give Him an opportunity to work out His purpose in us and with us—Mark 12:30.
 - 2. If we love God, everything will work together for our profit, that is, for our conformation—Rom. 8:29.
 - 3. Whether all things are a profit or loss to us depends on our love for God; the secret is to love Him—v. 28; 1 Cor. 2:9.

IV. "In the midst of the church I will sing hymns of praise to You"—Heb. 2:12b:

- A. This is the firstborn Son's praising of the Father within the Father's sons in the church meetings.
- B. When we, the sons of God, meet as the church and praise the Father, the firstborn Son praises the Father in our praising—v. 12b:
 - 1. It is not that Christ praises the Father apart from us and alone; rather, He praises within us and with us through our praising—13:15.
 - 2. In our singing, Christ, the firstborn Son, sings hymns of praise to the Father—2:12b.