

Transcripts of
**CHRISTMAS
MESSAGES**

A Lecture Series by R.J. Rushdoony



R.J. RUSHDOONY

(1916–2001)

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony (1916–2001), was a leading theologian, church/state expert, and author of numerous works on the application of Biblical law to society. He started the Chalcedon Foundation in 1965. His Institutes of Biblical Law (1973) began the contemporary theonomy movement which posits the validity of Biblical law as God's standard of obedience for all. He therefore saw God's law as the basis of the modern Christian response to the cultural decline, one he attributed to the church's false view of God's law being opposed to His grace. This broad Christian response he described as "Christian Reconstruction." He is credited with igniting the modern Christian school and homeschooling movements in the mid to late 20th century. He also traveled extensively lecturing and serving as an expert witness in numerous court cases regarding religious liberty. Many ministry and educational efforts that continue today, took their philosophical and Biblical roots from his lectures and books.

Learn more about R.J. Rushdoony by visiting: <https://chalcedon.edu/founder>

The Firstborn of Every Creature

R.J. Rushdoony

Let us worship God.

“Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.”

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Let us pray.

Glory be to thee, oh Father Almighty, who hast given us thine only begotten Son that we might live through Him. Glory be to thee, oh Lord Jesus Christ, who became man that we might become the sons of God. All glory be to thee, oh Holy Ghost, who dost direct and rule our hearts. We give thanks unto thee in this blessed season, that it is thy will that shall be done, and thy kingdom that shall come. We rejoice that thy judgment is upon the nations, and the time of separation and cleansing is here. Make us joyful in what thou ordainest, faithful in thy service, and triumphant in thee. In Christ's name, Amen.

Our scripture this morning is from Paul's letter to the Colossians. Colossians 1:12-18. Our subject; 'The Firstborn of Every Creature.' Colossians 1:12-18.

“giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

Some years ago, I was in the East speaking at a large Presbyterian church, and the pastor, an outstanding man, told me of the decline of the Presbyterian church from orthodox faith. And he said it was because they were always seeking the lowest common denominator. They were always surrendering something saying: “We'll hold the line here.” And he said it has reached the point where now, they are saying: “Well, we are ready to give up on such things as the infallibility of scripture, six-day creationism, the historic stand on abortion, and on homosexuality, but we're going to hold the line on

the necessity of being born again.” Well, that soon went down the drain, too, because, if you look for the lowest common denominator, you are going to surrender whatever stronghold you have. Well, that temper has been in the church for too long, and as a result, a great many things have been surrendered, surrendered to the point of being virtually forgotten.

In recent weeks, we have been discussing again and again ‘the doctrine of the firstborn,’ this is essentially related to the Christmas story, and yet it is rarely discussed, but it is a key to the New Testament. The understanding of ‘the doctrine of the firstborn,’ of course, is not only something that is a keynote of much of Scripture, but it is essential to the Christian faith, because so much of the New Testament depends on it. Our Lord is described at His birth as: “the firstborn,” because He is the firstborn of God’s new creation, Romans 8:29 says: “He is the firstborn among many brethren.” The old humanity of the first Adam has death as its destiny, whereas the new humanity of Jesus Christ, the last Adam, has an eternal inheritance we are told in I Corinthians 15:39-50. The firstborn of Adam, the old humanity, has a future like that of Egypt’s firstborn, as Hebrews 11:28 makes clear. But it is the general assembly and church of the firstborn, according to Hebrews 12:23, who are the heirs of all things.

Paul, in our text, Colossians 1:12-18, declares that, in Christ, we have a very great inheritance because the kingdom is Christ’s. Through Him who is our Lord, we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. We are told by John in the third verse of the first chapter of his gospel, that: “all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” His creation, our Lord’s creation, is the totality of all things created, and all things were made by Him for His sovereign purpose. In our text, Paul says in the seventeenth verse: “By Him all things consist,” so that the meaning, coherence, and direction of all things comes from Him, is governed by Him, and is only understandable in terms of Him. He is the head of the ecclesia, the kingdom. He is the beginning of all things, the ‘arche,’ the meaning, the origin, the ruler. Therefore, our Lord can declare:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty.”

In verse eighteen, Paul tells us that in all things Christ has the preeminence. The word in Greek is ‘proteuo,’ the first and absolute power.

The firstborn, as we have seen previously in our studies of Exodus, represents the totality. In Luke 3:38 we are told that Adam was of God. That is, His first creation in the old humanity. Therefore, all who are of Adam share in his sin and death, whereas all who are in Christ share in His righteousness or justice, and in His eternal life.

The significance of the birth of our first born head, Jesus Christ, was not lost on the early church. Very, very early Jesus Christ was hailed as man’s ‘tree of life.’ One of the things that irks me during the Christmas season is that so many Christians believe the nonsense that the Christmas tree comes from pagan practices, and it was adopted from paganism and so the Christmas tree has nothing Christian about it. Well, it is true that pagans often worshiped trees, but what is there about tree worship in the Christmas tree? It is an evergreen. When I was a child, fruit was hung from the Christmas tree, or the ornaments were made to look like fruit. Why? Because Jesus Christ is declared to be the tree of life, and in Revelation we are told the tree shall bear all manner of fruit, all the year long. Now, the tree is a symbol of Christ, and this lowest common denominator kind of thinking has not only led us to surrender the doctrine of the firstborn, but to surrender everything, such as the tree as the representative of Christ in scripture, setting forth His ‘evergreen’ eternal character.

The minute an ungodly man says: “That’s paganism,” the church surrenders it. That’s insanity. It’s the lowest denominator kind of thinking. The significance of our firstborn head, as I said earlier, was not

lost on the early church. Our Lord was hailed as the 'tree of life,' and those who believe that the Christmas tree is a pagan origin do not know church history. If you go back to some of the earliest church fathers, you find them in this season, speaking about Christ as the tree of life. For example, St. Ephrem of Syria wrote very early in the history of the church:

"On this day to us came forth the Gift, although we asked it not! Let us therefore bestow alms on them that cry and beg of us. This is the day that opened for us a gate on high to our prayers. Let us open also gates to supplicants that have transgressed, and of us have asked forgiveness."

Now, this tells us first, that in the days of the early church, not only did the tree represent Christ, but the church father said, "We have received a gift, a gift we didn't ask for or dream of, from God. Therefore, it is a time for us to give gifts to the needy. To give gifts," and very soon, they said to children, in order to tell them of the gift of the Christ Child.

St. Ephraim of Syria also said of Christmas Day:

"Blessed be the Babe Who made manhood young again today!"

For our present concern, St. Ephraim's statement is telling that:

"This day is the first-born feast, which, being born the first, overcomes all feasts."

The early church saw the fulfillment of the feast of the firstborn and the birth of Christ, and the celebration of His birth. It is very important also to note that this emphasis by St. Ephraim, in the three hundreds, was not original with him. Neither the gift-giving, nor the stress on the tree. It went back as far as we can trace it, into the earliest origins of the church. Having received the gift of Jesus Christ by God's grace, we then give gifts to the needy and to one another.

Jesus Christ is called 'the firstborn of God,' 'the firstborn of the new creation.' By His resurrection, he also became: "...the firstfruits of them that slept," according to I Corinthians 15:20, so that both terms; 'firstborn' and 'firstfruits,' are applied to Jesus Christ, and their meaning is made plain in Him.

In the early church at the time of communion, the firstfruits of grapes and grain were offered. There was a recognized relationship between the firstfruits and the firstborn. Priority belongs to the Lord in every sphere. As a result, the firstfruits are given to the firstborn of God, Jesus Christ. And the fact that the firstfruits are given tells you something more. Why fruit was tied to a Christmas tree! The firstfruits to the firstborn.

The same is true also of the tithe, the first fruits, the first tenth of our increase. It is also given to God with the recognition that the totality of our lives in increase belongs to Him. All that we retain of our income is to be used to live in terms of His covenant grace and law. Paul says in verse eighteen that our Lord is preeminent in all things, because: "by Him all things consist." He is the cosmic Christ. He is Lord over all.

FF Bruce, in commenting on Colossians 1:16 said, and I quote:

"Christ then is prior to all creation and as the firstborn of God is heir to it all but more. It was in Him that all things were created. The preposition 'in' seems to denote Christ as the sphere within which the work of creation takes place. More commonly the preposition 'through' is used denoting Him as the agent by whom God created the universe." In verse eighteen, Paul declares that Jesus Christ:

“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead...”

The word that is translated as “church,” is in the Greek ‘ecclesia,’ from which we get ‘ecclesiastical,’ and it’s not quite the same meaning as our word, ‘church,’ which comes from kyriakon doma, “house of the Lord,” referring to the building and the institution of the church. The word, ‘ecclesia’ has reference to the assembly, the congregation, the spheres wherever Christ is served. So that your home, your work, your occupation, every Christian institution, every Christian civil government is a part of the ‘ecclesia.’ It is His kingdom, His new humanity in all its spheres and activities. As a result, the meaning of the word ‘church’ in the Bible is always far more than the worshiping congregation. It is church, state, school, family, and every area of life and thought and activity which is brought under Christ’s dominion. He is, as creator, Lord of all. As redeemer, He has a further lordship, that of the motivating and ruling power in us as His new humanity.

Now this headship is subject to the fact that: “...he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” Now, this is very important. A nation can continue its existence when the head of state dies. The life of the family goes on when the father dies, but the reverse is true here, and more than that. The life of all creation comes from the Lord’s creating word. It is sustained in life by Him: “...by Him all things consist.” They have nothing; no life, no meaning, no existence apart from Him. And both in its existence, and in its new humanity and its renewed life, humanity and creation are absolutely and totally dependent on Him. As a result, Paul declares in verse sixteen:

“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him...”

The Greek reads, “en autō,” “by Him,” because as John 1:4 declares: “In Him was life,” the sum of things. Their every detail and totality found its being by His word. He created them. “By Him were all things made...” and “...without Him was not anything made that was made.”

Now, this denies any division between the material and spiritual realms such as marks Greek philosophical thought. There all things stand created, through Him and for Him. Thus, the right of the firstborn sets forth the priority of life. The world does not exist for our purpose, we do not exist to serve ourselves. Our lives point beyond us, and our focus must be in God’s purposes in Jesus Christ. The right of the firstborn points to Christ’s birth, his life, his death, and resurrection. To His creation of a new humanity, and to His redemptive purpose for all creation. Remember therefore, when Paul says that “all things were created by Him and for Him, and that in Him all things consist,” that includes us. His eternal predestination includes us, to the very hairs of our head, so that all our life now and throughout all eternity is in terms of His eternal purpose which is entirely and totally perfect. Let us pray.

Oh Lord, our God we thank thee for this thy word, for it tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Thou hast made us for thyself. Thou hast made us to be the people of thine only begotten Son. Make us ever joyful in this knowledge. Make us ever mindful, oh Lord, how great and marvelous thy ways are, and thy purpose for us. We give thanks unto thee for this blessed season. For thy gift to us of Jesus Christ. For one another, and for the future that is ours in Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

ENDNOTES:

1. Rev. J.B. Morris, M.A., trans. Selected Works of S. Ephrem the Syrian. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847, 9.
2. Rev. J.B. Morris, M.A., trans. "Rhythm the Second." In Selected Works of S. Ephrem the Syrian. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847, 11.
3. F.F. Bruce. The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984, 61.

The True Mediator

R.J. Rushdoony

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“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Let us pray.

All glory be to thee oh God the Father Almighty, who hast given unto us Thine only begotten Son that through Him we might have life, and that everlasting. Glory be to Thee oh Lord Jesus Christ, who became man that we might become the sons of God, who for our sakes endured the agony of the cross in order to destroy the power of sin and death. All glory be to Thee oh Holy Spirit who dost direct and rule our hearts to conform them unto thee. All glory be to thee God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, one God world without end, amen.

Our scripture is from Genesis 3:14,15. These verses were once turned to every year in the Christmas season because of their importance, and they are too rarely used nowadays. Genesis 3:14, 15, a promise of victory.

“Because you have done this,
You are cursed more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you shall go,
And you shall eat dust
All the days of your life.
And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise (or, more literally ‘crush’) His heel.”

These two verses were once very important to the proclamation of Christ’s coming, of His birth, and of His mission. Their use has waned with the rise of modernism and with the decline of the Reformed faith. What these verses tell us plainly is that history is totally governed by God’s sovereign purpose. Man has a secondary freedom, but all things are essentially determined by God. This is not an emphasis which is pleasing to humanistic man. He prefers to see history as determined by man, and with a problematic future. An uncertain future means that the world can end in a cosmic crash-up and disaster, or that man may make of it a new paradise, everything depends on man.

To accept our text, and the Bible as a whole, is to believe that God's declared purpose alone shall prevail. History is ordered by God, and it is a battleground between the madness of sin and the Lord God. And God being God cannot lose, and He knows the end from the beginning because He has ordained it. The Christmas story thus is not a happy accident, but God's holy purpose from all eternity.

Now our text tells us several things. First; the curse on the tempter comes out of the very being of God. Good and evil cannot be indifferent to one another, this is what the modern world wants, a truce, a peace, between good and evil: "you live your lifestyle and I'll live mine." Of course they don't mean it to be a truce because they hate God's way with a passion, but they pretend there can be peace. But this is a war, there is a war on between God and Satan, between the Creator and the rebellious creature, and God cannot lose. We live in a trouble-filled world because men have chosen evil, or else they are unwilling to choose between good and evil, they want to be neutral, or say they do. Of course you know the old catholic bit of humor about the priest who asked the dying man if he renounced the world of flesh and the devil, and the man hesitated and the priest said: "man why do you hesitate at this point?" and he said: "at this point I don't want to offend anybody." Well, too many people want a neutral universe and that is impossible. The curse lowers the tempter to a position beneath the very animals of the field. Man cannot avoid the moral decision, they cannot side-step the issue of choice between good and evil.

Then second, men may not like the fact, but enmity is a fact of life because life is inescapably moral and religious. Again, this is something our world wants to evade: "you chose your lifestyle, I'll choose mine, they're both equally good." "What's good for you may not be good for me," and vice versa, this kind of nonsense. The enmity is between Satan's seed and the woman's seed, meaning Jesus Christ. The Redeemer will come out of the fallen race of man to destroy the work of the devil. He will be as we later learn, God incarnate, very God of very God and also very man of very man. The enmity is permanent, but so too is the victory. There can be no peace between good and evil and all who seek it want evil to prevail.

Then third; in due time the woman's seed, Jesus Christ, will come to confront and destroy the tempter's work. His heel will be bruised in this struggle; its cost will be great for the Savior-King, but not fatal. He shall bruise, and in modern that would be 'crush,' the tempter's head, and His victory shall be total and eternal. This text has over the centuries been an important one in the celebration of the Lord's birth and also His resurrection because it declares the inevitability in our final victory in Jesus Christ. Man in Genesis 1:26-28 is strictly separated from all of God's creation, on earth and also in heaven, as the appointed one, destined for dominion under God. The tempter's plan, set forth in Genesis 3:5, is for rebellion against God. Instead of dominion under God, it calls for domination as God, as the independent law-maker and law-giver. This plan was the death of man because Sin brought death into the world. For this reason too, our Lord calls Satan: "a murderer from the beginning," this is in John 8:44, and as the true father of the Pharisees there is no truth in him, that is in Satan, no truth at all! All truth is incarnate in Jesus Christ, as John 14:6 tells us. In I John 3:8 we are told this of Satan:

"he that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning, for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

Saint Augustine wrote:

"The devil made no-one, he created no-one, but whosoever imitates the devil is, as it were, a child of the devil through imitating, not through being born of him."

When John tells us the devil: "sinneth from the beginning..." he uses the present tense to indicate

continuous action, he is still sinning, still lying. The Son of God came to initiate the permanent destruction of the Devil's works. This is our calling in Christ, the birth of our Lord is history's happiest moment, but it also is the beginning of the great war in all its intensity. We are totally involved in that war which only ends when the joyful proclamation resounds:

"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."

The Psalm that is repeatedly referred to in Hebrews is Psalm one hundred and ten, which celebrates the kingdom, the priesthood, the conquest, and the passion of our Lord. Every year we celebrate at Christmas the certainty of that victory, and we rejoice in our recruitment into His army. It is a bitter war, but it is an assured victory: "for this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith..." John tells us in I John 5:4.

The birth of our Lord and the day of resurrection are the two great holy days of our faith, and both celebrate victory, they are times of joy. Both have been paganized by the ungodly, but in spite of their dechristianization, both still speak of joy, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot put it out, let us pray.

Our Father we give thanks unto thee for the promise that is ours in Christ. We thank thee that He has broken the power of sin and death, and in time they will be fully destroyed, banned from the new creation when all things are made new. Make us joyful in the victory that is ours, faithful servants of thy kingdom. Teach us to pray for thy victory and for one another, and for thy suffering servants the world time that even in this time of blessed joy are undergoing great pain and persecution. Give them joy and victory. Grant us this in Christ's name, amen.

ENDNOTES:

1. Vincent, M. R. (1887). Word studies in the New Testament (Vol. 2, p. 348). Charles Scribner's Sons.

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