Galatians 5:1 - It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, keep standing firm and don't be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

I'm gonna talk to you as a body here for a minute. Now, this is a man who has had a revelation of Jesus Christ. The body of Jesus Christ is NOT to conform you. It isn't to put you in subjection. The body of Christ is to set you free. I love that statement. The first time anybody ever spoke demeaningly of another, of you, or any human being, it was one of the greatest losses that any man ever will experience. The first time somebody kidded you about your funny nose, and the first time somebody ever teased you about something weird, and really genuinely put you down, that constituted one of the greatest losses you will ever know.

Brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, in the ecclesia, in the Church of Jesus Christ, there is no place else on this earth where we ought to be so free to be who we are, to express who He is. There is no place we ought to be freer to express what we are, to show forth who He is. There is a Lord in you, and everything else is dead. Don't put down your brothers and sisters, and when they sin and pull a big one, remember, your number's coming up next.

There is nothing I have learned but what everybody I've ever looked down my nose at, at what they did, I've been pretty well tempted to do it myself later on in life, or I just flat-footed went out and did it; one of the two. And you cannot possibly identify with that, can you? Brother, your number's coming up next. We are here for compassion and understanding; we're not here to constantly goad another to do better or to be something he's not. This is a place for the lame, the halt, the blind…and for you.

In the body of Christ, remember that *it was for freedom*. This is an incredible verse I've never been able to plunge into; maybe you have. That my God came out of heaven, was born of a virgin on this benighted place where men lived in sin, and so needed salvation and needed a new life, a higher, biologically higher life, and He came here saying, "Freedom. Freedom. Freedom." Within my body, freedom. Within the confines of the ecclesia, within the church, freedom, freedom. I've come to give them freedom. It was for freedom He set you free. He didn't set you free for bondage; He set you free for freedom.

Would you not like an apostle to come to you who had seen such a Lord? Would you not like that kind of church planter to come and plant a church you would have to be a member of? Brothers and sisters, I don't know if we need any other kind of church planters other than those who come to set you free, whose ministry is to get you out from under the world's condemnation. What drives a man to preach? What drove this brother was to set you free. To set you free, because Christ had set you free so that you could have freedom. May God give us such men; a time like this demands it.

How's the rest of that go? Strong men who live above the clouds. Sun-crowned men, whom the lust of office cannot…God give us men dead to themselves, who aren't standing here trying to conform you to what they think you ought to be. You see, I think everybody ought to be an extrovert. I think all men ought not to wear a beard, but a mustache. My point is that there is a certain element among men in which they seek to make people like they are, and they say that's what God is like.

We need extroverts, introverts, in-between verts. We need everything there is, and yes, we will get a few people who aren't, and we will put up with them until the Lord is formed in them. It is for freedom you are to be set free. Would you please be free? Oh, Gene, you mean free to do anything? Absolutely anything? Sure, just keep it within the body of Christ, brother. You are absolutely free. Alright. Amen. I would rather preach freedom—forgive me for inserting myself here; I would really rather preach freedom to you and see you do something you shouldn't than to preach bondage to you and see you live in the misery of conformity.

I want to repeat that. May I repeat that? I would rather preach and declare freedom to you and see you free, and see you pull a few big ones you shouldn't pull, than to see you enslaved to conformity, doing nothing outwardly wrong. I would rather see you pull a few big ones than see you enslaved to conformity, group conformity.

Will you come with me to Colossians? All I can tell you is that I am reading a letter written by a man who had seen a revelation of Jesus Christ. That's all I can tell you. Now look at what this has done to this man.

Colossians 1:10 - *...so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the experiential knowledge of God, strengthened with all power according to His glorious might, for the a-- the attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light, for He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.*

I don't have anything to say to you about this except, over and over, he is declaring to you not the centrality of your conduct, but the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ. He’s not telling you what you ought to be, but telling you what you already are. Not telling you what you need to be to please Him, but to show that you have already pleased your Lord. Not that you are in a kingdom of darkness, but that you have been translated out of a kingdom of darkness. Not that you ought to be a holy one, but that you *are* a holy one. Not that you ought to walk in light, but that you *do* walk in light.

Praise the Lord, this brother had seen the Lord and had known that if that Lord were declared to you, and that you would, he would tell you what you are, you wouldn't be able to resist becoming what you already are.

Then we come…to the passage of all passages. Don’t expect me to deal with this in two or three minutes. We will be looking at Colossians 1:15-20. What did Paul see when he saw the revelation of Christ? He saw that Jesus Christ should have first place in all things because the Son, Jesus Christ, had already been made first place in all things. He had already been given first place in all things, and now I come to you with a passage of Scripture that declares that Jesus Christ is first in all things.

For those of you who don't know this, there's an Old Testament. Old stories. Old Covenant, old law, belongs to this planet. Then there are the Gospels, which tell the story of a carpenter, Jesus

Christ, living on the earth, who is also the Son of God—all sorts of glorious things going on inside it. Then there are letters; we call them epistles, but I want to call them letters. Letters written after Christ died on the cross for our sins, became Savior and Lord, and ascended.

We begin to understand, in all these letters, how much glory there was in this Son of Man, this carpenter, who had made a visitation from other realms and was here with us 33 years and then ascended, but also stayed…invisibly...in us, but at the same time, because He's free of space and time, because He's free of dimension, He's also enthroned in the heavens. We read these letters, and we find out, "Wow, what a Lord! Wow, what a Lord! Wow, what a Lord that He was."

Then we go back to antiquity, where it's really old, and we read… the Lord opens our eyes, and we discover that they had also seen something of the glory that was in the epistles, in the letters. The letters even help us to see what they had seen. That there are things way back in those old, old writings, long before He came, that present to us the Christ revealed in the epistles. May the Lord open your eyes and see His glory from beginning to end.

Now listen to a man who had seen the carpenter, the Son of God, on this earth; who had an indwelling Father, the great Lord of all, in him; but who had also seen… had his eyes open to see… that the ancients had seen Him in His glory. He reveals what he and those others on the earth with him at that time, Paul of Tarsus, saw of this glorious Lord, and even began to see, and could see, what He would be in future eternals.

Now listen to this great Christological passage. Colossians 1:15 - *Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.* He's the only one who is. He is the visible image of the invisible God. When you have met one, you have met the other. *He is the firstborn of all creation.* What on earth are you talking about? There is no such evidence anywhere in Scripture that He is the firstborn of creation. When God said, "Let there be," what was the first thing that came into being? A man, Jesus Christ.

Now, can you find that anywhere in Scripture? Where can you find Him, a man existing before Adam? There it is: the first man, Adam, but the Bible even says that there was a man who came before him. A man who truly was the visible expression of an invisible Lord, so that it might be given to Him that He is not only Lord of lords and King of kings; not only that He is the eternal Son and the Father before creation, but that it would be given to Him that He would also be the first man ever to exist…and then came Adam.

Well, Gene, I never heard that in my life. Neither had I, until I read this passage, but somebody had seen a revelation of this Lord. Why did this happen? Because the Father who loved the Son was determined that there would be nothing called number one except the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no star until there is the Morning Star. There is no food until there is that food of heaven: the drink and the food of the eternals. There is no sun until there is the Son of Righteousness. There is no life until there is first the highest of all life, the life of God in His Son Jesus Christ. He will be preeminent in all things. He is first.

For in Him all things were created, and I hope you've been hearing that this week, that here He is, and all things were created in Him…and that's not all. They were created in Him. They were

created by Him…and don't you forget this, because you're in creation. All things were created *for* Him. All things in Him, all things by Him, all things for Him, all things through Him, and all things to Him, that He might have first place in all things…and that's not all.

Here is creation wrapped inside of our Lord, and if it's not in our Lord, if creation isn't in our Lord, it comes apart. The atoms, the molecules, the creation of galaxies - as scientists will tell you - the one thing we don't understand is what's holding it together. For in Him all things were created. The heavens were created in Him. The earth was created in Him. Everything visible is in Him. Everything invisible is in Him, whether it be thrones, dominions, rules, governments, princes, Ross Perot, presidents, kings, or lords. They are all visible and invisible in Him and under Him.

*All things have been created through Him and for Him, and He is also before…*He is before. By the way, He is also after. He is before, and He is after. *He is before all things, and in Him, in Jesus Christ, all things hold together.* I'm just gonna throw something else in here: that includes your life, brother. It's held together by your Lord. Amen. It's the only thing that holds it together.

There's a lesson that you will learn: the fall was worse than you think it is - you're all a bunch of twits. You're not having a bad day; you are a bad day. (laughter) You aren't having a nightmare; you are a nightmare. I tell you, we don't enjoy that. We don't enjoy hearing that. We laugh, but we don't enjoy that. If I just had a better boss, things would be better. If I just had a better house, things would be better. You see, no matter what you get, you're still a mess. It is the Father's good pleasure that you only make sense in Christ.

And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also, and this shows you in this magnificent and glorious list, how he lists those really great, expansive things: heaven, earth, principalities, dominions, ecclesia. This isn't a little footnote down here. Ecclesia, principalities, powers, rulers, dominions, things visible, things invisible, creation itself, ecclesia.

He is also in charge of and head of the body. Do you want me to tell you what keeps my furnace blazing hot? Then I will tell you. One obsession: to see Christians gather with no elders leading, no pastors present, no deacons deaconing, but a people coming together, and you can't have this anywhere else except under your Lord; to see Him be head of His house, to see Him be head of the church - Head of the church triumphant. It is the only place on this benighted planet where there is indisputable proof that He lives. And no other people and no other religion…this not being a religion, but a person…they can't have this. It only happens in the ecclesia, and it only happens in the ecclesia when Jesus Christ is allowed to be head.

The man who wrote this letter was obsessed with the ecclesia being under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he drowned those people in a vision, an understanding, and a knowledge, and in his insight and revelation into a Lord who was quite literally Head…Head of the church. There's nothing in the world like when a man stands up and leads a people; it's nothing but evidence of an ego trip. When he leads a people, I am here for one purpose, and that's to work myself out of a job.

It was Paul of Tarsus who was not leading a people nor launching a movement; he was coming in and showing those people a Lord and walking out the door and saying to them, "You can find this living, reigning Lord in your heart, and the meetings can be led by an invisible God."

He is also head of the body. He said, "How could I hurt another member of the church or attack another member of the body of Christ? I would be hurting my own Lord." Paul had a revelation that you are part of Christ. We use the term the body of Christ, but we have somehow lost what that means. That means that we have a Head, but He has left His physical body here.

You are in Christ, and the rest of you is dead, and that Christ is in you and the rest of you is dead, and that you are here on this earth as the physical evidence of an invisible Lord. That's why He has His ecclesia in this place. That's why you are a colony from heaven. That's why you're the only heavenly thing on this planet. You're the only thing that comes from the other realm. You are here, and you are a body. Now, brothers and sisters, treat one another as though they were a portion of Jesus Christ.

Now, can you not understand that that fits with a statement made in Ephesians that you were marked off in Christ before the foundation of the world? That a portion of the living God was marked off to be placed in someone down here, a small part of Him put in you? That you are a container with the living God in you; a portion of the living God. A portion of the living God and a portion of the living God physically visible.

When we, the parts of that body, come together, we shall put our Lord visible again on this earth. You can feel His gentleness, you can know His love, you can see His compassion, you can know His hospitality, you can feel His deep, deep concern, His pity, you can feel His caring, you can feel His presence here within the body of Christ, because there's a portion of Him here, a portion of Him here, a portion of Him here.

And when we assemble…when we are assembled, we are assembling the body of Christ together, and He is once more felt, sensed, and known. See this as Christ visible, and conduct yourself accordingly. Treat this brother, and so treat this sister, and so try to treat me… and treat one another… as a chip of God. A chip of God, and when we come together, all the chips are put together in their proper place, and He is seen again. He is head of the body, the assembled. That's where we got our name; don't anybody ever give you this "called-out" business. We got our name from assembly. Chips…coming together, a symbol, and make up the visible body of an invisible head. Are you following me? These are the writings of a man who has seen the Lord.

We have two beginnings here. He's the firstborn of all creation, and He is the beginning. In verse 15, He is the firstborn of all creation, and in verse 18, He is the beginning. Do you understand what that means? You do? I have no idea what that means. How can He be the firstborn and also the beginning? He's the firstborn of creation; He's also the beginning. All I can tell you is that when the Old Testament and the New Testament start, it says, "In Jesus Christ." Genesis 1:1 – "In Jesus Christ." John 1:1: "In Jesus Christ." And at the very end, He says, "I am the beginning and the end. I am Jesus Christ, and I am Jesus Christ. I am the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am the beginning; I am the end, and I'm all the things that surround, and I'm all the things that are in."

Why? Because the Father was determined that in all things He would have first place. I'm gonna give you a hint. If you want to run in the same direction the universe is in, make Him first place. That's kind of what He is, saints. He's first place. If you jump in a river - really fast-flowing river - you can do two things. You can swim upstream, or you can go with the flow. If you swim upstream, we can sit there and watch you all day, just struggling and struggling and struggling, getting nowhere fast and further behind, but creation is here to show Him to be first in all things. Such is the revelation of a little Jewish brother in the first Christian century.

He is also the head of the body, the church, and the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. He was the first person ever to break death's chains. He was the first person that death ever gave birth to life. Death hasn't ever given birth to anything; it has only killed. But one day, death gave birth to life. Can you imagine how badly death felt when it realized that it had to give birth to life?

I'm gonna give you a little insight. I'm gonna give you a page out of a book. It's called *The Resurrection* (now entitled *The Triumph*). Are you with me? It's Sunday morning, and death and Christ…actually death and the Eternal Spirit…are having the battle of all battles. This beats anything you ever saw in science fiction.

They are struggling; death to hold the Son of God in the tomb, Christ to break forth from the tomb, and in so doing, to make sure that death is eternally dead. As they battle, the entire universe begins to shake, and the angels notice that creation is blinking; that for a moment it seems that all things have ceased, and all things have turned to darkness.

Then the light dims, then the blackness, then the light flutters, then it strengthens, then it glows, then it goes out again. The whole creation trembles. Earth trembles, the galaxies tremble, and even heaven begins to shake. And there's one thing—this is fiction, please—one thing Michael knows: he must not fall to his knees. All the angels in the heavens are being knocked to the floor as the very foundations of heaven shake and begin to crumble; fissures crack the sapphire floor, and Michael knows he must not stumble and fall to his knees.

There's the blinking and the darkness, and then the light, and the light is struggling, and then it flares up, and then there's darkness, and the whole universe is crumbling as death and life battle, as Christ and death battle in the tomb. And Michael wonders what he can do, and he realizes suddenly; he rushes to the throne, and he falls upon the footstool of a throne that cannot be shaken.

Praise the Lord, once more the darkness falls, and it seems all creation has ceased; then there is a flare of light, a blaze of light, a burst of light, and now there is no longer the response of darkness and death. The tomb is flooded with unapproachable light, and death is giving birth to life that cannot die, for that life has died and risen again, and nothing can die twice. Life has come out of death, and the tomb explodes, and the Lord comes out and shouts, "Hallelujah! No more death!"

He is the firstborn of a new creation. He turns around in an open tomb, and what does He bring out of that tomb? Death didn't come out, and sin didn't come out. What comes out? The Lord has come

out; what else comes out? I told you the other night. *You come out* because you have been in Him before the foundation of the ages.

Let me make that really clear. What He reaches into that tomb and brings out is the prettiest girl that ever will be: the Bride of Christ. He has birthed…He has brought out of His side…a holy, flawless girl. She's the most beautiful thing that ever was. You know, when you fell in love, and you thought she was the prettiest thing that ever was. Well, sorry, brother, but she wasn't. The girl that came out of that tomb; you're part of her: the bride. Gene, a moment ago, I was the body of Christ; now I'm the bride of Christ. Please make up your mind.

Well, then you wouldn't have to understand marriage; real marriage: when two become one, and one becomes head, and the other becomes the expression of the head. She came out of there. How old is she? She's brand new. So, let's, let's talk to her for a minute. “Boy, I tell you, dear lady, you're beautiful. Dear lady, it was really rough back there in the fallen creation and Adam's sinning and all those things that happened.”

And she looks at you and says, "I'm sorry, I don't know what you're talking about. I was just born.”

“All the scars and the hate and the anger and the resentment and the hurt; don't you remember all that stuff?”

“I'm sorry. I just got here. I belong to a creation that just began when that tomb split open.”

“Don't you remember death?” She says, "Death, who?"

“And you don't remember sin?” “Sin, who?”

“Lady, how old are you?” “I don't know. I think I just got here, but I feel like I'm eternal.”

Then you look at her, and she doesn't have any wrinkles. She doesn't have any age to her at all. And you notice something else. She's got no imperfections. There are no blemishes on this girl. She's without spot…or wrinkle. She's perfect. She's as perfect as her Lord. He takes her hand, and the only thing that we see is the whole universe dissolving. There are only two things there.

You cry out, "Is there…isn’t there…isn't there any - whatever happened to that old universe? What happened to that creation? It was done away with by the cross. What happened to it? Isn't there anything left of it? Any proof it exists?" And the beautiful bride looks at His side and says, "What caused the scar?" And He says to her, "That's the only evidence left that there ever was an old creation."

Can you comprehend this, dear brothers and sisters, that in the eyes of the Almighty Living God, that has already happened? When He looks at you, the believer, and you, the believers, corporately together, all He sees is that beautiful girl. That very, very, very beautiful girl. What can you do but give your heart to Him? That's what God sees when He looks in this room. He sees the bride. All things are gone except the girl, and there's nothing left. There isn't anything left of that which was there before, that old creation.

What will be known forever after this creation? What is it? A man: Jesus Christ, and the most beautiful girl that ever was or ever will be. You say, "Boy, that's wonderful." …but that's not all.

Now we have the key in the first part of Genesis. *And so the two shall become one flesh*. Praise the Lord, this glorious, beautiful girl, and this triumphant reigning King of kings and Lord of lords, blemished by a scar: they get married.

You understand what the word marriage means? They're married…together.

Then what happens, Gene? I'll tell you someday.

Now, this is written by a man who saw all this. *He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He's the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead…*and that's where we got off on all that. Death has given birth to eternal life.

Listen, saints. There is divine life, but there's something higher than divine life. What is higher than divine life? What is higher than eternal life? What is higher than the highest of all lives?

It is life that has passed through death and been raised. That life is *indestructible*, for it has gone into its worst enemy, and only enemy. Life's only enemy was death, and He came out, and death gave birth to resurrected divine life.

Well, you know, saints, we fellowship in His resurrection. We fellowship in His suffering, we fellowship in His death, and then we know what it's like to be grabbed hold of by divine life that has passed through death, and we know what it's like to be yanked out into resurrection.

What are you talking about, Gene? Well, you just become a Christian and find out what it's like for the Lord to raise you up in the darkest hour you will ever live…and you will have the darkest hour you ever lived.

I'm gonna read this verse again. *He is also the head of the church, the body of the church. He is the beginning; He is the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself might have first place in everything.* A man saw a Lord whose Father was determined that that Lord have first place in all things.

Verse 19: *For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness of the Godhead to dwell in Jesus Christ. And finally, to reconcile all things to Himself through the cross*; to finally get everything reconciled.

It was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross. Through Him, I say, whether things on earth or in heaven. He takes off by saying, "There is a need of reconciliation of all these things that you and I have seen, and we live in today. There is need of peace. There is need of peace, and all this is made possible through Jesus Christ."

Now I'm going to bring this to a close, and I'm going to ask two or three questions.

If I have no peace, what do I have? There is only one thing I can have, and that is Christ... quoting scripture…I have Christ who is my peace.

If I have no love, then what do I have? I have Christ who is love. Now then, I'm gonna ask another question. If I am dead, who did I used to be? If I am dead, who did I used to be? I used to be a son of Adam, fallen in a fallen creation. That's who I used to be, and I died. Therefore, I am no longer a son of Adam belonging to an old creation. I used to be a fallen creature in a fallen universe. If I am dead, who was I before? Something not worth the paper I was written on.

Now then, if I am dead, then who's in my place? Who has taken my place? If I am dead, please tell me, who am I? I am a member of the body of Christ, and that body of Christ is part of Christ, and I am one with the head. I am a portion of Him in the eyes of God. Praise the Lord.

If I am no longer a part of Adam, who am I gonna be? I'm gonna be what I used to be. *I'm gonna be what I used to be*. I used to be in God. I was a part of eternal life. I was part of the Lord; that's what I was. And what am I gonna be? I'm gonna be part of that which He is in. I was in Him. Back there in eternity, I was in Him, and there was nothing there but God. He was all, but is going to reverse.

What am I gonna be? I'm gonna be what He is in. *I'm gonna be what He is in.* God is the All. Christ is the All. What's He gonna end up being? First place. He is going to be all that is in me. I'll have a new body; it'll be Christ. I'll have a transformed soul; it'll be Christ. I'll have a spirit that has absolutely melted into and become one with my Lord.

What will He be? He will be all that is in. He will be all that is in. You open the inner shell; it's Christ. The middle shell, the middle portion, it's Christ. The outer portion, it's Christ.

He shall be *All in All.*

I'm going to be back where I was, only He's going to be in me instead of me being in Him. That is what was declared, and I wish we could go on. That was what was given to us… by a brother... who had seen his Lord.