

# ERC Theological Study Day—Vol. 8, No. 41

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Dr. Ben Witherington



The Middletown Church building

Every fall our Eastern Regional Conference (ERC) holds a theological study day for pastors and church leaders. Last Tuesday, September 30, Middletown Church hosted the event for this year featuring Dr. Ben Witherington as the presenter. He currently serves as the Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary and on the faculty at St. Andrews University in Scotland. He's also taught at Ashland Theological Seminary, Vanderbilt University, Duke Divinity School and Gordon-Conwell, and has presented seminars for churches, colleges and biblical meetings in the States, England, Estonia, Russia, Europe, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Australia. In addition he's led tours to Italy, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Jordan, and Egypt and written over forty books, including *The Jesus Quest* and *The Paul Quest*, both selected as top biblical study works by *Christianity Today*. Read carefully as the synopsis below, though brief, offers some profound insights.

Dr. Witherington devoted his morning and afternoon sessions to exploring "The Image of God: Theology and Ethics in the Bible." He introduced his talk by raising the core question for the day and quoting Shakespeare. What does it mean to be quintessentially human, to be created in "the image of God" as the Bible says?

*What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties,  
in form and moving how express and admirable,  
in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!  
the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals  
—and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?  
Hamlet: Act II, scene 2*



He began with a discussion of the Göbekli Tepe Temple archeological site in southeastern Turkey. It appears this elevated location functioned as a spiritual center by 11,000 BC or earlier. The oldest surviving structures not only predate pottery (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pottery>), metallurgy (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metallurgy>), and the invention of writing (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writing>) or the wheel (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wheel>), but were built before the so-called Neolithic Revolution ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neolithic\\_Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neolithic_Revolution)), i.e., the beginning of agriculture (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture>) and animal husbandry ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal\\_husbandry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_husbandry)) around 9000 BC. In addition, the construction of Göbekli Tepe implies organization of an advanced order not hitherto associated with Paleolithic (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleolithic>) societies. The view, shared by most experts, is that Göbekli Tepe was a stone-age sanctuary. It's the oldest religious site yet discovered anywhere. Klaus Schmidt (1953-2014), who began the excavations in 1995, summarized the importance of the site to human civilization, "First came the temple, then the city."



Dr. Mike Walker and Colleen Gross enjoy the study day

Witherington proposed that man's essential identity or *Imago Dei* is much more spiritual than it is physical, or even intellectual. Mankind has an internal drive to worship, especially in community. Every human society however remote in time or place invariably links together the concepts of temple, priesthood, and sacrifice as the core components of religious expression. Göbekli Tepe simply confirms the antiquity of this fact. Furthermore the developed context at Göbekli Tepe strongly suggests this reality has even more ancient religious roots that can be seen in the burial practices of early modern man dating back 30,000 years and more. In the Bible, man's quest to regain favor with God starts in the very beginning, right after Adam and Eve's disobedience, and continues in the subsequent stories of Cain and Abel, Noah, etc.



Man's age-old desire to worship contains a serious flaw, namely sin or self-will. This fact of human fallenness has not erased the *Imago Dei*, but it has effaced it. Thus, both the human understanding of God and the reality of God's image in mankind have been distorted. The corrective comes with Jesus Christ. He is both the fullness of the Father incarnate (Colossians 2:9) and the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15), the new image bearer, without sin. By receiving him (John 1:12) the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve can become image wearers, reborn "after his likeness" to "walk in newness of life." True spirituality (theology) and moral character (ethics) are founded upon the Image of God and become attainable only through the Lordship of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). The redemption through him results in true worship which is "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23) and which requires no more temples, priests, or sacrifices (Hebrews).

It was a good thought provoking day in the Word and with the brothers and sisters present.

ONE Mission together,  
Ed  
*Soli Dei Gloria!*

# Search for New CGGC Executive Director Begins



The Churches of God, General Conference, based in Findlay, Ohio, is now receiving applications for the position of Executive Director of the denomination. Bill Reist, CGGC president, is serving as the chairperson of the transition team along with eight others from across the Church.

An application, position description and desired attributes of the Executive Director are available on the Churches of God website or by contacting [wreist@collegefirst.org](mailto:wreist@collegefirst.org) (mailto:wreist@collegefirst.org) or [revrockey@gmail.com](mailto:revrockey@gmail.com) (mailto:revrockey@gmail.com). Applications received by December 15, 2014 will be given priority, with a decision to be made, Lord willing, by March 31, 2015.

For more information regarding values, beliefs and history of the CGGC you may visit <http://www.cggc.org/about/> (<http://www.cggc.org/about/>) online. Please direct all inquiries pertaining to the Executive Director position to the e-mail addresses above and not to the CGGC offices.

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For Rules and Entry Forms see your church office,

contact Rachel Foreman at the CGGC office

(419) 424-1961, or go to the website at

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