

Colossians: The Supremacy of Christ (Col. 1:15-20)

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- [0 : 0 0] If you're a guest with us today, we've been walking through a book of the Bible called Colossians. It's a church that the Apostle Paul wrote to this church in the city of Colossae. And so we get this privilege to read the Apostle's Word to this church. And if you have a copy of God's Word with you, we'll be today in Colossians chapter 1. We're going to be reading from verses 15 through 20. That will be our text for today. And I encourage you to follow along as I read this passage with us. So Colossians chapter 1, beginning in verse 15 through verse 20. Speaking of Jesus, Paul writes, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. And by Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through Him and for Him.
- [1 : 0 8] And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might have preeminence. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross. This is a lofty passage that portrays Christ in a very elevated, superior to all things manner. In 1835, a great preacher whose name is Charles Simeon, a person I have great respect for, he was 76 years old and he stood in a pulpit in Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, and he cited verse 18 to his congregation. And after he recited this passage that concludes with, that in everything He might be preeminent, he said this, He must have it, speaking of the preeminence of Christ, the first place, the superior nature of Christ, he must have it, he will have it, and he shall have it.
- [2 : 3 2] 33 years later, a Bishop Handley, Moule, an Anglican pastor, from his memory recounted those words that he remembered Charles Simeon saying. If I remember anything I said 33 years from now, I'm doing well. And if you remember anything I say 33 years from now, you would be doing well. But Bishop Handley remembered that, and he must have it. He will have it. And he shall have it. That is the preeminence. The first place in our lives. This is, we probably read, one of Paul's most profound and powerful descriptions of the person of Christ. What's important to remember is that in the early church, there was a controversy that centered around the nature of the person of Christ. It centered around this church heretic, whose name was Arius, and who used this verse to say, He is the firstborn of all creation, and starting in verse 15, to mean that he is the highest form of created beings.

[3 : 40] Now, if you've been at 4th for a while, you know anytime I bring out the box, it means one thing. That all creation, imagine all creation is in this box. The universe, everything in it, solar system, stars, sun, he knows them each by name, animals, sloths, and bedbugs.

So, they're all in here. Everything that was created is in the box. And so, at one point in time, God creates. And so, at one point in time, God created.

And so, Arius understood that Jesus Christ, being the firstborn of all creation, he was the first thing that was created, Jesus. And this is a heresy. That's a false teaching.

That's not what the Bible prescribes for us, describes for us. But that's what Arius thought, is that Jesus being the firstborn of creation means that he was the first in the box.

He was the first of all creation. And we're going to get to that here in a second. That understanding of who Jesus is became known as Arianism, after this man whose name is Arius.

[4 : 47] There are modern-day Arians today who adhere to this same form of misunderstanding that Jesus is not fully divine, fully God.

Those Arians that already exist today are called Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. And I find it sad. I find it sadly ironic that in this very passage, Paul is writing to extol the supremacy of Christ.

And he's seeking to clarify this. And you say, Well, Scott, why do you say that there was maybe this, a similar heresy in the church at Colossae. There was a false teaching in the church at Colossae.

And Paul is seeking to rectify it. Turn to chapter 2 with me. If you turn to chapter 2, verses 16 through 18, we read something interesting. Paul is specifically seeking to correct a misunderstanding.

He said, Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions about food or drink and regard to the festival or the new moon or the Sabbath, for they are a shadow of the things that are to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

[5 : 56] Let not one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism, that is, to go without something, and to worship of angels, going on in detail about visions puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind.

So you see there's this worship of angels. Somehow, in some way, what all false teaching has in common is it seems to denigrate or diminish the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

That's what all false teaching has in common. And Paul, in our text today, has this, is speaking of Christ in this preeminent way.

He is superior to all things. He is preeminent, and he ought to have first place in our lives. If we were to put Jesus as the first created being, higher than any other created beings in the box, we undermine our very salvation.

The only proper place is to put Jesus Christ as supremely preeminent over all things, and Paul is seeking to do that in our text today, because he is the eternal son who took on human flesh for our salvation.

[7 : 20] What is difficult, and we need to be mindful of, when individuals knock on our door, we're using the same vocabulary, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, they will say, yes, Jesus is the son of God.

They will use the same vocabulary, but what they mean by that is he is a progeny or a descendant of, he is a created thing of God. He is not fully divine, and he is first of creation.

And they will even use this verse that is in our text today to share with you and try to get you to believe that lie. He is the firstborn of all creation.

He was the first thing created that we find in the box. Don't buy it, and I'll explain why today. But why do I make mention of that? There is something in, while the church at Colossae is a relatively mature church, there is a false teaching that Paul is seeking to correct that is in the background.

We don't know exactly the nature of it, but we do know that in some way the supremacy of Christ is under attack. And in our text today, Paul is saying, oh, let me clarify any misunderstanding who Christ is.

[8 : 31] He is. And so today, where are we going to go in our study today? We're going to see that Christ is preeminent over all creation, all natural creation, and then he is also supremely preeminent over spiritual creation, the creation of the church.

So he is the agent and he is preeminent over all physical creation, natural creation, and spiritual creation. That's where we're going to go. So in our text, we read in verse 15, he is the image of the invisible God.

This Greek word for image is the word icon, that we get icon. It is used of the image of Caesar that is found on a Roman coin. You would say that Caesar's image is on the coin right here.

And so the average person in the Roman Empire had never met Caesar. The average Roman citizen could never see, didn't know what he looked like, but they could see his coinage. They could see his image on the coin.

And though the word does not necessarily imply a perfect image, both the context in our text today and the rest of Scripture demands that meaning of Christ. He is the image of the invisible God.

[9 : 47] He is the perfect image of the invisible God. We read in John 4 that he, God who is spirit. We read in 1 Timothy 1, verse 17, no, he is not visible to the human eye.

We see F.F. Bruce, this theologian guy, he talks and he says this, in him that is Christ, the nature and the very being of God have been perfectly revealed.

So, Paul, having seen or witnessed Christ, he saw the very nature and being of God perfectly revealed in the person of Christ.

Paul is emphasizing that Jesus is both the representation and the manifestation of God. He is the full and final, complete revelation of God. He is the image of the invisible God.

God chose, Caesar chose to reveal himself to humanity through his coinage. God chose to reveal himself through his son.

[10 : 48] That's the implication of this verse. Christ alone is preeminent over all the universe because he is the image of the invisible God.

Secondly, he is preeminent over the universe not only because he is the image of the invisible God because he also created it and he sustains it. Look with me in the latter part of verse 15.

He is the firstborn of all creation. He is the firstborn of all creation. Earlier, I mentioned Arius as this heretic. Again, modern day Arians are Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons.

They interpret it to mean that Jesus is the first of all created beings. But, in fact, here's Arius' own words. Arius is on record. This is around 325 A.D.

He says this, there was a time when Christ was not. So imagine, what Arius is saying is because Jesus is the first of all creation, there was a time when Christ was not.

[11 : 53] That's heresy, by the way. This is false teaching. But that's Arius' own words, so you get the idea of what he is saying. But, Arius was wrong for several reasons.

Paul immediately explains what he means by this term, he is the firstborn of all creation, in the very next verse. What does he mean by it? Verse 16, for by him all things were created.

So let me, let me ask, let me share this. If Jesus is the agency, God, who is the one for by him all things were created, Christ, by Christ, he is, by which, by him all things are created, then he would have had to create himself.

And that's not possible. So he is, Paul is clearly saying, by him, Christ, all things were created. He is not a part of creation.

It's by him all things were created. He's not of creation. He's not a part of it. Notice, all things were created by him and through him and for him in this passage, in verse 16.

[13 : 18] By Christ points to that Christ is the, is the authority, has authority over creation. Through Christ points to the fact that he is the agent of creation and for Christ points to the fact that he is the supreme reason for all things that were created.

This helps us understand when we read, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, the very first verse in all of the Bible. It helps us understand which member of the Godhead, of the Godhead, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, was responsible for all of creation.

We now know, oh, the Son. The Son was the one who was responsible for creating everything in the box. It's the Son's responsibility. He's not in the box.

He was the one who was responsible for creating everything that's in the box. Everything that is. Everything that is. I'm debating whether to share.

That's what the pause is for. I'll go. the New World Translation, which the Jehovah's Witnesses have put out, to emphasize their false teaching, inserted a word that is not in the Greek manuscripts.

[14 : 47] They say that he is the firstborn of all creation. They insert the word other. He is the firstborn of other creation, meaning then Christ is also created and he is the first of all the other creation.

Do you see how pernicious this is? And they put it in their authoritative writings that they read. It's very sad. And why am I mentioning? You know that I don't often cite false religions and things, but this is so important because many of these religions, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, who occupies the pews in those churches are former Christians.

And they pick us off using verses not in context with us not knowing the truth of the matter. And so I'm being a little specific because this false teaching has existed since 325 A.D.

when Athanasius and Arius, Athanasius was correct and Arius was wrong and this issue is not, is settled in Scripture, but the church argued over this and Athanasius was true to Scripture and in 325 A.D.

the issue was settled and it's been settled since the Scripture and since 325 when the church argued over it. And just know the history and to know, this is why this is so important to me, is I just don't want any of you to be picked off.

[16 : 11] Okay. the verse 3, all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

The fact that Christ created all the invisible powers demonstrates to the Colossian heretics the heresy that we know that was existing in the church at Colossae.

that who advocated angelic worship were in error. They are worshipping a created thing rather than the creator.

And he, Paul is lifting Christ before their eyes and say, oh, he is the one created all those invisible things as well. All those principalities and powers, Christ is responsible for creating.

Worship the creator, not the created thing. in verse 17, he is, Jesus Christ has absolute priority over all creation because he existed before it.

[17 : 18] Look with me in verse 17, he is before all things and in him all things hold together. This means a priority of time. He is before all things. This is akin to Jesus saying, before Abraham was, I am.

I am the I am. I am God. He is before all things. So before the box, everything that was created, Jesus is saying, I was.

He is not in the box. He is not part of creation. Jesus had no problem declaring his full deity. In John 10, 33, Jews said that they intended to stone Jesus because you, they're accusing Jesus, they're speaking to Jesus because you, being a man, make yourself out to be a God.

And again, Jesus did not deny their charge. Yes, I am claiming to be God. He doesn't deny it. In Luke 5, 21, there was another occasion. Jesus forgave the paralytic sins and the Pharisees reasoned and it says, who is this man?

The Pharisees are reasoning among themselves who speaks blasphemes. And what is the blaspheme they're concerned about? Who can forgive sin but God alone? They reason. And that is exactly right.

[18 : 32] Precisely. Who can forgive sin but God alone? And Jesus then heals the man, if you will, saying, yes, God alone can forgive sin and I just heal the sinner. I forgive him.

I am God. He has no problem declaring his deity. In the Gospel of John, Thomas saw the risen Savior and exclaimed, my Lord and my God.

And Jesus did not say, oh, please let me clarify, I'm not God. No, no, no. He accepted Thomas' exclamation, Lord, my God. Jesus did not rebuke him for blasphemy but rather he commended his faith.

Jesus has no problem claiming deity. He is the image of, and not only does he, he created everything that exists, he sustains it.

If you came in today and you are free from anxiety, let me help you with anxiety. In him, all things hold together or consist, depends upon your translations.

[19 : 38] If there was a change in the distance or the rate at which the earth rotates around the sun and around its axes, it would lead to catastrophe.

The earth would become either too hot or too cold to sustain life. If the moon were any closer to the earth, huge tides would inundate the continents.

A change in the composition of the gases that make up our atmosphere would be fatal to life. A slight change in the mass of a proton would result in the disillusion of hydrogen atoms.

And if that doesn't concern you, that would result in the destruction of the universe because hydrogen is the most dominant element. Are we anxious yet? Without Christ continually holding all things together, electrons would cease to orbit nucleus.

Your very next heartbeat that you take for granted would not occur. The very next breath of air that you fill your lungs with would never occur. Jesus Christ is not merely the agent of creation.

[20 : 46] He is not merely just before all creation. He is the one who continually holds all things together. Jesus Christ continually sustains all things. Without growing weary, without growing tired, He does.

I hope I alleviated some anxiety. What holds the universe together is not an idea.

It is not merely physical laws themselves, gravity, electromagnetism, nuclear forces. It's not a virtue. It's not an impersonal force like Star Wars, but it's a person.

What holds all things together is the resurrected Christ. That's who holds all things together. He is preeminent over all things, not only natural creation, but spiritual creation.

Let's remember what Charles Simeon said, that in everything He may be preeminent, He must have it, He will have it, He shall have it.

[21 : 51] So we've talked now, Paul is making the argument to the church at Colossae, listen, He is preeminent because He is the agent of creation of everything that is physical.

Everything physically created, Christ is preeminent among all those things, and He gives the reasons for that. Now He's going to transition for verses 18 through 20 to say, but He's not only preeminent because of physical creation, but He's also preeminent because of spiritual creation because He created the church.

So then He continues making His argument, and this is how He does it. In verse 18, verse A, or first part of verse 18, He says this, He is the head of the body, the church.

He is the head of the body, the church. We don't know exactly how Paul's concept of the church and as the body of Christ came into being, but we do know that his first encounter with a risen Savior on the road to Damascus, we know he met the Lord there.

And listen to me and remind ourselves of that occasion when Paul was walking on the way to persecute the Christians. He says, we see, we pick up in chapter 9, verse 3, we see this, now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him, and falling to the ground, he heard a voice and say to them, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

[23 : 21] And he said, who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. The head of the church is the one to whom Paul was persecuting when he was persecuting Christians individually.

Saul's mind, in Saul's mind, he was persecuting the members of the individual church, individually. But in Jesus, he was persecuting him.

To combat the heresy that was in the church at Colossae, Paul asserts, Christ is the head of the church. He is in the chief position. He is of the highest rank.

He is, as the beginning, as its originator, he possesses supreme authority over his church. And so we, the members of the body, must submit to this sovereign headship.

And what are the implications of this? The implication is, I'm glad we have a practice here, and it was here before my time as pastor, and I'm grateful that it continues, but I desire for us to be a church that speaks well of other churches.

[24 : 38] When Christ is the head of the church, he's the head of the church universally, not just Fourth Memorial Church. Yes, Fourth Memorial Church, but he's the head of the church universally, the head of the church who make up the Chinese church, the Korean churches, South African churches, Asian churches, Australian churches.

He is the head of God's people wherever they are who are the church. This week, I got a card, and I didn't actually open the letter until this morning, and I was blessed by the card.

It goes on to say, Pastor Scott and the church family at Fourth Memorial. There are many doors that are opening to us this year to talk to people about Jesus.

I pray that it would be so even at Fourth. We are so grateful for your partnership in the gospel, and we pray for you often. We pray for your ministries. Our church is growing, and we are blessed to have our pastors, and then she names the pastors, and then it says, God bless you, Three Crosses Church.

This is from another church in town who's praying for us. Christ is the head of his church. We speak well of other churches.

[26 : 03] We pray for other churches. We pray for the success of his name, even if it doesn't happen here. Praise be to him. One of the things we love to do in our elder meetings is to pray for the members of the body of Fourth, and I'm grateful for our time to pray, and we recognize as elders, we are just under shepherds of the chief shepherd.

He is the head of the church, and it blesses me in every elder meeting, someone, one of the elders will pray, Lord, these are your people that we pray for.

These are your people. There's an acknowledgement that this is your church. You are the head of this church, not us. And then we pray by name for you as the body here at Fourth because we recognize he is the head of this church.

church. Paul continues to make the argument Christ is preeminent because he is the head of the body of the church, but he is also preeminent as the beginning, the firstborn of the dead.

Look with me in verse 18. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he may be preeminent. Christ is the beginning. That means he originated the church.

[27 : 26] It wasn't the brilliant idea of the apostles that the church exists, but rather it is the creation of church by Christ himself. Just as Christ created the first man, he created a new man, the church, in his image.

It also says that Christ is the firstborn from the dead. It points to the resurrection as the first of its kind, supreme over all other resurrections.

There are other resurrections that are recorded in scripture, but those people again died. Lazarus was raised from the dead, but Lazarus is not walking around the earth at this time.

He ultimately died. But Christ is a first of that kind of supreme resurrection that he is over.

And Jesus alone has been raised with an indestructible resurrected body, the type of bodies that we will receive at his second coming. And our new bodies will not be subject to disease, aging, or death.

[28 : 33] He had that kind of resurrection and he will offer it to us. He is the firstborn. from the dead.

But all of this was for a purpose. So that, look at the purpose statement in verse 18, that in everything he might be preeminent.

He might have first place. He might be superior than all others. Preeminent. Philippians chapter 2 verse 9 and 11 says this, Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him a name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.

Charles Simeon said, speaking of his preeminence, he must have it, he will have it, he shall have it. The third argument, and we'll close here quickly, Christ is preeminent over the church, his spiritual creation, because it is the only means of reconciling all things to God.

He is the only means of reconciling all things to God. We read in verse 19 and 20, for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.

[30 : 11] Two things to note, Christ is qualified to reconcile all things to himself because in him the fullness of deity dwells in him. Christ is fully divine and he is fully human and the fullness of deity was pleased to dwell in the person of Christ.

He is fully divine. This is why this heresy in the book of Colossians is, there's some way that they're diminishing the person of Christ and Paul is saying, oh, don't believe it.

It was pleased. He was pleased to, all the fullness of the deity was pleased to dwell in Christ. And this is why modern day Arians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons namely, are categorically wrong.

Christ is able, secondly, to reconcile all things to God because he made peace through the blood of the cross. Rather than, or through the blood of the cross, Christ has made peace with his former enemies whom the Father had given to him like you and like me.

We were former enemies. But he has made peace through the blood of his cross and I'm grateful that in his sinless life, let's back up.

[31 : 40] before creation, all who existed is God. God, in three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, there he is.

He chooses at some point in time to create. He creates through the second person of the Godhead, the Son. So the Son is the person in the Godhead that chooses or is the agency of creation.

Then all things in the box, if you will, are then created. Mankind fell, became sinful, and God, in the second person of the Godhead, condescends to earth, leaves heaven, condescends to earth, lives a sinless life, takes on the name Jesus, Jesus Christ, lives a sinless life, dies for sin, and it says by the blood on the cross, he dies for sin, sheds his blood as a perfect sacrifice that sin might be forgiven for all who trust in him, and then raises from the grave.

And that's the grand narrative of Scripture. Scripture. That's the big story. And I pray that if you have not placed your faith in Christ today, in his life, his death, and resurrection, I pray that you would consider that today.

Otherwise, you are still in your sin and apart from God. Let me conclude this way. the whole purpose of Paul writing this is that he wants us to know that in Christ he is preeminent.

[33 : 32] He is superior. He is greater than. He is first. He is to have first place. He is to have that because he created physically and then he created spiritually the church.

It is because of him that all things exist and he died for even the church that they might know him. So then he should have first place.

So the question naturally is then does he have first place in my life? Does he have first place over my thought life? Does he have first place in my words? Does he have first place over the use of my time?

Does he have first place in the relationship with your boyfriend or your girlfriend? Does he have first place over your finances? Does he have first place over your entertainment choices? Does he have first place in everything in your life?

If I had an opportunity to look at your calendar and say hey can I see your calendar and I saw the use of your time every minute of every day I saw the use of your time would it be obvious to me oh Christ is preeminent in this person's life.

[34 : 33] If I had the opportunity to look at your bank statement do they still though? Yeah they'll still print those or you can look online. Anyway you gave me access to your bank thank you very much and then you gave me access to your bank and I looked at all the expenses that you had would it be obvious to all of us oh Christ is preeminent in this person's life look how the investment of their money that God has entrusted to them they use.

If I could look into your mind and see your motives would I discern that the reason behind you do all things is for the glory of God and him alone.

Charles Simeon so forcefully put it and we're going to conclude with this speaking of Christ's preeminence he must have it he will have it and he shall have it and I pray that we all will voluntarily say Lord you shall have it in my life.

Let's pray. Father thank you so much for this day for this opportunity to declare your word to share the truths of scripture.

I pray that Lord all of today's text is writing so that we understand how superior you are to all things. How that it is written with the thrust that you ought to be first place in all things because you created all things physically and you created the church by dying for her.

[36 : 06] Lord I pray that you would have first place in our lives. We love you and we thank you and it's in your beautiful name we pray Jesus. Amen.