

The All-Supreme Son

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[0 : 00] So there are certain things in life for which you're required to pick a side. So the footy is a classic example.

You live in Melbourne and you have to pick a side. A footy team, whether you want to or not. Otherwise, you spend ages explaining why you don't want to pick a side, which is what you didn't want to do in the first place.

You spend all that time talking about a subject that you have no interest in whatsoever. So you pick a side. And people use all sorts of ways to do that, don't they?

So you could pick a side because it's got the biggest following, even though everyone else hates that side. Or you could pick a side because that's your parents' side.

Or you like the color or design of the jumper. Or if you're a purist like me, you pick a side because of the way they play.

[1 : 04] The start of play, how classy it is, the way they win beautifully, the ethos of the club. You pick a side because they play the game as it should be played.

That's why I follow Geelong. Some of you thought I would say Richmond, but no.

Even though my daughters, one of my daughters at least, is allergic to cats. Well, it turns out the same is true with our beliefs. We don't call it picking a side, I suppose, but we all still go through life choosing, don't we?

Picking a set of beliefs and convictions to live by. Now, for a long time in Australia, that would mean choosing between being a Protestant or Catholic. Even though I think that's not really a choice, it's just which family you came from, largely.

But with migrants coming to Australia, bringing their own religions, and increasing secularization of society, there are now many paths to choose from. And even if you don't follow a formal religion, you still choose an ideology or philosophy to guide your lives.

[2 : 19] Last week, Paul began his letter by commending the gospel, declaring the bold news that Jesus, God's Son, has come into the world to save it. He has brought us from the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of light.

Verse 13 and 14. So Paul is saying, choose Jesus, the Son. Believe in Him, and you will be saved. Now, in a society where there was a pantheon of gods, the Roman gods, and then the Jews themselves were waiting for a Messiah, which they thought had not come, but actually has, that was a very bold claim to make.

And so, I think in our passage today, Paul seeks to back up this claim. We have here in our passage what I call a resume of the Son to show us just how impressive Jesus is.

So if you look at your bullet points, the first thing he says in verses 15 to 17 is that the Son is shown to be supreme over all creation.

He writes, Nothing lies outside the reach of the Son, does it?

[3 : 52] All of creation, heaven or earth, visible or invisible, every competing power, is created in Him, through Him, and for Him.

Likewise, John the Apostle would concur in the first three verses of his gospel, which is on the screen, the third verse. He says, Through Him all things were made, without Him nothing was made that has been made.

Jesus is the creator of the universe. And so the phrase, firstborn over all creation, cannot mean that He was the first thing to be created.

Instead, that word, firstborn, denotes His authority over creation. He holds the traditional rights and privileges of a firstborn, to whom the father often delegates the affairs of the household.

So if a father is absent, the firstborn manages the household. The servants report to him. He takes charge of the finances. He acts in the father's place.

[5 : 01] Which is what the son does with creation. When God created the world, it wasn't simply that the father was doing all the work, and the son was just standing by watching. No, the son was God's agent, the father's agent.

The father was creating the world through him. And even now, the father rules the world through the son. Hence, Paul can say that he holds all things together.

The son sustains all creation, even now. Which is a mind-boggling truth to proclaim. Because many people of Paul's day would have seen Jesus in the flesh.

But Paul claims that this man, who on the outside looks just like you and me, this man was and is the one who continues to hold all creation in his hands.

Every breath we take, every move we make, and I'm not going to sing the rest of the song, is only possible because of him.

[6 : 05] Now, of course, the label firstborn also speaks of a deeper connection that he has with creation. That is, there is a sense of kinship, isn't there?

Creation is an alien to him. It's not like some foreign power coming in and subjugating creation. No, as a firstborn, he took on flesh and blood to become one of us, to be part of creation, even though he was not created.

And so Paul says that means it's possible now to know and see God. Hence the phrase, image of the visible God. Jesus has made visible what was invisible until then.

He reflects the Father in full. We no longer just hear God's voice. We can see the very character of God embodied in a person.

But the word image also reminds us of Genesis 1, which we read earlier, because humans are also created in God's image. So the verse back on the slide, they're made in God's image so that they may rule over the fish and the birds and the livestock and all the creatures.

[7 : 14] And verse 28 even goes on to say that humanity is to subdue or rule the earth. And so while we don't rule the universe like the sun, from the very beginning, it was always our responsibility to take care of the world, this earth, this small little marble of a planet that we live on.

It's like saying that Jesus is given the reins of the whole house or mansion, and us humans are being taught to look after one room, one small part of this huge mansion.

And yet, as we look around, it's sad to say, but we haven't really done a good job, have we?

Nowadays, all the focus is put on the environment, and to some extent that's right.

But that's not the only thing we've stuffed up, is it? Because the Bible's focus is on the mess we've made with our relationships. Ever since Adam and Eve, we've exploited and mistreated each other. We've lied, we've cheated, we've lived selfishly and in rebellion against God. We've tainted the world with our sin from day one. It's like the bedroom of children or teenagers.

[8 : 34] Mom and dad keeps telling them to tidy their room, but it's as a state of perpetual chaos. And even if they try to tidy it, the best they can do is shove everything under the bed.

But did you notice that there's a stark incongruence with this passage to the last few verses?

Because on the one hand, Paul says, the Son holds all things together, even the thrones, powers, rulers, and authorities.

And yet, just a few verses earlier, in verse 13 and 14, he talks about the rescue from the dominion of darkness. How is it then that he can be supreme over all creation, and yet there exists a dominion of darkness?

Well, the answer is, it's because of us. In our sin, we've sort of, in one sense, carved out a place with which we can rebel against God, but thereby, as well, enslaving ourselves to the dominion of darkness.

Which is why Paul now moves on to the next few verses, point two, to show us God's solution, whereby the Son inaugurates the new creation over which he is also supreme.

[9 : 48] So look in verse 18, and the Son is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Here, the word beginning indicates that he is starting something new, the new creation. But at the same time, as firstborn from among the dead, it's achieved by means of a resurrection.

So this is not something that is a new creation that's totally divorced from the old, but it arises by resurrection from what is old. Of course, Jesus himself, by his resurrection, inaugurates this new

creation.

Hence, again, he is the firstborn, the firstfruits in other places of the Bible. Here, Paul reinforces the idea by calling him the head of the body, for it's his own physical body rising from the dead that brings to life this new spiritual body.

But Paul is quick to point out, isn't he, that it's not Christ's physical body that he's speaking of, but he's talking about the church. The church is the locus of this new creation.

[11 : 04] Those who are in Christ, their head, together form this new creation. Now, again, the word church in the Bible isn't a reference to buildings, nor is it a reference to institutions like the Anglican Church of Australia.

These are just proxies for the real thing, and the real thing is the gathering of God's people. The church are those who are in Christ, the people that are in Christ.

And again, Paul develops on this image in verse 19 when he goes on to say, For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Now, it's quite subtle, so you may not pick up on it, but the idea of God's fullness dwelling in Christ is actually an allusion back to the Old Testament, to Mount Sinai, to the Tabernacle, to the temple in Jerusalem.

These are places where God has chosen for his glory or his fullness to dwell. And in each case, it's also the place where God instructs his people to gather to meet him.

[12 : 18] Paul now says that this place is in Christ, not a physical place, but a spiritual one in Christ. God has chosen his Son on which his fullness or glory will dwell so that we may meet him as we gather in Christ.

but just as the temple was in the Old Testament, so also Christ is the place and means of reconciliation, not primarily between humans, but firstly between God and humans.

That's why we have the language of redemption and forgiveness of sins in verse 14, but now here as well, the making of peace through his blood on the cross.

Jesus is the sacrifice whose blood shed reconciles us to God. But whereas the peace gained at the temple was temporary and only for Israel, in Christ, God's reconciliation has gone global.

Actually, I should say universal. God has never lost his sovereignty even with sin in the world, but through Christ's death and resurrection, it's almost as if God reasserts his supremacy over all creation.

[13 : 35] And hence, you have that parallel, don't you, between verses 15 to 17 and now 18 to 20. All creation, new creation, they are parallels. Firstborn is used twice, and so are the phrases things in heaven and things on earth.

From the beginning, the Father, through his Son, creates and sustains creation, but now, in the new creation, in the new beginning, the Father reconciles all things to himself again through the Son.

Now, if you're thinking carefully about these things, you sort of may understand that, yep, I can see why Christ's death has a global effect. He's not reconciling just Jews, but all of humanity to him.

But then you may wonder, how does his death on earth reconcile all things in heaven, as Paul says? Well, Paul's answer is actually found later in the letter, in Colossians 2, verse 15.

There he says that, having disarmed their powers and authorities, a parade should be, should have a parade of that verse, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

[14 : 46] That is, by dying on the cross, Christ takes away any basis that these spiritual powers, namely, Satan and his cronies, have of accusing and convicting God's people.

What Jesus did on the cross on earth has a heavenly or cosmic impact. These heavenly accusers are silenced and banished from the heavenly court of law.

That heavenly war for the souls of humans, which has been raging since Adam and Eve's sin, is finally over. Christ emerges victorious and supreme.

And this is, Paul sort of uses this image as he goes on in verse 21. You will, once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior, but now, he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body, true death, to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation.

You see the language of acquittal there, free from accusation? That's the scene of a court, isn't it? There are also allusions to the temple, I think, because we are being presented by Christ with the qualities required of the animal sacrifices without blemish, holy in his sight.

[16:10] But please note that this is purely the work of Christ's death. Nothing to do with us because Paul says that we were alienated from God.

We were enemies in our minds and because of our evil behavior. In thought, word and deed, we were totally opposed to God, weren't we? We're not just some immature kid that's trying hard to please dad and just can't get it right.

No, we are enemies, evil in intent. And we may not think of it in these terms, but if we know what God requires of us and we still live in our own way, that's tantamount to being God's enemies. And yet, despite our defiance, can you see that God himself graciously takes the initiative, doesn't he? he sends his son to reconcile with us.

He provides the means. He makes the sacrifice. So sometimes you might hear that God is this angry God up in heaven, you know, and it's the son that comes to appease the father as though the father didn't want the son to do that.

[17:22] That is absolutely not the truth. The father is the one who gives his son, sends his son, and the son comes willingly. It is God that has made the approach to us.

And he doesn't do it. This whole idea of cosmic child abuse, that's just totally wrong. Friends, there's rightly a lot of talk nowadays about reconciliation in the world.

So we have Reconciliation Week in Australia. We talk about how Jews and Muslims in the Middle East should be reconciled. We fear, for example, that all the hard work done between the Catholics and Protestants in Ireland is going to be jeopardized by Brexit.

And some of us are fearful, I think, we've seen on TV, just today I saw on TV, that there might be a lot of reconciliation now need to be done between the Chinese in Hong Kong and those from the mainland.

Now, all this work of reconciliation is good and important, but, brothers and sisters, I want to tell you that there is a more important reconciliation than that. and that is the reconciliation that needs to occur between creation and the Creator, which actually God has already done through Jesus.

[18:41] We only need to respond to it and receive it. You know, living in a beautiful country like Australia, which God has created, by the way, it's sometimes hard, isn't it, to think that humanity can be alienated from God.

You know, we look around, how, in what sense are we enjoying life? How are we actually alienated from God? But the fact is, if we thumb our noses at the one who gave us this abundance, then yes, we are, aren't we?

We are alienated from God. And any reconciliation we might achieve between humans, I think simply just masks the problem. It's a bit like pushing humanity's mess under the bed.

It's still there. We're still in the dominion of darkness. The accusations of Satan will still stand if we don't put ourselves in Christ because the blood of Christ does not testify on our behalf.

And so I say again, the same thing I said last week, that we must not then therefore neglect the preaching of the gospel because that's where the work of true reconciliation lies. If we really want to see lasting reconciliation, which leads to true freedom, then it begins with reconciliation between God and humanity in Christ.

[20:05] As I say, it's my third point, Christ is the only hope or Christ is humanity's hope for salvation. And we are called to put our faith in Him. And then having done so, verse 23, we are to continue in that faith, establish and firm and not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

Paul is saying the same thing here as he said last week. This is the gospel that you heard and that have been proclaimed to every creature under heaven of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

And so friends, to go back to the start, it may seem like there are many faiths and ideologies to choose from.

And maybe to the mind of some, they're all the same anyway, you know, different ways to the same God. And you know, as long as you're sincere and you follow your heart, then everything will turn out all right.

But that's not how God sees it, is it? For Him, there is only one way back to Him, only one reconciliation through His Son. He's the one that holds all things together.

He's the one who laid down His life so that rebellious creatures can be reconciled to their Creator.

And so from God's perspective, there are only really two choices, choose the Son or reject the Son.

[21:24] All other choices are really just failed human attempts to get to God. It's not going to work. And so if you're not a Christian here today or still not quite sure I know this may sound harsh

to hear, but there is only one way and that is to turn back to God.

Turn away from your rebellion and turn back to Him in humility and repentance. But for those of us who are already reconciled to God, then of all people, we are the ones that ought to show what reconciliation really means, isn't it?

We should be the ones working hardest to be reconciled. And we need to express this in how we treat one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Now if you're anything like me, I'm sure you'll feel that you'll fall short some of the time.

That yes, you would love to love everyone, but it's hard. There's just some people in church you don't get along with. There are still misunderstandings and hurt that we cause to each other. You know, we still say the wrong things, do the wrong things. We step on the wrong toes. And thankfully, Christ's blood covers even those failures. I want you to just pause for a moment and take a look around you.

[22 : 49] Yeah, do that. You can look into each other's eyes too. Yes. Do you see all these people? These people are part of the new creation.

Is that sunken yet? We're all part of the church, God's new creation. We're part of whom the Son died for and reconciled back to God.

And think about this. We're actually going to be spending eternity with each other. Now that might fill some of you with horror, but that's the truth. And so what does that mean?

That means we need to be reconciled to each other, don't we? Sometimes I think we expect too much of church that on this side of heaven we think that all the conflict among us and the mistakes that we make shouldn't happen and we're disappointed when church lets us down.

But the fact is we're redeemed, not perfect. So to my mind, conflict is I think unavoidable to some extent. But what matters is what we do when we get into conflict.

[23 : 57] do we work at reconciliation? Do we seek to restore fellowship when it's been broken? Even when it means swallowing our pride, admitting that we're wrong.

Even when we're not in the wrong and we should go and seek reconciliation with the person who's wronged us. We should, shouldn't we? Because that's the mark of the church.

people who have understood God's grace. So when we look at the brother who's giving us a hard time or the sister who's hurt us, we need to see that this is someone that the Lord has actually died for.

That he or she has been presented holy and blameless and free from accusation in God's sight.

And if that's how God sees them, then how much more should we?

Is that right? So here's a little litmus test. The next time we have chicken and chips two weeks from now, is there one person or two persons or whoever that you just don't think you can sit with to have chicken and chips with?

[25 : 10] That's perhaps someone that you may need to have reconciliation with. At least start the conversation. Friends, we've all been reconciled to God through his son Jesus.

He's the one who holds all things together and we need to hold firm to the faith that we have in him. Hold out the hope of the gospel as Paul says to others. And that means holding out reconciliation as well to one another because that is what it means to be in Christ.

Well, let me pray to ask for God's help because I know for me particularly sometimes that can be hard. Father, thank you for your son who creates all things, sustains all things and gave his life to reconcile us to you.

Thank you for your church, Christ's body, the people that you've sent your son to die for, those who have gathered to belong to the new creation. Thank you that you've included us, sinners, undeserving, into this.

And thank you for your gospel which has made all of this known to us so that we might believe and have hope. Help us to live out the gospel for your glory.

[26 : 23] Help us to seek reconciliation when fellowship has been broken. In the name of your son, we pray. and thank you.

Thank you for your addition and thank you for your honor and helping. For your need to go to flow for your life.

And thank you all for your gospel