

The Supremacy of Christ

Colossians 1:15-23

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In June I was climbing down Kelso's ridge in Colorado with my son Ben when clouds moved in and then more clouds, then it started lightly snowing. Our visibility was severely cut down. We could barely see the mountain range just across from us. Life is often like that. Clouds obscure our ability to see what matters and what way to go. Often life is confusing, clouded with pain and busyness. Physical pain distracts us; emotional pain disables us; relational pain paralyzes us.

It was a totally different story a few weeks ago. On Labor Day weekend I stood 14,336 feet above sea level on the top of Mount La Plata, the fifth highest peak in Colorado. It was a clear day, not a cloud in the sky with a slight breeze. I could see 100 miles in all directions. It was breathtaking, almost more than words can describe. I felt small and vulnerable on the bare rock up so high right in the middle of such a mighty mountain range. That kind of sight gives fresh perspective on life. But there is another sight, a much grander one; one that if you can see it, puts all life in perspective. Today I hope you can clear the clouds from your mind to see the grandest sight of all. I invite you to come see the Supreme One.

Our passage today clears the clouds. In Colossians 1:15-23 Paul gives us a clear view of Christ that puts everything else in proper perspective. Come see the Supreme One of all. Do you know Him? Will you follow Him? Jesus Christ is eternally supreme over creation and reconciles all things by His bloody death so although we were opposed to Him we too can be reconciled to God to live holy lives. I want you to see the awesomeness of Christ. His supremacy guarantees His sufficiency. When I see His supremacy I am compelled and excited to live for Him.

This is week two in our new series: Experiencing Christ, a journey through Colossians. Not only are we preaching through Colossians, but secondly we are studying it personally in a Bible Study we have written for you. You have taken all 1000 copies we printed, so we have had more printed this week! There is one for you. Thirdly, we are studying Colossians together in Life Groups. Over 850 of you have joined Life Groups to experience Christ together.

Last week our opening passage ended with beautiful images of our salvation. We are qualified for God's inheritance, rescued from darkness, transferred to God's kingdom, redeemed and forgiven. Now today Paul shows us the One who makes all of that possible because of Who He is and what He has done.

Most people I know would agree that the world would be a much better place if only more people would follow Jesus' teachings. That's true, but that's a far cry from seeing Jesus as Paul sees him in this passage. We cannot reduce Jesus to simply a Mediterranean peasant who went about doing good and spouting pithy maxims. He is much more than a good religious prophet. We tend to see Christ as a piece of life, but not as the Prince of all. We see Him as a part of our lives, but as the whole. We see Him as a great addition to our lives, but not as the ALL of the universe. We see Him as a wonderful supplement, but miss that He is the Supreme.

Can you see Him? Pray God will blow away the clouds of distraction and confusion from your mind. Pray the Spirit will open your eyes to see His Supremacy. Do you know Him? Will you follow him? He is supreme.

This passage is a stunning revelation! It stretches our puny minds and stimulates our souls to change us. When we truly understand what is being said here, it is shocking that we should ever look anywhere else for meaning and purpose in life.

Paul's opening five verses, 15-20, appear to be an ancient hymn, a poem, depicting and declaring the supreme One. We will never fully penetrate the depth and power of the person of Christ but we can appreciate His supremacy and order our lives accordingly.

Open your Bibles to Colossians 1:15. The hymn is beautifully crafted. It moves from the creation of "*all things in the heavens and on the earth*" (1:16) to a climax in the reconciliation of "*the things on the earth and the things in the heavens*". Apparently the Colossians were slipping in their understanding of Christ's status and significance. They were not abandoning Christ or following another religion, but they may have been slipping. Their view was getting cloudy. Christ was not supreme in their minds and lives. Sounds like many of us.

Look at the back of your outline. The hymn falls into two broad stanzas followed by a personal application. The first stanza begins with the

affirmation “who is” (1:15), followed by an explanation, “because” (1:16), and ending with another affirmation “and he is” (1:17). The second continues with another “and he is” affirmation (1:18a), followed by a “who is” affirmation (1:18b), and ending with an explanation “because” (1:19-20). The two stanzas draw parallels between the creation of all things and the reconciliation of all things. Together they affirm that the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth is the one the Colossians know as their Reconciler.

When you try to describe what is inherently indescribable words fall short. Prose yields to poetry when it comes to the deepest emotion and the grandest truth. When we come to the supreme being of all, poetry itself pales. And yet in His grace God has revealed Himself in words; truthful words that point to profound realities outstretching our comprehension.

Today I ask you to read slowly; to ponder. Feel its power. Digest each phrase. Stand still before the One who stands alone in all supremacy. Slow down; stop and stare; mouth hanging open; eyes wide before Him. Do you know Him? Do you live for Him? He is supreme.

Please stand for the reading of God’s Word. Follow along in your Bible or close your eyes and listen deeply. ¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.* ¹⁶ *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.* ¹⁷ *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* ¹⁸ *And he 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.* ¹⁹ *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,* ²⁰ *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.* ²¹ *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.* ²² *But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—* ²³ *if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.* Silence. He is supreme. That’s my King. Do you know Him? Will you follow Him with all your life? In the first stanza the clouds begin to dissipate as we clearly see that

Christ is Supreme over all Creation

Follow with me through this profound poem as we trace the supremacy of Christ. The first line grabs us with paradox. He is

The image of the invisible God

How can invisibility have an image? It does. In the Greek world, the word “image” (*eikōn*) conveyed one of two nuances of meaning. Both elements were always present, but one tended to dominate the other. The first is that of representation. The image represented and symbolized what the object pictured such as a coin or a reflection in a mirror.⁶⁷ If this emphasis were primary, Paul would have said Jesus was the symbol of deity. Paul would have meant that Jesus exactly symbolized God. The second element of meaning in the word “image” (*eikōn*) was manifestation. When the term was employed, it meant that the symbol was more than a symbol. The symbol brought with it the actual presence of the object. Thus J. B. Phillips translated it, “visible expression,” and by it Paul meant that Jesus brought God into the human sphere of understanding. He manifested God.¹ That’s why Jesus could say, “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*” John 14:9. Jesus is the manifestation of the invisible God. The Supreme One is the image of the invisible God and He is

First before all creation

The Hymn calls Him “the firstborn over all creation.” “Firstborn” is a person of preeminent rank. Against both Jehovah’s Witnesses today and ancient Arians in their view that Jesus was the first human being fathered by God, “first-born” does not have the sense of being born, but of being first. It is a term more of rank than time. In modern English “firstborn” means, He is number one. He has precedence over all creation. He outranks everything. One reason is the first is that He is

Creator of all

⁶⁷ C. Vaughan, *Colossians and Philemon, BSG* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 38.

¹ Melick, Richard R.: *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1991 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 32), S. 214

Through Christ all things were created. Nothing exists that He did not create. Poetically Paul makes it clear that nothing is excluded from Christ's creative touch. He created "*things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things were created by Him and for Him.*" Not only did He create everything you can see, but also everything you cannot see. The sheer size of the universe He created is staggering. The sun, for example, has a diameter of 864,000 miles (one hundred times that of earth's) and could hold 1.3 million planets the size of earth inside it. The red star Betelgeuse, however, has a diameter of 1000 million miles, which is larger than the earth's orbit around the sun. It can hold 160 million suns.

Wherever you look, or whatever realities you think of, you discover entities which, even if they do not acknowledge the fact, owe their very existence to Christ. They are his handiwork. No power or unseen force can begin to stand against Christ. They owe their original existence to Him. The Supreme One is

First of all that is

"He is before all things." "The Greek word here translated "before" denotes Both time ("before"), status ("supreme over"). Christ is eternal. He is before everything. He is supreme over all things. He is above them; before them in status and glory and power. He is supreme. He

Holds all together

"And in Him all things hold together." The universe has an ongoing relationship to Christ. What Christ has created He maintains in permanent order, stability, and productivity. He is the source of the unity and cohesiveness of all that exists. As C. G. Moule memorably put it, "he keeps the cosmos from becoming a chaos". And yet, Christ is more than the force that preserves the orderly arrangement of the cosmos; he is its rationale, its rhyme and reason. He is the basic operating principle controlling existence. This first stanza sings out: Christ is supreme over all creation. The poem's second stanza, brings the cosmic Christ down to earth, where blood flows from a body strung up on a cross. Christ is not only supreme in creation but

Christ is Supreme in Reconciliation

Notice many connections between the stanzas, common words and phrases. The one who created all things the first time now reconciles all things in His recreation of all He created. He is supreme. He is

The head of the church

The pre-existent Lord of the world becomes Lord of the church through whom He brings His message of reconciliation to an alienated creation. Christ's role as head of the church does not narrow his cosmic role; rather, it expands the significance of the church. The church does not exist primarily to meet the needs of its members or to insure its institutional survival, but to fulfill the redemptive purposes of Christ, its head. It is a radical thought that the Supreme One of all can be met and is represented by a humble tiny group of believers in the small town of Colosse. I marvel that we here at McKinney Fellowship are His body, His church. We represent the Supreme One to the world.

Last week I asked this and I am going to ask again, pray for our elders and pastors as we consider what God has for us in the next ten years. We are taking the rest of the month as a time of intense prayer for our future direction. Pray for us to have the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding for His church. This is His church. He is the head of the church which is His body. Then Paul declares "*He is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead,*" He is saying that Christ is

The first of all that will be

The English word 'beginning' is too thin to do justice to the Greek word archē, which means 'first principle', 'source', 'creative initiative', and again indicates priority in both time and rank. He is the pioneer and guarantor of resurrection from death to immortality.

Not only is He the beginning but Christ is the firstborn from the dead. Here is the second major use of this pregnant phrase. Jesus is number one not only in the original creation, but He is supreme one in the re-creation from death. He was Lord of all at creation and now He proves again He is the supreme One by His resurrection so that He is number one for all that ever will be. He is supreme not only over that is, but all that will come in the new heavens and new earth as a result of His resurrection. You see, He is Supreme. He is

Supreme over all

Paul says all this was “*so that in everything He might have the supremacy.*” The supremacy of Christ is sole and universal. Like toddlers entering preschool and learning to cope with the rude awakening that they are not the center of the universe, so when we confront the supremacy of Christ, we grasp that we are not the center of the universe. All of life does not revolve around us. As Rick Warren says in the first line of the *Purpose Driven Life*, “It is not about you.” Colossians tells us who life is all about. When we see the supremacy of Christ, all of life falls into order and proper perspective. The clouds disappear and you can see clearly. Christ not an add-on to your life, He is your life and not just your life. Jesus is the supreme One for all that lives. He is

Fully God

The basic reason that Christ is Lord of creation and has become Lord of the Church is that God in all His fullness was pleased to dwell in Him. Christ can reconcile all things, because all the fullness of deity lives in Him. He is literally God and yet is unique from the Father. Deep mysteries are here. The word “fullness” denotes completeness, as in the regular Greek use of it for a ship’s crew. Jesus is completely God. He is supreme. As the supreme One Jesus Christ,

Reconciles all things by making peace through His bloody cross

In the beginning, God created all things through Christ; in the end God will reconcile all things through Christ. Verses 19-20 are our memory verses for this week. They give us the two major truths about Christ: He is fully God and He fully reconciles all things. Let’s stand and say them together. In every venue, stand, in Traditions and Video Café and Revolution. Ready, ¹⁹ *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,* ²⁰ *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.*

How is everything reconciled? Are nonhuman things reconciled? Are all people reconciled? While only human beings are justified, salvation includes all creation. Even the rocks will cry out; the lion and the lamb will lie down together. The fall impacted all creation and so salvation will restore all

creation in Christ. In an oft-omitted stanza of the famous Christmas hymn, “*Joy to the World*,” Isaac Watts catches the thrust of Colossians 1:20: *Nor more let sins and sorrows grow/ Nor thorns infest the ground/ He comes to make his blessings flow/ Far as the curse is found*

“Far as the curse is found” God will reconcile creation through Christ’s blood shed on the cross. Ironically the cross itself, an instrument of violence, is the means of bringing peace. Blood pictures the importance of His death and echoes back to Old Testament sacrifices. Only through blood can come forgiveness of sin. Amazingly the One who is before all things is the One who sheds His blood in a violent death on a shameful cross in ultimate lowly humility. This is our King. He is supreme. By the power of His death He restores the original creation and brings that restoration to the world through His church. By its Gospel living and Gospel speaking the church brings the truth of Christ’s reconciliation to the whole world.

In its incredible two stanzas this hymn of Christ shows us that Christ is supreme over all creation and re-creation. He made the world. He reconciles all the ruined creation by His bloody cross. In verse 21 Paul shifts from the poem to application with the emphatic opening pronoun: “*once you.*” Christ’s universal cosmic creation and reconciliation relate to you. It’s not about you. It’s about Christ, but Christ is about you. The clouds blow back, so you can see your life takes on meaning and purpose in Christ. Christ intends to present us to God.

Christ will Present us to God

He has reconciled us to present us to God. In verses 21-23, Paul uses the three words “once,” “now” and “if” to mark out his logic moving from their past to present to future. He starts in their past.

“Once” We were opposed to God

Before your reconciliation you were alienated from God. Today if you have not trusted in Christ, you are alienated from God. He is distant. Worse you are enemies in your minds and behavior. If you have not trusted in Jesus Christ to reconcile you, you are away from God by your sin. You too can find reconciliation as many of us have. You can be reconciled to God through the bodily death of Jesus Christ. Jesus has created the possibility of reconciliation by His death. But you must respond in faith. Reconciliation

does not wait upon human achievement but upon human acceptance. For those who have trusted in Christ by faith,

“Now” we are reconciled by His bodily death to be holy, blameless and beyond accusation

Notice Paul’s strong focus on the physicality of Jesus’ bodily death. He opposes any false ideas that Jesus did not really die or have a physical body. In Greek he uses two words: “flesh” and “body” to emphasize Jesus’ death was physical and real.

When He reconciles us, it is not just to give us a ticket to heaven. Christ reconciles us to live a new holy life as we were created to live. Christ comes to restore to us the kind of purpose-filled, pure life we were meant to live in the beginning. He made us holy in principle at our justification and now He is making us holy in practice by refashioning our lives according to the pattern of the supreme life, Christ’s.

If Christ reigns over all things and reconciles all things, then every aspect of our lives should come under His rule. We are to be holy, dedicated, set apart for God’s use. We are to be without blemish, an image from sacrifices that were to be unblemished lambs. And we are to be free from accusation, an image from the law courts. No one can bring moral charges against us that stick. We are beyond reproach, blameless. This is our goal as those reconciled by Christ, to live for Him fully since He is fully God and fully reconciles all things. How can we do this? Paul says we must

“If”we persist in Gospel-given faith and hope

“if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.” Here “if you continue” is not a condition of our reconciliation, but of our future presentation. Grammatically this is a confident condition. Paul is saying “If, as I am confident you will.” We are to continue, or better persist, in our faith. We are to be stable and steadfast without shifting. Imagine the impact of words like “stable, steadfast, and not shifting” to people in the Lycus Valley for whom devastating earthquakes were common. Spiritually the Colossians are to be stable and steadfast, not shifting when earthly earthquakes happen.

How is your faith and your hope? How will you get established so that you are firm and unmoved? Get into God’s Word. Study the Bible by yourself

and with others. We need to become firm in our faith and solid in our hope. We are not guaranteed an easy life free from troubles. Some of you are facing devastating trials right now. Faith stays firm in the storm. Hope rises above the cycles of success and failure, happiness and sorrow.

Our mission is to share this message of faith and hope with the whole world that Christ created and is reconciling. As His church, His body, we live and speak the Gospel, the message of reconciliation. We are to share the Supreme One with all people without exclusion; to every creature under heaven. The universal supremacy of Christ matches the universality of the gospel (1:6) and assures us of the sufficiency of Christ for anything and everything. He is Supreme.

While this passage is an apex, the whole book of Colossians is centered on Christ Jesus. We have written a responsive reading taken from the text of Colossians that expresses the heart of the book. Please stand. We will respond this way each week of the series.

Leader: *May we live a life worthy of the Lord*
Congregation: *Let us please Him in every way*

Leader: *He is the image of the invisible God*
Congregation: *Let Him be supreme in everything*

Leader: *Be encouraged in heart and united in love*
Congregation: *Let us have the full riches of complete understanding*

Leader: *In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*
Congregation: *Let us know Him fully*

I hope and pray that in the next weeks these affirmations will shape our souls. The Lord Jesus Christ is supreme over all creation and all re-creation. He reconciles all things. And so He should be supreme in our lives. Christ is not an object to analyze but a King to worship. He is key for the meaning of creation, the purpose of life today and the door to life beyond this one.

Scientists continue their search for the “holy grail” of science, the “theory of everything,” the simple set of laws that explains every complex detail of our universe. This poem professes that, in a way, Christ is the theological

“theory of everything.” He is the key who unlocks the meaning and purpose of the universe, and our lives.

Christ is supreme over all. He is the image of the invisible God. The First before all creation; the creator of all; first of all that is; and holds everything together. He is the head of the church; the first of all that will be; He is supreme over all; He is fully God; He reconciles all things by making peace through His bloody cross. How strange if He who is sufficient to sustain a universe, should be insufficient for our lives. How strange if He who is supreme over all that is, should not be supreme in our lives.

Come with me to the top of the mountain and see Christ in all His supremacy. I pray God has blown away your clouds of confusion and pain to reveal before you the outstanding supremacy of Christ. He must have supremacy in everything: Supremacy in our families; Supremacy in our marriages; Supremacy in our professions; Supremacy in our mission and ministry; Supremacy in matters of the intellect; Supremacy in time; Supremacy in love; Supremacy in conversation; Supremacy in pleasures; supremacy in eating; supremacy in play; supremacy in athletics, in what we watch; supremacy in art; Supremacy in music; Supremacy in worship. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Supreme! Let’s make Him supreme in our lives. Do you know Him? Will you live for Him? He is my King!

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