

## THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS CHRIST

### Colossians 1:15-20

While under house arrest in Rome, the apostle Paul received news about the church at Colossae. Epaphras reported to Paul about their faith in Christ Jesus and love for all the saints. There was also disturbing news. False teachers promoted error about the Person of Christ. They preached a Christ who was prominent, but not preeminent. They claimed Jesus was one of many angelic emanations of God. In the process, these false teachers ultimately denied the deity and humanity of Christ.

Error about the Person of Christ opened the door to confusion about the gospel, the church, and the Christian life. Various “isms” infiltrated the church. None of these false teachings were promoted to rival Christ. They all were presented alongside of Christ, as if Jesus was not enough. When Paul received this report, he was moved to write this letter to exalt the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. **Colossians 1:15-20** begins the body of the letter. Paul greets the saints in verses 1-2. He gives thanks for the church in verses 3-8. He prays for them in verses 9-14. Now the letter shifts from introduction to the heart of the matter.

Colossians is polemical. Yet Paul begins the letter with a declaration of truth, not a refutation of error. This text is one of the most important statements about Christ in the New Testament. It is also one of the most debated texts, because of its lofty language and daring claims. Scholars tell us it may have been a hymn the early church sung in worship. But if this text does not derive from the worship of the church, it should result in the worship of the church. Worship of Christ should overflow into witness for Christ. Here Paul declares and defends the most essential truth of the historic Christian faith. I can state it in seven words: CHRISTIANITY IS CHRIST AND CHRIST IS GOD. **Colossians 1:15-20** is about the real Jesus. Paul gives two reasons why you should live, minister, and witness with confidence in the supremacy of Christ!

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#### I. JESUS CHRIST IS SUPREME OVER ALL CREATION.

**Colossians 1:15** says, “He is the image of the invisible God.” This opening clause makes two affirmations. First, Paul affirms that God is invisible. This is the consistent teaching of Scripture. In **John 4:24** Jesus says, “God is spirit.” **1 Timothy 1:17**, Paul calls God “the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God.” **1 John 4:12** bluntly says, “No one has ever seen God.” God occasionally showed up in a theophany. But these special and temporary appearances never revealed God’s essential nature. God is invisible.

Secondly, Paul affirms that Christ is the image of God. Image translates the Greek term from which we get our word “icon.” It is the representation or manifestation of a thing. **Exodus 20:4** commands: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” No image man creates can fully or faithfully represent God. Yet **Genesis 1:27** says: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he

created him; male and female he created them.” Human beings are made in the image of God. We are rational beings with intellect, emotion, and volition. We do not bear God’s image essentially. We do not share God’s incommunicable attributes like eternity, immutability, omniscience, omnipotence, or omnipresence. And we do not bear God’s image morally. God is holy and we are not. **Romans 3:23** says: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

But there is one who bears God’s image essentially and morally. **Colossians 1:15** says: “He is the image of the invisible God.” What does this mean? It means that Jesus represents God. **John 1:18** says: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” The final clause of this verse translates the Greek word for “exegesis.” It means “to bring out of.” We use it to describe faithful preaching that exposes the meaning of the text, rather than imposing human opinion on the text. John used it to declare that Jesus is the exegesis of God! To see what God is truly like, look at Jesus! **Hebrews 1:3** says: “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”

It also means that Jesus manifests God. At the Last Supper, Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” In **John 14:9**, Jesus answered, “**Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?**” People who knew my father say I remind them of him. But I could never say that whoever sees me has seen my father. Yet Jesus claims more than a resemblance to God the Father. He declares himself to be God in the flesh. WARREN WIERSBE WROTE: “**Nature reveals the existence, power, and wisdom of God; but nature cannot reveal the very essence of God to us. It is only in Jesus Christ that the invisible God is revealed perfectly.**”

Verse 15 says, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” JEHOVAH WITNESSES use this verse to teach that Jesus is the first creature created by God. But for Paul to call Christ a created being would have been to agree with the false teachers he rebukes. It would violate the context of this statement, in which Paul exalts Jesus Christ as the Creator-God. The word “firstborn” does not refer to first in order. In that sense, Cain is the first person born in creation. Firstborn is used here to speak of rank. The firstborn son in a family had the birthright that gave him the lion’s share of the inheritance and made him the head of the family. In **Exodus 4:22**, God instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh, “Israel is my firstborn son,” to declare its special rank of divine favor. In **Psalms 89:27**, God says of David, “And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” When Paul calls Jesus the firstborn of all creation, he is not claiming Jesus is the first thing created. He declares that Jesus is Lord over all creation. The Lord Jesus Christ created the world and sustains it.

#### **A. JESUS IS THE CREATOR OF THE WORLD.**

Verse 16 says: “For 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.” This verse explains verse 15, describing Jesus’ relationship to creation three ways. First, Jesus is the source of creation: “For by him all

things were created.” Who made the world? Who created the universe? Who created the starry heavens? Who scooped out the deep oceans? Who stacked the mountains? Who flung the stars into space? Who created you and me? Every created thing bears the stamp: “Made by Jesus!” He is the originator, architect, and builder of all things. Jesus created the physical world. This is what Paul means when he refers to that which is “on earth” and “visible.” ROBERT GROMACKI commented: **“People should praise Him when they view the minute complexities of life through a microscope or the vastness of the universe through a telescope. Glory should be attributed to Him, not to a series of angelic emanations, to an impersonal Mother Nature, or to an atheistic principle of evolution.”**

Likewise, Jesus created the spiritual world. This is what Paul means when he refers to that which is “in heaven” and “invisible.” Paul lists four categories of spirit beings created by Christ: “thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.” There is no need to distinguish between these terms. They all refer to the spirit beings in the unseen world. The point is that Christ created them all. The false teachers in Colossae claimed Jesus was an emanation of God, derived from generations of angels. Paul claimed Jesus created the angels. Even the evil angels aligned with Satan are under the sovereign authority of Christ.

Secondly, Paul says that Jesus is the agent of creation: “all things were created through him.” **John 1:3** says, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” **Hebrews 1:1-2** says: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our Fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world.” Thirdly, Jesus is the goal of creation: “all things were created through him and for him.” The created order exists for Christ. Whatever exists is for his pleasure, purpose, and praise. **Philippians 2:9-11** says: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

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## **B. JESUS IS THE SUSTAINER OF THE WORLD.**

Verse 17 says: “And he is before all things.” Christ predates and antedates creation. When the universe began, Jesus already existed. **John 1:1** says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Unbelieving Jews wanted to know how someone barely thirty could speak so intimately about Abraham, who died centuries ago. In **John 8:58**, Jesus answered, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”**

I was in the seventh grade when I was first confronted with the claims of atheistic evolution. My science teacher, whom I liked and respected, denied the existence of God and creation of the world. I was too shocked to respond. A classmate challenged the teacher, quoting **Genesis 1:1**. He used his scientific explanations to shut her down. I wish I had the courage that day to say that science does not have all the

answers. For instance, matter is primarily made up of space. But if matter is made up of space, what holds it all together? Scientists struggle to answer that question. But there is an answer. **Colossians 1:17** says: “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Jesus did not create the world to let it run on its own. Jesus is the creator and the sustainer of the world.

- Why is it that the world is a cosmos and not chaos?
- Why is it that the earth remains close enough to the sun that we don’t freeze up but far enough from the sun that we don’t burn up?
- Why is it that the sun keeps rising in the east and going down in the west?
- Why is it that winter, spring, summer, and fall continue to pass in their seasons?
- Why is it that the flowers keep budding, blooming, fading, and falling?

Jesus holds all things together! This is also true in your life, whether you acknowledge it or not! The only reason your life has not utterly fallen apart is because Jesus holds all things together.

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## II. JESUS CHRIST IS SUPREME OVER THE CHURCH.

Verse 18 says, “And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” This verse ascribes three titles to Christ. First, Paul says, “And he is the head of the body, the church.” The New Testament does not define the church as much as it describes it. It describes the church as an army, bride, flock, family, and temple. But the primary metaphor for the church is a body. The picture of a body teaches that the church is a living organism, not a dead organization. This metaphor is typically used to emphasize the mutual dependence of the members of the body. Here it is used to emphasize the total dependence of the body to its head. Anything without a head is dead. Anything with more than one head is a monster. Jesus Christ is the only true head of the church.

Secondly, verse 18 says, “He is the beginning.” In **Revelation 22:13**, Jesus declares, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” Thirdly, verse 18 says, “He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.” This is the second time Paul calls Christ “the firstborn.” Verse 15 calls him “the firstborn of all creation.” Verse 18 calls him “the firstborn from the dead.” Jesus was not the first person raised from the dead. Jesus himself raised three people from the dead. They experienced resuscitation, not resurrection. They eventually died again and are still dead. In **Revelation 1:17-18**, Jesus says, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”

Why does Paul ascribe these sovereign titles to Christ? Verse 18 answers: “And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” This term is used only here. It means Jesus is the supreme one who is to have first place, full control, and final authority in everything. He is to have first place in all creation. He is to have first place in the church. And he is to have first place in your life. CHRYSOSTOM writes: “**For everywhere he is first;**

**above first; in the church first; for he is the head; in the resurrection first.”** There are two reasons why the Lord Jesus should be preeminent in the church.

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#### **A. THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST**

Verse 19 says: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” During their wilderness wanderings, the children of Israel dwelled in tents. It was an extended-stay but temporary lodging, as they made their way to the promised land of Canaan. Solomon later erected a temple for God. It was to be a dwelling place where God’s presence would meet with his people. But in **1 Kings 8:27**, Solomon prayed, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!” Yet Paul says, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”

This is just as much a statement about God the Father as it is about Jesus Christ. It expresses the Father’s role in the incarnation of Christ. The Father chose to dwell in the Son. **John 1:14** says: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” God dwelt among us in the Person of Christ. It pleased the Father to dwell in Christ. In **Matthew 3:17**, God the Father declared, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Moreover, it pleased the Father that all the fullness of God would dwell in Christ. We don’t need the Shekinah glory. We have Jesus Christ. **Colossians 2:9-10** says, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” The supremacy of Christ is inextricably tied to the sufficiency of Christ. If Jesus is the fullness of the godhead bodily, we are complete in Christ. There is nothing lacking in our salvation. Jesus is everything we need.

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#### **B. THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST**

Verses 19-20 says: “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 his cross.” Reconciliation assumes a relationship has been broken, ruptured, or dislocated. This is the human predicament. Sin has severed our relationship and separated us from God. When the first man and woman sinned, they declared war on God. But God sought Adam and Eve and provided a covering for their sins. This continues to be God’s loving disposition toward rebellious sinners. God seeks to be reconciled to sinners. And God has provided the means of reconciliation. **1 Timothy 2:5-6** says, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all.”

Note the scope of this divine reconciliation: “to reconcile to himself all things.” This little word, “all” shows up in every verse of this text. Verse 15 calls Jesus: “the firstborn of all creation.” Verse 16 says: “by him all things were created.” Verse 17 says:

“And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Verse 18 says: “that in everything [all things] he might be preeminent.” Verse 19 says: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” Verse 20 says: “through him to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven” Sinners are beneficiaries of the reconciling work of God in Christ. So is everything on earth and in heaven. All things are reconciled to God in Christ. This does not mean unrepentant sinners or fallen angels will enjoy eternal glory. But everything in heaven and on earth will be ultimately consummated according to God’s good pleasure through Christ.

How is this possible? Verse 20 says: “and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” This is the only place this phrase is used in the New Testament. Paul says much about the blood of Christ. And he says much about the cross of Christ. One assumes the other. Here Paul mentions both together to emphasize the power of the atonement for sins the blood of Jesus accomplished at the cross. This is the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. **2 Corinthians 5:20-21** says, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

**The last battle of the American Revolution was the Battle of Blue Licks. But it was a battle that should have never been fought, for it was fought after the war was over! News traveled slowly. There was no means of quick communication over the Appalachian Mountains to Blue Licks, Kentucky. So the two sides went on fighting because no one knew the war was over.**

ALAS! INDEED MY SAVIOR BLEED. AND DID MY SOVEREIGN DIE.  
WOULD HE DEVOTE THAT SACRED HEAD FOR SUCH A WORM AS I?

WAS IT FOR CRIMES THAT I HAD DONE, HE GROANED UPON THE TREE?  
AMAZING PITY! GRACE UNKNOWN! AND LOVE BEYOND DEGREE!

AT THE CROSS, AT THE CROSS! WHERE I FIRST SAW THE LIGHT!  
AND THE BURDENS OF MY HEART ROLLED AWAY  
IT WAS THERE BY FAITH I RECEIVED MY SIGHT,  
AND NOW I AM HAPPY ALL THE DAY!