

The Preeminent Christ

Colossians 1:15-18

All Stand and Read Scripture

Colossians 1:15-20 (NASB)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Prayer

INTRODUCTION:

During the last month we have been looking at Paul's prayer for the Colossians that started in verse 9 and ended in verse 12. Now we will be looking at what is believed to be an **early church song** in verses 15-20 that we just read.

Starting in verse 15, you will notice that Paul has reached a transition point. He has gone from the first and second person form of writing to the third person.

- The first person uses pronouns like "I" and "We" which is Paul's point of view.
- The second person uses pronouns like "you" which is Paul's words to the Colossians.
- Now, verses 15-20, he is using third person which uses pronouns like "He", "She", and "It" where Paul speaks from an outside point of view.

According to Greek scholars, verses 15-20 in the original Greek are written and laid out in the form of Greek poetry. Because they are written in that form, scholars think that these verses were used as an early Christian hymn.

Apparently Paul is using the words of an early hymn that they would, no doubt, have memorized to remind them of what they were first taught by Epaphras about the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There was a lot of false teaching in Colossae that was diminishing the preeminence of Christ.

In religion the Colossians were especially lax and worshipping angels. (2:18) “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,”

Another problem was that Gnosticism tried to mix Greek philosophy with Christian theology. Gnostic philosophy taught that **matter was evil** and **spirit was good**. In order to avoid having their pure god create evil, they had created a system of lesser deities that overflowed from their god. These lesser gods were far enough removed from the pure god that they were able to create the universe (which was, in their eyes, composed of evil matter).

They named this lesser deity, "Jehovah", the God of the Hebrews.

This heresy was rejecting the deity of Jesus Christ, probably teaching that He was just a “unique man” and that He was lower than the angels. Paul warns in (2:8) **not to allow anyone to lead them astray with philosophy, trickery, or by traditions of men**. Paul then continues with the words to the early church song to remind them of the preeminence of Christ.

This passage of scripture is the most doctrinally packed verses concerning the preeminence of Christ in the entire Bible.

Let's start by defining the word **preeminence**.

The word literally means having first place. Christ is "over and above" everything. His rank and superiority is above everything due to merit. A lot of translations actually translate the word as "**first place**" such as the NASB instead of preeminence as in the KJV. The NIV translates the word as "**supremacy**".

Do you realize that **you** are referred to many times in the scripture?

Would you like to see a passage of scripture that YOU are in that EXEMPLIFIES the preeminence of Christ?

The passage that I am reminded of is very powerful! It is a passage of scripture in Revelation where John is writing about an unopened book with seven seals.

Revelation 5:1-14 (NASB)

5 I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. **2** And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” **3** And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. **4** Then I *began* to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; **5** and one of the elders *said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.”

6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. **7** And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. **8** When He had taken the book, the

four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they *sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

¹⁰ *“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”*

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many **angels** around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

¹³ And **every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them**, I heard saying,

“To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” (This includes you and I. We will understand fully the preeminence of Christ and will be saying, *“To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”*)

¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

When God looked for someone to open the book with seven seals, He looked at all creation (men and angels). There was not a man (including Abraham, Noah, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, the prophets, John the Baptist, or any of the apostles) to be found that was worthy to open the book. There was not a created spiritual being that could open the book. Only Christ was worthy because He had earned the preeminence from God.

How did He earn that right?

Philippians 2:8-11 (NASB)

⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This morning we are going to look at verses 15-18 and see three ways in which Christ is preeminent according to Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit.

BODY:

I. Christ is Preeminent in Eternity

Colossians 1:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

The first way Paul gives in verse 15 is that Jesus Christ is “**the image of the invisible God.**” This means if you want to see God—to know His character, values, purposes, and desires—then take a long look at Jesus as He is revealed in Scripture. Also, He is the “**firstborn over all creation,**” indicating that Christ has the firstborn rights to everything. Actually “firstborn” has nothing to do with His birth but is a legal term for beneficiary rights. As the rightful heir, everything belongs to Him.

It is made clear in the scriptures that Christ has lived through eternity.

John 1:1-2 (NASB)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.

As hard as it is for our minds to comprehend God, we know that although God and the Son have separate entities, they are one.

The writer of Hebrews clearly wrote in

Hebrews 1:3 (NASB)

³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

The words, "exact representation" or "'express image" in some other translations,' are one Greek word, "**character**". Literally, this word refers to something engraved or impressed. The image that is stamped out will look exactly like the original.

ILLUSTRATION:

The word **image** was used when making Roman coins.

The Romans would take a round piece of metal and place it under a die that had been engraved with the image of the emperor's head. They would take a heavy hammer and WHACK the die. When they pulled the round piece of metal from under the die, it had the image of the emperor's head on it exactly like the die.

Jesus Christ Himself said in *John 14:9*, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*”. Jesus Christ lived and manifested the love and mercy of His Father. Everything that Jesus did while on earth demonstrated the character of God perfectly.

Secondly, Christ is the creator of the entire universe.

II. Christ is Preeminent in Creation

Colossians 1:16-17 (NASB)

¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

The creation of God in Genesis 1:1 is done through Jesus Christ.

John 1:3 (NASB)

³ All things came into being through Him, (speaking of Christ) and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

When Paul writes, “*For by Him all things were created,*” that leaves nothing out. Everything related to planet earth, as well as the starry heavens, was the product of Christ’s creative work. Out of nothing He created everything, including the unseen world of angelic beings. **In the light of this, to say that “Christ is preeminent” is certainly an understatement!**

Yet, Paul is not finished. A third reason is that Christ, as the creator of the universe, continues to sustain it—“*in Him all things consist*” Physicists tell us that they have no idea what holds the protons and neutrons together in the nucleus of an atom. This cohesive force is a mystery to scientists, but Paul states that it is simply the controlling influence of the Creator. In other words, all the material elements that comprise everything in the universe would disintegrate into absolute chaos were it not for Christ holding it all together.

III. Christ is Preeminent in the Church

Colossians 1:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Paul calls the church the body of Christ several places in the scriptures.

Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ. We do not all have the same functions in the body. Just as the various members of our physical bodies do not have the same function, the members of Christ's church are placed by God to use his or her talents to serve God. Some are preachers, elders, deacons, teachers, and song leaders. Whatever capacity God has called us to serve, every member has a responsibility to use his or her talent to further the cause of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12,18-19 (NASB)

¹² For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be?

Paul also tells us that Christ **is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.** The expression, "**the beginning,**" means that Christ was in the beginning and is eternal.

He is also **the firstborn from the dead.** Paul was not arguing that Christ was the first person to be raised from the dead. Christ himself raised the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8) and his friend Lazarus (John 11). The difference between those that were raised from the dead and Christ is that they all died again. Paul is teaching that Christ was the first person to be raised from the dead who would never die again. He became the firstborn and head of the church.

CONCLUSION:

In Psalm 8 (verse 3) we read that God sprinkled the stars into the universe with His fingers. Creating the stars may have been a mighty miracle, but even greater was Christ overcoming death in order to redeem you from your sin. This is the exclamation point for Paul as he encourages you to acknowledge the preeminence of Christ.

There is only one person that deserves that preeminence in your life. That is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of Christ's death on the cross for our sins, God exalted his name above every name.

Are you allowing Christ to be Lord of your life? It is only by giving Him **first place** in your life and serving Him that you can inherit His promises. When God accepted you into the body of Christ, He assigned a role for you to do.

If you have not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, do it today. He died for you, because you loves you and wants you for His own.

If you have accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior and you are still living like the world and not living a life fully pleasing to God. I urge you to seek the will of God in your life and rededicate your life to him. You are either **“dead to sin”** or you are **“dead in sin”**. There is no in between.

He is Lord, He is Lord.

He has risen from the dead and He is Lord.

Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess,

That Jesus Christ is Lord.