

The Supremacy of Christ

Colossians 1:15-20

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The Supremacy of Christ is an over-arching theme in scripture. The word “Supremacy” in the Oxford Dictionary is defined as “The state or condition of being superior to all others in authority, power, or status.” Put simply, none can compare. Jesus Christ is supreme over all things and all persons in both the earthly and heavenly realms. In reality, He is God and He is like no other. This truth is essential as one seeks to understand the truths of the Bible.

The Bible is a story of how mankind sinned and broke its relationship with God. How when mankind had no hope for restoration, God reconciled mankind to Himself through Jesus Christ. Because of this, the central point of the scripture is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of the Old Testament points forward towards Christ, and all of the New Testament points back to Christ. Because of the centrality of Christ in scripture and salvation, the identity and character of Jesus Christ is the goal of Satan’s greatest deceptions. Satan tries to convince us that possessions, power and pleasure are of utmost importance. Satan seeks to confuse the definition of gender, erase the fact of creation, undo the sanctity of life, but he saves his greatest efforts for the deception that Jesus of Nazareth was not God, was not the Christ, was not resurrected, and is not sufficient to save.

2 Corinthians 4:4 talks of Satan, the god of this age, who ***“has blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”***

Satan was continuing this same strategy through the false teachers in the church in Colossae. News of this had been carried by Epaphras, one of the Colossae church leaders, all the way to Paul, who was a prisoner in Rome. In response to this news Paul wrote the book of Colossians, which was a letter seeking to explain clearly the gospel and the identity of Christ.

Colossae was a cosmopolitan city with different religions and cultures that were mixed together. Most of the population was Gentile, but there were also a good number of Jews residing in Colossae and in the church. While we do not know all the details of the heresies that Paul was confronting, from Paul’s response we do see that the false teachers were putting into question the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

We see that some false teachers were adding good works as a condition to salvation. Others were seeking to syncretize Christianity with the other pagan religions in Colossae. Others were adding the rigid Jewish law to the Christian life, and others were even worshiping angels. All of these in one way or another were communicating that Christ was not enough to save. It was a young church who desperately needed a good, biblical, theological foundation. Paul wrote with this in mind.

There were two main false teachings that seemed to be causing the most trouble. One was calling the Christians towards a strict obedience to Jewish law. We see this throughout the early church, in various places. The more orthodox Jewish believers were still under the impression that to be a good Christian, that followed the Jewish Messiah, you needed to live according to Jewish laws and traditions. Yes, you needed to believe in Jesus, but to be a “good” Christian, a true Christian, you needed to obey the Jewish requirements. This included the Mosaic law (2:14), circumcision (2:11), observing Jewish religious festivals (2:16), dietary restrictions (2:16), and strict rules regarding what was clean and unclean (2:21-23). The false teachers were teaching that for true salvation you needed Christ plus what the Jews considered “righteous” living. That went completely against the gospel. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”*** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Salvation could not be earned by their good works. No one is good enough. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). All of us are guilty. None of us can earn salvation. We cannot be good on our own. It is only through Jesus Christ that we can be forgiven, reconciled to God, and be enabled to live rightly. Our only hope is Jesus Christ, and He is enough for complete salvation.

The second false teaching was a little more complicated. It would later become known as **Gnosticism**. It likely started out with the truth that God is holy and mankind is sinful. But then, instead of turning to scripture to understand this more fully, false teaching was birthed out of their trying to logically make sense of this on their own. Their logic went something like this. God is holy, so anything that is spirit is holy. Mankind is sinful, so all matter, including our flesh, is evil and sinful. Because of this, they believed that there was no way that a holy God could have created sinful man. In their minds, that would have made God unclean. So, they created a way to explain it.

They believed that God sent out what were called emanations or spirits that caused a ripple effect, like throwing a rock in a pond. The emanations that God initially sent out were holy, because He is holy, but the farther the ripples were from Him the less holy they became. Emanations would create other emanations. The farther removed they were from God, the more affected by evil they became. In this idea, Jesus was one of the early, more holy emanations, but nonetheless, created by God and not God. Later emanations included angels. Eventually the emanations became so far removed from God and near to evil that they were able to create evil matter and mankind without God being tainted or defiled.

This philosophy of Gnosticism resulted in various false teachings. One was that God did not actually create the world and mankind. Another was that Jesus is not eternal, but was created by God. That also meant that they taught that Jesus was not God. Another was that Jesus Christ was not actually human, because that would have made him evil. Some taught that Jesus didn’t have a human body; He was more like a phantom or ghost that did not even leave footprints while he was here on earth.

If Jesus were not in the flesh, that would affect the meaning of the crucifixion and call into question the bodily death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some even went far enough with this dualism idea of spirit and matter to believe that their true life was only lived in the spirit realm, and their physical life had no meaning. Because of this there was no problem for them to freely participate in the most immoral of sins with their physical bodies, while still considering themselves holy in their spirits.

In Colossians we see where some were worshipping angels. This would have been because they were believed to be an emanation or intermediary that needed to be passed through to get to God. Jesus would have been viewed as the same, but just a higher-ranking emanation. Because of this, those in the church were being taught that they needed to humble themselves even more, and first worship the angels before turning to Christ and ultimately turning to God.

In this false teaching Christ still had a role to play, but it discounted all the scriptures that reveal Him as God and man. It stripped Christ of His power to save and His taking on the sin of mankind so that we could receive the righteousness of God. While still talking of Christ, they explained away the gospel until it had no power to reconcile man to God.

In place of the gospel, the false teachers taught another way to begin to climb up the rings of emanation towards God. The Gnostics believed that the only way to be liberated from the evil in which mankind was trapped was through a special, supernatural knowledge.

The name Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means “to know”. The Gnostics taught that the way towards God was through a “higher knowledge” that was only available to certain people. It did not come from scripture, but came from a separate, mystical revelation from God. Because of this, the Gnostics saw themselves as the “chosen few”, on a higher spiritual plain than others. They called themselves Christians, but they had turned from almost all the true teachings of the gospel and who Jesus Christ was. Jesus said nothing about salvation through a special knowledge for only an elite few. Salvation is available to all who will repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ.

These false teachings were able to take root because of the lack of spiritual understanding of the people of this young church. It is as Christians know the truth of God’s Word that they are fortified to discern and stand against false teaching. This was the aim of Paul’s letter, and especially in Colossians 1:15-20, as he writes about Jesus Christ:

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And 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, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

In these verses Paul’s aim is to re-establish, in the minds of the Christians in Colossae, the supremacy of Christ above all things. Paul shows Christ’s relation to God, to the physical world, to the spiritual

world, to the church, to eternity and to all else. In this paragraph Paul begins to retake theological ground that had been lost to the false teachers in Colossae.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is not an emanation or a ghost. He is God. As scripture proclaims in Hebrews 1:3, ***"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."*** As we read in John 1:1, John refers to Christ as the Word and states, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*** Romans 9:5 declares, ***"To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all."*** As is written in Hebrews 1:8, ***"But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.'"*** As the angel declared in Matthew 1:23, ***"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, 'God with us')."*** As Paul writes in Titus 2:11, 13, ***"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people . . .¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."***

Jesus Christ is God. As Jesus responded when asked by his disciples to show them the Father, ***"If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father"*** (John 14:9). Paul is declaring, in line with scripture, that Jesus is God.

Paul then shows the Colossians how Jesus is related to the world. Jesus is **the firstborn of all creation**. The word for "firstborn" was the Greek word *prototokos*. It had two meanings. The original use of this word came from the idea of the one who was born first in a family. The firstborn usually was given all the rights of inheritance, meaning the largest share of the material resources plus authority and responsibility over the family. As the years passed, this word "firstborn" eventually began to describe less the actual birth order or even birth at all. If someone was described as a firstborn, it was used to describe a person who possessed total preeminence, authority and responsibility. We see God use the word "firstborn" to describe King David in this way in Psalm 89:27: ***"I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth."*** King David was the last born in his family, not the firstborn. He was not even the first King of Israel, but amongst the kings of the earth God will appoint him ***"My firstborn"***.

When Paul calls Jesus the Firstborn of creation, Paul was not saying that Jesus was born and created. In Colossians 1:15, the phrase ***"firstborn of all creation"*** is immediately followed by, ***"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."¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."*** This tells us that Jesus' being "firstborn" was meant to communicate preeminence and higher in authority and importance, not literally born or created first as some, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, have chosen to believe. Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ was not created. He was the Creator.

In the eyes of the false teachers Christ was quite feeble, but in reality He is the Creator of all oceans, mountains, stars, galaxies and universes. In the Psalmist's words, ***"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"***

For Christ to be referred to as "Firstborn" communicated the One who possessed responsibility for, authority over, and greatest honor in the midst of all Creation. Christ was God, and now He was

relating directly with creation. This was a direct contradiction to the Gnostics belief of separation of the spirit and material world. Christ, God in the flesh, now dwelt in the midst of His creation.

Paul continued, now addressing both the physical and the spiritual world: ***“¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”***

Once again Paul was showing the error of the false teachers. They had believed that if God created the world, that He would be corrupted by evil, but Paul is explaining that not only did the Divine create both the physical and spiritual worlds, but it was Christ, Himself, through whom all things were created. Christ is Lord over all of creation, which would include every person and every angel. There is nothing that exists on earth or in the heavens, or in the physical or spiritual realms that Christ does not have authority over.

As Christ stated in Matthew 28:18, ***“All authority is given to Me in heaven and earth.”*** As Paul wrote in Philippians 2:10-11, ***“At the name of Jesus every knee shall 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.”*** As we read in 1 Peter 3:22, ***“He is Jesus Christ who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels, and authorities and powers being made subject to Him.”***

Paul now continues, showing Christ’s relation to the church. ***“¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church.”***

The head in the physical realm is the analogy. The head guides all things. It is the essential part. It controls movements. It coordinates the body’s functions. Whether it be voluntary or involuntary, it is the head that has the final word. We can exist without an eye, or a hand or even an appendix, but the head is essential. We are the body of Christ, with different abilities, giftings, needs, strengths and weaknesses, but it is the head that synchronizes the body for life and function.

About 20 years ago I had an accident while playing basketball. I hit my head on the floor and fractured my skull. I passed through surgery, intensive care, and eventual rehabilitation. Glory to God, eventually my health was restored, but during the process I had to endure a loss of balance, double-vision, palsy in my face muscles, loss of short-term memory, confusion with my speech, and difficulty with sense of time. It was quite the adventure, but all of those changes were due to the fact that I had injured my head, which governs all in the human body.

Christ is the Head of the church. We have no need for extra knowledge, guidance of angels, or trying to please God in our own strength. It is through Christ that we have all that we need. As we put our faith in Christ we are reconciled to God. It is as we abide in Christ that we are united and bound together as the family of God, the temple of God, the bride of Christ, and the body of Christ. Christ is the Head of the church, our ultimate authority and our hope.

Continuing to describe Christ, Paul then wrote, ***“He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”***

As we have already discussed, the firstborn is the heir, the one who will lead us forward, the one who will wield all responsibility, authority and supremacy. Christ is not just Lord over the present

creation, He has also come to reign and be the firstborn over all eternity. His reign will never end. He has already conquered sin and death so that we may now follow Him into eternity. As Ephesians 1:21 states, ***“Christ is far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in that which is to come.”*** In the words of Christ, ***“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. I am He that liveth, and am alive forevermore.”*** (Revelation 1:17)

Paul then states that, ***“¹⁹ In Him (Christ) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”*** We need to look no further. Not to angels. Not to religious rituals. Not mystical knowledge. Not to other religions or spiritual experiences. Not to our own logic. If we desire to know and be reconciled to God, we turn to Christ. In Him we find the complete presence of God and the fullness of salvation.

The paragraph then closes with these words: ***“²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”***

Paul had now showed them Christ’s relation to God, to the physical world, to the spiritual world, to the church, and to eternity. In the garden of Eden, when man first sinned, all had been lost. But now, through His life, death, and resurrection, through the blood of the cross, He would reconcile all things in heaven and earth to Himself.

Because our sin was against an infinite God, our sin against Him is an infinite offense. For this infinite offense to be made right, the payment or sacrifice had to be infinite. It is not possible that we trust our salvation to another created being who is bound by time and space. As said in Hebrews 10:4, ***“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”*** Because of our infinite offense, it is also impossible for us to be good enough to earn God’s favor, to pay for our own sin, and to save ourselves.

To not believe in the supremacy and divinity of Christ leaves us hopelessly lost. ***“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:23). ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (Romans 6:23).

In John 14:6, Jesus declares, ***“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** Only Jesus Christ is sufficient to reconcile us to God. We are not here to prove that we have a monopoly on God and that all others are wrong. We are not here to be religious bigots or religious elites. We are only here as forgiven sinners who are crying out to a lost and dying world to repent and believe in Jesus Christ, for is written, ***“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”*** (Acts 4:12).

That is why we are commanded to have no other gods before Him. God is protecting us from ourselves and driving us towards the only One who is truly worthy of our allegiance and our worship. Christ is more precious than football, than power over others, than people’s approval, and even pleasure. He is more precious than the newest technology, than our career plans, than money, than great vacations, than an easy retirement on the beach, than your search for a mate, than having a million followers on TikTok, or anything else that our hearts can desire.

May we join with those of Colossae, hear the words of Paul, and renew our faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord.

As we look back over today's scripture what can we learn?

When we base our theology on our own logic, we will invariably end up in the midst of wrong understanding. That is what the Gnostics did. God had already taken care of their dilemma between a holy God taking on the form of sinful man, through the virgin birth, and yet they chose to turn to their own "knowledge" instead of turning to scripture for God's explanation.

Whether we are trying to understand salvation, suffering, marriage, forgiveness, or prayer, may we cling to Proverbs 3:5-6, which calls us to, ***"Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your path."***

Christ is sufficient for our salvation and sanctification. He is faithful to save and make us holy. May we study the truth so we will be prepared to recognize the counterfeit. May we rely on the Christ's work in our lives and not on human effort to be made holy. May we avoid any religion that seeks to define Christ differently than scripture or that seeks to mix Christianity with other beliefs. May we avoid any Christian teachers that teach human ideas that are contrary to scripture. May we flee other sources of spirituality such as cults, new age, energy healing, metaphysics, horoscopes, Ouija boards, fortune-tellers, or other pagan beliefs from our past.

Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the Author and Perfector of Our faith, the Bread of Life, the Good Shepherd, our Great High Priest, Immanuel "God With Us", King of kings and Lord of lords, the Lamb of God, the Light of the World, the Lord of All, the Messiah, Our Rock, Our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

In the words of Bert Ghezzi:

"(1.3 million earths could fit into the sun.) The earth is 149 million kilometers from the sun. Our sun is a star—one of a billion stars in a galaxy called the Milky Way. We also know that the Milky Way is one of fifty to one hundred billion galaxies, each of which has its billions of stars. Scientists estimate that, all told, the universe has about three hundred billion trillion stars,[ii] a number so huge that our minds cannot begin to grasp it . . . The galaxies and their stars are spread over an unimaginable expanse of space. The distances among them are so great that for convenience's sake, astronomers measure them in terms of light-years rather than kilometers.

According to this standard of measurement, Proxima Centauri, the star nearest our solar system is 4.2 light-years or more than 40 trillion miles away from the earth.[iii] Andromeda, the closest galaxy to the Milky Way, is 2.5 million light years from us. And the most distant galaxies so far discovered by astronomers are an astounding 14 billion light-years from the earth.[iv]"

In light of this, how should we respond to the One ***"through whom and for whom all things were created?"*** We fear. We bow. We submit. We believe. We hope. We trust. We pray. We rest. We love. We belong. As we understand more and more of Christ, our Christian life begins to finally take root and bear fruit . . . in Him.

Let us submit ourselves anew to the supremacy of Christ. Trusting that He alone is all that we need.

Discussion questions:

1. What about this sermon did you find most interesting?
2. In your own words, describe the phrase "Christ is the central point of scripture".
3. What false teachings was the church in Colossae facing?
4. What false teachings are Christians facing today?
5. How are we to protect ourselves against false teaching?
6. If we believe all that Paul tells us about Christ in Colossians 1:15-20, how do you think we would relate to Christ differently?
7. What do you need to remember from this sermon?
8. What do you think God wants you to do in response to this sermon?
9. How can we pray for you?