

Christ Supreme in Creation

Colossians 1:15-19 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. ¹⁹ For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell;*

If you have ever heard children boss one another around, you are bound to have heard one say to the other “Why should I?” They come to a place where they think – “why should I do the thing you are telling me to do?” As we grow up, we actually keep asking that question, only in more sophisticated ways. As we read the book of Colossians and hear that we should live as if Christ is sufficient, we might ask, “Why should I?” “Why should I regard Jesus as being so sufficient that it radically changes my life?” The answer to that question comes in these verses.

This passage is the central passage of the Book of Colossians, the foundation for everything else. It is also one of the most profound portions of Scripture in the Bible. Some believe it was in fact an early hymn - there are some features about it in the Greek which have led some to feel this was probably something the church was already singing. If not, I am sure they soon incorporated Paul's inspired words into hymns. It is poetic, and majestic, and deep. Coming to this passage is like the feeling we get when we have been swimming, not realising how far we have swum, and suddenly we notice how deep the water is beneath us. As we study this passage, we are swimming over some of the deepest water in Scripture.

The depth and meaning of this passage also serve to dismantle the Gnostic teaching. This passage is like heat which melts the glue on the planks of the Gnostic house. All Gnostic ideas are held together by unbiblical ideas about Jesus, and as this passage is applied, it just melts the ‘house’ and collapses the system.

The very centre of the book actually could be missed if you were reading too fast. It is found in verse 19.

1.The Purpose of God for Jesus (v18b-19)

At the very centre of this book is God's Motive. God has wanted something to happen, and we see it in verse 19.

The Father's desire is to have Jesus be the one in whom the fullness dwells. What does that mean? Chapter 2:9 tells us a little more:

Colossians 2:9 *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;*

The Father's desire is to have all that God is being known and shown in Jesus; so that as Jesus is seen and worshipped, God is seen and worshipped. Jesus is not half God or 90% God. All the fullness of who God is, Jesus is. This is why Paul says in verse 15 – He is the ***image of the invisible God.***

That should strike you as almost contradictory – *image of the invisible*. That is like saying – the opaque of the transparent, the solid of the gas. But that is the teaching of Scripture. God Himself is invisible

1 Timothy 1:17 *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen*

1 Timothy 6:16 *who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power. Amen.*

So then what does it mean that Jesus is the *image of God*? That word image is the word εἰκών. What English word does that remind you of? *Icon*. Pagans have always had icons. They have had their small and big statues to represent their god.

Dagon was a shark, so they had shark images. Moloch was an ox, so they had ox images. Baal and Ashtoreth were depicted with images.

Yahweh could not be depicted. The second command specifically forbade this. It was precisely this that made Gentile nations from Babylon to Rome mock them – ‘you have an invisible god.’

But God desires to make Himself known. So He made Himself known in the Son.

What is God like? He is like Jesus. How is He to be thought of? As revealed in Jesus. Christ is the revelation, the exegesis.

John 1:18 *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.*

He is the exact impression of God the Father.

Hebrews 1:3 *who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

It is like a stamp - people can't read stamps, and they are backwards. But when they are stamped on to a surface they leave an exact image for everyone to see. God's stamp looks like Jesus.

Another name for the Son is *the Word*. Why the Word? A word is really a symbol, a sign, an icon – with meaning. The word 'tree' is a sound I make that stands for and points your mind to that thing. If we didn't have words, we would have to point at everything and grunt. So if Jesus is the Word, He is the sign, that pointer that explains God to us.

Jesus explains and reveals the Father. You don't make an image of God, because Jesus is the image of God.

John 14:9 *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

This is a powerful argument for the Trinity. That God can be invisible, and yet, someone who *is* God can be the image.

If God has ‘put all His stock in’ Jesus; if He has chosen the Son to be the lighthouse of His glory, *what then must be done with Jesus?*

This fullness would be known and shown if Jesus has the preeminence. We can see this because verse 19 begins with a 'for'. God's desire for all the fullness to be in Jesus is the ground for Him wanting Him to be *preeminent*. That word, *preeminent*, means first place, highest rank, the first place of dignity. In other words – ultimate glory. *First*.

Christ's preeminence is seen in the two greatest works of God – Creation and Redemption.

In both of these, Jesus is first. He is first when it comes to Creation. He is first when it comes to Redemption.

The passage functions like a parallel – Jesus the firstborn of creation, Jesus the firstborn of resurrection. Things in heaven and earth created by Him, things in heaven and earth reconciled by Him. Creation accomplished by Him, through Him, for Him; redemption accomplished by Him, through Him for Him.

The goal is to take the two greatest things – Creation and Redemption and show that Jesus is at the very centre of both, to prove He is absolutely supreme.

His status in these things has the purpose of proving His preeminence. And both of them conclude in v18 *'that in all things He might have the preeminence'*. His 'firstness' in creation, His 'firstness' in salvation, proves Him to be preeminent.

Today we want to look at the work of creation, and in the next sermon, at redemption.

He is the *firstborn over all creation*.

What does that word *firstborn* mean? In Hebrew culture, the firstborn child was the one who received the place of honour and glory. God has chosen to have many children. But who will always be the firstborn? Jesus (Rom. 8:29). Does that mean He was created? If God has been the Eternal Father, then Jesus has been the Eternal Son. He is the Unique Son of God. He has this unique place of honour – this place of 'firstness' when it comes to creation. He has the place of honour in creation.

Some cultists try to say that 'firstborn' means Jesus was the first thing God created, and then God created everything through Him. But a number of things in this passage show that cannot be. Firstly, v16 explicitly says, everything was made *by* Him. V15 just told us that Jesus is the explicit image of God, not simply a likeness of God – but the very imprint of God. And then v17 tells us – *and He is before all things*.

How can one be before everything, and still be part of what was created? To be before all things, is to be before the beginning. To be before Genesis 1:1 is to be God.

To be before everything is to be first. To be first, is to be the One who must receive all the glory. Jesus is therefore the First and the Last – a title given to God alone.

Isaiah 44:6 *Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God'.*

In fact, if we want to get an idea of how devastating Paul's passage is to Gnostic teaching all we have to do is open the Bible of their descendants – the Jehovah Witnesses.

They add the word 'other' four times in this passage. 'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 because by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All [other] things have been created through him and for him. 17 Also, he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist, 18'

The reason they do that is because this passage gives Him the honour as *first* – as the fullness of God – first in Creation.

Firstborn means Jesus must receive all the glory when it comes to creation.

We know this because verse 16 tells us why. It begins with the word '*for*' or '*because*'. It is going to give us the ground for making that statement.

2. Jesus Himself made the universe.

Verse 16 gives us three prepositions that relate Jesus to Creation – *by (ev) Him; through (dia) Him and for (eis) Him*.

Greeks used to say everything needed a primary cause, an instrumental cause and a final cause. The primary cause is the plan, the instrumental cause is the power, and the final cause is the purpose. For example, the primary cause is to plan a meal, the instrumental cause is to cook and eat it and the final cause is to be nourished and pleased.

Jesus is the primary cause, the instrumental cause and the final cause. He planned it, He produced it, He did it for His own pleasure.

i) Everything was created by Him (v16a).

What was made by Him?

He made the *visible earth*. The accounts in Genesis, and in Job 38 and 39, and in Psalm 104 give us the catalogue - the earth, the sea, the fish, the birds, the plants, the reptiles (including the dinosaurs) and insects, the cattle and wild animals. He made the complex living cell, and every complex machine of every one of the living organisms, from single cell creatures to blue whales.

He made the sun, the moon, and every one of the stars. He made the entire light spectrum. He made the atom, He made the chemistry which causes atoms to combine into elements. He made the solid, liquid and gaseous states of matter. He made the laws of gravity and motion, and time and space.

He made laws which are mathematically absolute, and He made beauty which escapes our language. He made it with the simplicity of bacteria, and with the complexity of black holes. He made everything. He made it as safe as a laughing stream, and as terrifying as the rumbling of thunder.

And the more we study what He made, the more we marvel. Whether it is the honey bee or the cumulonimbus cloud, the soaring eagle or the fire-belching volcano, the geometric snowflake or the human eye – the more we study the more we say “Marvellous are thy works.” We agree with God's own view, that it was **very good**.

The Gnostics taught that matter was evil. Therefore God could not create it. Maybe He could create other heavenly beings, but not earthly things. But Paul says – ‘*heaven and earth, visible and invisible*.’

Not only did He make what is on earth, that which is visible, He made that which is in *Heaven – the invisible*. That is what is meant by *thrones, dominions, principalities, powers*. These titles are always used by Paul to speak about spirit beings, high angelic forces, fallen and not fallen, who were given great and exalted places of rule and status. These are not visible to our physical eyes, but very real, so much so that if we saw one, we would probably, like the apostle John in Revelation, instinctively fall down and worship them.

And Jesus made these spiritual rulers of the cosmos, like Geppetto made Pinocchio, like a sculptor makes a statue. These rank highest as far as created beings go and if Jesus made them – then the conclusion is that *He is above them*.

The false teachers taught that there were aeons – that is manifestations of the original Deity. That is why the worship of angels had begun. But Paul says – *you don't worship them – Jesus made them*.

Everything was created by Him.

ii) Everything was created through Him (V 16b).

How did Jesus make all of this? Did He have to first make something else which could make the world? Or, as the Gnostics taught, did He have to make an angel, who might make another angel, until far enough down the line, one of them would make matter?

No, it did not pass through anyone else's hands. We can say *Jesus is responsible for it overall, it passed through His hands.*

John 1:3 *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

How did He do it? How do you make something out of nothing?

He spoke it. This is the Jesus of the Bible, the Man of Nazareth, the Ancient of Days, the Lion-like Lamb and the Lamb-like Lion. He said “*Let*” and things were created. ‘Let there be light. Let there be a boundary for the sea. Let there be lights in the sky. Let the waters abound. Let the earth produce. Let Us make Man’.

It is a strange thing that God has given us the ability to hear His Word, at which waves of the sea hurry and mountains obediently rise or fall as if they were trained dogs and scared to disobey.

iii) Everything was created for Him (V 16b).

The Lord Jesus shaped this universe as a carpenter designs and builds a beautiful chair for himself to sit in. Therefore, do not think of this physical world as evil. It was made by the Lord and is beautiful – though stained by sin – even this He will redeem.

One of the things about being the firstborn meant that you received the inheritance. The inheritance of Jesus is the universe. Do not think that the earth or the rest of the creation belongs to Satan. No, Satan is like a rebel prince who builds a castle on the king's land. He seems to own territory, but soon the King will wipe Him off the world which belongs to Him.

The universe is His inheritance as the firstborn.

Now let me provoke a thought which ought to shake you. Amongst the things made by Jesus and through Jesus and for Jesus is *you*. You are not an accident. You are not the inevitable result of mom and dad. You are not an evolved monkey. You exist for the purpose Jesus created you. Your life is enormously significant.

Created by Him, through Him, to Him. Do you remember a verse which says very much the same thing?

Romans 11:36 *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things,*

and then the conclusion -

to whom be glory forever. Amen.

He is Supreme – the Preeminent One in Creation.

But there is one more reason why He is the Firstborn of all Creation.

3. Jesus Himself Sustains the Universe (v17).

We read in verse 17 – ‘*and in Him all things consist.*’ That word literally means *to hold together*. He sustains the universe, He keeps it going. He made it, and now He maintains it. Jesus did not make the universe and then abandon it. Moreover, He did not make a universe that is self-sustaining. That might surprise you.

Physicists have told us some remarkable things about the atom. As they have studied the protons and neutrons within the atom, they have yet to understand why the atom does not fly apart. Something holds it together, which they call the strong nuclear force. But that name they give it doesn't explain it. Physicists have peered into the building blocks of the universe and said, ‘This shouldn't exist – it should fly apart – something holds it.’

That is on the micro level. On the macro level, astrophysicists have looked up into the heavens and calculated that the amount of stars, the amount of matter that can be seen is not enough to explain why the universe does not actually scatter. You need matter to have gravity, and there isn't enough visible matter to explain why stars and galaxies hold together. So they are looking for what they call dark matter – matter which cannot be seen or measured – but is supposed to explain why the universe holds together. The Bible tells us. *Jesus holds it together.*

Scientists have found other finely tuned laws – gravity; the electromagnetic forces; the speed of light; gravity and other constants – that, if they were changed, the universe could not exist. Jesus is the reason we have a cosmos, not chaos.

In fact, not only does He sustain the raw matter of the universe – He sustains life. He makes sure life can happen on this planet; that our sun is the size it is, no bigger, no smaller, (otherwise we would be fried or it would be too cold); that the earth is so far from the sun; that we are orbited by a large moon which tilts us so that we have temperate seasons; that the solar system has planets like Jupiter and Saturn which protect the inner planets from asteroids and comets; that the earth is as big as it is, so that its magnetic field protects us from the sun, which would otherwise strip away our atmosphere; that we have just enough nitrogen and oxygen in our atmosphere, so that we can have liquid water.

And once we look on this planet we see that He does much to keep the life that can exist going.

Psalm 104:10-23; 27-30.

There is another thing He sustains – us. That our hearts keep beating, that all the systems of our body keep working, that we get the food, water, rest and air we need to live. This comes from Him.

How does He do it? Hebrews 1:3 tells us He does it the same way He made the world –

Hebrews 1:3 *and upholding all things by the word of His power,*

He speaks it. He says – ‘*live, rain, grow, stay, rotate, continue, stop.*’

The sense we get is that the Lord has not relinquished Creation. He has not wound up the universe and now is disinterested in how it all turns out. He made it and He maintains it.

Now the Bible uses God's status as Creator to teach us many things about Himself, but the clearest is when God questioned Job. God used His creation as the cross examination of Job, who had doubted and questioned God. Job's complaint was essentially – ‘God, this isn't good enough. It is not sufficient that I should be suffering like this’.

So now, we can safely take those chapters and place ourselves in the place of Job as the believer, and recognise the voice of God is indeed the voice of Jesus Christ asking the questions.

“If I made the very things that cause you to marvel – what should your attitude be towards Me? Am I worthy of your songs, of your prayers, of your devotion, of your gratitude? Do I deserve ingratitude, complaining, murmuring? Am I not sufficient to worship?”

“If I could make the universe, have I not made you as well? Do I not have the right to work with my own creation? If I made you, who do you really belong to? Indeed, I own you twice. Am I not sufficient to obey?”

“If I sustain the universe I made, do you think your life is out of control? If I feed ants who live for two months on average; if I replenish forgotten streams, if I keep the gravitational pull of the moon exactly steady, and ensure the nuclear reactions in a trillion suns you will never see, and keep the molecules of the water you drink from flying apart – do you think things happen to you by accident? Do you think I 'miss' things? How dare you say – 'my life is out of control'. If I could make the universe, do you not think I know what I'm doing with you? Am I not sufficient to trust?”

In other words, “Job – if you truly understand my supremacy – you will say – ‘You, being my God, are enough. You God, being so supreme, are sufficient for me. I need nothing else if I am reconciled to You. I was created to worship, not to merely gratify physical needs. Therefore You, being You, are enough.’

“If I designed you, and know what you need – do you not think I myself am sufficient to complete you?”

Supremacy means sufficiency. Believing it means obeying it. In words, thoughts and deeds, showing that you believe your Creator loves you, has come in to dwell in you, and your whole life is planned and controlled and sustained by Him.