

Christ – Supreme in Redemption

Colossians 1:18-20

You're sitting in one of the public venues in Colosse, and someone whom you have seen at the local church comes up to you, greets you and sits down. "You're a believer in Jesus Christ?" he asks. "Yes", you say. He smiles, "That's wonderful." You're glad to hear someone say that amongst all the false religion in Colosse, so you ask him, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" "Oh, yes," he says. "Jesus is an excellent place to start."

You're a little puzzled by that last remark, so you ask him what he means.

"Well, Jesus is one of the great aeons of the pleroma." He sees the confusion on your face and begins to explain. "This world is very evil", he says, "So God, the perfectly holy God, could not have made it. The original God was the one where the pleroma resided – the true, original 100% pure God. But, that original God chose to distribute Himself by making lesser versions of Himself – the aeons. The aeons are great beings. They were not as great as the pleroma God, but they are great, and worthy to be worshipped. Christ is the greatest of the aeons. He made other aeons. The aeons made other aeons. It was one of the smallest aeons that made the world.

For us to get back to the pleroma God, we must grow in secret knowledge which Jesus has given us. This is why he is an excellent place to start."

Well, that leaves you puzzled. That evening you gather with the disciples and there is an excited hush, because a letter has come from the great apostle, Paul, specifically addressed to your church. Then you hear the words from verse 15 down.

Colossians 1:15-20 ¹⁵ ¶ *He is the image of the invisible God (how could he be an aeon?) 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. (But if Jesus is the greatest of the aeons, He wouldn't have created this world if it were sinful) 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, (but if He died, He must have actually lived as a human, which means He couldn't be one of their aeons) that in all things He may have the preeminence. ¹⁹ For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness (pleroma – Jesus is the pleroma Himself) should dwell, ²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven (no angels are needed for reconciliation, he Himself did it and does it).*

And you know that person who spoke to you earlier is a false teacher and a denier of Christ.

Recently, a new-age teacher wrote a book. He says there were three Jesuses: first, the historical Jesus who lived in Palestine 2000 years ago; second, there was the Jesus as the symbol of the Son of God, someone who became the embodiment of a new religion – Christianity; third, there is the Jesus, the spiritual guide who guides any human of any religion to find a deeper God-consciousness. His book is praised by ministers of the Episcopalian, Congregational, Catholic, Methodist churches, by university professors and even the Harvard Professor of Divinity.

Once again, as you read Colossians 1:15-20, you realise such a teacher is a false teacher, and so is anyone who agrees with him. The historical Jesus, the Son of God, and the one who takes us to God are one Jesus. I am not grappling with the third Jesus, I'm engrossed in worshipping the first one -the preeminent one of Colossians.

When you think about it, all religion, all philosophy, all teaching about reality, man, the world, God, our future, must come down to this question – 'Who is Jesus?' What do you say about Jesus?

It is no small thing to get the identity of Jesus wrong.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4 *But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. ⁴ For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted -- you may well put up with it!*

Believe in the wrong Jesus, and you will not experience eternal life. Believe in the wrong Jesus and you will not be accepted into His presence when you die.

This passage promises to reveal the right Jesus. We saw last week that Jesus is the ultimate explanation and revelation of the Godhead. The Father is pleased to have Jesus be the Blazing Light of God. God is pleased to have Jesus be at the absolute centre of attention when it comes to who God is. Because Jesus is the very image of God – He expresses and reveals who God is.

This passage shows the identity of Jesus by taking the two greatest works that God has ever done, and showing that Jesus is at the centre of them both. Creation and Redemption – God's two greatest works – have Christ at their centre.

Creation	Redemption
Firstborn of creation All things created in Him, through Him, to Him (ev, dia, eis) - <i>(by (ev) Him; through (dia) Him and for (eis) Him).</i> Things on heaven, things on earth Before all things	Firstborn of the dead Reconciled all things through Him, to Him (dia, eis) <i>(through (dia) Him and for (eis) Him).</i> Things on heaven, things on earth The beginning

How is He preeminent in salvation?

There are three things in this passage which show how He is first in salvation – He provided it, He guarantees it, He applies it.

1. He Himself Provided Your Salvation (v20)

In a recent sermon, we spoke about the importance of having the correct picture in our minds when a biblical image is in front of us. The Bible has many pictures of salvation.

Justification – we stand before God as guilty criminals in a court, and He declares us not guilty.

Redemption - we stand before God as slaves, and God frees us.

Forgiveness – we stand before God as debtors – the debt is paid and forgotten.

Reconciliation – we stand before God as? *Enemies!* Maybe you have never thought of it that way, but there is enmity between you and God until you are reconciled to Him.

You might ask, “How? I have never regarded God as my enemy. How could I be an enemy of God?”

Well, the Bible gives us at least two ways that we are all the enemies of God.

Firstly,

Romans 8:7 ⁷ *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be....*

The act of not submitting to God is an act of war against Him. God has the right to rule the universe. Those who disobey His commands are rebels in His country. How does a government regard people who rebel against its authority?

In fact, when someone tries to overthrow the government, and set themselves up as the authority – what is the name given to that act? It is called Treason.

From the day you and I were born, our minds were naturally set on going their own way. Every word thought, and deed, further identified us as conspirators against God's rule, subversive, rebellious traitors, who wanted our own lives and authority, not God's.

Luke 19:12-15, 27 *Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. ¹³ "So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' ¹⁴ "But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' ¹⁵ "And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading..*

²⁷ 'But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.'

Secondly, we have not only identified ourselves as being against God's rule, but we have joined forces with Satan's world system.

James 4:4 *Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

If South Africa was at war with Botswana, and a man ran in front of one of the South African tanks, picked up a Botswanan flag, waved it and then took out a hand grenade – he would be a legitimate target. He would have shown with whom his loyalties lay.

To side with this system that loves the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, is to be an enemy of God (I John 2:15-17).

What do enemies do to each other? They wage war on one another. They attack, usually with the aim of destroying the other.

Now if you have made an enemy of your Creator, you are in a lot of trouble. In fact, you are in the worst trouble you can possibly find yourself. All the problems human enemies could cause cannot compare with God's anger, if it is directed at you.

Psalms 130:3 *If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*

Psalms 76:7 *You, Yourself, are to be feared; And who may stand in Your presence When once You are angry?*

So, enter the idea of *reconciliation*.

Reconciliation literally means – *to bring back together*. The wars in Africa have often required an impartial person like Nelson Mandela to arbitrate between the two sides, and effect reconciliation. But who is going to intervene between man and God? There is only one guilty party here – man, and man does not want to reconcile.

So think of the matchless grace of Jesus; that He Himself initiated and effected reconciliation. He did not send an ambassador, or an angelic peacekeeper.

To effect reconciliation, He had to be a qualified mediator between God and man. That is, He had to become a man, take humanity up into Himself, so He could forever be the God-man, so there could forever be a bridge between man and God.

1 Timothy 2:5 *For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,*

So He entered humanity, embraced the humiliation of being a helpless baby, a developing child, an anonymous adult. His ministry was attacked, rejected and scorned. He was ultimately betrayed, abused, tortured and killed, like a murderer or a rapist.

And on top of the shame of the cross, were poured the sins of the world and the anger of God.

But this He did, to reconcile all things, to make peace between us and God through the blood of His cross. There, God was satisfied that justice had been served upon our treason, and His own standards had been met in His Son's perfect obedience.

What prince would leave the life of royal privilege, become a peasant, endure harsh mistreatment from the peasants, and eventually be murdered by them, in order to reconcile those rebellious peasants to his father, the King?

Romans 5:1 *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:*

2 Corinthians 5:19,21 *that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation... ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*

That is from God's side. God is satisfied in Jesus' reconciliation. God's anger has been removed, He has been propitiated. Jesus is the means of God being reconciled to man.

From our side, we must come through Jesus. Jesus' death for sin must become our death for sin. Jesus' perfect life must become our perfect life. Jesus is the means of man being reconciled to God. We must repent of disobeying God and accept Jesus as our reconciliation with God. Turn away from sin, turn away from trying to bribe God with good works, turn away from trusting yourself. Throw yourself on the reconciler Himself.

In this way, Jesus remains first in salvation.

It wasn't as if Jesus paid the price and then slipped away quietly, anonymously, and now everyone is saved, with or without knowing Jesus. No, Jesus is first, and supreme in salvation, because He achieved it, and He is the One we must come to, and believe, and receive, and trust, to be saved.

When people tell me they are saved and do not specifically mention the Person of Jesus as the reason they are saved, I have every reason to doubt that they are actually saved.

A desire to be moral doesn't save you. An interest in spiritual things doesn't save you. Attending church with your parents doesn't save you. Not being a Moslem, Hindu, Roman Catholic or Buddhist doesn't save you. You must have a means of reconciliation. You must have a white flag to wave at God. And there is only one white flag which will cause Him to cease firing judgment at you, and it is the white flag of Jesus Christ.

Jesus achieved it by Himself, and He achieved it for Himself. Jesus died to buy Himself a bride.

Ephesians 5:25-27 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

So He is at the centre of salvation, because He made the reconciliation, He is the means of reconciliation, He reconciled people for himself.

One question – why does it say – things *in heaven and things on earth*? (Colossians 1:20).

What was there in heaven that needed to be reconciled? Does this teach that Jesus reconciled fallen angels to Himself? Heaven is used here in the sense it was used a few verses ago – to speak of the entire creation – the cosmos, and the created earth. Christ's death will eventually bring these back to a state of perfection. If He hadn't died, the earth would continue to wind down and degrade under the curse of sin. But Christ's victory means even the physical curse will be lifted, and the creation will be redeemed, restored, brought back to its ideal state.

Now there is a second thing that proves Jesus is Preeminent in Salvation:

2. He Himself Guaranteed Your Salvation (v18)

Try to re-imagine something. Good Friday, as the Bible describes it – Jesus in anguish, the period of darkness, as Jesus cries out – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

He says – “It is finished” and “Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit’.

Now picture Sunday morning. The women come to the tomb to finish the embalming process. The guards are still there. They open the seal, roll away the stone, and there is the body of Jesus. They re-dress it, taking as much time as possible. They return, tell the other disciples that they have just done so. The disciples go back to Galilee and return to their old professions.

What meaning would the death of Jesus have had? If He had remained in the tomb, He would have been declared as guilty as Adam. God said of Adam – in the day you eat of the tree, you shall surely die. The wages of sin is death. If Jesus had died and remained dead, He would have been shown to have been a sinner. And if He had been a sinner, could there have been any reconciliation between us and God? You may as well use a traitor as your ambassador; no sinner can reconcile a holy God and a sinful people.

But if He rose from the dead, it meant He was no sinner; which meant He had successfully paid for our sins, which meant there can be reconciliation.

If He defeated the wages of sin – which is death, it means He defeated the cause of death – sin. He triumphed over sin and death in His resurrection. In other words, His resurrection is the *guarantee* that reconciliation has been achieved.

It is as if we are in a long queue, about to enter a doorway called death. Each of us will go through there, one at a time. But if you are a believer you are in a different queue from the rest of mankind. Jesus is at the head of your queue. Everyone behind Jesus watches to see what will happen to Him when He goes through that door. If it swallows Him up, we have no hope. We must go through that door expecting the same to happen to us. But, lo and behold, Jesus goes through the door of death, and comes right back out again, victory written all over His face. He is first in that queue, and we can expect the same thing if we are in Him. Our reconciliation is guaranteed, secured.

Jesus was the first to conquer death, and become our resurrection. He was the beginning. And if you are reconciled to God, it also means you will one day be resurrected to enjoy His presence in a resurrected body for all eternity. Jesus was the beginning of this. He was the firstborn of resurrection. He was the first one to be resurrected. He has the place of honour in resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23¶ *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. ²¹ For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward*

they that are Christ's at His coming.

In a way, every Sunday, we praise Him as the firstborn from the dead, and look forward to our ultimate resurrection because of Him.

3. He Himself Applies our Salvation (v18)

Jesus made reconciliation possible. He guaranteed that He actually had done so. But then what? What does He do with what He achieved? He applies it. Verse 18 says *He is the head of the Body, the church.*

He is the head of the body. What is the body? The verse tells us – *the church*. Who makes up the church? All those that have been reconciled to God make up the church. No one who is still one of His enemies is a part of Christ's body. His body is made up of people who have been reconciled, and will be resurrected, and belong to Him eternally.

Jesus reconciles and resurrects individuals who make up His Body – the church. He applies His work to people. The individuals He applies it to make up His body – the church.

Now consider your own body. How much does it do without your head? Does it ever move without your head? Does it go anywhere without your head?

Has your body received nourishment apart from your head?

Have you ever understood the world without your head?

In fact, if you want to kill a body, what is one way to do so? Make sure it is cut off from the head.

So who is Jesus to the church? Jesus is our source of life. Jesus controls our decisions. Jesus decides on the direction of the Body. Jesus gives us understanding of the world. Jesus is the Leader, and Source, and Controller of the church. All whom He reconciles, He gathers into a Body which He leads, nourishes, teaches, heals and sustains.

Once we are reconciled, guess who we remain completely dependent on? To remain absolutely preeminent, He does not bring us into a relationship where He is the bones and we are the muscles; where He is the skin and we are the hair. Rather – He is the Head, and we are body – total, utter dependence. His complete leadership, life, sustenance is needed.

Just as He Created the world and now sustains it, so He reconciles people and then sustains them, being the Head of the Body.

We live the Christian life the same way we received it – by complete dependence on Jesus Christ – (Col. 2:6).

It is one thing to talk about being Christ-Centred. It is another to really believe it. And, as we often say, what we really believe affects how we behave.

If we really believe that Jesus is the Creator who made us and maintains us; that He is the Saviour who reconciled us and will resurrect us and, even now, spiritually nourishes and leads us – then that has to affect us.

If we say we are Christ-ians, then we are saying this Person – not the false Christ of the Gnostics or the Jehovah Witnesses or Deepak Chopra or Oprah – this Christ is ours and we are His.

That has to affect whether we have hope or if we are perpetually pessimistic. It will affect if we are grateful or filled with complaints. It will affect if we are confident or fearful, depressed or hopeful, joyful or melancholy. It will affect what we will spend our life on. It will affect how we will spend

our retirement years. It will affect how we train our children. It will affect how we use our money. It will affect how we treat our bodies, what we do to them, what we put into them, and what we use them for. It will affect what we set before our eyes, and what we listen to. It will affect the way we speak, at home, at work, at church. It will affect the way we work, and for what motive. It will affect our ambitions, goals, desires. It will affect our driving, our reading habits, our internet usage, our marriages. It will affect how we approach the Bible, prayer, fellowshiping with God's people, serving one another, being discipled, evangelising.

How could this Person move in to your life and the needle on the Richter scale of your life hardly even budge? When Jesus moves into a life, it is an earthquake, with perpetual aftershocks.

If He is supreme enough to create you and then save you from your biggest problem – alienation from God, how can the knowledge of His presence not change how you view everything from washing dishes to holidays, to financial hardship.

So once again we come to two possibilities. Either we don't know Him, or we do know Him.

One possibility is that you don't know Him at all – you have never been reconciled to God, He is still a stranger to you. Then I appeal to you – do not turn your back on your Creator, for there is no escaping Him, ultimately. Do not declare yourself independent of His kingdom – because He is a wise, wonderful, kind King, whose servants are the best loved and cared for of all.

The second possibility is that you know Him, but hardly. You have not spent time cultivating His knowledge in the same way you would any other relationship. You have not sought to know Him by meditating on His Word and communing with Him, and dwelling in His body. So He seems far away, disconnected from life, a truth you believe, but almost unrelated.

You don't have to buy into Deepak Chopra's Christ to live and think like an unbeliever. You just have to take very little time to meditate on the Christ you say you believe in. What will happen is that you will live like a practical atheist – as if Jesus is theoretically true, but practically irrelevant to your life. Small-j Jesus, small -f faith; or probably, capital-U Unbelief.

The difference between a great Christian life and any other kind lies in the quality of our religious concepts.

What comes into your mind when you think of Christ signifies the most important thing about you, and will determine your spiritual future. Thus your goal must always be to purify and elevate your concepts of Christ. I challenge you not to accept the status quo of your Christianity – press on to seek to know Him personally, experientially. Know the supreme Christ who is sufficient for everything in your life.