

Living Word Fellowship Church

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The Supremacy of Jesus Christ Above All Things

Colossians 1:12-18

Introduction:

Our church theme for 2026 is - **CHRIST ALONE!** But why that theme? Why not highlight and emphasize what we are doing --- *our faithfulness, our gifts, our abilities, our sacrifices*? Because when all is said and done, it is **all about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**. He gets all the publicity, all the headlines, and all the credit and glory ---- He is **SUPREME** over everyone and everything. This is the primary truth presented in our Scripture text. For this study we will be investigating the historical context, the Colossian heresy, the textual setting, and the teaching of the text.

Historical Context

Colossae had been an important city in the region of Asia Minor prior to the time of Paul. Colossae was built along the Lycus River, which was important for trade in the ancient world. As a result, Colossae became a major trading center. Colossae was located on a main overland trade route between Ephesus approximately one hundred miles to the west and the Euphrates about four hundred miles to the east. The growth of two sister cities in the Lycus valley spurred the decline at Colossae (*Laodicea and Hierapolis*). Colossae had declined in importance by the time the gospel was preached there by Epaphras, who was a convert from Colossae (cf. Col. 1:7, “*As you also learned from Epaphras*”). This was the least influential city to which any of Paul's surviving letters were addressed.

Colossian Heresy

According to the false teachers in Colossae, Jesus got equal billing with a vast number of emanating spirits flowing out from God. They said Jesus could be **prominent**, but He certainly was not **preeminent**. This heresy (aka, “*Colossian Heresy*”) was extremely dangerous and threatened the life of the church at Colossae. But why? Three reasons:

- ❑ **It perverted** the doctrine of salvation by grace teaching that faith in Christ alone was inadequate to save.
- ❑ **(2) It insisted** upon forms of asceticism (*extreme self-denial*) which led to the practice of licentiousness (*debauchery, sensuality, a lack of moral restraint*).

- (3) It depreciated the Person of Christ, teaching that He was at best, one of many spirits who had emanated from God. Similar features are rampant in Christ's Church today.

Setting for the Text

After expressing thanksgiving to God for the condition of the Colossian church, Paul offered a prayer on its behalf. The prayer reflects the specific threat to the church and, in its own way, combats the heretics.¹ Note the requests he makes: (1) that they might know His will (v.9); (2) that they would walk so as to please God (v.10a); (3) that they would work to bear fruit (v.10b); (4) that they would understand the Word better (v.10c); and (5) that they would know His glorious power (v.11). These are things the heretics falsely promised their followers, but these blessings can be found only in Christ. He is preeminent!²

Teaching the Text

As we study these verses we must keep in mind that Paul is writing to demonstrate the Preeminence of Christ. He reveals three inexplicable reasons why we believe in CHRIST ALONE! Christ is our Savior, Creator, and Sovereign.

I. Jesus Christ Is Our SAVIOR: Col. 1:13-14

Man's greatest problem is sin, a problem that can never be solved by a philosopher or a religious teacher. Sinners need a Savior. Here we have a vivid picture of four saving actions of Christ on our behalf - WE'RE QUALIFIED THROUGH CHRIST (v.12)

A. Christ delivered us (v.13a)

This word "deliver" means "rescued from danger." Paul used a precise word to describe God's deliverance of believers from darkness. The force of this word indicates that we were in critical danger and have been delivered from the power of darkness. We were under that authority before we were saved, and the unsaved are still under that authority at this very moment. Darkness is Satan's realm, the realm

¹ R. R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* - Vol. 32. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 199.

² W. W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 576-577

of opposition toward God, the place where Satan exercises his authority (2 Cor. 4:1-6; Eph. 6:11-12 *We wrestle not against flesh and blood*).

B. Christ translated us (v.13b)

The word “*conveyed*, or *translated*,” was used to describe the deportation of a population from one country into another. Jesus Christ did not release us from bondage only to have us wander aimlessly. He moved us into His own kingdom of light and made us victors over Satan’s kingdom of darkness. Earthly rulers transported the defeated people, but Jesus Christ transported the winners.

The phrase “*His dear Son*” can be translated “*the Son of His love*.” At the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus Christ, the Father declared that Jesus was His “*Beloved Son*” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). This fact reminds us of the price the Father paid when He gave His Son to be our sacrifice for sin. It also reminds us that His kingdom is a kingdom of love as well as a kingdom of light.

C. Christ redeemed us (v.14a)

The word “*redeem*” (*Apolutrósis*) means “*to rescue and release a prisoner by the payment of a ransom*.” “Redemption” is best understood by reviewing the three most used words for “redeem” in the New Testament.

1. Redemption (Greek, *Agorazō*,) = to purchase from the marketplace; the act of buying something back (Gal. 3:13; 4:5).
2. Redemption (Greek, *Lutroo*) = to purchase and release from the slave market (Titus 2:14 “*redeeming us from all iniquity*”).
3. Redemption = (Greek, *Apolutrósis and Exagorazō*) to purchase out from; denoting a total deliverance (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7, 14).

Paul did not suggest that Jesus paid a ransom to Satan to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness. By His death and resurrection, Jesus met the holy demands of God’s Law. Satan seeks to accuse us and imprison us because he knows we are guilty of breaking God’s Law. But the ransom has been paid on Calvary (“*redemption through His blood*”), and through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been set free forever.

D. Christ forgave us (v.14b)

Redemption and forgiveness go together (Eph. 1:7). The word translated *forgiveness* means “*to send away*” or “*to cancel a debt*.” Christ has not only set us free and transferred us to a new kingdom, but He has canceled every debt so that we cannot be enslaved again. Satan cannot find anything in the files that will indict us!

As sinners we stood before God in debt, and the debt, paid by Jesus Christ, **HAS BEEN CANCELED**. (Rom. 8:33-34, “*Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died, and is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us*”).

II. Jesus Christ is Our **CREATOR**: Col. 1:15-17

The false teachers in Colossae were very confused about Creation, believing that matter was evil, including the human body. They also taught that Jesus Christ did not have a real body *since this would have put Him in contact with evil matter*. The results of these false teachings were tragic, including extreme **asceticism**³ on the one hand and **unbridled sin** on the other. After all, if your body is sinful, you either try to **enslave it** or you **enjoy it**. In this section, Paul explained the **fourfold relationship** of Jesus Christ to Creation.

A. Christ existed before creation (v.15; John 1:1-2)

Paul says that Christ is “*the image of the invisible God*.” Christ does not bear the image of God in the same way that humans bear the image of God. The word for **image** (Greek, *eikon*) contains the idea of **representation and manifestation**. The word was used of the image of Caesar on a coin. The average person could not see Caesar, but by looking at the coin, they could see what he looked like. Though the word itself does not necessarily imply a perfect image, both the context and other Scriptures demand that meaning.⁴ Jesus Christ is both the **representation** and **manifestation** of God the Father.

Corroboration from Hebrews 1:3: “*Who (God’s Son) being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power*” - Understanding this verse provides deeper theological insights into Christ’s divine essence:

- **Radiance or Brightness** – The Greek term used here, (*apaugasma*), signifies a reflection, indicating Christ's divine glory.
- **Exact Representation or Image** – The phrase (*charaktēr*) implies a precise likeness, showing that Christ fully embodies God's nature.
- **Upholds** – The Greek word (*pherō*) indicates continuous action, meaning Christ actively sustains all creation.

³ Extreme “Asceticism” refers to rigorous self-denial practices suggesting that appeasing God and gaining salvation can be earned through harsh treatment of the body.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 57.

- **Word of His Power** — This phrase emphasizes the authority of Christ's command, reflecting the creative power seen in Genesis.⁵

The phrase, “***firstborn over all creation***,” does not refer to time, but to place or status. Jesus Christ was not the first being created since He Himself is the Creator of all things. ***Firstborn*** simply means “***of first importance of first rank***.” ***Firstborn of all Creation*** means “***prior to all Creation***.” Heretics like Arius (a priest from Libya around 250 AD - founder of Arianism) and Charles Taze Russel of the Jehovah Witnesses, teach that Jesus is the first created being; he was not coeternal with God the Father. In Arius’ own words, “***There was a time when Jesus was not***.”

Since no mere creature can perfectly reveal God, Jesus Christ must be God (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 (EXEGETED) Him***”).

B. Christ created all things (v.16a; John 1:3, “*All things were made by Him*”)

Part of the Colossian heresy included the worship of angels (2:18). Since Christ created all things, (*including angels, powers, rulers, and authorities*), He Himself must be uncreated. Therefore, it is ludicrous to worship that which owes its very existence to someone greater. The word ***for*** that introduces this verse could be translated “***because***.” Jesus Christ is the Firstborn of all *because* He created all things. It is no wonder that the winds and waves obeyed Him, and diseases and death fled from Him, for He is Master overall. “***All things were made by Him***” (John 1:3). This includes all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible. All things are under His command.

C. Christ is the focus of all things (v.16b)

Everything exists ***in*** Him, ***for*** Him, and ***through*** Him. Jesus Christ is the Sphere in which they exist, the Agent through which they came into being, and the One for whom they were made. Paul’s use of three different prepositions is one way of refuting the philosophy of the false teachers. For centuries, the Greek philosophers had taught that everything needed a primary cause, an instrumental cause, and a final cause. The primary cause is the plan, the instrumental cause the power, and the final cause is the purpose. When it comes to Creation, Jesus Christ is the (1) primary cause (He planned it), the (2) instrumental cause (He produced it), and the (3) final cause (He did it for His own pleasure). Genesis 1:1, “***In the beginning God (Elohim)⁶ created....***”

⁵ Cambridge Greek New Testament Commentary for Schools and Colleges – Hebrews 1. StudyLight.org.

⁶ Elohim is the Hebrew word for God signifying His majesty, creative power, and authority. It is a “plural” noun denoting God as the “One True God,” the “Supreme Creator.”

If everything in creation exists *for* Him, then nothing can be evil of itself (*except for Satan and fallen angels, even those God uses to accomplish His will*). Gnostic regulations about using God's creation are all foolish (Col. 2:20-23). It also means that God's creation, even though under bondage to sin (Rom. 8:22), can be used for God's glory and enjoyed by God's people (1 Tim. 6:17).

D. Christ holds all things together (v.17)

"In Him all things hold together." The reference here is to organic permanence, the continuance of the composition of the things of the world ***"in Him,"*** because He holds together what He has created.⁷ In Christ we have a COSMOS and not a CHAOS.

Nothing is complete without Jesus. He is the "Author" *and* the "Completer," the "Beginning" *and* the "End" (Hebrews 12:2, Revelation 22:13). Everything exists because of Him, and everything is missing something without Him; and not just missing *something*, but the *central thing*; the thing that supplies true meaning and purpose to all things. That is what the Bible means when it says of Christ, ***"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Whom be glory forever! Amen"*** (Romans 11:36).

III. Jesus Christ is Our Sovereign: Col. 1:18

The theological goal of this paragraph is to demonstrate Christ's supremacy in all things, including the church. What are the implications of this reality?

- The Church recognizes that Christ's HEADSHIP signifies His function as His church's leader, guide, teacher, director, and life source.
- The Church understands that Christ's HEADSHIP includes His authority over the church. He alone is the source of power or authority. Every part (member & ministry) is under His authority and answerable to Him.
- The Church realizes that Christ's HEADSHIP is a position of relationship - Jesus is the Head of HIS body, and we are members (*not the head*) of that body (cf. Col. 3:16-17; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; Ephesians 4:11-32).

This brings us to the theme of this entire section: ***"That in all things He might have the preeminence"*** (Col. 1:18 - Greek, *prōteuō*) meaning, ***"to be first in rank, power, and authority."*** The word is used only twice. Here, and its reference to Diotrephes' narcissism in 3 John 9, ***"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who***

⁷ J. P. Lange, P. Schaff, K. Braune, K., & M. B. Riddle, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Colossians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 23.

loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us”). As used in Col. 1:18, the word is related to the words “*the beginning, the firstborn from the dead*,”⁸ and magnifies the unique position of Jesus Christ. “*Christ is all, and in all*” (Col. 3:11).

CONCLUSION: – What is the significance of Christ’s Preeminence for us?

- Christ has supremacy over all things because all of God’s fullness resides in Him: He is the full embodiment of God’s attributes and saving grace. Through Christ, God can reconcile to Himself all things, making peace through the blood of His cross.
- There is nothing that can be added to Jesus Christ to make him a ‘better’ or a ‘greater’ Savior, for in Him, “*all the fullness dwells*.” The Greek word translated ‘*fullness*’ (*pleroma*) is one of the words Paul used to remind us there is nothing lacking in Christ because all the fullness of deity, power and grace are His.⁹

⁸ “*Firstborn from the dead*” signifies Christ as the One who died, never to die again. He rose again, thus guaranteeing resurrection life to all who belong to Him (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

⁹ I. S. McNaughton, *Opening up Colossians and Philemon* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 30.