

Colossians 1 • The Preeminence of Christ

Introduction

Paul faced the introduction of a heresy which has again resurfaced in the church today: Gnosticism. These are people blending some Christian truth with other things such as Jewish legalism, philosophy, and/or mysticism while claiming a superior knowledge of spiritual things. Their system was supposed to give believers a special “full knowledge” not possessed by others, and how they loved to use the world “fullness”; this is why Paul uses it so many times in this letter. Gnostic systems have a semblance of spirituality but are actually the worst form of religion with no actual, spiritual value. Because Gnostics ultimately teach that Jesus was something less than the literal Son of God come in the flesh, Paul begins by placing Christ as the preeminent Lord of all things; otherwise false doctrine is sure to follow.

¹Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

²To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; ⁷just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, ⁸and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

⁹For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

[Read v.1-12]

Q: How were the Colossians saved?

A: According to v.5, Epaphras preached “the word of truth, the gospel”, which they heard and accepted.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.
Romans 10:17

Q: According to v.6, what was the evidence of their salvation?

A: They were “constantly bearing fruit”.

Q: What is mentioned in this passage which would be evidence of spiritual fruitfulness, evidence of their salvation?

1. “...we have heard of your faith...” (v.4)
2. “...the hope laid up for you...” (v.5)
3. “...your love in the Spirit.” (v.8)

Point: Only Christ can give faith, change a selfish heart into a heart of love, and then give hope for the future.

Q: How might Paul’s prayer for the Colossians’ spiritual growth be a direct contrast to the false teaching of Gnosticism?

A: Salvation is a personal experience with Christ, not merely the acceptance of a set of doctrines. Therefore Believers experience daily growth and development whereas Gnostics falsely preach a mystical “fullness” to be gained. Paul contrasts this with being filled with Christ.

Q: What are the things which Paul desires for Christians to experience in order to obtain that fullness in Christ?

1. To know His will. (v.10)
2. To walk so as to please God. (v.10)
3. To bear fruit. (v.10)
4. To understand the Word better. (v.10)
5. To know His glorious power. (v.11)

Q: What are the greater qualities which Paul desires these things to provide in us specifically?

A: “Steadfastness and patience”. (v.11)

Point: These are expressions of spiritual quality and consistency which define spiritual faithfulness, the goal of spiritual maturity.

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Application: *The Gnostics – the false teachers – had a message, but their message had no power to it. They taught about angels, “emanations” from God, legalistic rules, and bodily disciplines, but their message did not have the power to permanently transform lives. Paul begins by reviewing the effect the Gospel of Christ had on the Colossians, of Christ’s preeminence in the Gospel message. What place does Christ hold in the message we heard and believed? And what place does the message we now preach have?*

¹³For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[Read v.13-14]

Q: What event in Christ’s life allowed Him to accomplish our rescue “from the domain of darkness”?

A: The work of the cross.

Point: *Religious leaders have died, but only Christ – God’s Son – died on the cross for the sins of the world making Him preeminent in the cross. No angel died to redeem sinners, no religious ruler has ever produced forgiveness; it’s the cross which lifts Christ above all others.*

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

[Read v.15-17]

Q: How is Paul describing Christ?

A: As preeminent in creation.

Q: What did the Gnostics teach as to how creation came about?

A: They claimed God made the worlds through a series of “emanations” from Himself, their logic being that Christ was just another one of those emanations.

Q: What’s specifically wrong with this belief?

A: It ultimately leads to denying Christ’s deity, whereas Paul is confirming with other Scriptures that Jesus is God Himself.

Point: *The word “image” means “the exact reproduction”, not one of God’s creatures resulting from some kind of “emanation”, and the term “firstborn” is not a reference to time (as though Christ were the first thing God created) but to position. (See John 1:1.) Only God could exist “before all things” and only through God could he hold “all things together”.*

¹⁸He 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. ¹⁹For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰and 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.

[Read v.18-23]

Q: Paul has described Christ’s preeminence in the Gospel, the cross, and the church. What is he now describing?

A: Christ’s preeminence in the church.

Q: How is the church here connected with the creation?

A: The terms “beginning” and “firstborn from the dead” combine to describe the church as His **NEW** creation.

Q: But WHY is the church considered a new creation? What happens within the church which did not exist previously?

A: For the first time, **EVERYONE** can come to God through Christ. **BOTH** Jew and Gentile are reconciled to God as one in the church.

²¹And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, ²²yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— ²³if indeed you continue in the faith firmly

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established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Ephesians 2:14-16

Q: How does Paul reinforce this in v.21-22?

1. "...you were formerly alienated and hostile..." (v.21)
2. "...engaged in evil deeds..." (v.21)
3. "...He has now reconciled you..." (v.22)

Q: It states that Christ's goal is to "present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach". What responsibilities on our part are connected with this?

1. "...continue in the faith..." (v.23)
2. "...firmly established and steadfast..." (v.23.)
3. "...not moved away from the hope of the gospel..." (v.23)

Point: These are all expressions of personal faithfulness.

Q: What God-like attribute is being highlighted by Paul's mention that Christ is BOTH the "firstborn of all creation" (v.15) and "the firstborn from the dead" (v.18)?

A: It's His all-encompassing sovereignty over **EVERYTHING**, both the living **AND** the dead. Christ therefore **MUST** be God and cannot be mistaken as some kind of afterthought or "emanation" from God.

²⁴Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. ²⁵Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, ²⁶that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, ²⁷to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. ²⁹For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

[Read v.24-29]

Q: How does Paul now personally apply the teaching to this point?

A: By affirming that Christ is preeminent in Paul's own life and ministry.

Q: When Christ first appeared to Paul, what were Paul's first words? How did this dictate the tone for the rest of Paul's life and ministry?

A: Paul's first words were, "Who are You, Lord?" (Acts 9:5) Christ being preeminent above all things was established at the first and carried over through the rest of Paul's life and ministry.

Q: What are the three words Paul uses to describe the actions of his ministry?

1. "...preaching of the word of God..." (v.25)
2. "...admonishing every man..." (v.28)
3. "...teaching every man..." (v.28)

Point: Paul's ministry was a balance of preaching, teaching, and warning.

Q: And for what ultimate purpose?

A: "...so that we may present every man complete in Christ". It's the expression of fulfilling the Great Commission to make disciples, not merely converts.

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Q: So what is Paul's definition of Christian perfection?

A: Spiritual maturity. This greatly contrasted with Gnosticism which taught that one could be instantly "full" and complete, whereas Christianity is an ongoing process as part of a personal relationship with Christ.

*but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,
Ephesians 4:15*

Overall Application

The beginning, deception is always found to be chipping away at the place and person of Christ Jesus, to marginalize or explain away even the tiniest portion of His preeminence with something else offered in its place. If He is not preeminent in the Gospel message we received and preach, it leads to diminishing His preeminence in both the work of the cross and creation itself. This further erodes His standing within the church and, finally, our personal life and ministry. Revival is really the expression of sincere repentance and a return to the preeminence of Christ in all things.