

Fil-Am Community Church
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THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST Colossians 1:15-20

Good morning! We're starting a new series this morning. It's a 3-part series based on the book of Colossians. We're going to look at the first three chapters where we find three important topics as they relate to the authority and sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. These topics are the Supremacy of Christ, the Sufficiency of Christ and the Sanctity of Christ Followers.

Let us start by reading together with me Colossians 1:15-20.

There was an article in a national newspaper a few years ago that featured a denomination that wanted to radically reach those who feel alienated from the church. Using market research and focus groups, this denomination has designed weekly services that deliberately de-emphasize Jesus Christ. One of the founders of the church has said, "The sad fact is the name of Jesus Christ has become for many people exclusionary." Using Hindu and Zen, intermingled with a few verses from the Bible and recorded music by Willie Nelson, the leader of this group is quoted as saying, "We're enabling people to discover God themselves, maybe through Jesus, maybe through Buddha, maybe through any number of ways."

Most of us think that sounds crazy and some may even feel disgust hearing that. I want to make you aware of something just as deadly that is infiltrating into the church, our church even today. It seems pretty harmless and most would brush it off and not give it another thought, but it is deadly to a church and even a whole community.

I'm talking about practicality. I have found myself infected with this disease at times and I'm sure you have had it too. Here is how it works. Instead of calling

people to faith, repentance and submission to the supremacy of Christ, many of us tell people that Jesus wants to give them a happy marriage or a stress-free life.

While Jesus will certainly change our lives, our marriages, and our stress levels when we bow before His preeminence, we must move away from “What Jesus can do for me” to “Am I living in light of His lordship?” We don’t simply “add” Jesus to our lives; we adore Him with our lives through our obedience. We must face the question and answer it honestly – Is Jesus first place in my life?

In addition, about ten years ago, the National Geographic Society released information about an ancient Coptic manuscript USA Today called “The Gospel of Judas.” Of course, even the National Geographic scholars admit Judas didn’t write it: He committed suicide soon after he betrayed Jesus. It was written by someone two hundred years after Judas died. In addition, this is not some “lost gospel” that’s going to change the Bible. In the first 300 years of the church, there were many documents written telling strange and unusual stories about Jesus not found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But again, this front page story makes people consider the question: Who is Jesus Christ?

Let’s see how these questions relate to our text this morning. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, heresies or false teachings were in abundance. Much of these had to do with the minimizing of Jesus. Many people thought He was important but not essential. They had given Him a place in their lives, without recognizing that He demands first place. Jesus was prominent to them, but certainly not preeminent. For example, one heresy was called Gnosticism and its followers were called Gnostics.

In Colossians 1, Paul refutes at least three misconceptions of this heresy:

- The false teachers taught that God did not create the world because in their view matter was evil and logically, God cannot create evil.

- Believing that matter was evil, they argued that God would not have come to earth as a human in bodily form. A human is made up of matter (matter is evil).
- They did not believe that Christ was the unique Son of God but rather one of many intermediaries between God and people.

Our text this morning points to the Preeminence of Christ. God's complete and perfect revelation is revealed thru the person of Jesus Christ. Our passage breaks into two natural sections with the last part of verse 18 providing the overriding theme: "...so that in everything he might have the supremacy."

In our text this morning, we see two things with respect to the supremacy of Christ. First is his preeminence over Creation and the second is his preeminence over his new creation. Let's look at the first.

I. Christ is Preeminent Over Creation (vs. 15-17).

The Bible is a book about Jesus Christ our Lord. The OT provides details of His coming. The Gospels present Him as God in the flesh. Acts begins the story of Salvation in Christ while the letters detail the theology of Christ's work and personification of Christ in His body, the church. Finally Revelation gives us a picture of Christ reigning as King of Kings.

John Mac Arthur, pastor, preacher, and writer, states plainly about our text this morning, *"But of all the Bible's teaching about Jesus Christ, none is more significant than Col 1:15-19. This dramatic and powerful passage removes any needless doubt or confusion over Jesus' true identity. It is vital to a proper understanding of the Christian faith."*

As mentioned in the intro, the heretics denied Christ's humanity. Since matter was evil, God couldn't come to earth and put on flesh thus this led them to deny Christ's deity. I want to highlight four truths Paul talks about between verses 15-17. Let me read them again.

We see here a powerful statement in scripture. We find four truths about Christ that reveal how Christ is Preeminent over Creation.

And, these are the reasons why Jesus should be first place in our lives. So, Jesus should occupy first place in our lives because...

1. He is God (15a). “The Son is the image of the invisible God.”

Why should Christ be exalted in our lives and throughout all creation? He must be exalted because he is the revelation of God. He reveals God to us. Paul says he is the “image” of the invisible God. The word “image” is *eikon* in the Greek, which connotes “an exact representation and revelation,” and was used of an idol, picture, or statue. It is the word from which we derive our English word “icon,” which are religious relics or pictures used in orthodox churches. And, of course, in our modern times, we see icons of software applications in our computers or smartphones.

When Paul says that Christ is the “image” of God he seems to mean at least two things. First, it is through Christ that we see and learn about the characteristics of God. Scripture teaches that God is spirit, and therefore, he does not have flesh and blood and cannot be seen. There are times where he has revealed himself in the Bible through theophanies. This means that God took the form of something such as a fiery bush, a cloud, or even a man, to reveal himself to people in tangible, temporary ways. But theophanies did not fully depict God’s person or character.

You see, it has always been the desire of mankind to see God. Moses cried out to God, “Show me your glory.” But because no one could look at the full display of the glory of God and live, God showed Moses only a portion of his glory (Ex. 33).

Therefore, how then can man see God? We can see God through Christ, and we can know him more as we study Christ. Look at what John said: “*No one has*

ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known” (John 1:18). Christ made God known.

Jesus said this to his disciples, *“Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”* (John 14:9). In Christ, God was manifest in ways that we had never clearly seen before in the Old Testament.

Not only is Jesus God, but He is the “firstborn over all creation.” This means....

2. He is the unique Son of God (15b).

In the early days of the church, near A.D. 315, there was a Bishop from Alexandria named Arius who taught that God the Son was at one point created by God the Father, and that before that time the Son did not exist, nor did the Holy Spirit, but the Father only. Thus, though the Son is a heavenly being who existed before the rest of creation and who is far greater than all the rest of creation, he is still not equal to the Father in all his attributes—he may even be said to be “like the Father” or “similar to the Father” in his nature, but he cannot be said to be “of the same nature” as the Father. Those who followed his teachings were called Arians.

The Arians depended heavily on texts that called Christ God’s “only begotten” Son (Jhn 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). If Christ were “begotten” by God the Father, they reasoned, it must mean that he was brought into existence by God the Father. The word “beget” in human experience refers to the father’s role in conceiving a child. We see this word used in the KJV where it talks about Adam begat Seth and so on. The Arians also pointed to this verse in Colossians, “the first-born of all creation.” They said, does not “first-born” here imply that the Son was at some point brought into existence by the Father? They used this verse and a few others to make claim that Jesus was a created being. We have some pseudo-Christian religions that teach this today. But these texts do not require us to believe

their interpretation of the text. In fact their exegesis of these passages is incorrect. According to Biblical usage and customs the correct exegesis or interpretation of the text tells us that Christ has the rights or privileges of the “first-born”.

So Col 1:15 means that Christ has the privileges of authority and rule, the privileges belonging to the “first-born,” in respect to the whole creation. Thus, it means first in position, rank, or to be supreme.

This is one of the main reasons the Council of Nicea was formed which led to the formulation of the Nicene Creed in 325. Once and for all, the early church sought to establish the divinity of Christ through this creed. And we had a series on this last year.

The third reason why Jesus should be first place in our lives is because
3. He is the creator of all things (16).

This verse tells us that Jesus was present and participating in the Creation of everything. The early church father Irenaeus put it this way, “Jesus Christ is the glove that the Father puts on when He creates the world.”

I don’t want to belabor this because if Jesus is God, it stands to reason that he is our Maker and the Creator of all things in the universe. John says, “*All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*” (John 1:3)

What I want to point though is that if we believe he is the Creator, we should always give Jesus thanks and honor.

Certainly, there is a sense in which all children should honor their fathers and mothers because they gave them birth. We owe our existence to them. How much more should we always give thanks to Christ, the Creator of all things? He did not have to create us, and he certainly did not have to save us after the fall of man. God uses this argument in Malachi 1:6. “*A son honors his father, and a*

servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?’ says the LORD Almighty.”

Because Jesus is the Creator, we should also seek to fulfill his purposes for our lives.

Every creator creates something for a purpose, and therefore our purpose is found and fulfilled in Christ. Ephesians 2:10 says, *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

It would be foolish for man to live his life without knowing and submitting to the will of his Creator. The Creator ultimately knows what’s best. He knows what will fulfill us and in what ways we will be most useful in his service. He created each one of us for specific good works.

Because Jesus is the Creator, we should also seek him for wisdom about everything. We should seek his help and wisdom in everything including freedom from sin, righteousness, salvation, future plans, education, missions, government, etc. When you want help with something, wouldn’t it always be best to ask the Creator? Listen to what Paul says, *“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”* (Col. 2:2–3).

Some years ago a South American company purchased a fine printing press from a firm in the United States. After it had been shipped and completely assembled, the workmen could not get it to operate properly. The most knowledgeable personnel tried to remedy the difficulty and bring it into proper adjustment, but to no avail. Finally the company wired a message to the manufacturer, asking that the company send a representative immediately to fix it.

Sensing the urgency of the request, the U.S. firm chose the person who had designed the press.

When he arrived on the scene, the South American officials were skeptical—the young man was obviously wet behind the ears. After some discussion, they sent this cable to the manufacturer:

‘Your man is too young; send a more experienced person.’ The reply came back: ‘He made the machine. He can fix it!’

Because Christ is the Creator, we can go to him for everything. He can fix our broken lives.

The fourth reason why Jesus should be first place in our lives is this. Because...

4. He Holds All Things Together (17).

Not only did Jesus create the universe, He sustains it. Jesus is the super glue and duct tape of the universe. He keeps everything from falling into chaos. Physicists have been debating how atoms and smaller, quarks hold together. They recognize the presence of what they term “strong force.” And they even have a name for it.

Video

If Jesus can hold the universe together in perfect balance, He can also bring perfect balance and cohesion to your broken and confused mind. Most of us aren’t really concerned about why the planets keep spinning or why the molecules in our bodies are intact—we are more interested in worrying about whether we can keep our minds or families from breaking apart.

Jesus can give you peace and rest for your troubled heart. “Come to me all who are weary and I will give rest for your souls.”

In these verses we learn that Jesus is preeminent over all creation. Now we shift a little here and see in vs. 18-20 that Christ is also preeminent over His New Creation.

II. Christ is Preeminent Over His New Creation (vs. 18-20). [read vs. 18-20].

The Bible uses different metaphors to describe the church – a family, a flock, a kingdom, a vineyard, and a bride. But of all the metaphors probably the human body is the most profound.

That is what we find in vs. 18. Paul is not referring to the head of a company, but of a body because the church is not an organization; it is an organism. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church.

The human body can survive without a finger, a hand, arm, even a leg. If you cut off the head the whole body dies. Many churches seem to forget this. If Jesus Christ is not supreme in a church, then there is no church. That was part of the trouble at Colosse. They had lost connection to Christ and as a result they were experimenting with all sorts of false doctrine and sinful behavior. Jesus Christ is the head of Fil-Am Church – not me and not any of the directors. Jesus Christ is supreme over this church and we bow before His authority.

The 2nd part of vs. 18b we read that Christ is the first resurrected. You may recall that there have been others who came back to life. The daughter of Jairus and Lazarus are two of them. That may make us wonder how this text can talk of Christ being the firstborn from the dead.

To answer this we need to look at the word firstborn in the same context as that of vs. 15. Again, firstborn, in this case is also used to denote rank or position. Jesus Christ is the firstborn from the dead because he is the only one who resurrected and did not die again. He is the very first one who conquered death permanently.

This passage affirms, Jesus is the “firstborn from among the dead.” That not only means He’s the first, but that there will be other resurrections—ours! He’s the first in the parade, but there is more to come. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we have the hope that one day even our dead bodies will be raised and changed into a resurrection body like His! Amen?

At the end of vs. 18 it reads so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. Does He truly have first place in everything?

Is he first place in your life? We know from the text that He is first above creation and the head of His church. Have you put him in that first place spot in your life?

Paul tells us in Colossians 1 that Jesus has the right of absolute supremacy because of who He is and what He has done. That means first place in everything. That means Jesus deserves preeminence and not mere prominence in our lives. Nothing in our lives should occupy the spot that Jesus deserves – first place.

In the end, it matters little what Dan Brown, C.S. Lewis or Danny Rogers says about Jesus. It all comes down to this: Who is Jesus Christ to YOU? Be careful how you answer that question because it will determine your eternal destiny.

Let me quote this poem from someone:

“In Jesus we find a love that can never be fathomed; a life that can never die; and a righteousness that can never be tarnished.

In Jesus we find a peace that can never be understood; a rest that can never be disturbed; and a joy that can never be diminished.

In Jesus there is a hope that can never be disappointed; a glory that can never be clouded; and a light that can never be darkened.

In Jesus we experience a beauty that can never be marred; a wisdom that can never be baffled; and resources that can never be exhausted.”

The Bible says Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end; the author and finisher of our faith. In Jesus Christ, you find everything you will ever need for this life and the next! That's the supremacy of Christ!