

# THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

## COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 1

We are preparing for the season in which we celebrate the birth of our savior. I can think of no better introduction to that time than the book of Colossians in which we see the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ for our entire lives, indeed, our existence.

Not only is Christ the complete focus of this book, Colossians answers the questions of society as well. I recently read the following characteristics of our times:

- Ours is an age of science. Ninety-five percent of all the scientists who have ever lived are alive today. The past century has seen a tremendous increase in knowledge in all areas of science and technology, from microbiology to astrophysics. The rapidly advancing pace of scientific discovery leads to the question of how God relates to the universe. Is he a part of the created universe, or its creator? Did the universe evolve, or was it created? **Colossians answers those questions.**
- This is also an age of ecumenism. Many people are seeking to unify the world's religions. **Colossians gives us God's perspective on the push for a one-world church.**
- Rebellion against all forms of authority also marks our age. Absolutes are denied. Truth, especially religious, is viewed as relative. All religions are assumed to be equal. To claim that one religion is exclusively true is regarded as the pinnacle of intolerance and bigotry. Jesus becomes merely another wise man. He is nothing more than a great moral teacher, on par with Moses, Muhammad, Confucius, and Buddha. **Colossians gives us Jesus' true identity.**
- This also is an age marked by frustrated relationships. People long for meaningful relationships, yet most find those longings unfulfilled. Many people do not know how to relate to their spouses, their children, or the people they work with. **Colossians speaks clearly to this issue.**

### THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE

During Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord." It was at this time that the churches in Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae were born. Paul did not plant these churches; in fact, we will see that he had never seen these people but that it was Epaphras who had presented to them the gospel.

Epaphras was apparently concerned that the heresy of the day might creep in and infect the Colossian church. That heresy would have included Hebrew legalism as well as Greek paganism. So he made the 1200 mile trip to visit Paul in prison. It was probably that visit that prompted Paul to write this letter. Based on the content of Colossians, I believe Paul is warning them more than correcting them.

In the first 8 verses we see much of Paul's traditional greeting in his letters. That doesn't mean, however, that this is generally a section we ignore or skip over. The truth of God's word is alive and powerful, even in these greetings. For example:

- The gospel is received by faith and its result is love(1:3-4)
- The gospel give us hope (1:5)
- The gospel bears fruit that is rooted in grace (1:6). The gospel is not some list of rules and guidelines meant to make the world a better place. The gospel bears fruit and brings spiritual growth. The living and active gospel transforms lives and as it does, those lives produce fruit and the influence of the gospel spreads.

It's dark. It's cold. You've been thrown into prison, and you don't know when you'll get out or when you'll eat your next meal. You bow your head to pray. What will you pray for? Safety? Deliverance? A decent meal?

If you are the apostle Paul, you pray for something far different. You talk to God about a group of people you have never seen.

Paul follows in verses 9-14 with a prayer for these saints. Saints he has never met - yet look at the love he has for them.

“And so from the day we heard...”, referring to the good report given by Epaphras, Paul and probably Timothy have been praying for this church. And they are praying for very specific things.

Paul begins by praying that they be filled with the knowledge of God's will. The Gnostics prided themselves in their knowledge. Paul's prayer is not simply that they would have knowledge, or be smarter people; he is praying that their knowledge would be fuller than that.

This term filled has a much greater meaning than we use it here in the west, We might say the glass has been filled with water, or the trash can is full. In the New Testament, however, the word implies being totally controlled. We see examples of this in:

- John 16:6 - The disciples' hearts were filled with sorrow when Jesus told them of His departure.
- Luke 5:26 - he crowd was filled with fear after Jesus healed the paralytic.
- Luke 6:11 - The scribes and Pharisees were filled with rage after Jesus healed on the Sabbath.

In each case they were totally under the control of what filled them.

And by what does Paul want them to be controlled? By “the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”. Having the knowledge of God's Word controlling our minds is the key to righteous living. What controls your thoughts will control your behavior. Self-control is a result of mind control, which is dependent on knowledge. Knowledge of God's Word will lead to all spiritual wisdom and understanding and thus, a walk worthy of the Lord.

It seems impossible to us that we can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, but that is the clear teaching of Scripture. Paul repeats this same theme in Thessalonians, Ephesians, and Philippians.

It seems impossible because in our own strength it is impossible.

There are 4 characteristics of this worthy walk:

- Fruit bearing (v10)
- Growing by the knowledge of God (v10)
- Being strengthened with all power (v11)
- Giving thanks (v12)

So, God has not left it up to us, but has given us the all-sufficient Christ to dwell in our hearts in the person of the Holy Spirit. And indeed he must give the strength.

The church has declared this very truth.

Did we in our own strength confide  
Our striving would be losing,  
Were not the right Man on our side,  
The Man of God's own choosing.  
Dost ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus, it is He.  
Lord Sabaoth His name,  
From age to age the same.  
And He must win the battle.

Paul could pray such a prayer because believers stand in a special relationship with God.

- They have been rescued (v13)
- They have been transferred into the kingdom of God's son (v13)
- They have redemption from sins (v14)

The Bible is supremely the book about the Lord Jesus Christ. All of Scripture testifies about Jesus Christ.

But of the entire Bible's teaching about Jesus Christ, **none** is more significant than Colossians 1:15–23. Here the preeminence of Christ is unmistakable. This remarkable and powerful text removes any doubt or confusion over Jesus' true identity.

Jesus is the perfect, absolutely accurate image of God. Jesus is the full, final and complete revelation of God. He is not only the representation of God; Jesus is the manifestation of God.

Paul describes him as the firstborn of all creation. Jehovah's Witnesses (and others) like to use this phrase to deny Christ's deity. They argue that as a firstborn man he certainly could not be the eternal God.

But that is not the meaning of the word here. Here it refers to position, or rank. Jesus then is the "Chief-Born" and Paul now goes on to explain what that entails.

In verse 16 and 17 we see Jesus preeminence over creation. In these two verses Paul makes five statements regarding the preeminence:

In him - By him - For him - Before all things - Sustainer of all things

He is the creator.

Jesus also has primacy over the creation because he is before all things. When the universe began, He already existed (John 1:1–2; 1 John 1:1).

Jesus has primacy over the creation because in him all things hold together. Not only did Jesus create the universe, He also sustains it. He is the one who keeps all the entities in space in their motion. He is the energy of the universe.

Jesus is preeminent over the unseen world, “whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities” referring to various ranks of angels, both good and evil. Far from being an angel, as some claim, Christ created the angels. He is above the angels, who in fact worship him and are under his authority.

Jesus is the head of the church. There are many metaphors for the church:

- Family
- Kingdom
- Flock
- Building
- Bride

But here the church is referred to as the body with Christ as the head. He is the Chief-Born so that as the result of his death and resurrection Jesus has come to have the first-place in everything.

*“...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*  
(Phil 2:8-11)

And thus, “in him all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.”

In reconciliation the sinner stands before God as his enemy, but becomes his friend. Verses 21-23 show that that reconciliation applied to the Colossians as it applies today to us. Christ is the reconciler. This is the work of Christ among us.

And Paul spells it out for us clearly:

Verse 21 - The need for Christ's work

Verse 22a - The nature of Christ's work

Verse 22b - The purpose of Christ's work

Verse 23 - The evidence of Christ's work

Finally this morning we hear Paul's proclamation to the church and his pastoral commitment to them in verses 1:24-2:1.

Paul never took for granted the ministry to which God entrusted him. He spoke of it often in his various letters. He never lost his sense of amazement that God would call him to such a task.

**The mystery revealed to the Colossians was not some secret teaching or ceremony they were to follow, but was the truth revealed to all believers in the New Covenant. It was not some wonder discovered by the genius of man. It was revealed by the will and act of God.**

And the most amazing of these mysteries was indeed, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The Old Testament predicted the coming of the Messiah. But the idea that He would actually live in His redeemed church, made up mostly of Gentiles, was not revealed. The fact that Christ indwells all believers is indeed their hope of glory!

And to that end, "Him we proclaim". Who else would we proclaim?

- He is the preeminent one.
- He is the image of the invisible God. What is God like? Jesus. In him the fullness of God dwells.
- He has created all things
- He sustains all things
- He has dominion over all things
- He is before all things
- He is the head of the church
- He is reconciling all things to himself
- He has been made known as the mystery to the Gentiles and the Church
- He is in his saints, the hope of glory

And so Paul toils and struggles to the point of exhaustion to present the saints mature in Christ, that they would be filled to the limit with the gospel. Yet not in his strength alone, oh no, it is Christ's energy that powerfully works.

Allow me to speak to the elders and their families here this morning in regard to this good work. The rest of you should also pay attention.

There is no place in ministry for lazy pastors. A pastors' job does not begin at 8 and end at 5. In fact, it is not a job at all; it is a lifestyle. Those men and their wives in this congregation, who desire eldership, take heed.

A pastor friend of mine wrote an open letter to his pastor friends a few years ago that resonates with every REAL pastor. In part he wrote:

**“No one knows the depth of pain, anguish and hardship you and your family go through on a weekly basis.** You have been handed a high calling from God that requires great sacrifice. No person in his right mind would ever take the position of a pastor. The daily glass-house that you and your family live in, can be overwhelming at times. Everywhere you go someone has an opinion on your ministry, sermon, decision, children, house, car, clothes, wife, and kids.

**Your evenings and weekends are never the same again, when most people punch out at 5PM your work increases.** Your weekend get-away is non-existent because of your responsibilities. One sin in your life can lead to the end of your eldership. You are held to a higher standard of life and people remind you often.

You rarely can appear in public without the eyes of people watching how you respond to a referee's call, an umpire's decision, or a fan's outlandish comments. **You become the conversation of people's Sunday afternoon dinners, blogs, tweets and lunchroom breaks.**

**You carry information about people and their lives to the grave that only you know.** You know way more information about decisions that have been made about people, yet can never defend your decisions with that information. You are expected to have every answer that the Bible surfaces and your kids are supposed to be perfect. If you miss a hospital visit, wedding, or party you are labeled as not caring, or not as good as the last pastor or another pastor.

**There are moments in your most honest times that you wonder if it is worth it.** It feels like people do not appreciate you, understand you, or follow you. You carry such a burden for people who have chosen to walk away from God. There are incredible attacks spiritually on your family from Satan because of your desire to exalt Christ and proclaim the Gospel.

There never seems to be a moment where you can just stop and say, look at what God is doing - because someone's marriage is failing, or sin has invaded the camp.”

Why do your elders do it? Why did Paul do it?

- It is because of the preeminence of Christ.
- It is the hope of glory.
- It is your eternal future.
- It is to present everyone mature/complete/filled up in Christ.
- It is because nothing else compares to participating in the mystery of the gospel.

And if Paul did it and your pastors are to do it, shouldn't you do it as well?

- Are you imitators of Paul?
- Do you view yourself as Paul viewed himself, as servants and stewards of Christ and his word?
- Do you consider your suffering for others a great privilege and source of joy?
- Are you concerned about whether or not our brothers and sisters in Christ and others are being presented "mature in Christ"?
- Are you willing to expend the effort and the emotion necessary to reach this end?