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# Christ – Supreme & Sufficient *in full view*

**Colossians 1:15-2:7**

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**Introduction** “Teenagers need grand and glorious things in their lives...Our teenagers go into the world every single day to find things to marvel at. They are on the lookout to be impressed by something. They love to be dazzled by things in their surroundings. But not only our teens, we were all made to be dazzled. We’re made to stand back and gape, to wonder and be overwhelmed by the glory and goodness and greatness of God. (Taken from Ted Tripp’s article titled *Dazzle Your Teen*; The Journal of Biblical Counseling; Summer 2005 – Vol.23, Number 3; p.7)

These words taken from an article that Ted Tripp wrote last summer introduce us to a life-supporting, heresy-stopping, soul-satisfying, joy-stimulating, love-spreading truth. One of the most important tasks your elders have in this church is to give you a big picture of the glory of God in the face of Christ; so big, so bright, so beautiful that your hearts will want nothing else but Christ. And in this condition of worship you will not be deluded with plausible arguments and fall for lies. You will not be like many who no longer turn to God’s Word in order to see God’s own Son and listen for God’s own intentions. People fooled by plausible arguments of the day might continue using the Bible but will replace God’s purposes with their own. This results in replacing the truth and intent of the Bible with other “authorities”: new fads in church ministry; insights drawn from the fields of social science and psychotherapy; devotional writers and speakers who have lost biblical clarity but who can effectively pull at the heartstrings of our emotions; or recognized “stars” from the worlds of sports, entertainment, politics or Christian ministry.

In the letter we set out to study for the month of October (the letter to the Colossians) Paul says in 2:4 “I say this in order that no one may delude you (i.e. con, fool, mislead) with plausible arguments”. What we are about to hear this morning has this purpose in mind.

## **Christ – Supremacy and Sufficiency in full view** **1.15-2:7**

Last week we read the Apostle Paul’s introduction of the letter to the Colossians. We noticed that even in introductions, Paul cannot be shallow. He put forth Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency to the Christians in the Lycus valley in order to reassure them and to remind them of precious truths regarding Christ. The point of this introduction was that they mustn’t give their attention to the false teachings of the day as though they needed anything but Christ. Christ is supreme and so the believers at Colossae have in Him more than they need to carry out their daily lives.

Now that the introductions are over, Paul launches out into a grand description of Christ to marvel at his supremacy and sufficiency. My aim this morning is Paul's agenda in the following four paragraphs. Undoubtedly, the false teachers of the day were attacking the nature of Christ. If they could erode his infinite attributes and reduce him to part of creation, they would then have a shot at influencing the church with their new improved teaching.

To keep the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in full view they needed to be reminded of four things. My goal this morning is to remind you of these four things.

1. Be dazzled by Christ (v.15-20).
2. Be devoted to Christ (v.21-23).
3. Be discerning of Bible ministry (v.24-2:5).
4. Be developing in Bible basics (v.6-7).

Let's start where Paul starts.

### **Be dazzled by Christ**

**v.15-20**

In vv.15-20 we notice how Paul praises Christ's supremacy. If the church is to stay clear of false teaching it needs to be dazzled by Christ Himself. Listen with your eyes as you follow along the reading of v.15-20.

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

### **In creation**

**v.15-17**

In order to be dazzled by Christ, first we see Christ's supremacy in creation; v.15-17.

*He is the image of the invisible God*

Christ is seen here as God Himself. The invisible God made visible for man to see (and worship) is taught in v.15-17. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament make clear that "no one has ever seen God". But by this phrase Paul states that Christ Jesus has done what no one else has done or can do. **He makes God visible because He is God.** Christ came to earth as a man without giving up his divinity. He is the true image of God who came to restore the image of God in man (cf. 3:10; see also Gen.1:28, 29). Christ; the image of the invisible God.

*The first-born of all creation*

Moreover, according to the phrase "the first-born of all creation", Paul reminds the church of the nature of Christ. Jesus is the King of the

Universe who created EVERYTHING; things seen and things unseen. He was not created. He is the Creator.

The effects of not believing vv.15-17 came to my attention some months back when I was in a coffee shop.

(Describe how a lady tried to this verse to “prove” that Jesus was created. Talk about how it was brought to her attention that the term “firstborn” is frequently used in the O.T. [approx. 130 times in the LXX] to denote priority, rank or first as heir of an inheritance. Highlight Ps.89:27 and how it refers to the Davidic king as the highest of the kings of the earth. Point out that the following verse gives proof of this interpretation)

The effects of not believing this paragraph were blatant. She was not dazzled at God in Christ. She would not bow in worship to Jesus.

Paul uses the term “firstborn” to indicate that Christ is supreme, ultimate; he is the highest. And we...we are to be awe-struck and breathless when we view the utmost Jesus Christ himself.

*He is before all things and in him all things hold together*

And not only is He the Creator of everything but in v.17 Paul tells us that He is the Sustainer of everything. All things hold together by His powerful will. One of my daughter’s text books for school described the affects of gravity by saying in effect, “the world without gravity would fly out into a million pieces like mud flung all around”. As I thought of this verse, I marveled at Christ’s power. But not merely the world does He hold together continuously. He does this with all the created order. (show slide of the galaxy).

Here before us is mind-boggling, soul-spinning, awesome Christology. But the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ is not to be theoretical. Notice how Paul follows up his description of the supremacy of Christ in v.18-20.

### **In the church**

### **v.18-20**

He talks about Christ as He relates to the Church. Follow along as I pick up our reading of Scripture starting in v.18.

*And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything his might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

*Head of the body, the Church*

We see Christ first as head of the Body. The Colossians (and we) were to understand Christ’s supremacy not merely over the heavenly bodies but also over the earthly body; the church. We aren’t to view the exalted Christ merely as way up there. We need to see Him also as right down here. The notation that Christ is the Head of the body gives the church the teaching on Christ’s authority over and sufficiency for God’s people. The living relationship between God’s people and

Christ is highlighted. To discredit a current heresy that called Christ's supremacy and sufficiency into question, Paul uses this imagery to demonstrate that we are utterly dependent upon Christ for life and power. His supremacy is our sufficiency.

*He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead*

Also, notice Paul's description of the supreme Christ as the firstborn from the dead. Here, we have reference to Christ's resurrection. But this description is more than telling the church that Christ is the first to rise from the dead. This phrase is reminding the saints at Colossae that Christ is the Author of life (cf. Acts 3:15). He is the One and only one who can give life to those who are dead in their sins (2:13). The church is therefore the company of those who share His resurrected life. They do not have to listen to any teacher who claims that (s)he can supplement Christ. Christ needs no enhancement! He is alive from the dead to reign over his people with all that He is for all that they need.

*In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile all things to himself*

To finish this sublime paragraph, Paul tacks on two more descriptions of the amazing Christ. He longs for the church to be dazzled with Christ. He is concerned that they are vulnerable to other teachings of the day that would lead them astray. And so, in v.19-20 he talks about Christ's incarnation and reconciling work. He puts before the Church the teaching that God gladly became a man in order to atone for the sins of man through the blood of his cross. This teaching unquestionably came to the first century church with power.

We can see how wonderful this teaching was to them (and rich to us) by noticing the supremacy of Christ coming down as a man to reconcile His people to himself by dying on the cross. We need no others to bring us to God – no mystical entities or powers, no third parties, no human sponsors, no mediator between God and man except the One in full view this morning; Jesus Christ.

Paul's contention throughout the letter is to demonstrate that since Christ is supreme Christ then is sufficient. In v.15-20, a most striking depiction of Christ is given to the church at Colossae. We are to stand in awe over the pre-existent One who has revealed the very nature and character of God, who created and sustains the entire universe, who came down to earth as a man, who went to the cross to die for His people, who was resurrected from the dead to lead and provide for a new humanity (the church). He alone is preeminent. He is worthy of praise due to His supremacy over the entire universe and due to His sufficiency for the entire church.

The point is plain. Jesus is indescribable, unspeakable, beyond words! Nothing can be added to Him in order to make us better. Beloved, to keep Christ before you and to keep false teaching away from you **BE DAZZLED BY CHRIST!**

## **Be devoted to Christ**

**v.21-23c**

Secondly, to keep Him before you and false teaching away from you be devoted to Christ. This we see in the next paragraph as Paul describes the Colossian's conversion.

The apostle considers it wise in v.21-23 to remind them of a matchless thing Christ has done for them. This unparalleled reality is known as reconciliation. He talks about their reconciliation at this point in his letter to present a "case study" if you will of the sufficiency of Christ. This was to lead them on in their devotion to Christ.

*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven...*

For clarity, we might be able to outline this paragraph in three parts.

### **You once were**

**v.21**

*Alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds.* In v.21 we get an account not only of the saints at Colossae but of us too. Everyone begins life alienated from God (cf. Eph.2:1-3). All human beings are on bad terms with God due to sin. This estrangement is viewed here as hostile in mind. Nobody apart from the miraculous work of God in Christ through reconciliation is friends with God. The mind is antagonistic toward His rule and reign over everything and everyone.

From this kind of mind come all sorts of evil behavior. Apart from God, angry at Him and doing evil acts is a description of all of us. This grave predicament has no hope apart from v.22.

### **You now are**

**v.22**

The message of Christ's peace-making work on the cross has particular reference to the Colossians. In v.22, we witness the fact that the death of Christ on the cross has as its goal the condition of His people for the final day when they will stand before him. Making enemies into friends through His death, Christ prepared His people to stand perfectly before the holy judge of the universe.

"You once were but now you are" is the testimony of a Christian. But for this testimony to be authentic v.23a needs to be witnessed.

### **You must now**

**v.23a**

Authentic conversion leads to actual continuance. This is what we notice in v.23a. Remember, Paul is chiefly saying all of this "in order that no one may delude [them] with plausible arguments (see 2:4). To keep clear of the false teachers' he says that they are to not only be dazzled by Christ but they need to be devoted to Christ. Loyalty to the gospel is the sign of true conversion. They mustn't listen to people who say that the gospel isn't enough. They

mustn't shift from the hope of the gospel. The non-optional command to continue in the faith is to be heard and heeded by Christ's people.

The point: Jesus is perfect and His message is peerless. This demands devotion to Him throughout our lives. Beloved, to keep Christ before you and to keep false teaching away from you **BE DEVOTED TO CHRIST!**

## **Be discerning of Bible ministry**

**v.23b-2:5**

Having seen Christ's perfections and the Colossians perseverance, Paul next focuses their attention upon his own commission v.23b-2:5. Paul's ministry is put forward as a pattern of genuine biblical ministry. The false teachers without question were challenging Paul's doctrine and position. If they could erode the Church's confidence in Paul they would have a shot at influencing them. And so what we have in this paragraph is Paul's mission and pastoral concern functioning as a prototype of Bible ministry

Paul's biblical ministry can be broken down into two areas.

1. "Of which I became a minister (of the gospel)" v.23d
2. "Of which I became a minister (of God's people)" v.25a

In other words, biblical ministry serves God's gospel to God's people. Biblical ministry is concerned with truth and people. Biblical ministry cares much about getting it right and getting it across. Biblical ministry speaks the truth in love; dedicated to God's message and devoted to God's people.

With that as a pattern of biblical ministry, let's briefly walk through this paragraph to see what effect this type of ministry is to have on Clearcreek Chapel.

### **First, biblical ministry makes the word of God fully known**

**v.24-27**

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body that is the church of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you **to make the word of God fully known**, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Paul describes purposefully his suffering and his God-given ministry. The intent was to make the word of God fully known to them. "Filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" does not mean that he viewed Christ's death as insufficient (Paul's whole aim in this letter is to argue for just the opposite; namely that since Christ is supreme then Christ is sufficient). May it never be! Though this is a difficult phrase to interpret, John Piper in his book *Let the Nations be Glad* was on the mark when he said of this passage "Christ's afflictions are not lacking in their atoning sufficiency. They are lacking in that they are not known and felt by people who were not at the cross. Paul dedicates himself not only to carry the message of those sufferings to the nations but also to suffer with Christ and for Christ in such a way so that what people see are "Christ's sufferings" (p.92).

Paul took great joy in his embattled mission as he made the mystery of the New Covenant clear to God's people. *Christ in you, the hope of glory.* Paul (and biblical ministry in general) models the suffering Messiah as he makes the word of God fully known.

**Secondly, biblical ministry makes the people of God fully mature v.28-29**

Follow along as I read God's word to see another effect biblical ministry is to have.

*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

The second mark of biblical ministry can be seen in these verses. All the hard work and struggles and the proclamations and the admonitions were all aimed at making everyone mature in Christ. Biblical ministry makes the people of God fully mature.

**Thirdly, biblical ministry makes the people of God fully united. 2:1-3**

Paul continues talking about his ministry by now highlighting his concerns. In chapter 2:1-3 we read

*For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

The upshot initially of the false teachers' influence was one of disunity. Paul makes it plain to them that his biblical ministry with all the struggles was to bring about encouragement that would lead to being knitted together in love. God's people fully united is a result of biblical ministry.

**Fourthly, biblical ministry makes the people of God fully secure. v. 4-5**

Paul rounds out his talk about himself as a way to make clear what biblical ministry looks like by mentioning why he wrote the letter. Here we come to his pastoral heartbeat. Here we see what biblical ministry is to do for God's people. Follow along as I read v.4-5.

*I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.*

Though Paul was not present with them (remember, he is in prison at this time; 4:3, 10,18), he rejoiced to see them someday. And when he finally could see them, he longed to see their careful and orderly ways springing from the stability of their faith in Christ. Biblical ministry, modeled here by the Apostle Paul, makes the people of God fully secure.

## Be dedicated to Bible basics

v.6-7

We come now to the last paragraph in the message for today; v.6-7. If we are to keep the supreme and sufficient Christ in front of us and keep false teaching away from us we must 1) be dazzled by Christ 2) devoted to Him 3) discerning of Bible ministry and lastly seen in v.6-7 we must be dedicated to Bible basics. Follow along as I read v.6-7.

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

In the space of a few brief words the apostle says that receiving Christ is not an end but rather a means to an end – it is a beginning of a life-long submission to Jesus Christ as Master.

Paul summarizes many of the important ideas already spelled out in the letter in these two verses. Before Paul deals overtly with the false teaching of the day (in 2:8-23) he instructs the readers as to what is involved in true Christianity.

To keep the greatness of Christ before our affections and to stay clear of the counterfeits circulating today, beloved be dedicated to Bible basics. Here are the basics.

### **Bible Basic #1 As you received Christ Jesus the Lord...so walk**

What God has brought together let no man separate! Bible Basic #1 is crucial. The Colossians had received the tradition and teaching of Jesus Christ from Epaphras. Never was there a time when the church believed that the Messiah was not the master. The lordship of Jesus was the tradition received by the Colossians. They (and we) are commanded to bow the knee to Christ in daily living. There is no separation between believing and behaving. Beloved, continue to live in submission to the Lord Jesus in daily living. This is Bible Basic #1.

(What specifically is meant by “walking” is addressed by Paul in the four following participles. Lest we make this part of the message into a grammar lesson, I simply will state the teaching of this paragraph. Should you want additional rationale for the interpretation, see me afterwards.<sup>1</sup>)

### **Bible Basic #2 As you were rooted...continue being built up in Him**

Having been rooted by God’s doing in Jesus Christ, the Colossians were exhorted to continue edifying each other in Christ. Once the seed of the Word sends out its roots into our hearts (i.e. regeneration; see James 1:21), the Bible talks about the Christian life as one of ongoing vigorous growth (see 1:6). Bible basic #2 is never

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<sup>1</sup> “walk” is the verb. There are four participles that follow. 1) rooted, 2) built up, 3) established and 4) abounding. They all are in the passive voice denoting God’s activity in their lives. The first participle (rooted) is in the perfect tense denoting a completed action that has present effects. The following three participles are in the present tense pointing to the Christian’s ongoing behavior. It reads like this: “having been rooted and now being built up in Him and being established in the faith...and overflowing with thanksgiving”.



become complacent. Growth by means of building each other up in Christ is commonplace in Christianity.

**Bible Basic #3 As you were taught...continue being established in the faith and overflowing with thanksgiving**

Paul concludes his exhortation on Bible basics by urging the Colossians to be well founded in the body of faith they had been taught by Epaphras. This Bible basic is about continual learning of the doctrines of our faith. There must have an appetite for knowledge that translates into daily living that gives expression in thanksgiving. Interpretation and application are held together in Paul's mind. We are to thirst for insights into the Bible with an eye to apply. This is Bible Basic #3.

The legendary J. Gresham Machen once said of this letter "In refutation, Paul proceeds positively rather than negatively...He points out the all-sufficiency of what the Colossians have already received, in order to prevent them from seeking anything new".

In the article "Dazzle your Teens", Dr. Tripp said well. We are on a hunt. We need grand and glorious things in their lives...We go into the world every single day to find things to marvel at. We are on the lookout to be impressed by something.

Beloved, we will all be dazzled in this life. The question is "what will hold our attention? The glorious Christ or a stand in. What has your heart? Trends and trinkets and teachings and technologies? Beloved, we're made to stand back and wonder at the glory and goodness and greatness of God seen in Christ. To keep Him before us and to keep substitutes away from us remember four things.

1. Be dazzled by Christ
2. Be devoted to Christ
3. Be discerning of Bible ministry
4. Be dedicated to Bible basics