

## **The Supremacy of Christ Jesus - The Living Gospel Colossians 1:15-23**

### **Introduction**

This letter to the Colossians is from Paul the Apostle, one of the early Christian movement leaders. He writes to a group of believers in Colosse, a small town in South-Western Turkey. Paul had never met these Christians personally, but he wrote this letter with a clear purpose: to re-focus their attention on what he calls "the gospel."

A couple of weeks ago, we learned that the term "gospel" was not originally a Christian term. In Paul's Day, the term "gospel" was a technical term used in the Roman Empire to announce or proclaim news about Caesar himself or about one of his many victories in battle. Caesar would send out Heralds throughout the Empire proclaiming "the Gospel" or the "good news." These proclamations would be presented as world-changing events and followed with a summons for the people to put their trust in Caesar and the Roman Empire.

At the time of writing this letter, Paul was in prison in Rome. Probably familiar with the secular use of "the gospel," Paul takes it and applies it to the message about Jesus Christ. However, he says that "the gospel of Jesus Christ" announces a far greater ruler than Caesar and his kingdom.

The Christian "gospel" is the good news that Jesus Christ has come to bring salvation and establish an eternal kingdom. The Christian gospel is the announcement that Jesus won a great victory for humanity and now summons every person to entrust themselves to Jesus.

Why does Paul want to re-focus the Colossians on the gospel? It's because pseudo-Christian teachers taught that the gospel was merely a spiritual "starter kit"—and from there, people needed to graduate to other spiritual "secrets" to attain spiritual fullness. These false teachers were interjecting Gnosticism into the Christian teachings. Gnosticism was perhaps the most dangerous heresy that threatened the early church during the first three centuries. Philosophers, like Plato had a significant influence on Gnostic teachers.

Gnosticism is based on two false premises. First, it advocates a dualism regarding spirit and matter. Gnostics teach that matter and materialism is inherently evil, and the spirit and spirituality is the only good. As a result, Gnostics believe anything done in the body, even the grossest sin, doesn't mean anything because real life only exists in the spirit realm. You can commit any sin you want because your body isn't going to last anyway. What's important is your spirit. Second, Gnostics claim to possess an elevated knowledge, a "higher truth" known only to the truly spiritual. The word "Gnosticism" comes from the Greek word gnosis, meaning "to know." Gnostics claim a higher knowledge, not from the bible, but from a higher plane of existence. Gnostics see themselves as a privileged class elevated above

the simple-minded. They claim to have a deeper understanding of life and a higher knowledge of God. Paul rejects this and argues that genuine spiritual development depends on growing in understanding and appreciation of the gospel.

Paul spends the first half of his letter explaining and expounding the real meaning of the gospel. He reminds the Colossians that Jesus is the Living Gospel. Jesus is the Messiah who has come down from Heaven with the good news of redemption and restoration. Jesus is the Messiah who has come down to provide us with forgiveness and faith so we can rise above the sin of this life.

If Jesus was only a lower spirit-being (as some were claiming to the Colossians) or a moral teacher or prophet (as many claim today)—then he cannot be the remedy for sin. He can only point us in that direction. We could only hope that He could give us some help toward spiritual wholeness.

But in verses 15-20, Paul shares some profound truth, declaring the absolute supremacy of Jesus. He says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him, all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His Cross." (Col 1:15-20 NKJV)

### **The Preeminence of Christ**

Paul says Jesus is absolutely a supreme being in every way. It is one of the most important and deifying statements made about Jesus in the New Testament. It is a profound description of who Jesus is!

Notice that in these five verses, Paul uses the word "all" seven times and insists that Jesus is supreme in everything. In verse 18, Paul actually says, "that in all things He may have the preeminence." Jesus is the preeminent or supreme being. There is no other word that more fully emphasizes the supremacy of Christ over everything.

In the Book of Ezekiel, the prophet sees a vision of angelic beings that are so glorious he is tempted to bow down and worship them. But then he sees the one true God towering far above them. Paul says that Jesus is not one of the angelic or living creatures; Jesus is the God that towers above them.

Let's look at what Paul asserts here about Jesus.

### **I. Jesus is the Perfect Revelation of God**

The first thing Paul says is that Jesus is the unique and perfect revelation of God. Jesus is not merely an angelic spirit being or a prophet or an enlightened guru. Jesus is the image of God. When you look at Jesus, you are seeing God manifested in human flesh. All of the fullness of God dwells in him alone. Jesus is not just a spiritual teacher or a manifestation of God-consciousness, or a heavenly avatar. Jesus is the unique Messiah sent by the Godhead to reveal God's plan to all of humanity.

John begins his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (Joh 1:1-4 NKJV)

In verse 14, he says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (Joh 1:14 NKJV)

Jesus is all that is knowable and all that we can understand about God.

## **II. Jesus is the Absolute Owner of the Universe**

Jesus is the absolute Owner of the entire Universe.

He is also "the firstborn over all creation. For by Him, all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." (Col 1:15-17 NKJV)

"First-born" does not mean that Jesus was the first created being; it means that Jesus is the rightful heir and owner of everything.

Paul offers these reasons why:

1. Jesus created the Universe (everything material – including humans and angels).
2. The Universe is made for Jesus.
3. He predates the Universe.
4. Jesus holds the Universe together (both physically and metaphysically).

Jesus is what makes it all fit together. Because of Jesus, the material world makes sense. These are titanic claims Paul is making about Jesus.

## **III. Jesus is the Redeemer of Our Broken Universe**

Jesus is the sole Redeemer of our broken world. In verse 18, Paul says, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by

Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His Cross." (Col 1:18-20 NKJV)

God's creation is broken! Our world is broken! We are broken! We were made in the image of God. But because of sin, we die! Sin corrupts us and causes us to oppose God. We misuse the power and skills God gives us to exploit and oppress others and further break this world. Since the very first sin in the Garden of Eden, our environment began to deteriorate. Our world is broken ecologically. Nature doesn't even work properly because of the sin and curse upon it. Just look around, and you can see a world that is depleting its resources and destroying the environment. In over six thousand years, all we have managed to do is produce wars and enslave humanity. America is supposed to be the "land of the free and home of the brave." Yet, the majority of Americans are living in fear and confined to small spaces. There is no doubt we live in a world that is broken, broken, broken!

Can anyone fix this problem? The answer is Yes! The purpose of Christ's coming is to rescue and mend His creation. Christ must and will return to the earth to mend the brokenness of our world. He is the only one who can do it. He is not one of many ways to salvation; he is the only Savior.

Religion enslaves people; Jesus saves them. It took the Cross to defeat sin and death, and it took the Resurrection to begin creation's healing and restoration. When Paul says that Jesus "made peace through the blood of his cross," he does not mean that Jesus will save all humans and angels. He means that it is the death of Jesus on the Cross that saves and rescues every repentant person and establishes Jesus as the Lord to whom "every knee shall bow" (Phil.2:10,11)—including his unrepentant enemies.

We live in an age that refuses to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Creator of the Universe. Everything said or taught about Jesus seems to be ambiguous. Today, pastors and preachers are some of the most gifted and eloquent orators and some of the gospel's worst communicators. They're great at telling stories and modernizing psychology and self-help, and making church fun for everyone. Add in Hollywood's take on Christianity with the Divinci Code, the Gospel of Thomas, and Angels and Demons, and the History Channel's constant attempts to rewrite history, and you've got a recipe for disillusionment and apathy. Most all of the great minds of our day love to leave you with the question, "How can we really know who this Jesus was, or if he even existed?"

Does that make Paul's Jesus the figment of his imagination or some myth he heard from others? No, not at all! Paul paints the same portrait that the Old Testament prophets did to describe and predict the coming Messiah. It is the same claim Jesus made himself in John 14:9 when Phillip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (Joh 14:8-9 NKJV)

Or when the High Priest asked Jesus at His arrest, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." (Mar 14:61-62 NKJV)

It is this same Jesus that the earliest Christians suffered and died for proclaiming, "Jesus is Lord." You can not manipulate Jesus to fit your own personal preferences and then bow down to Him as if He were a statue of everything you want Him to be. Jesus is God, and when He confronts you, you must either accept Him or reject Him.

Your faith doesn't create Jesus. The value of faith is that it enables you to accept the reality of something that is real even though you can't see it. You don't create the reality; that's presumption or an illusion. Faith believes in who Jesus is and what he came to give you. Faith enables you to receive what only Jesus can provide and promises to you. So if you claim that Jesus has promised you something, then you should be able to produce the reality of that promise as a testimony to Christ's provision. That's why Paul tells Timothy, "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that Day."

Paul is calling these believers at Colosse back to the gospel. You either believe Jesus is the Christ and can save you, or you reject Him as the Savior. There is no neutral ground about this. Jesus said, "If you're not for me, you're against me." Paul says Jesus is absolutely supreme. That's the claim. Who Jesus is, is vitally important because who you believe he is, determines what you believe he can provide for you.

We don't graduate beyond or outgrow our relationship with Jesus. He is all that there is! The word the bible uses to describe Christ's provision is the word salvation.

## Conclusion

Because Jesus is supreme, He can save us! But suddenly, beginning in verse 21, the language changes to up-close-and-personal. This Jesus, who is supreme over the whole Universe, is also the One who loves us and came to save us. Verse 21 says, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister." (Col 1:21-23 NKJV)

I like to read this with "I" and "me." Paul speaks of two different aspects of this salvation.

First, he talks about reconciliation with God. Reconciliation is re-establishing a relationship between people by resolving the root causes of their conflict. Because

of our sin and rebellion, we have turned away from God. But God took the initiative to try and reconcile with us. Because of Jesus' death on the Cross, God is willing to fellowship with us again. When we end our rebellion and receive Jesus' forgiveness, we become permanently reconciled to God. Have you been reconciled to God—or are you still a fugitive?

The second aspect of salvation is the transforming work of Christ in our lives. Jesus reconciles us to God so that He can present us "holy and blameless and beyond reproach." Jesus wants to forgive you of sin's penalty, but he also wants to heal you from sin's corrupting and destructive power. He wants to restore your life from the inside out so that you become more and more like the person God created you to be.

The moment you choose reconciliation, the Holy Spirit begins this transformation. The only condition is that you stay focused on the gospel (1:23). As you stay focused on Jesus and his love for you, the Holy Spirit gradually transforms your life (2Cor.3:18). So set your heart on Jesus and let him re-created within you God's purpose and joy and hope for eternity.