

“The Preeminence of Christ”

Colossians 1:15-17 v.17 and beginning v.18-23 [Part 5]

I. DOCTRINE:

CHRIST’S PREEMINENCE DECLARED—Colossians 1

C. Christ’s Preeminence Declared in the Work of Creation –1:15-17

- 1. Jesus is Actually God—v.15**
- 2. Jesus is the Architect of Creation—v.16**
 - a. Christ is Creation’s Author—“by Him”**
 - b. Christ is Creation’s Agent—“through Him”**
 - c. Christ is Creation’s Aim—“for Him”**

Note We have noted over the past several weeks that Jesus holds supremacy over the created universe. The creation (all things that exist, seen and unseen) get their being from Him, having been created by Him, and are there for His glory.

To complete his span of teaching on Jesus and His relation to the creation, Paul finishes with Christ as the One who also keeps the creation intact.

3. Jesus is the Adhesive of Creation—“And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Note We talked about this some last week with the illustration of the atoms and the order of the universe.

Two things flow from v.17.

Jesus existed before any of the creation was made. Many passages bear this out. John 1:1; 8:58; 17:5; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Phil 2:6; Revelation 22:13

Without Jesus the universe would cease to cohere. IOW—Nothing would be stable in the universe. It would be total chaos. Though it may look like chaos now it is working in beautiful order. Things work just as they were created to work even though sin has corrupted the creation. Notice the words, “*hold together.*”

This word means, “to be or become composed of many parts into a cohesive and enduring whole.” It is used only one other time in the NT. 2 Peter 3:5

2 Peter 3:5 (ESV) [Peter speaks in this chapter about those who scoff and joke about the promises of Christ’s return.]

5 For they deliberately [*or strongly desire to*] overlook [*they fail to recognize and understand*] this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was **formed** [*This is the same word Paul uses in v.17. It is perfect tense, meaning the creation took place and continues on in present time.*] out of water and through water by the word of God,

Note Everything throughout history has been and continues to be “*held together*” by the word of Christ.

Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

3 . he upholds the universe by the word of his power. .

Appl How fickle we are. How small our faith is. The One who created the universe and keeps it running with no effort on His part is the One that watches over me. If He can maintain the stars and planets, if He can control the natural order of all things, then why do I have such a difficult time trusting that He can control me? The fact is that He delights to control me and meet my every need. Nothing is too small that He would not be concerned with it, and nothing is too big that He cannot manage it.

Note That brings us to the last doctrinal point in this section. Christ’s preeminence in the gospel, in the work of reconciliation and in the work of creation is undisputed. But, in this last passage, v.18-23, we see an equally important place of preeminence. It is Christ’s preeminence declared in the church.

Note Paul has covered many points of argument to persuade that Jesus is the preeminent Person in all of time and eternity. He started with the **evangelical** (gospel), then moved to the **soteriological** (redemption), then to the **cosmological** (creation), and finally now he moves to the **ecclesiastical**(church).

D. Christ’s Preeminence Declared in the Church—v.18-23

Note One might think it unnecessary to defend the Lord's place of preeminence in the church that He redeemed with His own blood, but here we have one of the most direct and poignant passages to that effect.

The companion passage to this one is found in Ephesians 1:22-23.

Ephesians 1:22-23 (ESV)

22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as **head over all things to the church, 23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

1. Christ Holds Preeminence in the Church—v.18 *“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.”*

In this verse Paul gives four truths about Christ and His relation to the church.

a. Christ is the Commander (Head of the church)—*“he is the head of the body”*

Note The starting words in v.18 “He is” are emphatic. It literally reads *“He and He alone; or He and no other.”* If you carried it from the previous verses it would read, “He who is the Head of Creation and the Head of Nature is also the Head of Grace.”

The church in Scripture is likened to many things descriptively. It is a family, a vineyard, a flock, a building and a bride. But, there is no description that is more relative to the church than the **body**.

This term does not recognize the head as leading an army or a business or government. Rather, it is a symbiotic relationship to a living organism. The church is a living entity. As Head, Christ controls the entire body. He is the brain of the organism. Without Him the true church would not exist. He provides life and direction for it.

Quote Vine writes;

“He will forever fill all things in all the members, all their activities being under His authority and direction.”

Note There is no better passage to explain this than 1 Corinthians 12. He provides the unity lived out among its membership.

1 Corinthians 12:12-20 (ESV)

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. **14** For the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? **18** But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19** If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

He gifts it with energy and spiritual power so that the gifts given by the Spirit meet the needs of the body.

1 Corinthians 12:4-13 (ESV)

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; **5** and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; **6** and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. **7** To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. **8** For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, **9** to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, **10** to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. **11** All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. **12** For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

There is a great deal of support for the members when they follow the divine pattern of the Head and experience spiritual growth as a result. This was what Paul meant when he wrote in Ephesians 4:15-16.

Ephesians 4:15–16 (ESV)

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Christ becomes the goal, the example to follow. Christ is the means through which we grow because of His ever sufficient grace and power given to us through His Word; and He is the object of our growth because as 1 John 4:17 says, “*as He is so are we in the world.*”

Christ is the Head of the church!

b. Christ is the Cause (Source of the church)—“*He is the beginning*”

Note This phrase has been understood in various ways.

Governor of the world

Originator of the world

Cause or Source of God’s creation

Though these things have truth in them they are not specifically what Paul is talking about.

The verb “is” is present tense and speaks of being that is continually present. So, He had no beginning as we think of beginning.

The word he uses here for “*beginning*” is [archē]. Here it means, “the first cause; one with whom a process begins.” He is the agent of a first cause of which there was no previous cause. He is the initial starting point; the source.

Quote Barclay writes about this word as it appears in v.18;

“... in the present context it means a double sense. It means not only first in the sense of time, as, for instance, the beginning of the alphabet and the beginning of the series of numbers. It means first in the sense of the thing which something came, the power which set something in operation. We will see more clearly what Paul is getting at, if we remember what he has just said. The Christ; and the creation Christ.”

The church has its initiation in Him from eternity past.

Ephesians 1:4 (ESV)

4 even as he [*the Father*] chose us in him [*the Son*] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

What process or cause is he referring to? The new process or cause was the church. The new creation born by the Spirit through the work of Christ's birth, life, death, burial and resurrection.

As Head of the Body, Jesus holds the chief position, or highest rank in the church. As the, He is its originator.

c. Christ is the Conception (Life of the church)—“*the firstborn from the dead*”

Note As it's creator and Organic Head, He gives life to the church and that life is the life of His own resurrection. His resurrection life now becomes the prototype for all those resurrected or who will be resurrected.

In this passage the word “*firstborn*” speaks of Christ as the very first One to rise from the dead by their own power, with no dependent outside source.

John speaks of Jesus the same way in Revelation 1:5.

Revelation 1:5 (ESV)

5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, **the firstborn of the dead**, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood

Christ is not merely someone Who lived and died and of Whom we read and learn. He is someone Who, because of His Resurrection, is alive for evermore and Whom we meet and experience, not a dead hero nor a past founder, but a Living Person.

Note It is very interesting how this phrase is worded. He says, “*he is the firstborn from the dead.*” The word “*from*” is the preposition [**ek**] which means, “out of the midst of something.” So, Jesus is the One who raised Himself out from the midst of death (or the dead).

You remember that Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “*today you will be with Me in paradise.*” That was the abode of the dead, where all the OT saints went and were comforted. In Luke 16:19-31 the rich man died and went to a place of torment called Hades, but Lazarus went to Abraham’s bosom. This is the place Jesus went for three days in the heart of the earth after His death on the cross. The place He promised the thief he would go.

Jesus was resurrected out of the midst of that place; the place of the dead.

Romans 10:6-7 (ESV) [Quote from Deut 30:12-13]

6 But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, `Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) **7** "or `Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up **from** [*Same preposition as in Col 1:18*] the dead). [*The point is that people don't have to do unbelievable or impossible acts to gain salvation. Christ has already come down from Heaven; and Christ has already risen from among the dead.*]

Hebrews 13:20 (ESV)

20 Now may the God of peace who brought again **from** [*Same preposition as in Col 1:18*] the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,

Note Jesus is the Head of the Church. Jesus is the Source of the Church. Jesus is the Life of the Church.

c. Christ is the Crown (Preeminence in the church)—“*the firstborn from the dead*”

Note All these places that Jesus holds in the church leads to one thing. Christ is to be the preeminent One in the church. If He is not, then the church is not fulfilling the dictate of Scripture. It is disobedient!

To what extent is He to fulfill this place as Head? Paul says He is to have this place in “*all things.*” The word literally means, “that which constitutes the full quantity or extent; entirety; complete.” IOW—Jesus has reign and control and preeminence in everything no matter how small or insignificant it might seem to our human understanding.

This is saying that Jesus is the One who has full control over the visible world, the unseen world and the church. The word “*preeminent*” means, “to be

first; to be or become ranking above all others.” This is the only time this verb is used in the NT, but it speaks volumes to us as those who have been called to follow Christ and who make up His church in the world. Christ’s preeminence is the final result of all that has been said about Him.

Paul is trying to get across the point that Jesus is not just another emanation from God. He is God, and as God who conquered every foe, he has the right and should have first place in everything in life. Everything!

Questions:

Do you view Jesus as the Head of the church (specifically Bethany Bible Church)?

Do you recognize the existence of the church as coming from Jesus alone?

How much do you contemplate the resurrection of Jesus as the life giving power of the church?

Does Jesus hold “first place” in the life of His church here at Bethany?

Does Jesus hold “first place” in your life? (Or is He just the occasional go to person when you feel you need a little extra boost.) Is He the all present Lord who rules you and all that you possess and do? Is there some area of life that you have shut away and held back for yourself? If so, Jesus is not preeminent to you.

Give Him first place in every area of your life, so that all the closets of your life are opened to Him and He has full reign over them.