

## **“The Pre-eminence of Jesus Christ”**

*May 28, 2017*

Colossians 1:15-19

### **I. Introduction**

Since it's been several weeks since we were in Colossians, let's recap a little. A man by the name of Epaphras had planted a church in the city of Colossae. Several years after the church had been in existence, attacks from within and without had come. So-called wise men, or Gnostics, had come who claimed that God was good but matter was evil. They also claimed that God had created beings or emanations that had created other beings or emanations that had eventually created Jesus Christ. For this reason, Jesus Christ was not unique, but merely an emanation or an intermediary between God and man. Therefore, Jesus Christ was less than God. Jesus may stand high, even the highest, in the series of creations or emanations from God, but still He was one among many and for that reason was not the only way to salvation—there were many different paths. Finally, these so-called wise men taught that a secret, higher knowledge above Scripture was necessary for true enlightenment and true salvation. It was the task of humanity to find the way to God, climbing up the ladder by special knowledge and even special passwords. Sounds a little like what we hear today, doesn't it.

Epaphras had traveled to Rome to get help from Paul who was under guard there. Paul wrote the Letter to the Colossians from prison in Rome sometime around AD 60. He wrote this letter to warn the Colossians against the heresy they faced and then sent the letter to them with Tychicus, who was on his way to Colossae with Onesimus.

Of all the Bible's teachings about Jesus Christ, none is more significant than those found in today's Scripture. In these verses, Paul summarized the doctrines about Jesus Christ as he proved “The Pre-eminence of Jesus Christ” and His deity.

## II. The Pre-eminence of Jesus Christ

**A. First,** Paul wrote that **Jesus is the image of the invisible God.** Man is made in the image of God—turn to [Genesis 1:26-27](#). Man was created in God’s image, but in a limited way. Like God, we possess intellect, emotion, and will by which we are able to think, feel, and choose. But we lack God’s morality, His holiness; we don’t possess all His attributes including omniscience, omnipotence, or omnipresence. We are human, not divine.

Unlike man, Paul was saying that Jesus Christ is the perfect, absolutely accurate image of God. For us “old people” we might say He is a carbon copy. [Hebrews 1:3](#) says, “**The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.**” Jesus is the exact likeness of God—[Philippians 2:6](#) says that He is “**in very nature God.**” That is why Jesus was able to say in [John 14:9](#), “**Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.**” Jesus is the full, final, and complete revelation of God. He is God in human flesh—[John 1:1](#) put it this way, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**” Jesus is the exact image of the invisible God.

**B. Second, He is the firstborn over all creation.** “**Firstborn**” doesn’t refer to time, but to place or status. “*Firstborn*” simply means “*of first importance, of first rank*”—we might say that He is #1. For example, although Esau was born chronologically first before his twin brother Jacob, it was Jacob who was the “*firstborn*” and received the inheritance. In [Exodus 4:22](#), the nation of Israel is called God’s firstborn. Though not the first people born, they held first place in God’s sight before all other nations. In [Revelation 1:5](#) we read, “**From Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.**” Jesus wasn’t the first person to be resurrected chronologically, but He is the pre-eminent One. He is #1.

To use “**firstborn**” to mean that Jesus Christ is a created being doesn’t even fit in these verses in Colossians. Paul has just finished describing Jesus as the perfect and complete image of God. In the

next verse, he refers to Christ as the creator of “all things.” How then could Christ Himself be a created being? Being “*firstborn*” means Jesus is 1st overall.

C. 3<sup>rd</sup>, Paul wrote that **He created all things**. Jesus Christ is the Firstborn of all, He is preeminent, He has supremacy because He created all things. [John 1:3](#) says, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Back in Colossians Paul went on to write that there are two kinds of creation, the “visible and the invisible.” The “visible” in heaven and on earth tell of the power and knowledge and wisdom of the Creator. It’s all the things we can see. So many things work just right—the earth is just the right distance from the sun and has just the right tilt of its axis to sustain life. The atmosphere has just the right mixture of gases for life. Water has special properties that allow life to exist. All this and more are visible to those who look at the creation around them—turn to

[Romans 1:18-20](#).

The “invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities” refers to the various ranks of angels—holy or fallen—that Jesus created. Since He created all things, all things are under Jesus’ command, even the angels. [Ephesians 1:21](#) says that Jesus has been exalted “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.” Writing of Jesus, Peter wrote in [1 Peter 3:22](#), “who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand-- with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.” As the Creator, Jesus is preeminent over all that He created.

D. 4<sup>th</sup>, all things were created “for Him.” Not only did He create all things, but they were created for Him. When it comes to Creation, Jesus Christ planned it, produced it and He did it for His own pleasure. This means that God’s creation, even though under bondage to sin ([Romans 8:22](#)), can be used for God’s glory, and enjoyed by God’s people.

**E. 5<sup>th</sup>, He is before all things.** Jesus has supremacy over creation because His is before all things, i.e. when the universe began, He already existed—He is eternal. In [John 8:58](#), Jesus told the Jews, “Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am!” not “I was!” In [Revelation 22:13](#) Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” Turn to [Hebrews 7:1-3](#). Jesus is without beginning or end, He is eternal. But only God is eternal, therefore, since Jesus is eternal, Jesus must be God.

**F. 6<sup>th</sup>, He holds all things together.** Not only did Jesus create the universe, He also “holds it together.” Jesus maintains the delicate balance necessary for life’s existence. God didn’t just start things off and then withdraw from His creation; Jesus continues to sustain the whole universe. As one commentator wrote, “*He keeps the cosmos from becoming a chaos.*”

**G. 7<sup>th</sup>, He is the head of the church.** There are many images of the church in the New Testament and the body is one of the most important. The church is a Body and Jesus is the head of the Body. The church is a living organism made up of Christians joined together by the living Christ. Like the head controls the functions of the physical body, Jesus controls every part of the spiritual body—the church and gives it life and direction. He gives gifts to men and then places these gifted people in His church that they might serve Him where they are needed.—turn to [Ephesians 4:11-16](#). Jesus isn’t an angel who serves the church; He is the head of the church. But He isn’t just the head of the church ...

**H. 8<sup>th</sup>, He is the source of the church.** Jesus’ death and resurrection on the behalf of mankind was the beginning of the church. The church is composed of all true believers, and it was born at Pentecost. It was then that the Holy Spirit came and baptized the believers into one spiritual body. [Colossians 1:18](#) says that “He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead.” Jesus’ resurrection proved that His sacrifice for sin was accepted by the Father. For that reason, He is the source of the church. As we saw earlier: of all those who have been raised from the dead, or ever will be, Jesus Christ is the highest rank.

**I. 9<sup>th</sup>**, Paul wrote that **Jesus Christ has supremacy or the preeminence over everything**. Jesus isn't just another creation or emanation from God. Jesus reigns supreme over the visible world, the invisible world, and the church—as God, He is supreme—[turn to Philippians 2:6-11](#).

**J. 10<sup>th</sup>, the fullness of God dwells in Him**. Paul summarized all this by saying in [verse 19](#) that **“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”** Jesus is God—in every way, shape and form. The fullness of God dwells in Him. I sometimes talk about the “negotiables” and the “non-negotiables”—this is nonnegotiable.

### **III. Conclusion**

The attacks the Colossians experienced almost 2000 years ago have continued through the ages. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, some 300 years after Paul, the same questions concerning Jesus Christ were around. This led to the Nicene Creed. The major part of that creed is about Jesus and goes like this:

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.*

*Through him all things were made.*

*For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.*

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.*

*On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.*

Things aren't much different today. Some people say that Jesus was a good man—a good teacher, but they refuse to accept Him as God. Paul summarized such feelings in [Romans 1:21-22](#):

“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.” Islam claims that Jesus was a man—a prophet like Moses but He isn’t God. Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that Jesus began as Michael the Archangel. He was the first one created and used by Jehovah God to create everything else. Mormonism teaches that like all human beings, Jesus preexisted in Heaven before becoming human. As a human being, He is the literal son of God the Father through a physical union with Mary. Although Jesus is of the “Godhead,” (one of many emanations) one should not pray to Jesus. Every non-Christian religion has a warped, a Satanic view of Jesus Christ.

Like the Colossians we must never forget who Jesus is—we must never make Him into what we want. As “*People of the Book*” we know that Jesus is the exact image of God. As the creator of all things, He is the firstborn or sovereign over all creation. As God, He is before all things, i.e. He is eternal. He holds all things together, He is head of the church, He is the source of the church.

We must be on guard so that Jesus Christ doesn’t lose the pre-eminence, the supremacy in our hearts and minds—Jesus is God and demands 1<sup>st</sup> place in our hearts. That is what Jesus meant in [Luke 14:26](#) when He said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters-- yes, even their own life-- such a person cannot be my disciple.” This is what is meant by the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In [Matthew 16:15](#), Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say I am?” What about you, is He really the Lord of your life, or is there someone—something else that is #1? In closing, listen to these words from [Joshua 24:15](#): “But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”