

## **Colossians: The Supremes Part 1**

### ***Colossians 1:15-18***

**Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on April 30, 2023**

*When we come to Christ, we're no longer the most important person in the world to us; Christ is. Instead of living only for ourselves, we have a higher goal: To live for Jesus. – Billy Graham*

### **Supreme**

The word supreme is not one we use often in matters of the spiritual, invisible realm. We save supreme to describe Motown pop groups, tacos, pizzas, and judges. We don't typically consider something to have supremacy in our hearts and lives.

When was the last time you took stock to see what is in first place in my life? In my home? In my family? At my job or in my studies?

We mentioned the difference last week between Jesus being prominent or Jesus being preeminent. Often, we settle for making Jesus prominent in our lives rather than preeminent. This week, Paul will share how that needs to be corrected as we continue our sermon series in Colossians. I invite you to turn with me to Colossians 1:15-18. (read text)

### **Supreme in Eternity and all Creation**

Last Sunday, we spend our morning considering the first portion of verse 15, which affirmed that Jesus was the image of the invisible God. That image emphasizes Christ's relationship to the Father. Knowing that Christ is the image of the invisible God provides confidence in Jesus' supremacy in eternity. This morning we focus on the next truth that Jesus is supreme over creation.

Paul moves from Christ's supremacy in eternity to Christ's supremacy in creation. Paul will provide four examples of Christ's supremacy in creation. Christ is the firstborn (v.15b); Christ is Creator (v.16); Christ is the goal (v. 16b); Christ is sustainer (17). Paul then unpacks what those four facts mean for believers in verse 18.

### **Firstborn of All Creation**

Verse 15b calls Jesus "the firstborn of all creation."

Jehovah's Witnesses and the fourth century heretic Arius distorted this verse to make the claim that Jesus was created. This claim ignores the context of the passage. If this is what Paul was teaching, that Jesus was in fact the first creation of God the Father and then subsequently Jesus created everything else, Paul would be agreeing with the false teachers that he is writing to refute, rebuke, and correct. It would also mean ignoring the entirety of the New Testament revelation which teaches Christ's eternity. Paul is clear in the overall context of Colossians 1. Jesus is the Creator. This means that Jesus is God. Christianity is Christ and Christ is God.

While firstborn can mean first child, it very often is simply a term that means "first in rank or honor." For example, Jewish scholars consider the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) to be the "firstborn of the Scriptures" to indicate its elevated rank in Judaism.

In the past I have mentioned how Christians and the Church loves to use code words. These are words that have an understood meaning by those who participate in worship in the same place but for those outside that church or that faith experience, it can mean something else. God is a code word. Grace is a code word. Lost and saved are code words. For those in the first century who lived in the Ancient Near East, "Firstborn" was a code word for the coming Messiah. Psalm 89:27 reads – "And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth."

The people of Israel as a whole were sometimes referred to as "firstborn," indicating their high position as recipients of the Father's love (Ex. 4:22). So when Paul called Christ "the firstborn of all creation," that indicates that the highest honor belongs to Jesus. Christ is completely supreme in creation.

When Paul refers to Christ as firstborn, our response should be to consider him supreme and that to give our highest honor to him. Except that as humans, we like to be "honor adjacent." We like to give God lip service, but we still enjoy the take some credit and honor for ourselves. Sure, God is the one who provides, and Christ is Lord of all, but shouldn't we get a little something for the effort we put in? I mean, isn't that why a lot of Christians do what they do in church? To be acknowledged, recognized? To get just a little bit of honor? Christ is supreme, not us. Revelation 3:14 calls Jesus the Originator of God's creation. That is a pretty supreme title. He deserves the highest honor.

## **Christ is Creator**

Christ is supreme in creation because Christ is Creator. Paul is clear about the relationship Jesus has with creation in verse 16. Jesus is the agent of creation *ex nihili*, from nothing. Everything that you see, trees, grass, flowers, people, animals, vegetable, mineral – all of it was spoken into existence. God the Son spoke and from nothing came something.

The extent of His creation is amazing. It is not limited to what we can see and touch. It also includes things in the heavens and the invisible. It includes angels.

The Scriptures and even Jewish writings reveal that the four descriptions “thrones...dominions...rulers...authorities” can refer to four classes of angelic powers, with the last two referring to the highest orders of the angelic realm.<sup>1</sup>

The heretics that Paul was refuting in Colossians taught that Jesus was a spiritual emanation from the true God, but here Paul boldly said that Jesus was the true God who created everything, even the invisible spirit-world. Verse 16 is a powerful and combative proclamation.

Christ is Creator of all! We are aware of what this implies when we think of a universe that is millions of light years across, but here on our earth it is astounding as well. He created even the tiniest creatures. There are over 800,000 catalogued insects in the world, with billions in some of the species – all created by Christ.

## **Christ is the Goal**

Christ is not only the Creator of creation, but He is also its end, the end or the goal: “all things were created through him and for him.” (1:16b) What an astounding statement for Paul to have made. “Paul’s teaching about Christ as the goal of all creation...finds no parallel in the Jewish wisdom literature or in the rest of extant Jewish materials for that matter.”<sup>2</sup>

Some Greek scholars translate the word “for” as “toward,” making things even more dramatic: “All things were created by him and *toward* him.” Everything began in Christ, and everything will end with Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon. Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

All creation sprang from his command, and all things will one day return to him as his command. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. One day all things will give Jesus glory. (Phil. 2:11)

This means that Christians must live completely for Christ. Any other action is completely irrational for those who claim to believe in Jesus. This was Paul's logic in Romans 11:36 when he wrote, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

Paul claimed that total commitment to Jesus was our "reasonable (*logikos*, logical, rational) service." (Rom. 12:1) As a Christian, as yourself this question: Is my life logical or illogical?

Am I living totally for God, or am I living outside rationality?

### **Christ as Sustainer**

In verse 17, Paul reaches the apex of his argument: Christ is superior in creation because he is the sustainer: "He is before all things, and by him all things hold together." The verb tense (perfect) lets us know that Jesus continues now to hold all things together, and that apart from his continuous activity, all would disintegrate, fall apart. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power." (Heb. 1:3)

Physicists tell us that among the atom's whirling protons and electrons there is vast space, not unlike our solar system. Though some have theories as to why the atom holds together, none know for sure. Christ is not contained in matter, but he holds it together by his word!

There is a medieval painting that shows Christ in the clouds, and below him is the world of humans and nature. From Christ to every object is painted a thin golden thread. The artist was saying that Christ is responsible for sustaining the existence of every created thing.

Not seeing Christ as Creator, firstborn, the goal, and sustainer means we see a diminished, scaled-down Christ. Seeing Christ as he is means we can defend our hearts and minds against lies that diminish who and what Jesus is. Those lies have captured and are still capturing lost hearts and minds. Seeing Christ for who He is will also help us to love Christ with an authentic love, as we begin to comprehend more fully who Jesus is.

If Colossians 1:15-20 was a hymn in the early church, than it sings of the supremacy of Christ in creation: he is *firstborn* and that means he has the highest place. He is *Creator* of everything, every cosmic speck, every invisible spirit. He is the *goal*, and all creation is moving toward him and for him. He is the *sustainer*. He is holding the very breath that falls in this room right now.

This is just stunning, shocking, beautiful revelation about Christ. These words are meant to stretch our small minds. This teaching is meant to dominate and overwhelm any preconceived notions we had about who Jesus is.

Which means that this is meant to change us. If I can truly understand what is being proclaimed here, why would I ever look anywhere else for meaning and purpose in life? Jesus is the Creator who holds everything together. He knows how best to fix and order our lives. We were made for Him!

Because of who Jesus is, we need to submit our personal problems and issues to Him because Jesus knows how to solve them. And if the solution is painful or not what we anticipated, He sustains us and carries us.

### **Christ Supreme in the Church**

This means that Christ is supreme in the Church. “He is the head of the body, the church.” Christ is sovereign over the Church in the same way that He is sovereign over creation. When we became believers, we were baptized into Christ’s Body through the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). “So we, though many, are one body in Christ.” (Rom. 12:5) As members of His Body, we are totally dependent on the Head, Christ, for direction. Christ must be in control. I am always concerned when I hear a person say that their church is “committee-run” or “pastor-run” or “elder-board-run.” How many heads can a body have? No, the Church has *one* head, and that is Jesus Christ.

Christ is the head because of His exalted position. “He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.” In v. 15, the word “firstborn” communicated rank or position. It means the same here, too, in v. 18. Paul was not saying Jesus was the first to be raised from the dead, because he wasn’t. However, Jesus is the most important of all who have been raised from the dead, because without HIS resurrection there could be no resurrection possible for others (1 Cor. 15:20).

Jesus Christ chose to enter His own creation, take on a body created and sustained by his power, die, and then undergo resurrection and so be “the firstborn from the dead” – *and first rank in salvation*. Incredible. No human being could have dreamed up something as remarkable as this. This plan could only come from the mind of God.

What does this mean to believers? Simple. “He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, *so that he might come to have first place in everything*.” Everything means that we are to put Christ first in everything across the wide scope of our lives. Christ is to be preeminent in everything. He must have first place in everything.

First place in our families.

First place in our marriages.

First place in our jobs.

First place in our studies.

First place in our mission and ministry.

First place in our thoughts and intellect.

First place in time.

First place in love.

First place in conversation.

First place in pleasures.

First place in hobbies.

First place in eating.

First place in play.

First place in athletics.

First place in video games.

First place in finances.

First place in what we watch.

First place in art.

First place in music.

First place in worship.

Christ is the Creator, the firstborn, the goal and the sustainer of everything. Don't settle for him being prominent in your life. Make him preeminent.

## FURTHER THOUGHTS

Paul claimed that total commitment to Jesus was our “reasonable (*logikos*, logical, rational) service.” (Rom. 12:1) As a Christian, as yourself this question: Is my life logical or illogical? Am I living totally for God, or am I living outside rationality?

Is Christ prominent or preeminent in your life? What is the difference between those two ideas?

How well do you do in a spiritual inventory measuring if Christ is:

First place in our families.

First place in our marriages.

First place in our jobs.

First place in our studies.

First place in our mission and ministry.

First place in our thoughts and intellect.

First place in time.

First place in love.

First place in conversation.

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First place in what we watch.

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First place in worship.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

**Wednesday Bible Study: 10:30AM – The Book of Mark.** All are welcome.

**Silver Wings Trip:** Silver Wings Ministry is going to see *Hello Dolly* on Friday, July 21<sup>st</sup> at 2:30PM. The cost is \$38 per ticket, and this needs to be paid to the church office by Wednesday May 31<sup>st</sup>. They will carpool and leave the church parking lot at 11:30AM and enjoy lunch together before the show begins.

**Silver Wings Nutter's Trip: Wednesday May 17<sup>th</sup> at 2PM.** The Silver Wings group will meet at the church at 1:15PM to carpool over to Nutters for ice cream.

**VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL: JUNE 19-23 – 6-8:30PM** This is for all children Pre-K through completed 5<sup>th</sup> Grade. We still need volunteers, and we will also need donations for snacks, volunteer suppers, crafts, and decorations. Donation boards are out now. If you have questions, ask Pastor Craig for more info.

**THERE IS NO VBS VOLUNTEER MEETING THIS MORNING.**

**SUMMER WORSHIP SCHEDULE BEGINNING JUNE 4 THROUGH AUGUST 13:**

**9:30 - BIBLICAL COMMUNITY BIBLE STUDY/SUNDAY SCHOOL HOUR**

**11:00 – JOINT WORSHIP SERVICE**

During the summer months, we shift the schedule to ease the volunteer burden for the worship service hours, particularly in the Children's Church ministry. This allows a break and to stretch the volunteer pool a bit during June, July, and early August while so many are in and out for vacation. During these weeks, we will NOT offer worship at 9AM. We will adjust the Biblical Community hour to begin at 9:30AM to allow for more time to pass between Bible Study and worship.



**OFFERING: 1 Timothy 6:18** “**Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share,**” – Do what is good, be rich in good works, be generous, be willing to share. How can you live out the challenge of this passage through your generosity to the church through the offering plate? How can you model generosity and the willingness to share in other ways beyond simply giving?

Do you think just tossing some bucks in an envelope and throwing them in the plate is all that Paul had in mind when he called Christians to be generous and willing to share? What in your life is God asking you to share? What areas of generosity is God calling you to step into?

PLATES – ONLINE OPTIONS: WEBSITE, APP, TEXT to GIVE

**BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36**