

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> 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, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

[\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 1:15–23.

Good morning! Let's pray together!

[.....]

If you have a Bible I invite you to open to the New Testament to the book of Colossians. This is a letter Paul wrote to the small town of Colossae while he was in prison. Colossae is a place that Paul never visited in Acts. We know from chapter 1 vs. 7 and from chapter 4 of Colossians that a man named Epaphras has shared the gospel with those in Colossae and that has led to the beginnings of the local church there. And so Paul hears about the church in Colossae from Epaphras and he writes to the church there this letter.

And, the purpose of this letter to the Colossians is to show how Christ is first in everything and sufficient in everything (we see these especially in chapter 1:15-23) and so therefore we must continue to follow him [chapter 2:6-7]. Paul writes with this purpose because there are many competing allegiances in Colossae. We see this especially in chapter two. If you turn to chapter 2, we get hints and descriptors of what the false teaching vying for the Colossians' allegiance was, but commentators debate on what exactly the false teaching was. Chapter 2:8 says, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. Vs. 16 says, "Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new

moon or a Sabbath.” Vs. 18 says, “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions....” Lastly chapter 2:21-23 says, “Why do you submit to regulations- like ‘Do not hand, Do not taste, Do not touch’ (referring to things that all perish as they are used)- according to human precepts and teachings? Vs 23. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Whatever this false teaching is at Colossae, it’s clear that it’s a teaching which is making little of Christ and making much of Old Testament laws and human rules and experiences. There were teachers in Colossae saying, Sure, you need Christ, but you also need circumcision. Sure you need Christ, but you also need this food law. Sure you need Christ but you also need to be harsher on your body and fast more. And so Paul is coming along and saying you just need Christ. No more. All the Old Testament laws were just shadows pointing to Christ. So hold fast to Christ. Don’t get distracted. Don’t wander from Christ. Vs. 7, Just as you received him, now walk in him.

And so it’s in this context that I invite you to turn back to Colossians chapter 1:15-23. My goal in these verses is to show that Christ is first in creation (vs. 15-17) and he’s first in the Church (vs 18-23). And then in application, we must make him first in our lives.

First, Christ is first in creation. Look at chapter one verses 15-17:

<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God,

Here Paul is saying that Christ is the perfect representation of God. He is God in the flesh. But not only this, he’s also echoing Genesis 1 in which humans are made in the image of God, made to represent God’s rule on the earth and reflect God’s glory. Adam and Eve failed in imaging God. They listened to the serpent. In contrast, Christ faced the serpent and did not succumb to temptation but rather disarmed Satan at the cross, Colossians 2 says. And now, Christ, the perfect image of God, is leading a new humanity, his church, to reflect his image over the earth (see Colossians 3:9-10).

**9** Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self<sup>[d]</sup> with its practices  
**10** and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

So Colossians 1:15:

<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Here we need to be careful to let the Bible interpret the Bible. If we took this out of context, we could say that Christ was born first and then we would not be Christians. Rather, we need to read this in context. In the next verse we read, "All things were made through him and for him." And in verse 17, we read that "He is before all things." Therefore, we know that this doesn't mean he was born first. So what does this mean? Psalm 89:27 helps us here, in talking about David, it says, "I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." We know David wasn't born first in his family. Rather, this text is saying that firstborn connotes the rights and privileges of a firstborn, especially of the firstborn of a king who would inherit the throne. So firstborn is a metaphor to express Jesus's primacy, his supremacy over all creation.

Now verses 16-17 further support that Christ is first in rank or importance over all creation

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

So here we see that Christ is first, he's primary in the beginning, middle, and end of creation. Before all things, Christ was there. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, enjoyed eternal communion and relationship before creation. John 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In the middle of all things, Christ is there. Vs. 17 says, "In him, all things hold together." We live and we breathe we do this and that only because of Christ. And that's true of us and that's true of those across the world in Asia, Africa, and everywhere. And that's true of the planets and stars and all of this universe. God didn't just make the world and then set it aside and say "Good luck." He's involved in everything and in infinite power he's upholding everything at every moment in time and he's bringing all things to his end.

So that's the first truth. Christ is first in creation. Summary here:

And this truth confronts us. If Christ is first, if he's supreme in creation, what does that mean for me? This begs the question, if I exist for Christ, if he's first in creation, is he first in my life? my thoughts? Is he first in my speech? Is he first in my emotions and affections? What makes me happy and what makes me sad? What makes me angry and what makes me anxious? And especially, if Christ is first in creation, what does that mean for me, a sinner?

Praise God that he is not just supreme and first in his creation, but he is also supreme and first in redemption, in the church, the new creation. The infinite power that upholds the universe is the one who was born as a baby, who sat in his mother's lap, held by his mother and nursed at her breast. The one who was 30 years old is the one who eternally existed. For "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And Praise God that Christ came not to judge the world but to save the world, to reconcile his people to himself through the cross. The list of sins that Satan could hold against us before God, these Christ nailed to the cross, he wiped away our sins and reconciled us to himself. Praise God that Christ didn't remain dead but he is the "firstborn from the dead," meaning Christ is leading his people in resurrection. Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection. In the words of 1 Corinthians 15, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." Because Christ rose from the dead, we also will rise from the dead when he returns. And praise God that this is all of grace. Look at what we contributed in this text. We contributed: alienation, a hostile mind, and evil deeds. Look what we've received: life and breath, purpose, friendship and reconciliation with the God of the universe, holiness before him, and a future resurrection.

I think it's fitting that Paul begins and ends this book with grace. Colossians 1:2: To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. Colossians 4:18: I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

From beginning to end, life is all of grace. All we have to contribute is our sin. And yet God gives us a glorious future in Christ.

So verses 18-23 show us that by virtue of his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, Christ is first in redemption, he's first the church. And these verses show us what the church is, it's Christ's body.

As head, Christ rules and governs his body. Colossians 2:19 says of the false teachers, "They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow." So Christ as head not only rules his body but also supports and nourishes his body as well.

And by implication, this text not only exalts Christ but also his body, the church, who is united with Christ, one with Christ. And so Christ, the head, speaks and acts here in the Twin Cities and in this world through his body, the church.

So Christ is first and supreme in creation. And he is first and supreme in redemption, in his church. So what does all this mean for us? What does it look like to put Christ first in everything? 1. I can say that it affects everything. Chapter 3 vs. 17 says, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." "What you do." "Everything you do." Two: it can look pretty ordinary. It looks like forgiving one another. It looks like hearing and reading the Bible so that God's word dwells in us richly. It looks like singing praises to Jesus. And wives treating their husbands in this way and husbands treating their wives in this way. And the same for employees and bosses. So putting Christ first affects everything and it's done in ordinary, yet glorious acts.

Lastly, just two more points. This application doesn't just happen to us. We don't passively sit back and bam - Christ is first in everything in our lives. Rather, Colossians shows us that this involves an active, intentional life. It involves actively "Putting to death," putting away, putting off the old self and all of our sin and actively putting on the new self, putting on the character of Christ. This takes intentionality. Rather than being complacent with this sin or that, we need to actively die to self and live for Christ daily. So what does that look like tomorrow morning? For me...

Secondly and lastly in application, Christ doesn't magically become first in our lives over night. In giving us these commands to actively put to death sin put on Christ, it is assumed that this is a progressive process. This is a lifelong process of being more and more conformed into the image of Christ. God, in his sovereignty and wisdom has chosen to keep us in the world that's filled with sin and temptation, and he's chosen to not transform us instantly. Rather he gives us mountain top days of holiness and fruitfulness and he also gives us valley days of suffering, sin and setbacks, and yet through it he keeps us we persevere and continue to set Christ back on the throne in our lives, first in our lives, and through it all, we learn more and more to boast less in self and more in the Lord, for as Colossians 3:11 says, Christ is all, and in all. So we say All glory be to Christ.

Let's pray!

