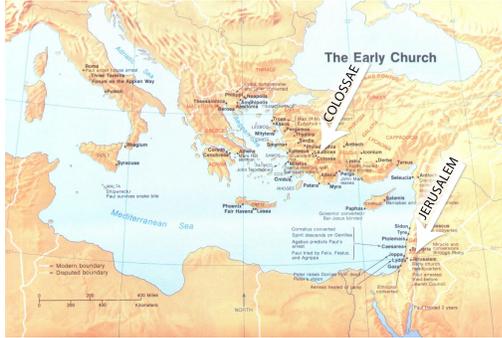


The Preeminent Christ

Colossians 1

INTRODUCTION: While on his third missionary journey, Paul had an opportunity to teach the Word to the citizens of **Ephesus** who gathered in the school of **Tyrannous**. While Paul taught, one of his proteges named **Epaphras** made a brief excursion to the town of Colassae, preached the Gospel there and the Holy Spirit birthed a church. It seems almost *accidental*, a brief detour, but **with God there are no accidents, only divine appointments**. Keep in mind Paul had never set foot in the city of Colassae.



Fast forward nearly 10 years - Paul finds himself in prison at Rome - when word comes to him about this "accidental church" in the city of Colassae. It seems that this relatively young church was facing an

onslaught of **heresies**.

NOW - let me be explicitly clear. There is a lot of silly, misguided, unbiblical ideologies being taught today in Christian churches.

But occasionally, what begins as a concept not rooted and grounded in truth... crosses over into the **HERETICAL** category. — **A Heresy is a teaching that modifies the Gospel to an extent that it is not longer potent to save.**

It is different from an incorrect teaching. Every teacher will get something wrong from time to time. That is why there is safety in a multitude of good counsel. Never listen to only one preacher. Make sure what he is saying lines up with other faithful men.

People make mistakes, you have to give them room and time to grow. You speak gently and correct the mistake, not humiliating the person. But if they persist in dishonoring the Word of God, eventually, inevitably, they start incorrectly representing the **PERSON** and/or the **WORK** of Christ and it quickly becomes **heresy**.

Souls are on the line. Throughout much of church history heretics were **burned at the stake**. The idea was **heresy is more dangerous than murder**. If you take a life, you rob a person of however many years they would have lived... but if you mislead a soul, you rob them of eternity. **DO YOU SEE WHAT A BIG DEAL THIS IS?**

That is why **Galatians 1:8–9 (ESV)**

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

ILLUSTRATION: We had a young man at my last church who was a known METH dealer. He began to show up at youth group. One of the guys in law enforcement let us know who he was and we began to keep an eye on him, wanting him to come to Christ, but not wanting him to sell

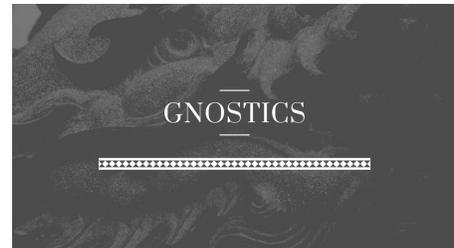
that stuff to our kids. Well he was doing pretty well. Then one day, he took a couple of the boys from the youth group to a party they had no business being at. Well, the boys did the right thing, they texted their dads and got out. The next time I saw the young man, I gave him a very firm hand shake and said, "I want to shake the hand of one of the bravest young men I know. He said, "Why do you say that?" I said, well son, the dad's of those boys you took to that party are among the militaries most elite warriors. So here's what will happen, you won't even see it coming, one day, you will just disappear. The poor kids looked terrified. He asked, "What should I do!?" I said, "If it were me, I'd find those days and personally apologize to each one before the assets are in play". Needless to say it worked.

Folks, we see drugs as dangerous. We would do anything to keep our kids off of them. But do you see, that Heresy is far more dangerous than drugs?

ALSO, keep in mind, the reason heresy works is because the people who push it are sometimes cool people. They aren't weird, they aren't strange, they aren't mean... some are... some are the nicest, most likable people you have ever met.

The Early Church had two heretical movements to deal with. The **Gnostics** and the **Judaisers**. Both were actively influencing the Colossian Church.

- **The Gnostics** - Gnosticism was a movement that viewed anything material as evil and anything spiritual as good. Therefore they were given to **asceticism** - that is we should liquidate all our physical possessions, all luxuries.



They had a real problem with the **incarnation**, the humanity of Christ. If the physical reality is all evil and if Jesus was good... he couldn't have come in the flesh. OR if he came in the flesh, he must have been sinful.

The **Gnostic Creation** account held that once there was only God who sent for emanations, or lesser beings these were the Angels, they in turn produced other lesser beings, something of a superhuman, but less than angelic offspring or demiurge, they in turn produced humanity.

Jesus they believed was one of these early emanations, he was just way on up the line.. making him much more holy than regular people, but not God.

So it almost sounded like they were pro-Jesus but did you know that ***it is possible to be saying "NICE" things about Christ and simultaneously be speaking a damnable heresy?***

- **The Judaisers** - Another group that the Colossians dealt with were called the **Judaisers**. When Christianity was first established, it was considered Judaism 2.0. The earliest Christians gathered on **Sunday** for Church in Solomon's Portico, but they also gathered in the Synagogues on **Saturday**, the Sabbath.



As the gospel reached out into non jewish regions the question

arose, should these gentiles become Jewish proselytes in order to be Christians? Embrace Jewish customs, bear the Jewish sign of **circumcisions**, and keep the **law of Moses** as a Jew.

The Jerusalem Counsel addressed the issue in Acts 15. But the Judaisers persisted to follow Paul and cause trouble for the churches.

Paul is in a Roman Prison when **Epaphras** brings word of the trouble these groups are causing the church in Colassae.

Paul writes the epistle to the Colossians and delivers it by the hand of a man name **Onesimus**. That name should ring a bell if you are a student of scripture. You see Onesimus would carry two letters back to Colassae, this letter to the Colossians AND a letter to his Master - Philemon.

That in itself tells you something of Paul's confidence in the life changing power of the Gospel, to entrust these only copies of two letters that would be enshrined in the eternal canon of scripture to a runaway slave who had bowed the knee to Jesus.

How will Paul answer these threatening heresies - ***Paul answers heresy with Jesus.***

TEXT: Colossians 1:1–14 (ESV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. ³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing — as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. ⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you.

Isn't that amazing - Paul had never met this church yet he perpetually thanked God and prayed for them. Not only that - this was not a perfect church! It was having a real issue with some heresy - but Paul thanked God for them. He saw the very fact that they were in existence as a sign of God's hand at work.

I wonder - how often do you pray for this Church? How often do you pray for our missionary partners around the world?

Well, you may ask - ***how should we pray for them?*** Pray how Paul prayed...

9b. asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

TRANSITION: NOW Those first 14 verses are typical Paul. Not to underestimate them, but they could have just as easily been copied and pasted into any one of Paul's other letters. What follows beginning with verse 15 is different, it's unique, Paul uses words from this point on that aren't found in any other letter of scripture. He is bringing the breadth and depth of the Greek language to bear to combat heresy with theological precision.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, (AND) the firstborn of all creation.

Let's look at each one:

Christ is the Image of the Invisible God - If you remember in creation the first man Adam was called an Image Bearer of God. In that sense he was the reflection of God's nature in the same way that a mirror bears an image. Mankind bore the reflection of God's nature... but what is being said here in **Colossians 1:15** is much more substantial. Paul is saying that Christ **IS** the image of God.

The Greek word is (eikōn) which means manifestation. When the term was employed, it meant that the symbol was more than a symbol. The symbol brought with it the actual presence of the object.

Thus **J. B. Phillips** translated it, "**visible expression**," and by it Paul meant that **Jesus brought God into the human sphere of understanding.**

ILLUSTRATION: I like boats. I like BIG boats and I can not lie. If you have ever been on a cruise, you will notice as soon as you step on board, a Manifest will be posted. The Manifest is an accurate record of EVERYTHING on board that vessel, from the crew, the passengers, the luggage, everything is on the manifest.

Paul is saying that Jesus is God the Father's manifest - EVERYTHING that is in God the Father is in Jesus.

Hebrews 1:3 (ESV) ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

John 1:18 (ESV) ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he (that is Christ) has made him known.

The point is that **in Christ** the invisible God became visible.

We are warned throughout the Old Testament not to make a **graven image** of God. For you see, no created thing could contain the Glory of the invisible God. But in Christ the omnipotent, omniscient, and omni-present nature of God Almighty was pleased to dwell in bodily form.

Then notice the second assertion that Paul makes...

Christ is the Firstborn of all creation -

In the first century the heretic **Arius** suggested that this term indicated that Christ was a created being, greater than the rest of creation but less than God himself. This is a position held by many groups today - Mormons, Jehovah's (False) Witness, both hold a similar heretical view of Christ.

The Greek word "**firstborn**" is not used in the NT to mean **primogeniture**. It refers to Preeminence. Of the 8 times the word, "Firstborn" is used in the NT, 7 of them are used in this sense.

However, there was a second use for the word as it was used in **Psalm 89:27** (ESV) speaking of David where it says 27 And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. So notice, this use does not indicate numerical order, but rather RANK. David was not the first in order, but he was the highest in rank.

Note three phrases in verse 16 - **by him, through him, and for him.**

16 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.**

Three different ideas are communicated in these phrases:

BY HIM -This means that Jesus conceived of creation and its complexities. Creation was his idea.

THROUGH HIM- This phrase means that creation came to be through his power and ability.

FOR HIM - This means that Jesus's Glory is the goal of all creation. Everything exists to display His glory.

So think of it this way - Jesus was like a great painter -

- He **conceptualized** the idea for the art
- He **financed** the work of art and ultimately
- He **signed** in the lower right corner with his name.

ILLUSTRATION: Can you imagine the insult to Christ, when you separate him from the world he created? Would it not insult Michelangelo to say the Sistine chapel was the result of random collision of accidental chemicals?

No friend - look at the created order and worship it's Creator! Study the complexities, predictabilities of natural law, gaze into the mysteries of the universe and worship!

17 And he is before all things,

That is before anything that can be called a, "Thing" existed - Christ was there.

17b, and in him all things hold together.

So the work of Christ in creation wasn't that of a divine watch maker who made a gorgeous instrument and sent it away... but he remains actively involved in creation - sustaining all that he has made.

When you see a wound heal, you witness the work of Christ.

When you see a baby born, you witness the ongoing work of Christ.

When you see a sunset, you witness the ongoing work of Christ the Sustainer.

Hebrews 1:3 (NASB95)

³... and upholds all things by the word of His power.

In verse 18, Paul begins to speak of Christ in relation to redemption... Because you see every fiber of creation has been touched by sin... so this amazing Creator did not leave his Masterpiece in it's damaged state.. but rather he began a process of restoration and redemption.... that which has been destroyed by sin, will now be touched by grace...

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church.

The church will be the Creator's **visible agent of restoration**.. and he properly takes his place at the Head of this body.

18b. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

So not only is Christ the firstborn of Creation (in other words he is preeminent over creation) Paul tells us here he is the firstborn from the dead - so in other words he is preeminent over **RE-Creation**.

Paul summarizes all he has stated in verse 19...

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Why, one might ask, would Paul begin his attack against the heresies of the Judaisers who had plagued the church at Colassae by a dissertation on the nature of Christ?

My friend the answer to that question reveals the genius of Paul - you see the answer to problem that plagues mankind is **ultimately found in the person and work of Jesus Christ**.

That is what Paul meant in **2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

Jesus is the source and the substance of all life change.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

Men want a better marriage?

- Don't get a new **person**, get a new **perspective** on what it means to love your wife as Christ loved the Church.
- Ladies you don't need a new **man** you need a new **mindset**.

You see the goal is maturity in Jesus Christ - if the enemy can **modify** the JESUS we worship then he will **mutilate** the results we get.

Perhaps, some of you aren't living the Supreme Life, the Abundant Life offer through Christ, because you aren't worshipping the true Jesus.

Wouldn't it be awful to get to heaven and discover you've been following a false christ for all these years? Get to know him - think deeply on what Paul is saying in this book.

You will find that Jesus is Sufficient, you don't need mysticism, or legalism or any other ism the world may offer.

ILLUSTRATION: Putting a puzzle together. Look at top of the box.

In the morning when I rise - give me Jesus
When I am alone - give me Jesus
When I come to die - give me Jesus
You can have all of this world... give me Jesus.

INTRO and PRAY FOR STELLA WIGGINS: Dad **Buddy**, Mom **Michele**, Grandparents - **Ellen** and **Wayne** Wiggins.