

Colossians 1:15-23

Have you ever watched a potter center a lump of clay on the potter's wheel? It's crucial for the clay to be centered or the entire vessel will be lopsided or fall apart. In one of the most beautiful poems written about Jesus, Colossians 1:15-23 has a centering effect on all who read it. (Most scholars think that Colossians 1:15-20 was a poem or a hymn in the early Church that described their belief about God. We don't know if Paul wrote this hymn himself or just added it into his letter, but it does seem Paul pauses for a moment to exalt Christ by worshipping him.)

In view of the false teaching at Colossae that Paul understood to dangerously downplay Christ, Paul's goal in this passage is to give the Colossian church an accurate picture of **who Jesus is** and **what He accomplished** on the cross and to encourage them to remain faithful to Jesus in spite of the pressures they are facing.

The text before us divides into three major sections. First, we admire Jesus' preeminence over creation (Col. 1:15-17) and then his preeminence over the new creation. (Col. 1:18-20). Finally (Col. 1:21-23) Paul speaks of our full participation in the new creation. (Col. 1:21-23)

Reflect on the following questions:

1. Read Colossians 1:15-23. What immediately stands out to you? Does anything in this passage particularly confuse you, encourage you or convict you? How would you answer someone who genuinely asked, "Who is Jesus"?
2. As the 'image of God,' Jesus is God's exact representation. (Heb 1:3) What God is, Jesus is. What God contains, Jesus contains. What God has, Jesus has. What God does, Jesus does. In every way that God is God, Jesus' being exactly (fully/perfectly) represents God's being. (John 1:18) How does this change the way that we look at God? So, if we could learn something about God outside of Jesus, even if in dreams and visions and myths (the things troubling the Colossians), what would this say about Jesus? How much of God can we learn from Jesus according to verse 19? How much of Himself has God given to us in Jesus?
3. How does seeing Christ as the creator and sustainer (vs. 16-17) help us fully understand the incredible humility of Jesus in His incarnation and crucifixion? (Philippians 2:6-8)? Discuss in your own words what it means that creation is: **by** Jesus (v. 16), **for** Jesus (v. 16b), **held together in** Jesus (v. 17) In light of the current global uncertainties and daily news of war, terrorism, and natural disasters, how might the knowledge that Jesus sustains/holds creation, bolster our faith and encourage us?
4. Jesus as the head of the church is a theology we strongly hold to and maintain. What does it mean that Jesus is the 'head of the body, the church'? So how should Jesus' headship of The Church work out practically in the context of a local church? What parallels are there in the language of vs. 18-19 and 15-17 and what does this say about Jesus in regard to the new creation?
5. Why is Jesus called "the firstborn from the dead"? (Hint: Romans 8:29)
6. As with many New Testament passages, there is a three-fold description of the work of the Gospel in a believer's life. There is a past sinful *old-self* that is recognized ("once you were"), a present redeemed reality based on Christ's work not ours ("but now he has"), and an ongoing responsibility for the believer ("if you continue in your faith"). Take turns in sharing your own (short) testimony as a way of explaining the Gospel using this past/present/ongoing model.
7. Why was Christ's physical death necessary to reconcile us to God? (Hint: Hebrews 9:11-28)
8. How do you understand what Paul is teaching when he writes that we will be presented without blemish and free from accusation 'if' we continue in our faith? What practical steps can we take to encourage one another to continue in our faith, established and firm, not moving from the hope found in the Gospel?