

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians The Primacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1-23) The Person of the Gospel - Colossians 1:15-20 (Part 2)

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

As I was reading Spurgeon's "Morning and Evening" this past week, I was struck by a statement that was made, a statement that caused me to ponder all week. For his September 6 morning entry he wrote:

A Christian man should so shine in his life, that a person could not live with him a week without knowing the gospel. His conversation [behavior] should be such that all who are about him should clearly perceive whose he is, and whom he serves; and should see the image of Jesus reflected in his daily actions.

I cannot think of a more noble pursuit. There is nothing that should so preoccupy the heart and mind of the believer that he would want all who live with him to know the fullness of the gospel within a week's time and whose life so passionately reflects the attitudes and actions of Jesus that none could mistake where his allegiance lies.

But of course, a bit of reality sets in and the question must be asked, "How"? How can I and how can you live like this, a live where all who are about us so clearly perceive whose we are, and whom we serve and see the image of Jesus reflected in our daily actions?

The answer is simple; we must continually pursue high thoughts concerning Jesus. We must become increasingly preoccupied with the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ must come to be the sole object of our worship, a worship that we take with us everywhere we go; into our homes, into our jobs, into our schools; into our hobbies, into our chores and into our errands. While it sounds overly simplistic and perhaps a bit too idealistic, the truth of the matter is that Jesus is to be at the very center of our attention, our desires, our devotion and our choices. Jesus is to be our first and primary focus. In fact, anytime that we make something other than Jesus the primary focus and goal in our lives we are engaging in idol worship. And a diminished or damaged view of Jesus will always lead to idol worship.

Now I went and mentioned idols, so I had better explain what I mean by idol worship. What is an idol? Is an idol a little stick or stone we bow ourselves down before? Well, it could be, but in truth and idol is simply this; anything that we consistently make equal to or more important than Jesus in our attention, our desire, our devotion and our choices.

Such a definition of an idol should really cause us to consider; not if we have idols in our lives, but just what idols are we entertaining or even succumbing. If we devote more thought, time, devotion and consideration things other than Jesus, we are on a path to idol worship.

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Beloved, even good things can become idols if we place more importance upon them than upon Jesus Christ and what He says to us in His Word.

Last week we began looking at the text before us, Colossians 1:15-20 and I asked you to note from these verses the shift from looking at the power of the gospel in people's lives in the previous fourteen verses, now to consider the Person of the gospel in verses 15-20. Paul wanted his readers to be blessed with a broad understanding and appreciation of who Jesus Christ is. We noted last week that what comes into our minds when we think about Christ is the most important thing about us. For the Colossians, there was a challenge to Christ's supremacy and sufficiency. False teachers were saying to them that there were more important or at least equally important persons other than Jesus to be worshipped. They were teaching that Jesus did not even do everything needed to secure salvation for those who believe in Him. And beloved, before we start pointing our fingers at the cults who so sickly diminish Jesus with their translations and theology, let us rather look at our own lives. Do you realize that whenever you say or express the attitude of "I want or I will do things my way regardless of what Jesus says" then you are challenging His supremacy? Do you realize that by living in guilt, considering yourself such a sinner so as to be unable to be of any use for sharing the gospel is a challenge to Christ's sufficiency? Has Jesus justified you, made your standing before God perfect because of His work on the cross or not? Are Romans 5:1 and 8:1 true in your life, **"Therefore, having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...";** and **"Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** By the wounds of Christ, you have been healed. And now you are to be His witness, His ambassador, a co-heir of the kingdom of God with Him. Let us be careful that we do not entertain such low views of Christ and what He accomplished for us that we justify sinful behavior and unwilling hearts to more actively engage in the work to which He has called us.

So then, I come back to the question of how it is that we can be a people whose lives clearly reveal whose we are, whom we serve and reflect the image of Jesus in all our daily actions? To say this another way, how do we develop and maintain such a high view of Jesus Christ and the gospel? And I say to you again, let us be constantly entertaining the subject of Christ. Beloved, if we think less of Christ, we will do less for Him. Yet, the more I understand about Christ, the more I will yield to Him in service. The more I perceive the love of Christ for me, the more I will come to love Him. And the more glorious I come to see the person of Jesus, the more I will glorify Him. This is all accomplished by a resolve and devotion to consider the subject of Christ. And our text this morning is concerning the subject of Christ.

I. The Supremacy of Christ over Creation (1:15-17)

Last week, in verses 15-17, we noted how Paul presented Jesus as the true sovereign, sufficient and supreme God and Lord over all creation. Jesus has preeminence over the created order because He created that order being God. This week, it is my desire to point out how Paul presented Jesus in verses 18-20 as the sovereign, sufficient and supreme God and Lord over the new creation, over those who by faith willingly subject themselves to the loving care and compassion of Jesus and who are trusting in Jesus to accomplish all the purposes and pleasures of God.

The way that Paul presents the supremacy of Christ over the new creation is by making yet another profound statement about the person and position of Jesus Christ in verse 18, calling Him **"the head of the body, the church"** and then by proceeding to descriptively define for us why it is that Jesus is the head, namely because of His resurrection, because of His rank and finally because of His work of reconciling all things to God.

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II. The Supremacy of Christ over the New Creation (1:18-20)

He is also head of the body, the church;

Notice that verse 18 begins much like verse 15. In verse 15 we read, “**He is the image of the invisible God...**” a statement of fact that tells us that Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God; that Jesus is indeed God in the flesh having come to display before humanity the very character of God. In verse 18 we have similar structure, a statement of fact, namely, “**He is also head of the body, the church...**” Jesus is not simply supreme in a general way over all creation, but is also supreme in a specific way over the new creation, which is defined as a body and as the church. But let us get a grasp first of all on what this means, that Jesus is the head of the body, the church. Consider Paul’s high view of Christ here.

The first word Paul uses is “**head**” – a word that speaks figuratively as the one who is on top, the director, the controller, the decision maker. The idea of the head is that such a person is making the decision regarding everything that takes place. Just as my head is the control center of my body, directing both my involuntary actions such as breathing and heart rate, but also my voluntary actions such as the forming of these words on my lips or the raising up of my hand, so is Jesus to be seen, regarded and submitted to as being in such a position. Not only does the head direct the affairs of the body, it would also speak of this person’s responsibility to be the provider and sustainer of the body. Just as the head of the household is to provide for his home, Jesus provides everything needful and necessary for the body.

And that leads us to the description of what it is Jesus is the head. Our text says “**the body**” – a metaphor or picture of unity and function. Jesus is to be supreme over the body, directing and governing the affairs of that body even as a literal head does so over a physical body. There are some interesting applications here. For we know that our hands or our feet do not have a will or mind of their own. When I raise my hand, it does so first because my head, my mind has directed it to do so. My hand and arm have muscles that must be used to comply with the directive of the head, but if it does not come from the head, it will not happen. And yet how many times could it be said of me or of yourself that we have sought to act independently of the Christ the head. If our hands start going off and doing their own thing, we would be gravely concerned, asking what kind of disease has so afflicted me that my hand will not respond to my head, to my brain. Beloved, we need to receive our orders from the head, that is Christ. It needs to be His will, not my will; His glory; not my glory; drawing people to Him and not to myself. Our prayer and desire ought to be for others to see Jesus in us, which means knowing Jesus is the head, the director of our lives and therefore every decision and every thought is to be brought into captivity to the mind of Christ.

But Paul goes on to describe what this body is...it is the church! Jesus is the head of the church. What is the church? That is a sermon in itself, but let me just say that the church is the full number of people who are called into union and fellowship with Christ as their Savior and Lord, who gather together in local congregations here on earth to worship, speak about and learn about Christ believing that their gathering together is one of the most important ways in which to reflect their fellowship with Christ.

What I would have you notice here is that we are told the supremacy of Christ is reflected primarily through His headship over the church, over the local assemblies of believers. Beloved, the primacy of Christ is to be revealed the primacy we assign to the church; in our relationship, involvement and activity with the church. Are our families important? Absolutely! The church has much to say about family life and how it is to be lived to the glory of God. But the family is not the primary organization where we are to be reflecting our relationship to Jesus Christ. Yes, we preach the gospel to our families and will be challenged by our families in our relationship to

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Christ; but the goal of preaching the gospel to our families is not to simply benefit our families, although it will, but it is to benefit the church; it is to edify, built up and be involved with the church. There is a greater family to which we must be connected, that is the family of God. We must desire to see our families engaged with the greater family of God. All that we do then is to be considered in light of Jesus being the head of the church. How are my decisions going to glorify Christ in and before the Church. Beloved, you cannot glorify Jesus apart from the church. You have been placed into the church by the Spirit of God. You have been gifted by the Spirit with certainly spiritual abilities in order to benefit the church, or as 1 Corinthians 12:7, for the common good of the body of Christ. Our text tells us that Jesus is to have the primacy in the church and that means that the church must have a priority in our lives.

I am not trying to lay a guilt trip upon you or myself. I am simply asking you to consider carefully what you are doing, prayerfully to make sure that you are not inadvertently placing something before Christ, making an idol and robbing yourself and the church of the blessings He intends for us.

Beloved, we have a diminished view of Christ when we divorce Christ from His people, when we place more of an emphasis upon our individual or even our family relationships to Christ over our corporate relationship to Christ. If Christ is to have first place in the church, then there needs to be a priority given to the church. One of Paul's favorite descriptions of believers is that they are "in Christ" or "in Him." The church, each one of us who knows Jesus as Lord and Savior are in the church, which is in Christ – we are the body of Christ and everything we have or do is to be considered in light of how it glorifies Christ and Christ is glorified in and through the church – His new creation. The church is not secondary; the church is not optional; the church is not even a building, but it is the body of Christ; it is where Christ chooses to reveal Himself, to communicate truth, to challenge and correct His people and to manifest Himself to the world. Let us be wary of allowing our circumstances dictate or determine our commitment and involvement in the church. To be sure, there will be circumstances that cause us to miss opportunities to fellowship and interact. These however should be the exception and not the rule. Jesus Christ saved you from sin and a future in hell to place you into the body of Christ, the church and to anticipate a future in heaven. Watch over your heart with regard to your involvement with Christ's body. You are His. He called and loving you placed you in the church to be both encouraged by it and to be an encourager to it. As the Head of the Church, this is your mandate from Jesus. Either Jesus is supreme in this regard or He is not. Which is it for you?

But why is Christ to be regarded with such supremacy in both the church as well as over all creation. The rest of our passage offers us three reasons.

1. His resurrection (1:18b)

and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

The first reason why Jesus is to be seen and treated in our lives as supreme is because of His resurrection. After identifying Jesus as supreme over the church, we are next given in verse 18 two more titles of Jesus that speak to us of why He is supreme. First, He is called "**the beginning.**" Jesus is the head of the church because He is the "**beginning**" of the church. It is Jesus who brought the church into existence. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus says that "**He will build His church...**" that at that time the community of believers who are "**in Christ**" had not yet been established. The church itself would begin at Pentecost as described in Acts 2. Jesus is the start, the beginning, the very source of the Church. What Paul says here is similar to what we read in Revelation 22:13 where Jesus said, "**I am the Alpha and the Omega**" the first and last

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letters of the Greek alphabet and then **“the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”** The word “beginning” in Revelation 22:13 is the same word for beginning in our Colossians text, “*arche*” in the Greek and it speaks of the source, the author, the cause. So, just as Jesus was the cause of creation, Jesus is also the cause of the church. This makes Jesus supreme over the church.

The second title given that somewhat explain why Jesus is the beginning of the church as well as supreme is that He is the **“firstborn from the dead”** – a reference to His resurrection. Remember that we noted last week that the word firstborn can speak of priority in time, but also and more often it speaks of preeminence in position. The reason why Jesus is to be seen as supreme is because He is the preeminent, most glorious one come back from the dead. Remember that Jesus was not the first to be resurrected from the dead. Many before Christ had been resurrected from the dead in both the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. Just about a week before Jesus’ resurrection you might recall that Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus. So what is meant by this phrase, **“firstborn from the dead”**? Beloved, Jesus is the first one to be raised from the dead never to die again. Jesus is the first to be raised from the dead to receive a glorified body. [Jesus is the first of a type of resurrection, what the Scriptures call the “first resurrection” – Matthew 28; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 20:6]. And the point is this, that Jesus is first in rank or supremacy over all who will be raised to life never to die again because of their faith in Him. Because Jesus was raised from the dead to newness of life, we can rest assured that we will be raised from the dead in newness of life, clothed with immortality so that we might, like Jesus, forever dwell in the presence of God. Jesus is supreme over the church because He established for us by His resurrection a new order, those who would be raised like Him.

There is so much that could be said about this, but lets move on and note the reason why Jesus is given the titles of beginning, and firstborn from the dead as well as the image of the invisible God and Creator/Sustainer of all things... **“so that He Himself [emphatic] will come to have first place in everything.”** Beloved, this is the definition of supremacy, that Jesus Christ is primary in everything, in all our thoughts, all our actions, all our hopes and all our desires. Paul has shown his readers why Jesus is supreme over creation and now why He is supreme over the church. Being God, He has and is to be shown as having preeminence over all things.

How can we demonstrate that Christ has come to have first place in everything in our own lives? I believe the answer lies in our pursuit of living like Christ, of living sanctified or holy lives before God and others. How are we to live as Christians? Are we simply to make professions of Christianity, but live like everyone else in the world? We know that is not right. We are to live with the reality that He who has conquered death on our behalf is the one unto whom I am living. This affects the value we place on the things of the world; it affects our morals and ethics; it affects the way we use our time. We can ask ourselves, “what are we putting before our relationship to Christ; or before our relationship to the living organism He placed us in, the church”? It affects how we make decisions in life. The resurrection of Christ – because He lives, we live and ought to live in the likeness of Him, demonstrating Him to be our head, our beginning and our hope of eternal life.

2. His rank (1:19)

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

The next two reasons given as to why Jesus is supreme apply to Jesus being over both creation and the church. Verses 19-20 sum up the reasons for Christ’s supremacy. Verse 19 begins with, **“it was the Fathers good pleasure...”** This is followed by two things that please

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the Father, the first, **“for all the fullness to dwell in Him [Jesus]”** and second, **“and through Him [Jesus] to reconcile all things to Himself...”** The first description calls to attention Jesus’ rank or His position as God in the flesh.

I know we are often accustomed to speaking of Jesus as God, but this was truly a difficult teaching, first for the ones who saw Jesus walk upon this earth. Jesus was constantly making statements of His equality with the Father as God before the religious leaders and they constantly wanted to kill Him for what they considered blasphemy. In John 10:30-33 we read the following account with Jesus saying,

30 “I and the Father are one.” 31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” 33 The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”

The religious leaders had a problem with Jesus being God in the flesh. The false teachers at Colosse had a hard time with Jesus being God in the flesh. And even today there is a difficulty with understanding this. Yet Paul is emphatic. In Colossians 2:9 Paul writes, **“For in Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”** The miracle is not whether Jesus was God, for Jesus had always been God and with God from the beginning. The true miracle, that which makes Jesus so truly unique is that He became God in a human body. Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 forcefully remind us that all that makes God God was and is contained in the body of Jesus Christ. It was the Father’s good pleasure that the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, would be born into the human race and forever unite perfect deity with perfect humanity so as to save to Himself a people who would forever worship Him.

Jesus is supreme because He is the image of the invisible God, the visible manifestation of Him who had been previously unknown in this way because the fullness of God dwells in Him. This is yet another reason why Jesus is to have first place in everything, He is God, indeed God in the flesh. This is His rank, this is His position and it ought to cause us to think about all that we do in light of who He is.

3. His work of reconciliation

and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

The final reason given as to why Jesus is supreme over both creation and the church is because of His work of reconciliation. Remember that this is also part of the Father’s good pleasure, that **“through Him”** all things would be reconciled **“to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”**

What is this work of reconciliation? You are more familiar with it than you might realize. If you keep a checkbook then you reconcile that account monthly with your computer program or a calculator making sure that what you think you have is what the bank also says you have. And what happens when those do not match up? Well, at my house there is chaos. There is no peace until I find out the reason why, but as soon as that account is reconciled, there is a sense of relief and a sense of peace.

This is the idea behind Christ’s work of reconciliation. Jesus is to bring all things into their proper or balanced place with regard to their relationship to Him. For those who have trusted in His sacrifice on the cross, our reconciliation will be fully realized when we stand before the Father’s throne accepted in our Beloved. For those who have refused Christ and disobeyed Him,

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these will be reconciled by their just punishment in hell and the lake of fire. And for creation itself, a creation that was subject to the destructive effects of sin, even creation will be restored as Jesus will reign on this earth for a 1000 years in perfect government.

You might notice that our text does not tell us yet why we or creation needs to be reconciled. This will be introduced in the next verses. All we are told here is that our being reconciled to God, our having peace with God came at the cost of Jesus enduring the wrath of God on the cross. Our peace with God was established and made possible by the blood of Christ. The author of Hebrews would say in 9:22, **“without the shedding of blood there is forgiveness [of sin].”** We are also told in the book of Hebrews that Jesus offered Himself once for all time for our sins (Hebrews 10:14). If we are to be reconciled to God, we need the sacrifice of Christ and must believe that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was made for us? Do you believe that? That is the only thing that allows you to submit to Christ as your head in the church and thank Him for being your source and example of resurrection. That is the only thing that allows you to see and know Jesus as the image of the invisible God.

The death of Christ on the cross paid the price of sin for all who would believe and provided the justice needed for Jesus to come again to take back this earth that was usurped by sin and Satan and bring peace to it for the glory of God. You see again at the end of verse 20 that all things will be reconciled, brought to their proper place because of the work of Christ. According to Philippians 1:10-11 there will be a time when every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. This does not mean that everyone who bows will be saved, it simply means that everything will be reconciled, brought into right balance and that both the saved and the unsaved, the blessed and the cursed will all rightly acknowledge Jesus as Lord of all.

Jesus is supreme over creation and the new creation. Everyone will bow. The question for some is simply this, have you ever bowed before Him? What keeps you from bowing before Him as the one who provided for you everything you need for eternal life, who paid the price for your sin and who promises that if you come to Him, He will not cast you out, but will rather change your heart to know and love Him.

Let those of us who do know His love and sacrifice to continue to bow before Him and to praise Him as supreme over creation, supreme over the church as supreme in our lives, thanking Him for His resurrection from the death, His rank as God in the flesh and for His work of reconciliation, making peace between us and the Father all for His glory and honor.

Soli Deo Gloria

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