

The Supremacy of Jesus Christ

Bible Background • COLOSSIANS 1:15–20

Printed Text • COLOSSIANS 1:15–20 | Devotional Reading • EPHESIANS 1:17–23

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: UNDERSTAND Paul’s description of Jesus Christ’s supremacy; EXPRESS feelings of amazement at the supremacy of Jesus Christ; and DESCRIBE to others the awe-inspiring preeminence of Christ for bringing reconciliation.

In Focus

“I can’t believe this,” Brenda said. She threw her keys down and searched through her wallet for her auto club card. “I’ve got to make this job interview today!” she shouted.

Pleading with the clerk at the auto repair shop, she said, “I think my car battery is dead. Can someone come by this morning to give it a jump start?”

“Sorry ma’am, we are swamped this morning. We won’t have a truck available until this afternoon,” the clerk replied. “Also, our records show that you are behind in your payments. We can’t help you until the bill is paid.”

Brenda began to cry, smearing her makeup. “Lord, my life is such a mess. I can’t even keep my auto club bill paid.”

As Brenda laid her head on the table, a tune came to mind: “He’s got the whole world in His hands.” Brenda had heard that song since she was a child, but today it seemed to communicate a whole new meaning. Surely, God would provide regardless of her situation.

She washed her face, prayed that somehow the Lord would get her to her interview on time. Remembering that she had money on her credit card, Brenda downloaded a ride share app and scheduled a pickup.

This week’s lesson gives believers a bigger picture of who Jesus is and His position in the world. Hopefully, as our view of Him increases, our perception of our personal problems will decrease.

Keep in Mind

“For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.”
(Colossians 1:19, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Colossians 1:15** Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

The People, Places, and Times

Colossae. The town of Colosse (also spelled “Colosse”) was located on a ridge overlooking the Lycus River Valley in the southwest corner of Asia Minor in what is now Turkey. At the time of Paul’s writing, its neighboring cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis, were becoming more important, while Colossae was in decline. Epaphras and Timothy established churches in all three of these cities, but at this writing, Paul had yet to visit the believers at these churches personally. However, he did tell Philemon, a native of Colossae, that he was hoping to visit him (Philemon 1:22). Scholars believe that Paul wrote this letter during his first imprisonment in Rome around A.D. 60. Having received a report from Epaphras of the progress being made with this budding church, he also alerted Paul to the false teachers gaining a foothold in the church.

Epaphras. Christianity came to Colossae through the work of Epaphras. He was converted and rooted in the faith by Paul during Paul’s stay in Ephesus. Epaphras had established the faith in Colossae. Paul was not the founder of these congregations and never paid them a visit. He commended Epaphras for his excellent work.

Background

A heretical (false teaching) movement had started in Colossae. Before any real damage could be done, Epaphras reported to Paul the errors that were circulating among the congregation. Epaphras, under Paul’s direction, was the founder of the church in Colossae. However, Paul was imprisoned at the time, probably somewhere in Rome. Paul responded by sending Tychicus with this epistle (letter) to the Colossians. Paul wrote the epistle to crush the false teaching that had arisen. The identity of the heretics was not clear. It could have been members in the congregation pretending to be Christians or nonmembers from the outside, like the Judaizers, who attempted to invalidate Paul’s teaching. The Colossian heretics may also have been native Jews, not members of the Colossian church, who added fancy ideas to Epaphras’ teaching and fought to win members for their peculiar beliefs. Through this brief but powerful writing, Paul completely took care of the erroneous ideas. The theme of the letter focuses on Christ’s superiority. The false teachers in Colossae were attempting to reduce the significance of Christ’s authority and work. Paul, therefore, set forth his case about Christ and His elevated position.

At-A-Glance

1. Christ Reigns Supreme in Creation
(Colossians 1:15–17)
2. Christ Reigns Supreme in the Church
(v. 18)
3. Christ Reigns Supreme in Redemption
(vv. 19–20)

In Depth

1. Christ Reigns Supreme in Creation (Colossians 1:15–17)

In the earlier verses of Colossians 1, Paul gives many statements and compliments to the Colossian church. Starting in verse 15, however, his focus changes and he gives central attention to Christ. Earlier in the chapter, Christ has already been addressed as “his dear Son” (1:13, KJV). Paul continues to lift Jesus up. He gives a long report about Jesus’ person, His position, and His work. These teachings about Jesus Christ are not new to the Colossians, but they are restated to combat the erroneous teachings that were being spread. The first thing Paul emphasizes about Christ is that He is completely God and completely man. When we look at Jesus, we see who God is. Because it is beyond human understanding, this concept is difficult to comprehend. How can two natures—God’s divine nature and man’s nature—dwell in one man? Yet, Jesus claimed to be, and is, both God and man (John 1:1, 14). In Colossians 1:15, Paul used the word “image” to express Christ’s exact likeness of God. Like the image in the reflection of a mirror, the nature and being of God are perfectly revealed in Christ.

The second major characteristic that Paul points out is that “He is the first-born Son, superior to all created things” (from Colossians 1:15, Good News Translation). Being the firstborn could mean the first child to come out

of the mother’s womb. It could also mean the one who is given first place (heir) of honor or authority in the family, even though he or she is not the first in the childbirth lineage. Solomon was not David’s first son, but he was given the firstborn position as heir to the throne when David died. Both meanings were represented in the Colossians passage: Christ existed before all creation; He is also over all in rank and dignity. There was an ancient custom whereby the firstborn son in a family was given rights and privileges not shared by the other offspring. He was his father’s representative and heir, and the management of the household was committed to him. Following this interpretation, we understand the passage to teach that Christ is His Father’s representative and heir. He has the management of everything here on Earth and in heaven. Because Christ was the creator of the universe, He is firstborn or Lord over all creation. Creation was “through” Christ (v. 16, NLT); God spoke the words and gave the instructions. Jesus was the agent through whom it actually came into being. Because Christ is the reason all things exist, all things—that exist—are to contribute to His glory. The universe is His footstool, His throne. Thus, Christ made all things in heaven and here on Earth, visible and invisible, angelic hierarchy, or whatever supernatural powers that be. He is their Lord. Christ is before all things in time, and all things hold together because of Him. He sustains all of creation. The world would be in complete chaos if it were not for Jesus.

2. Christ Reigns Supreme in the Church (v. 18)

Paul goes on to further point out Christ’s supremacy by saying, “he is the head of the body, the church” (KJV). He is the source of the church’s life. He guides and governs the church. Christ and Christ alone is its chief and its leader. The word “church” simply means assembly

or congregation. Paul makes reference to all Christians everywhere, not just the individuals assembled in a church building. The church is a gigantic, living, moving organism by which Christ carries out His purposes and performs His work. The church is composed of members joined vitally to one another. God gives gifts to each Christian and then places His people in His church so that they might serve Him where they are needed. Through His Word, Jesus Christ nourishes and cleanses the church.

The body of Christ cannot function without Christ, its head. He gives instructions and holds the body together. The believers carry out His mission and His purposes. Or as Teresa of Avila says, “Jesus had no eyes but our eyes, no feet but our feet, no hands but our hands.” One cannot accomplish much in the way of winning the world without the other. Christ is not only the head of the church; He is the firstborn from the dead. This does not mean He was the first to be raised from the dead because He was not. Christ is the first to be permanently resurrected from the dead, the first to be clothed with immortality, and the first to obtain and declare His victory over death. For without His resurrection, there would be no resurrection for others at the end of the age. Christ is the origin and source of the life of the church. Paul summarized his teaching in one statement: “So that in everything He (Christ) might have the supremacy” (from v. 18, NIV). Jesus alone has the first place among all and over all. He is the sole Head of all things. The false teachers of Colossae attempted to communicate to the people that Jesus Christ was only one of many ways to God. However, the Scriptures are quite clear. Jesus emphatically said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father *except through Me*” (from John 14:6, NKJV, emphasis added). Jesus is the only entrance into heaven and the only way to know God.

3. Christ Reigns Supreme in Redemption (vv. 19–20)

Before he ends this section, Paul makes two more strong statements about Christ. The first statement is: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (Colossians 1:19, NKJV). God’s totality has a permanent home in Christ. Not a partial part, but all of God’s divine power and characteristics rest in Jesus. The fact that God would put all that He is inside Jesus proves that Jesus is God, and because He is God, He is able to do what no mere man could ever do—reconcile lost sinners to a holy God. Paul’s second strong statement in Colossians 1 is, “Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son’s blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven” (1:20, Good News). The Father willed that all fullness should dwell in Christ. He also willed to reconcile all things to Himself through Christ—changing people’s condition from separation to harmony with God.

Search the Scriptures

1. List as many facts as you can about Christ and creation (Colossians 1:15–18).
2. Explain the two definitions of “firstborn” and how Jesus fits them both (v. 18).
3. Explain how it is possible for sinful humankind to be reconciled to a holy God (v. 20).

Discuss the Meaning

1. How do the facts presented about Christ prove His supremacy over everything?
2. What does Christ’s reconciling humankind to God through His death on the Cross mean to us today?

Liberating Lesson

The assistant director of a local crisis pregnancy center had this to say about her

clients. "I talk to young women all the time who call or come in and talk about the difficulties in their lives. When I ask them what they have tried to do to better themselves and their situations, many of them talk about getting a better job, better education, and job training skills. Some even mention getting out of a bad relationship. Very rarely does anyone mention turning to God as a solution." We live in a society that habitually ignores God. And yet, God wants us to make friends with Him through His Son Jesus to personally be our guide through the difficulties of life.

Application for Activation

Make a list of personal difficulties and the way you have handled them in the past. Make another list of challenges you are facing. What changes are you going to make in your outlook? Your attitude? Your actions?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

"Bible Words – Phonetic Pronunciation." Better Days Are Coming.com. <http://betterdaysarecoming.com/bible/pronunciation.html#e/> (accessed October 31, 2011).
New Testament Greek Lexicon. Bible Study Tools.com. biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/ (accessed October 31, 2011).

Say It Correctly
Colossians. co-LOSH-uhns.
Epaphras. EP-uh-fras, EP-uh-fruhs.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY
Christ, the Head of the Church
(Ephesians 1:17-23)

TUESDAY
Christ, the Firstborn of the Dead
(Revelation 1:1-6)

WEDNESDAY
Christ, One with the Father
(John 17:20-26)

THURSDAY
Christ, the Reconciler to God
(2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

FRIDAY
Christ, the Channel of God's Grace
(Romans 5:15-21)

SATURDAY
The Compelling Call of Christ
(Matthew 4:18-25)

SUNDAY
The Person and Work of Christ
(Colossians 1:15-20)