

The Book of Colossians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: The Supremacy of Christ

Colossians 1:15-20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This is the doctrinal summit of the letter and of the study, and it should be taught with both care and joy. Everything is at stake here: the deity, eternity, creatorship, and absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ. Paul confronts a teaching that admired Jesus while treating Him as insufficient, and he answers not by shrinking the false teachers but by enlarging Christ until there is no room above Him. The teacher's task is to present Jesus exactly as Paul does: as the image of the invisible God, the Creator of all things visible and invisible, the One who exists before all things and holds all things together, the head of the church, the firstborn from the dead, and the One in whom all the fullness of God dwells. Any teaching that makes Jesus a created being, a high angel, or merely an exalted man collapses under the weight of these verses.

The most sensitive point is the phrase firstborn of all creation in verse 15, which Arius long ago and the Jehovah's Witnesses today take to mean that Jesus was the first being God created. This must be handled clearly and confidently, and the passage itself supplies the answer. In Scripture firstborn regularly denotes rank, preeminence, and the rights of the heir rather than chronological birth order, and Paul's very next words say that Christ created all things, which would be impossible if He were Himself a creature. The fullness of deity dwelling in Him (v. 19) seals the case. Equip the teacher to make this argument warmly and from the text, so that students can answer the error with confidence and without fear.

Yet this lesson is not merely a doctrinal defense; it is meant to reorder the heart. A small Jesus leaves us anxious, divided, and easily tempted. A Christ this large changes everything: our fears shrink, our idols lose their grip, and worship rises naturally. So aim the lesson at preeminence in everything. Send students home not only able to defend the deity of Christ but actually bowing lower before Him, ready to give Him first place in every part of their lives.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul calls Christ the image of the invisible God (v. 15). What does it mean that Jesus is the image of God, and how does this shape where we look when we want to know what God is truly like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul opens with Christ as the image of the invisible God. Help students grasp both halves. God is invisible, beyond our sight and full comprehension, and yet in Christ the invisible God has made

Himself visible. Jesus is not a faint copy or a symbol; He is the perfect representation of God in human form. To see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14:9).

This means that when we want to know what God is truly like, we look at Jesus. Not at our fears, not at the worst religious teaching we absorbed as children, not at our vague guesses, but at the actual character and conduct of Christ revealed in the Gospels. His compassion for the broken, His fierce truthfulness, His holiness, His willingness to suffer for us: all of it shows us the heart of God.

The word image also carries the idea that humanity was made in God's image but defaced that image through sin. Christ is the true image, and salvation is partly God restoring His image in us as we are conformed to Christ (a theme Colossians returns to in 3:10). Jesus is both the revelation of God and the pattern of renewed humanity.

Press the practical weight. Many believers carry a distorted picture of God in their private thoughts even while affirming correct doctrine. The cure is to keep returning to Jesus, in whom the invisible God is made plain.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the perfect, visible representation of the invisible God
- Looking to Jesus, not to our fears or guesses, to know what God is like
- The connection to John 14:9, whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father
- Christ as the true image and the pattern for renewed humanity (Colossians 3:10)

Discussion Prompts

- When you picture God, how closely does that picture match Jesus?
- What does it mean that to see Jesus is to see the Father?
- How can we let the Gospels correct a distorted image of God?

Question 2

Student Question:

If Jesus is the exact image of the invisible God, then everything we learn about Him tells us something about God's own heart. Is the God you actually picture in your private thoughts the God revealed in Jesus, or have you quietly imagined a harsher or more distant God than the One Christ reveals?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes the truth of verse 15 straight into the heart. Many faithful people affirm sound doctrine about God while privately carrying a very different picture, a God who is mostly disappointed in them, distant, hard to please, quick to anger. That gap between confessed belief and felt belief shapes how a person prays, repents, and rests.

Invite gentle honesty. Ask students to notice the God who shows up in their anxious moments, in their failures, in the middle of the night. Is that God the one revealed in Jesus, who welcomed sinners, wept with the grieving, and laid down His life? Or is it a harsher figure inherited from somewhere else?

The remedy is not to scold themselves for feeling wrongly but to keep looking at Christ until the true picture sinks down from the head into the heart. Encourage a specific practice: spending time this week in a Gospel account of Jesus with one question in mind, what does this show me about God's heart toward me?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between confessed doctrine about God and the God we actually picture
- Noticing the image of God that surfaces in anxiety, failure, and fear
- Letting the revealed Christ reshape the felt picture of God
- Gospel meditation as a means of healing a distorted view of God

Discussion Prompts

- What God shows up in your thoughts when you have failed?
- Where might your private picture of God be harsher than Jesus?
- What Gospel scene most helps you see God's true heart toward you?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says that by Christ all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, and that all things were created through Him and for Him (v. 16). What does it mean that the universe was not only made by Christ but made for Him, and how does that truth confront the way the world (and we) tend to think about our lives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 16 makes a staggering claim: by Christ all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones and dominions and rulers and authorities. Paul deliberately piles up the categories to leave nothing out. Everything that exists, including every spiritual power the false teachers were so impressed by, was made by Christ.

Note the three prepositions that frame creation. All things were created by Him (He is the agent), through Him (He is the means), and for Him (He is the goal). This last one is breathtaking. The universe is not only made by Christ; it is made for Christ, aimed at His glory. He is the purpose toward which everything is bent.

This confronts the deepest assumption of our age and our own hearts, that we exist for ourselves, that our lives are our own projects, that we are the center. Paul says no. We, and

everything else, were made for Christ. To live for ourselves is to live against the grain of the universe.

It also dismantles the Colossian error directly. If the angels and powers were themselves created by Christ, then they cannot be rivals to Him or supplements to Him. The Creator is in a category entirely above every creature, however exalted. There is no spiritual being worth fearing or worshiping alongside the One who made it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as Creator of all things, including every spiritual power
- The three prepositions: created by Him, through Him, and for Him
- The universe made for Christ as its goal, exposing the lie that we exist for ourselves
- Created powers as no rivals to their Creator, dismantling the Colossian error

Discussion Prompts

- What does it change to know you were created for Christ, not for yourself?
- Why can no angel or spiritual power rival Christ?
- How does living for ourselves go against the grain of how we were made?

Question 4

Student Question:

If all things, including your own life, were created for Christ, then you exist for Him and not merely for yourself. What is one area of your life that you have quietly been living for your own purposes, and what would it look like to hand it back to the One it was made for?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question presses the for Him of verse 16 into daily life. If all things, including each student's life, were made for Christ, then a life lived merely for self is a life out of step with its own design. The question asks students to find one area they have quietly fenced off as their own.

Help them get concrete. The fenced-off area is often a career pursued for personal glory, money managed as if it were ours to spend however we please, a relationship run for what we can get, a private corner of entertainment or ambition we have never submitted to Christ. Naming one such area is more useful than a general confession.

Then frame surrender not as loss but as homecoming. Handing an area back to Christ is returning it to the One it was always meant for, where it finally makes sense and bears fruit. Encourage one specific act of re-surrender this week, a decision, a conversation, a change in how some resource is used.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living for Christ rather than for self as living with the grain of creation
- Identifying one specific fenced-off area of life
- Surrender as homecoming rather than loss
- A concrete act of re-surrendering an area to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What is one area of life you have quietly kept for yourself?
- What would it look like to hand that area back to Christ this week?
- Why is surrender to Christ a homecoming rather than a loss?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says Christ is before all things, and in Him all things hold together (v. 17). What do these two claims teach about who Jesus is, and what does it mean for the world right now that Christ is the One actively holding all things together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 17 makes two more enormous claims. First, Christ is before all things. He did not begin to exist; He already was when everything else began. This is the language of eternal pre-existence and points directly to His deity. Only God is before all things.

Second, in Him all things hold together. Christ is not a watchmaker who wound up the universe and walked away. He actively sustains everything moment by moment, holding the cosmos together by His power (compare Hebrews 1:3). The orderliness of creation, the very fact that things cohere rather than fly apart, is the ongoing work of the Son.

Help students feel the comfort buried in this cosmic claim. The One who holds galaxies together is the same One who holds them. Nothing in their lives is outside His sustaining grip. Even when life feels as if it is flying apart, the deepest reality is that Christ is holding all things, including them, together.

This also continues the polemic against the false teachers. If Christ sustains all things, the spiritual powers depend on Him for their very continuance. There is no force in the universe operating independently of the Son.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ before all things as eternal pre-existence and a mark of deity
- Christ actively sustaining all things moment by moment (Hebrews 1:3)
- Comfort: the One who holds the cosmos together holds the believer too

- All powers depending on Christ for their continued existence

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between a God who made the world and one who holds it together right now?
- How does Christ holding all things together give comfort in seasons that feel chaotic?
- Why does before all things point to the deity of Christ?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul says everything holds together in Christ. What have you been depending on to hold your own life together, your job, your health, your relationships, your own competence? What happens to your sense of security when you remember that Christ, not those things, is the One who actually holds you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes hold together and makes it personal. Everyone is depending on something to keep their life from falling apart, whether they have named it or not. For some it is a job or income, for others their health, their competence, a relationship, a carefully managed schedule. These are gifts, but they are fragile, and when they fail, a life built on them feels as if it is disintegrating.

Paul redirects our security. The One who actually holds our life together is Christ, not the props we have leaned on. This does not mean the props do not matter; it means they were never meant to bear the weight only Christ can bear.

Lead students to identify their particular prop, and then to picture what it does to their anxiety to remember that Christ holds them. The aim is not to despise good gifts but to relocate ultimate security in the One who cannot be shaken. Be sensitive to anyone currently watching a prop fail; for them this truth is not abstract but a lifeline.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying what we actually depend on to hold life together
- Good gifts as real but unable to bear the weight only Christ can bear
- Relocating ultimate security in the One who cannot be shaken
- Comfort for those currently watching a prop fail

Discussion Prompts

- What have you been counting on to hold your life together?
- What happens to your security when that thing is threatened?

- How does it steady you to remember that Christ holds you?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul calls Christ the head of the body, the church, and the firstborn from the dead, so that in everything He might be preeminent (v. 18). What does it mean that Christ is the head of the church, and why does Paul say the goal of all of this is that Christ would be first, preeminent, in everything?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 18 turns from creation to the church. Christ is the head of the body, the church. Paul will develop this image more later, but here the point is supremacy: as the head governs the body, Christ governs and directs His church. The church is not a human organization with Christ as a distant figurehead; it is His body, deriving its life and direction from Him.

Christ is also called the beginning and the firstborn from the dead. He is the first to rise to die no more, the pioneer of resurrection life, the head of a new humanity as He was head of the old creation. His resurrection guarantees ours; He is the firstborn of a great family to follow.

Paul then states the purpose of all of it: that in everything He might be preeminent, first place. This is the summit of the passage. Christ's supremacy in creation and in resurrection has a goal, that He would hold first place in absolutely everything. Help students see that this is not divine ego but reality. Christ is first; our calling is simply to recognize and live in line with what is already true.

Connect headship to the false teaching once more. If Christ is the head of the church, the church needs no other authority, no supplementary mediators, no human traditions added to His rule. He is enough, and He is first.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as head of the church, the source of its life and authority
- Christ as the firstborn from the dead, pioneer of resurrection and head of a new humanity
- Preeminence in everything as the goal of Christ's supremacy
- Headship as ruling out any supplementary authority added to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean practically that Christ, not any human, is the head of the church?
- How does Christ being firstborn from the dead give us hope for our own resurrection?
- Why is it good news, not divine ego, that Christ holds first place in everything?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul's whole aim is that Christ would be preeminent, first place, in everything. Where in your life is something other than Christ sitting in first place right now? What practical step would actually move Him back to the center this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes preeminence and makes it searching. Paul's goal is that Christ would be first in everything, and the honest truth is that something other than Christ usually occupies first place in our actual priorities, even when we would never say so.

Help students discern the real first place by looking at evidence rather than intentions: where their time goes, what they think about in idle moments, what they protect most fiercely, what they fear losing most. The thing in first place is often a good thing (family, career, security, a relationship) that has crept into the center where only Christ belongs.

Move toward one concrete step. Restoring Christ to first place is rarely a single dramatic act; it is usually a practical reordering: a change in schedule, a decision to put obedience above an idol, a willingness to risk a lesser thing for a greater one. Ask each student to name one specific step that would move Christ back to the center this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discerning what truly holds first place by evidence, not intentions
- Good things creeping into the center where only Christ belongs
- Restoring Christ to first place as practical reordering, not just feeling
- Naming one concrete step toward preeminence

Discussion Prompts

- What does your time and attention reveal about what holds first place in your life?
- What good thing has crept into the center where Christ belongs?
- What is one practical step that would move Christ back to first place this week?

Question 9**Student Question:**

Paul calls Christ the firstborn of all creation (v. 15) and then says that in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (v. 19). Some have taken firstborn to mean Jesus was the first created being, a step below God. How do the surrounding verses themselves answer that, and what is Paul actually claiming about the deity and supremacy of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the most doctrinally demanding question in the entire study, and it should be handled with clarity, confidence, and warmth. Paul calls Christ the firstborn of all creation (v. 15). Arius in the fourth century, and the Jehovah's Witnesses today, take this to mean Jesus was the first being God created, a great creature but not God. The phrase must be answered carefully, and the wonderful thing is that the passage itself supplies every answer we need.

First, explain the biblical use of firstborn (Greek *prototokos*). In Scripture the word regularly denotes rank, honor, and the rights of the heir, not merely birth order. God calls Israel His firstborn son though Israel was not the first nation (Exodus 4:22). David is called the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth (Psalm 89:27), though he was the youngest of his brothers. The firstborn is the preeminent heir. So firstborn of all creation means Christ is the supreme heir and Lord over all creation, the One to whom it all belongs, not the first item produced within it.

Second, let the very next verse refute the Arian reading. Paul says, for by Him all things were created (v. 16). All things. If Christ created all things, then Christ is not a thing that was created. The Creator cannot be part of the creation He made. Paul even specifies all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, leaving no created category for Christ to belong to. The text closes the door the false teaching tries to open.

Third, point to verse 17, before all things, and to the climactic verse 19, in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Colossians 2:9 will say it even more plainly: in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. This is not the language of a creature. The fullness of God does not dwell in an angel or a man; it dwells in God the Son. Add the witness of John 1:1-3, the Word was God, and all things were made through Him, and Hebrews 1, where the Son is worshiped by angels and called God.

Finally, help students answer with both truth and grace. When someone at the door insists Jesus was created, we do not need to be flustered. We can gently walk them through the very verses they cite: read on, we say, and see who Paul says created all things, and in whom the fullness of God dwells. The aim is not to win a fight but to lift Christ high, where He belongs, and to invite others to bow before the true and supreme Lord. The supremacy of Christ is not a fine point of theology; it is the heart of the gospel and the ground of our worship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Firstborn (*prototokos*) as rank, preeminence, and the rights of the heir, not first created (Exodus 4:22; Psalm 89:27)
- Verse 16 as decisive: the One who created all things cannot Himself be a created thing
- The fullness of deity dwelling in Christ (1:19; 2:9) as proof of His full deity
- The supporting witness of John 1:1-3 and Hebrews 1
- A clear answer to the Arian and Jehovah's Witness readings of firstborn
- Defending the deity of Christ with confidence and with grace, aiming to exalt Him rather than merely win an argument

Discussion Prompts

- How does the meaning of firstborn elsewhere in Scripture (Israel, David) help us read verse 15?
- How does verse 16 by itself answer the claim that Jesus was created?
- How would you lovingly walk a Jehovah's Witness through this passage to show the deity of Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this towering passage. Paul lifts Christ above creation, above the powers, above death itself, and then points to the blood of His cross. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Colossians 1:15–20 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone follows a passage of overwhelming height, and it ends, as the passage does, at the cross. Christ is exalted above creation, above the powers, above death, and then He stoops to make peace by the blood of His cross. The student's task is to name one specific way this towering Christ is forming them.

Walk back through the movement as a prompt. Some students most need to recover a large view of Jesus that has shrunk over the years. Some need the comfort that the One who holds the universe holds them. Some need to dethrone a rival and give Christ first place. Some are most struck that the One this high loved them enough to die. Let them name the one that meets them.

Close by reminding students that a large Christ is not merely impressive; He is transforming. When Jesus fills the horizon, fear shrinks, idols loosen, and worship rises. The aim of the lesson is not to admire a doctrine but to bow lower before the Lord it reveals, and to carry that bowed heart into the week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The exalted Christ who stoops to the cross as the center of worship
- A large view of Christ as the cure for fear, idolatry, and distraction
- Carrying one specific truth into the week
- Formation through awe: becoming like the Christ we behold

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth about Christ from this passage most needs to grow large in you this week?
- How does a bigger view of Jesus shrink the things that frighten or tempt you?

- How can this group help you keep Christ preeminent in the days ahead?