

The Book of Colossians

Lesson 3: The Supremacy of Christ -- Colossians 1:15–20

Every so often you read something so large that you have to set it down and catch your breath. These six verses are like that. Many scholars believe Paul is quoting an early hymn the church sang, and you can almost hear it rising in a crowded room: voices lifting higher and higher as they sing of who Jesus is. It begins with the invisible God and ends at a bloody cross, and in between it sweeps across all of creation, all the powers of heaven, and the whole reconciled universe. If you want to know what the earliest Christians believed about Jesus, you could hardly do better than to sing this with them.

Why does Paul reach for such soaring language here? Because a quiet lie was spreading through Colossae. The false teachers were suggesting that Jesus was wonderful, certainly, but perhaps not enough on His own. Maybe He needed to be supplemented with angels, with special knowledge, with extra rules and rituals. Maybe He was one important figure among many in the spiritual world. Paul's answer is not a careful argument first; it is a song of overwhelming praise. He simply lifts Christ so high that there is no room left above Him for anyone or anything else.

Listen to the claims as they come. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the One in whom the unseen God becomes visible. He is before all things, existing before the first star was lit. By Him and through Him and for Him everything was created, from the galaxies down to the thrones and powers of the unseen realm. In Him all things hold together at this very moment. He is the head of the church and the firstborn from the dead. And in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. This is not a great man or a high angel. This is God the Son.

Then the song lands where all true worship lands: at the cross. The One who holds the universe together stretched out His hands and made peace by the blood of His cross. The same Christ who is high above everything stooped lower than anyone, to reconcile us to God. Read these verses slowly, even out loud. Let them lift your eyes until Jesus fills your whole field of vision. When He is that large, the things that frighten and tempt and distract us shrink to their proper size.

Group Discussion: The false teaching at Colossae did not deny Jesus; it simply treated Him as not quite enough, one important figure who needed to be supplemented. Where do you see that same subtle move today, in the world or even in the church, where Jesus is admired but quietly treated as insufficient on His own?

Personal Reflection: Paul lifts Christ until He fills the whole horizon. Be honest about the size of Jesus in your own heart this week. Has He shrunk into one part of your life among many, and what would change if He were truly preeminent, first in everything?

Read Colossians 1:15–20

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 1:1–18, the Word who was God and became flesh; Hebrews 1:1–14, the Son who is the radiance of God's glory, higher than the angels; Philippians 2:5–11, the One who was in the form of God and humbled Himself to the cross; Revelation 1:12–18, the risen Christ who holds the keys of death; Revelation 1:5, Jesus the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth.